OFF THE PAGE: do multimedia, performance and installation methods in the 21ST Century represent a development of poetic form or a departure from poetry proper?

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

degree of

Master of Arts

in

English

at Massey University, Manawatu

New Zealand.

JOY BELINDA GREEN

2012

Abstract

This paper discusses 21st Century methods of presenting poetry off the printed page, such as slam, musically structured performance, film and video poetry, multimedia, digital, site-specific, and installation work. Looking at the context within which these have developed, and investigating the roots within traditional poetry from which they have grown, it seeks to determine how far such presentations can be considered to be new poetic forms. It also considers how far the techniques within them can be described as analogous to, or extensions of, traditional techniques. It considers the paucity of critical discussion around these developments in poetry, and argues that, although the method of delivery of the pieces may be novel and unfamiliar, where off-page work uses language in such a way that it conforms to the same definition of poetry that would be applied to work presented on the page, its various manifestations represent new forms in poetry, and should be subject to, and part of, the same critical conversations as those more traditional works.

Acknowledgements:

Contents

> *Art is not a mirror to reflect the world, but a hammer with which to shape it.*
>
> Vladimir Mayakovsky

Introduction

"Wherever humans exist they have a language, and in every instance a language that exists basically as spoken and heard, in the world of sound," Walter J. Ong says (7). In all these languages — and Ong estimates there are around 3000—people tell stories, sing and recite, using language in ways we would understand as poetry. This oral-formulaic tradition of poetry creation, *Abrams Glossary of Literary Terms* says, is prehistoric, and pieces like the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* and the Homeric epics have their origins in that tradition (200). As literacy spread, and technology allowed the easy, exact reproduction of the written word that enabled it to be distributed to significant audiences, poetry largely migrated from oral dissemination to written and printed texts, along with fiction and other knowledge that people wanted to keep precise; It is worth noting, however, that in only 106 of those human languages did a written element develop to a sufficient extent for a written literature to evolve (Ong 7). Accordingly, the public understanding of poetry in literate cultures has become that it is a written thing; a thing that exists in books, on paper, even if it is occasionally read aloud. This perception persists; although political, ideological, theoretical and technological developments in the late 20th Century have led to an upsurge of work that is presented off the page, this work is not, as yet, widely acknowledged, particularly in the academic mainstream.

While it is true that definitions of poetry rarely describe it specifically as "written", the language in which it is discussed almost invariably implies the idea that it is presented in writing. One need only look at the language used in the definition and description of terms relating to poetry, across a number

of different reference sources. For instance, this language can be seen in *Abrams' Glossary of Literary Terms,* in its definition of "rhyme". This entry discusses an essentially auditory phenomenon in terms of the placements of the rhyming words within a 'line', which is a purely written entity; it is as if the rhyme would not exist unless the words were written down (273). Meanwhile, *The Cambridge University Virtual Classroom Glossary of Literary Terms* describes the term "Accentual Verse" thus: "Verse in which the metre depends upon counting a fixed number of stresses (which are also known as 'accents') in a line, but which does not take account of unstressed syllables. The majority of Germanic poetry (including Old English) is of this type." Dr Robert Harris, a Professor of English at Vauxhall University, meanwhile, as part of an explanation of the term "enjambement" in an online lesson, says:

> A hint to those who read poetry aloud: Don't pause a long time at the end of a line with no punctuation. Pause for a comma, pause longer for a semicolon, longer still for a period, but at the end of an enjambed line, if you pause at all, only the hemidemisemiquaver of a pause. (par 32)

This use of the word ***line*** in all three definitions clearly implies a poem is perceived as a written thing, since speech has no discernible lines, and the phrasing of the third incontrovertibly suggests that speaking poetry is largely synonymous with reading it from a written source. As Professor Rosemary Huisman says, "the correlation of visual line and heard rhythm and rhyme has been so commonly understood as framing the genres of poetic discourse that critical comment has sometimes blurred the basic distinction between seen and heard poem"(17).

For many, it is true, the word 'poetry' may also call up connotations of the memorised recitation often required in schools, readings by poets of their own works (usually from behind a lectern or table on which perch books or papers) or broadcasts like W.B. Yeats' histrionic 1932 BBC recording of "The Lake Isle of Inisfree". In all these cases, however, the focus is clearly on the accurate conveyance of written words.

In the academic community too, it is on written poetry that critical conversation mostly centres: while articles certainly exist examining various off-page presentations of poetry, these are inclined to concentrate on the cultural, sociological or anthropological impact of the work, discussing in in terms of in terms of race or gender issues, or presenting performance and spoken word as a way to rekindle student interest in more traditional, written, poetry. They do not tend to provide any kind of literary analysis of the work *as poetry*.[1] Indeed, the term 'performance poetry' to define a genre does not even appear in *Abram's Glossary of Literary Terms* until the 10th (2008) edition. This lack of critical conversation is noted by Ric Alsopp, critic and editor of the journal *Performance Research,* who says,

> Writerly work that extends beyond the page has found itself either marginalized or ignored in terms of its exploration of relations between writing and performance. Yet at the latter end of the twentieth century we are surrounded by examples and models of such writerly performance work. In short the conventionalized (and therefore often unquestioned) relations between writing and performance are proving increasingly inadequate as interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary arts practices emerge in response to rapidly shifting cultures. (76)

The purpose of this paper is to examine whether, and how far, those forms that Alsopp describes as "writerly performance work" can be described as developments in form within the field of poetry. To do so, this paper

---

[1] A search of peer reviewed journals in the MLA International Bibliography database for the period 2000-2009 yielded the following results for various terms:
- *dub poetry* – 1 result,
- *performance poetry* = 9 results,
- *slam poetry* = 7 results,
- *installation poetry* = 0 results.

Searches on multiple voices turned up numerous results but these all related to multiple voices in written poetry.

On investigating the result, I found that all the articles related to gender issues, cultural identity and similar discussions: there was no analysis or critique of the poetry itself, except insofar as it related to these issues. With articles having titles such as "Treacherous Laughter: The Poetry Slam, Slam Poetry, and the Politics of Resistance" , "Promoting Cooperation and Respect: 'Bad' Poetry Slam in the Nontraditional Classroom", "(Re)presenting Ourselves: Art, Identity, and Status in U.K. Poetry Slam".

defines performance poetry in its multiplicitous forms, clarifying the differences among those various forms. It distinguishes performance poetry from — and draws distinctions among — other off-page poetic forms such as multimedia, site specific, digital and installation presentations of poetry. While this discussion is, to an extent, hampered by the paucity of literary academic analysis and discussion available around this type of work, it is that very absence of academic attention that raises the question. In art and theatre, multimedia and site-specific work is accorded widespread critical attention[2], but in literature, as I have already pointed out, this is not the case. The implication appears to be that poetry presented in manners outside established written forms is some kind of gestalt entity similar to, but standing outside the boundaries of, literature proper. Indeed, Roberto Simanowski quotes a lecture by digital poetry researcher Christopher Funkhouser in which Funkhouser says "digital poetry devours other texts by appropriating, transforming and reconfiguring them" (159). This seems to explicitly say that digital poetry is not 'real' literature. If this is the case, by extension it is also implied that, since it falls outside the boundaries of what is accepted as literature, the written component of such work is therefore either unworthy or incapable of critical academic attention and analysis *as a work of poetry*. This paper seeks to challenge the validity of that implication. In a world where entertainment media are merging and proliferating across paper, traditional broadcast and, increasingly, digital platforms, and art of all kinds is responding by adopting a cross-disciplinary and multimedia approach, the current popular conception of poetry as primarily a written art form needs to be readdressed. It needs to take account of recent developments in performance, dramatised, multimedia, installation and other off-page forms if it is to reflect the state of poetry as it is being practiced in the 21st Century, and critical conversations that discuss these forms need to be taking place.

Calling upon close reading and deconstruction of texts, and particularly considering reader response theory, this paper contends that where the

---

[2] A database search for "installation art" in the MLA database yields 194 results; "site specific theatre" yields 81.

explicitly stated intention of the creator is to create poetry, or where language is clearly the central element of a creative work, and where that language can be identified as adhering to a definition of poetry that can be applied to work both on and off the page, then the means and methods by which that work is delivered are not relevant in answering the question "is this poetry?" It argues that performance structures and multimedia technologies represent extensions of techniques already used in poetry, and that these follow the pattern of previous such developments arising from technological advance. Additionally, it proposes that they can, and should, be considered and discussed in the same way as any other elements of craft at the poet's disposal. Within the context of an off-page presentation, it advocates that work produced using these structures and technologies should be subject to the same type of critical conversation as any other piece of poetry and argues that it is appropriate to consider the use of enhancements such as light, music, recorded voice (or multiple voices), visual stimuli and so on as equivalent to the use of techniques such as metaphor, alliteration, line-breaking and typeface in a poem presented on the page in conducting such analysis. Finally, it suggests that the way to analyse the use of these techniques in poetry is to assess how (and how effectively) they serve to communicate the emotional centre of the piece or pieces thus presented.

Defining 'Poetry'

In order to categorise off-page forms as poetry, it is necessary, to begin with, to define what this paper understands by the term 'poetry' itself. Doing so is a vexing problem, since one thing that the majority of sources seem to agree on is that it is a term that is complex, widely debated — and particularly resistant to succinct definition. Poetry is a broad church, and a definition needs to accept all its denominations, while distinguishing it from fiction and drama, which may, at times, look like poetry, especially when they draw attention to the language they use in the manner that readers have come to expect from poetry. Even poetic sub-genres are problematical to define; for

instance, David Lindley says, when attempting to pin down a delineation of lyric poetry, that it, too, is "particularly elusive of definition" (1). That being said, there are useful textbook definitions that can serve as foundations to build a working definition on. Laurence Perrine, in *Literature: Structure, Sound and Sense,* for instance, defines poetry as "a kind of language that says *more* and says it *more intensely* than does ordinary language" (553). He goes on to expand his definition thus:

> The poet, from his own store of felt, observed or imagined experiences, selects, combines and reorganizes. He creates significant new experiences for the reader – significant because focused and formed – in which the reader can participate and that he may use to give him a greater awareness and understanding of his world. Literature, in other words, can be used as a gear for stepping up the intensity and increasing the range of our experience and as a glass for clarifying it. This is the *literary* use of language. (554)

Perrine's idea that poetry promotes an intensification of awareness, meaning or emotion is a thread that runs through many definitions. For example, it is echoed by Scott Brewster, in discussing lyric poetry, when he talks about a "moment of intensified awareness" (2), and by the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of poetry as "Composition in verse or some comparable patterned arrangement of language in which the expression of feelings and ideas is given intensity by the use of distinctive style and rhythm". There are also other commonalities found amongst definitions both of poetry as an overarching genre, and those of poetic sub-genres that, if combined with Perrine's definition, serve to narrow that definition from *literary* use of language to *poetic* use. The words 'concentrated' and 'distilled', for example, are common themes, and, in descriptions of lyric poetry (which has become what many people in the 21st Century understand poetry to be), the word 'short' is also frequently used. There is certainly a suggestion in the majority of definitions of, if not brevity, then conciseness; an expectation that language in poetry will be compressed to eliminate the irrelevant and unnecessary word.

6

To be useful, any definition needs to be applicable to all the current forms of written poetry, before off-page forms can be tested against it, even those that diverge widely — and deliberately — from the mainstream. *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* poetry, for instance, moves away from the poet as the creator of meaning, and often divorces the language from syntactic sense. In it the reader is embraced as co-creator, and in place of that syntactic sense, the work foregrounds, Douglas Messerli says, "language itself as the project of [the] writing [...] language is not something that *explains or translates* experience, but is the source of experience. Language is perception, thought itself; and in that context the poems [...] do not function as "frames" of experience or brief narrative summaries of ideas and emotions as they do for many current poets"(2). He continues that "such poetry is rejected in favour of a production of a living document of the author's engagement with the reader and the world through language as the agent of their shared thinking" (3). The *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* poets and their work certainly seem, therefore, to be at odds with mainstream views, but, if one is prepared to accept their premise that language itself can be the source of experience, and if Perrine's definition is applied generously, there is no reason it should not pertain equally to this work as to more mainstream compositions.

One might, for the purposes of recognition and measurement, therefore, arrive at a working definition of poetry that develops Perrine's to consider other elements commonly categorised as 'poetic' and, briefly express it thus, "poetry is work that, through the selection and arrangement of concise and focused language, distils and intensifies experience, awareness, perception or emotion". This definition is the one that I intend to apply as a touchstone throughout this paper.

Defining forms of off-page poetry

Insofar as there <u>is</u> critical conversation on poetry off the page, it is largely focused on 'performance poetry', which is, in itself, a problematic term. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* defines "Performance"

quite extensively and acknowledges development of poetry since the 1960's which include the "Further experimentation with elements of recitation, music, song, digitized or synthesised sound, drama, mime, dance and video, which are merged, altered, choreographed or improvised in seriatim, simultaneous, random or collage order" (894). It does not, however, acknowledge 'performance poetry' as an entity in itself, saying instead that such experimentation is "variously called sound poetry, language poetry, intermedia or sometimes 'performance art' [...] David Antin called his improvisations 'talkpoems'."(894).

There are, perhaps, a couple of explanations for neglect of the genre in this standard literary text. The first is the publication date of the book — in 1993, although the foundations of performance poetry were clearly laid down, the fundamental shift in the means to disseminate such work *as performance* that was to come about with the explosion of the Internet was not something that could have been anticipated. The second is that the entry concentrates on the fact that contemporary poetry has generally been transcribed before performance and "composition has been completed and the work passed into textuality" (892). This shows an inclination to treat performance as an adjunct to written poetry rather than an integral element of a performed work. It reflects and reinforces the perception of poetry as primarily written, but neglects to consider that within performance contexts composition may be flexible with improvisations in, and revisions arising from, performance of the work and audience reaction to it. Furthermore, it neglects to consider that work is being written specifically for performance, and the poet does not expect the audience ever to see the text of the work. Poet Michael Rudd, who organised the first New Zealand Poetry Slam in 2011, says a poet developing work for performance will often make different choices about structure imagery and word choice than they would were the work to be presented in an on-page format that their reader could consider at leisure. Decisions such as how far ideas can be compressed and retain meaning, for instance, are likely to be different if the audience needs to absorb meaning in a single hearing of the work, without access to the text.

Abrams' Glossary of Literary Terms began to define the term 'performance poetry' in its tenth (2008) edition and provides two primary definitions. The first of these is based on the definition Hedwig Gorski offered in her *Litera* column in *The Austin Chronicle* throughout the 1980s. According to Dr Helen Gregory, (a poet, academic, and an organiser of slams and festivals in the UK and Japan) this definition is widely claimed to be the genesis of the term (204). On Gorski's own website, towards the middle of the press release for her 2007 book, it says,

> While living in Austin, Texas, from 1977 to 1993, she met her musician husband, D'Jalma Garnier. He wrote original music for her poetry with the band. They performed the results with East of Eden Band, considered one of the most successful spoken-word bands of all time. Gorski is credited for [sic] coining the term "performance poetry" in the *Austin Chronicle* "Litera" column she initiated. She can be called the first and original performance poet.

Certainly, no earlier definition of the specific phrase seems to appear in reference works or journal articles, and in an interview with Robert Creeley she conducted for the *Journal of American Studies in Turkey,* Gorski says she used it specifically to distinguish poetry from other forms of performance art, particularly art using multiple media. Discussing the difference between herself as a performance poet who uses music to emphasise performance and Laurie Anderson, a performance artist who uses voice and word to create music: "I like to call poetry written only for performance 'performance poetry,' like visual art designed only for performance is called 'performance art.' Either one can use music, or not, but each comes from a different set of aesthetic priorities and history, too. That's why Laurie Anderson is not a poet." (81). In this context, therefore, the term 'performance poetry', refers specifically to the type of work Gorski herself was doing with the East of Eden Band, performing poetry over music, or utilising a specifically musical rhythm for *a capella* performance. Because this is just one of a number of different forms of performed poetry I will examine, however, and different forms may extend

different poetic traditions, for clarity's sake I will refer to this particular form throughout this paper as 'musically structured performance'.

There are sub-categories of musically structured performance depending on the specific type of music that underpins that performance. According to Abrams, for instance, currently "the most widely known and practiced form of performance poetry is **rap**, an element in **hip hop**; the latter term has, since the 1980s come to designate a cultural movement among urban African-American youths" (243). It goes on to describe rap as a form, "spoken in a very heavily stressed beat, over an accompaniment of bass, percussion and sometimes other musical instruments" (243). Another example is dub poetry, a form originating in the Caribbean in the 1970s. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia,* in its discussion of West Indian poetry, describes dub as "a trend toward a more democratic and instant performance poetry." (1374) and further states that, "[T]he new trend unites elements of traditional orality (which uniquely are alive in Caribbean societies) with the new or secondary orality opened up by the development and spread of electronic media [...] This phenomenon draws upon the popular calypso and reggae music." (1374). Whatever the sub-genre, however, the essential structure of this type of performance poetry is music, or musical rhythm, plus spoken word.

The second sub-category of performance poetry that Abrams defines — one widely recognized — is slam poetry, wherein the poet generally delivers a (competitive) dramatised monologue. This is a discipline which Helen Gregory describes thus:

> Poetry slam is a movement, a philosophy, a form, a genre, a game, a community, an educational device, a career path, and a gimmick. It is a multi-faced creature that means many different things to many different people. At its simplest, slam is an oral poetry competition in which poets are expected to perform their own work in front of an audience. They are then scored on the quality of their writing and performance by judges who are typically randomly selected members of the audience. (201)

While delivery styles vary widely within slam, and while, in more recent events, there has been an introduction of team events for multiple voice presentations, the wider public perception of 'slam', driven by what is available on YouTube and television, is that it is a single voice directly addressing its audience. Poet and critic Susan Somers Willet further explains:

> Almost all slam poetry is written in first person, is narrative [...] Devices such as homophonic word play, repetition, singing, call and response, and rhyme are frequently used on the slam stage. A wealth of different performative modes of address are embraced by slam poets, but most of the work performed at slams falls under the categories of comedy, parody, or drama. In terms of tone, protestive and passionate pieces are frequent at a slam, and many poets treat the slam stage as a political soapbox. Some poets do so almost exclusively. (52)

Performance poetry, as defined by Abrams, however, is by no means the only way 'off-page' poetry has developed, and is still developing.   There are numerous other contexts in which poetry exists off the page.   In some cases 'off-page' may simply mean transposition of text from a paper-based medium such as a book or journal, or from a primarily text website, to a more public forum. An example of this is the *Poems on the Underground* project in London, a joint venture by Poetry Society and The British Arts Council. This takes poems, and excerpts of poems, prints them on posters, and displays the posters in the carriages of underground trains, providing commuters with unusual reading material (British Arts Council). In other cases, such as the 2007 concrete cast extract from Dennis Glover's "Wellington Harbour is a Laundry", which is part of the NZ Society of Authors' Writers' Walk on the Wellington seashore, during transposition text may be physically incorporated into visual media, as shown below.

Figure 1 - Wellington Harbour is a Laundry, by Dennis Glover. Image from Wikimedia Commons

In yet others, presentation may not contain any visual textual element at all, but be presented purely orally, moving away from the familiar modes of performance of single voice directly addressing the audience toward multiple voice performances and/or recorded performance, be that audio or video. Examples of this kind of approach include multi-voice, dramatised, filmed, or sound recorded presentations (with or without accompanying visuals) presented in theatres and at festivals[3]. As in visual art and theatre, some stagings may be site-specific works which incorporate the nature of the environment in which the poem is delivered (whether it is delivered in text, through live performance, or in some recorded form) as an element in the poem, such as Sue Hubbard's "Eurydice" painted on the wall of the Waterloo underpass in London and using imagery from Eurydice's descent into the underworld to mirror the descent of passing travellers. According to *The Guardian* this poem "was commissioned by the Arts Council and the BFI [(British Film Industry)]to make the experience of taking the tunnel from Waterloo to the IMAX Cinema less dreary and more theatrical. "(par 4); others are developed as installations, permanent or short term, incorporating

---

[3] The Manawatu Festival of New Arts, for instance, has incorporated filmed, performed, dramatised and multi-voice poetry since 2004.

multiple media[4]. Digital poetry is another emergent genre which can conceivably be described as an off-page presentation although it is not strictly what I refer to in my definition. Since it is largely presented in a primarily text medium, digital poetry, while not paper-based, has much in common with a book or journal. Nonetheless, it is relevant to this discussion insofar as it relates to the incorporation of text into other media or other media into text and insofar as poetry installations have been built around digital poetry.

Finding examples of these various types of presentation is not difficult. They are widely available, particularly through the internet; a search on Google, rather than more academically oriented databases, using the term *video poetry,* for instance, returns more than half a million results. The first of these results (after the Wikipedia definition) links to a website on which several hundred examples of poetry supported by, illustrated through, or otherwise presented using video and/or animation are collected, and others link to individual, educational and collaborative projects. There are more than 7000 results relating to *poetry installation*s, and similar figures for *recorded poetry*. This would seem to indicate that, particularly outside the academic establishment[5], writers are embracing new technological media to convey poetry to a technologically-savvy popular audience. Furthermore, as literary journals are increasingly being published online as well as on paper it is beginning to be possible to find examples of poetry presented through, or utilising, media such as visual art, photography, film, animation, music and soundscape in more academic publications. For instance, the 19th issue of Blackmail Press, the journal of the New Zealand Poetry Society, was a special Spoken Word issue and included, as well as straight spoken poetry, musically

---

[4] An example of a permanent installation is Language of the Birds in North Beach San Francisco: "a flock of 23 flying, illuminated books made of translucent polycarbonate and designed by artists Brian Goggin with Dorka Keehn. Underneath the books are words and phrases in English, Italian, and Chinese that appear to have fallen from their pages" (Hromack, Sarah Par 1), while "Text Rain", *open.ended* and "Words on Water" all discussed in depth later in this paper are examples of temporary works.
[5] As opposed to zero results for "installation poetry" or "poetry installation" and three for "recorded poetry" when searching the MLA database.

structured work and poetry with soundscape support by a number of international poets.[6]

Considerably less easy is finding critical and academic analysis or discussion around this type of work, however. Searches of the MLA database using the terms *Installation poetry, poetry installation* , *video poetry* or *site-specific poetry* generate no more than results 5 results, and all of these relate to articles where poets self-identify their works in such terms, such as Clark Lurberry's account of his class' installation project: *Writing on Water, A Murmur of Words.* These findings suggest that not only is there no real academic evaluation of this kind of work, there is little acknowledgement that it even exists.

One may speculate as to the reasons for certain performance forms being accorded critical attention, while others are not. The first possibility that presents is that the numbers of participants practicing musically structured performance or slam poetry (as artists and audience) are visibly large enough for these forms to be considered a movement or genre while these other forms do not have sufficient critical mass. The second, and perhaps more likely, is that beyond music, which has traditionally been associated with presentation of poetry, the use of additional, non-literary media to convey poetry might be considered by literary purists to move work out of the realms of literature proper into a grey area labelled 'multimedia', whatever the literary focus or aspiration of such work.

To determine how fair, or otherwise, this purists' perception may be, it is necessary to determine to what extent 21st Century off-page presentations of poetry can be shown to be an extension of form within the field of poetry. To do that, one needs to consider exactly what traditions they extend from, how immediate that extension has been and how closely elements used in putting across poetry in these off-page forms, such as environment, sensory stimuli such as light, visual image, sounds, or media such as film and digital

---

[6] available at http://nzpoetsonline.homestead.com/Index19.html

manipulation can be considered to be congruent with elements of craft used in more traditional poetry.

Context for the development of off-page forms

It may be useful in seeing how these forms have developed to look at the literary context within which an interest in off-the-page poetry has taken place, and how the forms respond to that context. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* suggests that the shift from traditional reading to contemporary performance had its genesis in avant-garde performances incorporating music and visuals during the Dadaist and surrealist movements and continued through the Beat and Black Mountain 'Happenings' in the 1950s and 60s (849). The real swell of new orality, however, in which off-page forms began to diverge further from the text-based reading into musically structured performance forms and slam came to prominence, occurred in the late 1980s. This period saw both the rise of the Uptown Poetry Slam at Chicago's Green Mill Lounge (Schmid) and the surge in popularity in urban musically structured performance such as hip-hop and dub.

At that time, a major academic debate about the future of poetry was raging. This debate was generated, Susan Somers-Willet says, out of two articles: Joseph Epstein's editorial "Who killed poetry?" in *Commentary* in 1988, and poet Dana Gioia's response "Can poetry matter?" in the *Atlantic Monthly* of May 1991. The discussion bewailed the falling off of popular audiences for poetry. Epstein, an essayist and short story writer, suggested that while poetry was apparently experiencing a golden age in terms of publication opportunities, prizes and earning opportunities for poets in jobs connected to the craft – primarily through teaching – this was, in real terms, a fallacy. The proliferation of the university creative writing programme, he claimed, engendered a closed community of academics who served as both creators and consumers of poetry, shutting out any audience that read poetry purely for pleasure. This audience, Epstein continued, quoting Philip Larkin's

15

1957 essay *The Pleasure Principle, was* "the only audience worth having, for which the dutiful mob that signs on every September is no substitute". While many poets vocally disagreed, Somers-Willet says[7] (13), Dana Gioia, writing in 1991, largely concurred with Epstein, and made some suggestions about how to revitalise poetry and reconnect with popular audiences. "Poems should be memorized, recited, and performed." he says, "The sheer joy of the art must be emphasized. The pleasure of performance is what first attracts children to poetry, the sensual excitement of speaking and hearing the words of the poem. Performance was also the teaching technique that kept poetry vital for centuries. Maybe it also holds the key to poetry's future." (105).

Furthermore, he suggested that "*When arts administrators plan public readings, they should avoid the standard subculture format of poetry only[8]*. Mix poetry with the other arts, especially music." (104). While it is unlikely that, in making this suggestion, Gioia was advocating the kind of incorporation of other media into poetry that we are seeing in contemporary off-page forms (he also suggested building readings of poetry into music based radio stations), it is clear that he could see the benefit to poetry of using media other than traditional text in close proximity to those words, if not necessarily in conjunction with them.

Susan Somers-Willet argues that this death of poetry debate provided the fertile ground non-academic poets were actively seeking to move away from simple readings of poetry through dramatising, theatricalising and inviting audience participation. She describes the genesis of slam at this period:

> In the midst of these years of artistic anxiety, a Chicago construction worker-turned-poet tested a new venue for poetry which sought an audience outside of "the captive domain of the academic poetry world." Marc Smith [...] turned to the late-night performance venues of bars and lounges in Chicago's Wicker Park.

---

[7] Somers-Willets cites articles by Donald Hall and Richard Tillinghast in *Harper's Magazine* and the *AWP Chronicle* respectively as examples of poets taking the contrary view to Epstein's position.
[8] My italics

He tried many modes of performance of his poetry, including vaudeville, ensemble work, and open mic readings, but none of them quite won Smith the adulation from a live audience that he desired. In 1986 at the Get-Me-High Lounge, when he ran out of material to complete a set during an ensemble show, Smith stumbled upon a format that stuck. He let the audience judge — at first with boos and applause, later with numeric scores — poems performed on stage. Amongst the clinking glasses of vodka tonics and wafts of cigarette smoke, the Uptown Poetry Slam was born. (4-5)

So, she continues, "at the same time that Gioia and Hall were duking it out over poetry's audience in the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's*, Smith found a non-traditional audience for poetry in Chicago's barrooms. The anxiety over poetry's popularity helped to increase attendance at slams; perhaps this was the solution, some reasoned, to discover a poetry for and of 'the people.'" (5). Simultaneously, musically structured forms were gaining popularity both on the ground, through hip-hop, rap and dub – type forms, and in the avant-garde circles of performance art literary elements were expanding with the increasing popularity of artists such as Laurie Anderson.

In terms of the critical environment for poetry, these debates were taking place during the period in which reader-response theory was developing. In essence, Reader-response (or reception) theory applies to a literary context Marcel Duchamp's contention in his 1957 session on the Creative Act at the Convention of the American Federation of Arts that "[t]he creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act". Developed in the 1970s primarily by American scholars such as Stanley Fish and Norman Holland, and German scholars Wolfgang Iser and Hans-Robert Jauss, reader-response counters formalist theory, particularly New Criticism. It shifts the focus away from concentration on the author and 'objective' analysis of text, and instead postulates that each reader interacts (possibly uniquely) with each

text he or she encounters. It suggests furthermore that literature is a subjective experience, as much directed by the reader as it is by the author. Wolfgang Iser states that literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the aesthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the aesthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader. From this polarity it follows that the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two. The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader-though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader. (279) According to critic Marjorie Perloff, this is primarily to disassociate the self/the poet from the writing, because, as she quotes Charles Bernstein, "It's a mistake, I think, to posit the self as the primary organizing feature of writing [...] A poem exists in a matrix of social and historical relations that are more significant to the formation of an individual text than any personal qualities of the life or voice of an author." (16).

In written poetry, one way this invitation to a reciprocal arrangement between audience and poem is evidenced is in what the critic Suman Chakroborty identifies as the postmodernist intention of the $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ poets. This group created poems which were often initially alien and difficult to understand; it necessitated the participation of the reader in creation of meaning in the piece. (24). Language Poets, critic Lee Bartlett says, moved deliberately away from 'expressive' poetry, seeking to develop, through poetry where the syntactical meaning is often obscure and hard to penetrate. He calls it a "spectrum of writing that places its attention primarily on language and ways of making meaning, which takes for granted

neither vocabulary, grammar, process, shape, syntax, program, nor subject matter" (743).

Off-page presentations of poetry (and other literary acts, such as drama and storytelling) seem clearly to respond, too, to the audience-focused approach of reader-response theory, embracing the idea that the reader is an active participant in the experience of literature, though in different ways to the *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* poets. Performance presentations such as slam or performance over music are addressed, in the main, to an audience that is present and responsive to the language and other stimuli of the creative act, the audience participating in the process of creation of meaning and the focus of reception theorists on the reader parallels that of slam poets. Julie Schmid quotes Marc Smith who started the poetry performances at the Get Me High Lounge in Chicago, which evolved into the Uptown Poetry slam at the Green Mill: "The slam is about returning power to the audience. The audience is the most important part of the performance, not the poet on the stage", a comment that resonates with Bernstein's reluctance to accept the self as the centre of organisation in poetry.(636) In a conversation we had after his performance at the Auckland Readers and Writers festival in 2011, Rives (who performs under his surname only), a prominent performance poet and host of the American television series Def Poetry Jam, explained that poems are spontaneously adjusted during performance to take account of and realign to the responses received. This aims to best engage the audience, thereby creating a reciprocal response relationship. Some form of active participation on the part of the audience is key in performance presentations, he says: where an author decides to commit an act of public poetry, they invite their audience to be an accomplice in that act and to engage in the narrative process with the 'speaker' (be that performer or persona).

Installation methods of presenting poetry lack the personal connection between the poet and the audience of performance forms, as the poet is generally not present during the time the audience accesses the installation. However, while it can be said to be less interactive in that way, it still clearly reflects the audience participation that reception theory embraces.

Installations invite the audience to immerse themselves within the text in a way that is more complete than watching a performance, and often gives them greater input into the way they receive text. Levels of interactivity vary from the structure of the installation leading the 'readers' on a journey, to allowing the audience to direct the various aspects of the installation themselves, controlling the order in which material is presented, the volume, the light levels and so on, but all involve some kind of physical immersion in the work. In some installations, particularly those which are digitally based, it may even invite 'readers' to physically play with the exhibit to change and manipulate the meaning of the poem.

In addition to the academic and theoretical contexts, new forms have been developing within a rapidly changing technological one. Since the 1980s there has been an unprecedented increase in the capability, availability and affordability of technological hardware and software. Digital technology, in particular, now allows individuals to experiment with media to present creative work in an ever-greater variety of ways, using low-cost computer hardware, video and image recording via mobile phone, combined with cheap – often free – video and sound editing which is designed to be quick and easy for an amateur to learn.

The most obvious effect of this technological development on performance-based off-page forms is evident the ease and speed with which work can be disseminated to a huge potential audience. Increasingly low-cost Video, DVD and CD recording technology and storage media and more recently transmission through podcasts and YouTube have allowed what were previously simply ephemeral moments to increasingly be captured and retained in the same way a printed book retains written poetry and allows it to be distributed across the world, only much faster.

 However, within other off-page presentations — such as audio and visual recorded poetry, poetry with film and digital poetry — advances in technology have played a much greater role in the developments of the forms, enabling experimentation and realisation of ideas by individuals that previously would have required large professional teams and commensurate

budgets. A Super 8 movie camera (the first home camera to record sound) , for instance, cost $239US in 1974, an equivalent of more than $1600 in 2010[9] , while in 2010 a digital camera, capable of recording 30 minutes of high resolution video with sound, can be purchased for $142.00 from Dick Smith[10]. Film editing was once carried out by specialists literally cutting and splicing film in movie studios or later on computers and software that cost thousands of dollars, while now it can be practiced on home computers, with no physical "film" ever being produced. In 1986, for instance, an IBM desktop computer with 20 megabytes of hard disk drive, only capable of editing around 1 minute of film at a time cost $16000 and a Toaster video editing machine capable of editing and applying basic effects, such as spinning image, cost $4500, and software was highly complex[11]. In 2010, a laptop computer with 1 terrabyte (50,000 times the size of the 1986 machine) can be purchased for less than $1200[12] and simple graphic user interface editing software with tutorials to make it accessible to amateurs, such as Windows Movie Maker, or VideoPad, is available for free.

Off-page poetry as 'proper literature'

I would argue that off-page presentations of poetry are literary responses to these three contexts. That is, despite the current dearth of critical commentary on off-page work, these forms can be seen as extension of more established, written forms, and their roots in these older traditions can be clearly identified.   In terms of what is accepted as 'performance poetry', the literary antecedents of both slam and musically structured performance are reasonably easy to identify. These off-the page presentations are quite simple, albeit sometimes embellished, 'spoken-word' approaches which have clear antecedents in oral traditions of poetry, and can, therefore, be immediately identified as developments of an established form, and quite minor

---

[9] Information from http://www.mrmartinweb.com/movie.html
[10] Source http://www.dse.co.nz/
[11] Information sourced from Mark Melnick, film editor, in a personal communication. Mr Melnick's details are available at http://www.imdb.com/
[12] Source http://www://dse.co.nz/

developments, at that. The slam poet, for instance, can be seen to be akin to the ancient bard. Historically, bards were poets employed by the powerful to record and publically recount heroic deeds and historical events (Nordic and Celtic myth has certainly arrived in the modern day via retellings of sagas and tales originally composed and performed by bards) and additionally to satirise and undermine powerful people perceived in some way to be need such treatment (Wesling 73).   Frank Delaney, for instance recounts an early Irish myth in which Bres, a king, proved troublesome to the Danaans he ruled. To eliminate him "the Poet Carbery satirised him, a fate all men of any stature feared more than death" (6) and this satire led to such humiliation, that Bres renounced the kingship. Robert Pinsky in his article "Responsibilities of the Poet" identifies that contemporary poets, too should be providing this 'social service', that they still have a role to play in chronicling, commentating on, and satirising the social and political issues of the age, that role can be played out equally on the page or off. While travelling a parallel path to the Laureate poet who delivers their own chronicle, commentary or satire on paper, the narrative style and direct audience address employed by slam poets fits firmly within this tradition. Indeed, the immediacy of slam is particularly applicable to satire and topical commentary, since it is received by its audience at the time it is delivered, whereas written poetry must wait to be picked up and read. Even the competitive nature of slam performance has its precedent in the history of the bard; Delany records many competitions between bards for the honour of themselves and their kings in his *Celtic Myths*.

Slam, and particularly performance over music, also has strong resonances with a second oral poetic tradition: the troubadour and trouvère tradition of Northern France, Italy and Spain during the 11th ‑ 13th Century. Trouvère poets, such as Blondel de Nesle, Colin Muset and King Theobald I of Navarre composed and performed mostly epic narrative works, chansons de geste - songs of deeds - largely around the deeds of the Emperor Charlemagne and his contemporary lords of the Carolignian era. These, according to the *New Princeton Encyclopedia*, though carrying an original sense of 'history' are often so overlaid with legend to that they have become largely or wholly

fictitious (180) to make a point about chivalric ideals. As the troubadour tradition developed elements of courtly love were incorporated into the trouvère school and the coming to prominence of the troubadour school, concerned with questions of love — especially courtly love — saw a shift more to lyric rather than narrative in both groups (1310). This is reflected in the styles embraced by performance over music which is less inclined to incorporate narrative elements than is slam, though it is by no means entirely, or always even primarily, lyric. What this means is that even if vocal performance is not the way most people (the majority who do not go to poetry readings) receive their poetry in the contemporary education system and wider world, neither slam nor musically structured poetry is unfamiliar to them. The single voice, direct address form of spoken-word, performed with or without accompaniment, has both historical precedent and is the most likely way people will have encountered poetry off the page, if they have done so at all, through parents/teachers reading aloud, or recordings.

In terms of other off-page forms, however, the traditional roots may be less easy to trace. With the variety of incarnations of off-page poetry, seeking poetic genealogy requires us to explore a number of family histories.

One key problem in perceiving certain off-page forms as 'poetry' comes from the current inclination to equate 'poetry' with 'lyric', since so much contemporary poetry is structured as such, consisting, as Abrams defines it, of "a fairly short poem [...] the utterance of a single speaker, who expresses a state of mind, or a process of perception, thought and feeling."(146) This, definition while it may apply to many examples of slam poems, musically-structured work and pieces presented through multiple media, it is not universal by any means and can be a very uneasy fit for other off-page forms.

Slam, for instance, says Julie Schmid, "often tends to be narrative — often times written in [...] iambic trimeter and tetrameter" (639), providing what Gérard Genette describes in his definition of narrative as a "representation of a real or fictitious event or series of events by language," (1), rather than expressing states or mind or emotion. It is not unusual, either, for off-page work in live or recorded performance or installation to stray into

multiple voices. And while these multi-voice works may be a series of interconnected individual lyrics, they may on occasion have more in common with dramatic poetry, where the speakers adopt characters and interact; thereby providing what Genette describes as 'direct representation of events by actors speaking and performing before the public."(1) when he defines dramatic poetry. These forms are not, however mutually exclusive, and while lyric may be predominant, it is not unusual, David Lindley suggests, for elements of the narrative or dramatic to be integrated within it, while enacting or plot-driven poems may incorporate emotional or perceptual epiphanies.

In written poetry, the use of shifting voices to provide multiple perspectives is a technique used quite widely. In T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land", for instance, the voice shifts from Marie to Teresias, Mrs Porter, the typist, with several of those speakers quoting others. Emily Dickinson frequently used dashes extensively in punctuation, something that many critics, including Paul Crumbley, Brita Lindberg-Seyersted, R.W. Franklin and Thomas H. Johnson, agree imply the presence of multiple voices within her poems (Crumbley). John Berryman, too, utilises a shifting narrator extensively in his "Dream Songs" series, at least insofar as the alter-egos Henry, Mr Bones and the unnamed voice could be said to be separate narrators. Though versions of the same person, each schizophrenic personality is treated as distinct within the series, with voice shifting between first, second and third person and the overall effect created is one of multiple voices, even if issuing from a single persona. Within these poems it is rare, however, for these voices to speak with each other; they contribute a variety of perspectives to the thematic of the poem, rather than holding conversations.

Off-page performances often hearken back, in their use of multiple voice, to this kind of approach, a series of individual sections, interlinked in some way, showing variations of perception of a single event, emotion or concept, from the point of view of several speakers. These perceptions, however, are addressed, by virtue of being performed to an audience, and, because of this, the dramatic monologue is probably the form which most obviously precedes the dramatised off-page performance of poetry. This form

often uses the elements Ina Beth Sessions identifies in her analysis of what she calls the 'perfect' dramatic monologue as, "speaker, audience, occasion, revelation of character, interplay between speaker and audience, dramatic action, and action which takes place in the present."(507). One key feature is the unseen (and unheard) listener separate from the reader to whom the monologue is directed: whose role, Abrams shows, is to be the focus of a one-sided conversation with the speaker, who is clearly not the poet and to encourage the speaker to reveal though what they say, and any responses they make to the invisible auditor, clues to their temperament and character. This auditor can be well defined, as in Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" where he is clearly present in the room. Browning's Duke acknowledges this presence, and the monologue is interspersed with instructions to, or responses to unheard comments or questions from, this conversational partner:

> But to myself they turned (since none puts by
> The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
> And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
> How such a glance came there; so, not the first
> Are you to turn and ask thus.(9-13)

Alternatively, the auditor may be undefined, and not addressed directly by the speaker, as is the case in T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". Whether defined, or not, the presence of the auditor constrains the character to speak as they do, unaware that they are revealing themselves thereby. This gives rise, A. Dwight Culler says to, "the dramatic irony that arises from the contrast between the limited understanding the speaker has of his own words and the larger, encompassing understanding of the poet and reader"(367). Culler notes, however, that while this ironic model has become the accepted structure of the dramatic monologue, in the wake of Browning's extensive use of this approach, "actually, in the early nineteenth century, before the Browning-esque model was firmly established, poems with a single dramatic speaker were written on several different models" (368).

In an off-page dramatised presentation, the audience provides a physical manifestation of the silent auditor implied in the text of on-page forms. Performance, in bringing together the audience and speaker in a

specific time and place, provides four of the elements of dramatic monologue Session identifies — occasion, speaker, audience and audience interaction — and the very transposition of text from page to stage furnishes dramatic action and action in the present. The actual audience, addressed directly in a performance, serves to constrain the speaker and allow for irony to be conveyed through performance, as it is conveyed in text, should irony be part of the outcome of the piece: but, as Culler points out, it need not be.

The chief variation of dramatised poetry from dramatic monologue occurs with the incidence of multiple speakers, though this, too, has precedent in written multi-voice work. In a similar way to written multiple-voice pieces, performed multiple-voice poetry tends to take each voice and give them their own, separate, but interconnected, monologue.

An example of a contemporary off-page presentation where acted performance is the focus is Rex MacGregor's "Death for Sophisticates", a piece produced for the 2010 Manawatu Festival of New Arts. Adopting a compressed language and a strongly metrical, rhyming structure, two protagonists, a man and a woman, discuss death with the audience in a Noel Cowardesque drawing room setting. Musical interpolations of well-known phrases from works such as the Funeral March punctuate the discussion. As they interact in a precise and measured dance, the imagery and language of their spoken words echo the formality and brittleness of the action, while the images themselves, of corpses, decay and putrefaction contrast sharply with the comedy of manners setting. The interchange is not conversation, as one would expect to see in a play, but the speakers explore their separate perceptions of the topic they are considering (death, in this case) and these perceptions develop and change over the course of the piece. The separate strands of the poem as expressed by the separate voices each share commonality, thus far, with lyric, as defined by Abrams. However, the speakers interact physically throughout the piece and their voices are interwoven, so that the physical interaction between characters coupled with the overheard musings of the other speaker are the primary influences on the

directions the changes of perception take, and this makes the piece fundamentally dramatic in nature.

Another example is Janis Freegard's "Crunch", again produced for the 2010 Manawatu Festival of New Arts. In this piece, again, two voices speak parallel monologues to the audience, but this time, they each speak about the other, without directly interacting except to watch each other from a distance. Two perspectives of the same relationship which show it apparently falling apart are provided as the speakers' perceptions of the relationship and their partners are expressed and develop over the course of their individual conversations with the audience. Irony is provided by the overlapping of these monologues. By giving the audience access to the separate conversations they are able to see that while both are perceiving similar problems in the relationship, and making similar journeys, both have a completely different understanding of what is driving those journeys (The male partner interpreting actions of the female as demonstrating a desire for freedom and a resentment of his presence, while the female sees the male's response to this impression he has as neglectful and distant). The audience can see it is this core misunderstanding rather than the behaviour of either partner that is creating the wedge dividing them. This allows the audience — and through conversation with the audience, eventually the speakers — to conclude that it is their personal perceptions rather than the actions of the partners that present the problems. This allows the piece to conclude in reconciliation. Though "Crunch" may initially appear, from this description, more like play than poetry, the two speakers never engage in dialogue or extended speeches but speak in concentrated, focused language designed to distil the essence of the relationship and allow the complexities of the situation to be conveyed in less than three minutes. The piece opens, for instance, with the male character saying: "She collected broken things: fragments of a delicate speckled eggshell she found on the gravel driveway, a starfish arm from the beach. She kept them in a leadlight box, along with her imaginings." Once this imagery is established, the voice changes to the female character's description of the

man. Each section spoken by each voice is similarly compressed and image-dense.

My own piece, "Not Alzheimer's After All" produced for the 2005 Manawatu Festival of New Arts is an example of a multi-voice piece, more like John Berryman's "Dream Songs" in that the three speakers in the piece are three manifestations of the same person, though in, the case of "Not Alzheimer's" they are a woman at three separate stages of her life, rather than schizoid personalities. The piece is, in effect, a lyric, spoken by a single voice and describing a process of perception (Abrams 146), but the speaker's voice is one fractured by time, so that it appears multiple. The piece examines memories recalled randomly from the past by the oldest incarnation of the speaker, and how these affect her perception of her future at the end of her life. The dramatisation, in using three separate actresses to speak the lines, allows for a more compressed and effective shift between the life stages than written presentation would: the physical and vocal representation of each incarnation emphasising the shift in poetic voice which underlines how the character has changed and been changed by the key moments and memories recalled.

Advances in technology have allowed for the use of visual enhancements such as film and animation, as well as the incorporation of visual images into off-page presentations in ways that would not have been possible in the printed form, but incorporating visual embellishment and enhancement to emphasise meaning and emotion is well established in written poetry also. The use of typography to create an intensification of meaning dates back to at least the sixteenth century, when Rabelais' poem "Dive Bouteille" ("Holy Bottle") was printed inside an image of a bottle, the typography of the words designed to follow that shape, as much as possible. The text can be translated[13]:

---

[13] My own translation

Oh, bottle,
brim full with mysteries,
I listen to you with one ear.
Do different,
utter the word
on which my heart hangs.
In the divine liquor
your flanks encompass
Bacchus, who returned
victorious from India
holds all truths enclosed.
Such divine wine that keeps
All lies and deceptions at a distance.
Joy fills the ranges of Noach
where, by you
we are made temperate.
Sound the wonderful word
to save me from misery
so I lose not a drop
white or rosy
of you.
Oh, bottle,
brim full with mysteries,
I listen to you with one ear.
Do different.

Figure 2 Dive Bouteille by Rabelais. Image from
http://web.mit.edu/ebarrett/Public/DigitalPoetry/ra
belais.jpg

This presents a bottle full of, and enclosing, the mysteries of the words within. It uses using wine-related imagery throughout ("divine liquor"/"divine wine" "so I lose not a drop/white or rosy") , images of things that one would expect to find enclosed within a flagon-shaped vessel, so that the   meaning of the text is echoed and emphasised through its visual expression.

The use of visual methods to emphasise meaning continued in the following century, as the growing use of movable type printing presses allowed more radical and innovative visual manipulation of text, such as the way George Herbert's 1633 poem, "Easter Wings", was printed (Turnbull 78). The two stanzas of the this poem were presented not vertically, as would be expected, but turned through ninety degrees to the horizontal, so that they

were presented on facing pages, and at a right angle to the spine of the book. The effect of this format allowed Herbert to create the visual image of two birds – or possibly angels – in flight, echoing the theme of the speaker's desire to rise like the birds singing in praise in the first stanza and to become angelic in the second: the meaning of "imp my wings on thine" here is to become one with God, as to imp, in falconry, meaning "to engraft feathers in the wing of a bird, so as to [...] restore or improve the powers of flight" (Oxford English Dictionary). Furthermore, each individual stanza displays a falling and rising pattern which follows the theme of the text, with man falling from grace through his "foolishness" or "sinne", but rising again in with Christ/God, thereby using visual enhancement to reinforce message.

Lord, who createdſt man in wealth and ſtore,
Though fooliſhly he loſt the ſame,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Moſt poore:
With thee
O let me riſe
As larks, harmoniouſly,
And ſing this day thy victories:
Then ſhall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in ſorrow did beginne
And ſtill with ſickneſſes and ſhame
Thou didſt ſo puniſh ſinne,
That I became
Moſt thinne.
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel this day thy victorie:
For, if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction ſhall advance the flight in me.

Figure 3 Easter Wings, by George Herbert. Image from Wikimedia Commons

This type of textual manipulation was further developed in the calligrammes of Apollinaire in the early 20th Century, and the work of the Italian Futurists of the same period, a development critics such as Willard Bohn and Wendy Steiner identify as occupying an position of transition between early pattern poetry, like Herbert's, and the concrete poetry that followed in the 1950s. Like early pattern poems, the words are arranged to make shapes that represent the

text visually. In "Il Pleut" for instance, by Apollinaire, the words sleet across the page like heavy rain.

Michel Foucault, in describing this type of work says:

The calligramme makes use of this double property of letters to function as linear elements which can be arranged in space and as signs which must be read according to a single chain of phonic substance. As sign, the letter permits us to establish words; as line, it permits us to figure objects. Hence the calligramme playfully seeks to erase the oldest oppositions of our alphabetical civilization: to show and to name; to figure and to speak; to reproduce and to articulate; to imitate and to signify; to look at and to read.(9)

Willard Bohn, too, speaks of a blurring of boundaries through visual poetry, not only between art and literature, but also between reader and text, text and world (8). This blurring, he claims, however, is a positive element in the poetry and serves to invigorate the text: "Not only is the genre an excellent vehicle for poetic inspiration; it is capable of many unexpected nuances [...] the visual dimension is an integral part of the poem, developing and expanding the verbal text" (2), The visual element is working to express the meaning, as much as the linguistic, he implies, but Bohn is still categorically identifying the work as poetry.

This tradition of visual enhancement of textual material continues in shape poetry on the page, such as John Hollander's work in *Types of Shape* in the 90s, containing poems like "Idea: Old Mazda lamp, 50-100-150 W.":

Like Rabelais and Herbert, Hollander here uses the visual appearance of the poem to echo its theme and imagery, selecting his words so that the line breaks (in the particular font selected) allow him to create an immediately recognisable shape. And as with the divine mysteries being contained in Rabelais' Holy Bottle and the fall and rise of man in Herbert's wings, here a shape that readers recognise as a source of literal light, contains an exploration of ideas about intellectual light – "a mind hung brilliantly on filaments", and the

```
                On or
             off Either darkness
          unlocked again or feigned
        daylight perhaps graded only by
       stepped intensities fifty watts apart
      In any event no continuities like those
     of flickering no nor even of fading Flick
    Click and there it is suddenly Oh yes I see
    Indeed A mind hung brilliantly upon filaments
    stung by some untongued brightness opening up
    also encloses and the dark unbounded room lit
    by bare bulbs collapses into an unhurting box
    occupied by furniture now avoidable The dot
     of closure menaces the attention which in
       the flutter of eyelids can only tremble
        like a nervous child lying awake lest
          he be aware of the moment a closing
           shutter of sleep claps to But a
            snapped-off dream disperses
              into darkness like gold
                becoming mere motes
                 becoming light If
                 the eye lies open
                  to such dust as
                  sunlight brings
                   it will never
                   burn But that
                   creation make
                   a visible big
                   difference in
                   the way minds
                   look a shaper
                    will burn
                    outwardly
                    first and
                    thus once
                    there was
                      light
```

Figure 4 Idea: Old Mazda lamp, 50-100-150 W. by John Hollander. Image from Wikimedia Commons

effects of shedding that light — of understanding: "the dark unbounded room lit/ by bare bulbs collapses into an unhurting box/occupied by furniture now avoidable". So, over the course of the poem, physical vision transforms into intellectual vision as the imagery of turning on a physical light bulb at the beginning, transforms into the turning on of understanding through the act of creation, by the end.

Another recent step towards the dissolution of distinctions between visual and language in the field of written poetry comes in the form of concrete poetry, a term coined in the 1950s. This is a form in which, critic R.P Draper says, the arrangements of words, the visual, "the spatial element is essential to the communication, not merely something additional" (329). In this type of poetry, he suggests, meaning *cannot* be derived in the absence of the visual element. Emmet Williams' 1958 poem "Like Attracts Like" demonstrates this principle. Here a visual convergence — an attraction — of the two instances of the word "like" occurs over the course of 13 lines, until

they are fused into a single block overlaying the word "attracts". Simple repetition of the phrase "like attracts like", without the visual element, would be unlikely to generate the impression the visual realisation does of an inevitable merging of the two objects into a single whole where the attraction and the things attracted are indistinguishable from each other.

like   attracts   like
like   attracts   like
like   attracts   like
like   attracts   like
 like   attracts   like
  like   attracts   like
   like attracts like
    likeattractslike
     likeattractlike
      likattraclke
       lihttradike
        likteralike
         liktelikts

Figure 5: Like Attracts Like by Emmett Williams. Photo scanned from Poems for the Millennium.

In an article for *Speechless,* a small press journal that prints and discusses Concrete Poetry, critic Kyle Larson says "In addition to using language or parts of language on non-traditional ways, concrete poetry also uses elements that are more commonly associated with visual art. However, concrete poetry is not visual art. It is still concerned, primarily, with the use of language, generally to communicate some meaning to the reader in some way that is undeniably linguistic in nature." (6)

This tradition of using typographical and visual enhancement in written poetry provides precedent for a number of contemporary off-page presentations which incorporate visual media to deliver or help deliver the message of the poem, including video and animated poetry, where animated text or images are displayed in conjunction with recorded poetry (many examples of which can be found at http://movingpoems.com/, the website mentioned earlier this paper); visual or image enhancement to onstage performance of poetry, such as the projection of images to support the multi-voice recitation of Jim Lindsay's *Cancer Views* in 2010's Manawatu Festival of New Arts; the moving images and text often encountered in digital poetry; and

other such presentations. Indeed, given the blurring of visual and linguistic borders already evident in written forms like pattern, shape and concrete poetry, the idea of using of visual images to support off-page forms seems a clear extension of well-established traditions.

Finally, in terms of the use of technological visual or broadcast media to enhance poetry, I'd like to consider film. The development of the use of film alongside recorded text and music is less recent than other off-page forms and can be directly traced back to pioneering work such as the combination of W.H. Auden's poetry with film and music in the 1936 documentary *Night Mail.* John Grierson's reading of Auden's rhythmic verse is designed to imitate the sound of a train: "This is the night mail, crossing the border/bringing the stamp and the postal order/letters for the rich/letters for the poor/ the shop at the corner and the girl next door" (1-4). The verse is spoken over film of the train and the people working on it, providing visual images to illustrate and enhance the words while the whole is underscored by Benjamin Britten's music to provide an experience that is simultaneously poetic and filmic. This shows that the drive to incorporate visual media to support poetry that began on the page with shape, pattern and concrete poetry had already moved into the adoption of multiple media by the mid 20th century. The use of visual images, provided by the film here was, in general, directly illustrative of the spoken word, "This is the night mail" was spoken over film of the train, for instance, and "letters for the rich, letters for the poor" was illustrated by images of workers sorting letters into slots.

This is the tradition that underpins work where film that neither directly dramatises nor provides animated text is used to support spoken voice poetry, such as my and Luke Anderson's filmed production of *So They Say* for the Manawatu Festival of New Arts 2010.   In this piece, film of a bus journey and the people who take that journey provides counterpoint images for a spoken-word performance of Sacha Norrie's poem. This is a meditative piece, in which the speaker contemplates how alienated he feels from the regular bus travel which represents the drabness of his 21st century existence. The poem is delivered by an actor, and the film segues into live performance

for the final section. The film that supports this piece is not directly illustrative of the words of the poem but has moments of resonance (a young couple climb on the bus, gazing at each other, to the words "They say love is blind", for instance, or an angry woman slams down her cellphone as the voice says, "Rage, rage") to emphasise the emotional centre of ennui and disassociation.

There has also been an impetus in poets to echo and emphasise the meaning of words visually in the way they are arranged, and even to take the words off the page to create that echo. The earliest shape poems, Richard Lanham says, were created by the ancient Greek poet Simias of Rhodes who wrote pieces in the shapes of an axe and an egg, which were designed not only to reflect upon those objects but also be inscribed on their surface. Lanham says that this is because:

> We want to insert the text into the 3D physical world, to engrave it onto the 3D world of stuff, just as we do with tombstones and public monuments. We want to bring the world of literacy, and all that literacy brings with it, into the world of objects and of oral conversation. We want to breach the gulf between letters and the world of objects (84).

It is this impetus, too, that drives the positioning of site-specific material such as David Eggleton's *Waipounamu* carved into the retaining wall at Lake Wakatipu. This piece, from 1994, places a poem that describes a landscape and the history of that region within the specific landscape that poem describes: it inserts the text into the "stuff" of the place, and reciprocally, the "stuff" of the environment is drawn into the meaning of the piece.

Figure 6: Segment of "Waiponamu" by David Eggleton - own photograph

I have not considered such site-specific or other publicly displayed poetry in terms of determining where off-page poetic presentations have their roots. This is because, while it is a develops the way poetry is delivered to an audience by bringing it into the wider world, where it can be discovered, rather than having to be deliberately sought out, in terms of the way the audience assimilates this material, it demonstrates the smallest departure from on-page presentations, and therefore the roots from which the pieces spring are clear. It uses techniques shared with printed poetry: the words, in written form, carry the message and emotional centre, and those words as presented are static and unchanging, allowing the audience to absorb them in a leisurely fashion and consider them reflectively, should they so wish The connotations derived from positioning, and the selection of the material on which it is transcribed provide additional possibilities for intensification of imagery, but essentially the distance travelled from the tradition at the poem's roots is small. This type of presentation is, apart from that desire to impact on, and draw meaning from, the environment around us — Latham's "stuff" — a simple transplantation of text.

Distinguishing 'Poetry' from 'Art'

However, while the poetic roots of a site-specific or other such public piece may be easy to distinguish, the relocation of the words out of a book into

some public space, is most likely to see it placed on (or as part of) a wall, a pavement or similar architectural feature or have it positioned within a specific environment in the same way that public art is positioned. This may lead to a perception that the work is "art" rather than literature: that something presented like visual art must be visual art. This is particularly true if the poem is in some way inscribed on or into a surface (rather than, say, being displayed on a poster) and thereby is fully removed from a printed presentation.

The way the work of Mary-Louise Browne is generally described provides evidence of this perception. Browne is an artist who works in a number of media, but always places words such as word chains carved into stone staircases or brief, poetic phrases painted on canvas, embroidered on fabric or engraved on silver, at the centre of her works. Bartley + Company, who distribute much of her work, call her "a sculptor of words", a description which makes the literary element of the work subsidiary to the way in which Browne constructs that literary element. Browne's work is extensively discussed, but invariably this discussion describes the work as art or sculpture, even while the discussion is concerned with the words that the piece centres on. For instance, her work is discussed by Michael Dunn in *New Zealand Sculpture: a history* thus:

> Mary-Louise Browne (b. 1957), an artist with a subtle feminist agenda, makes text an integral part of her work. Initially she was active as a performance and installation artist, but moved to using durable materials such as granite in the mid-1980s. Like Billy Apple, it is the concept that occupies her, not the object or its manufacture that she sometimes leaves to others. (128)

Browne is a sculpture graduate, and has worked as an arts administrator, so the perception of her as primarily an artist is not unreasonable. Furthermore, there is as much history of language becoming a part of visual art as there is of visual elements being incorporated into literature, so that the confusion between visual and literary art in installation is further exacerbated by the frequent use of words as a key element in

primarily visual artwork. In New Zealand painting, for instance, the Urawera or Elias triptychs of Colin McCahon make words primarily part of a visual image:

Figure 7: Urewera Triptych by Colin McCahon. Image from http://www.art-newzealand.com/ Issues1to40/mccahon0818.jpg

However, distinctions can be made between this type of work and Browne's. In the Urewera triptych for example, the words, painted as part of the two outer pictures of the tripartite artwork, are superimposed on the landscape to provide a political and historical context for that landscape, in a way that serves to intensify the importance of the visual image — for instance the assertion made in the text on the right hand panel "TUHOE/UREWERA/THEIR LAND" primarily serves to express in words the symbolic representation of Tuhoe in the central panel that dominates the landscape behind it in the same way that music underlies and intensifies the words in a performance poem over music: in this case, it is clear that the words have been absorbed into and form part of the visual experience of the audience.

In contrast, Browne's *Body -Soul* sculpture, at the Wellington Botanic Sculpture Trust, has a word-chain: BODY-BONY-BOND-BEND-SEND-SEED-SEER-SEAR-SOAR-SOUR-SOUL is carved into each step of staircase, BODY at the bottom and SOUL at the top with a single letter changing in each intermediary word. In this context, the visual element clearly supports literary, rather than the other way around, with the structure physically echoing the transition of the idea within the text depending on the direction from which it is approached — upward from corporeal to spiritual or vice versa.

Figure 8: Body to Soul by Mary-Louise Browne. Image from Wikimedia Commons

Text is explicitly integral to Browne's work to the extent that the work is generally meaningless without the words (without the word chain, *Body-Soul* is merely a set of steps, for instance). Furthermore, Browne's input to the final work is sometimes purely conceptual, i.e. confined to the writing and design of the piece. These facts, combined, argue for it to be considered *at least as much* as literature as it is considered as art, something that seems to be tacitly acknowledged in Art Consultant Kate Darrow's assessment of Browne's *Transmutations* series, "Each word in a chain, or a poem of sorts, changes its form and meaning one letter at a time. Each created for a specific site, these works are particular to their place and people. They reference the site's history, social or political, together with that of the current visitors or occupants". This argues that even where the practitioner may be identified as primarily an artist in a non-literary field (and generally this is not the case with site specific and public poetry, Browne being an exception, rather than the rule) the presence of a "visual art" aesthetic in a piece and the placement of that piece in the sort of public space often associated with the display of

visual art should not lead to the piece being perceived or treated as such. The determining element must be where the meaning of the piece is primarily derived; if that is poetry, in terms of conforming to the definition provided earlier, the work should be treated as an extension of poetic form. Clearly, in its use of a physical environment as a tool for intensification and distillation, site-specific and public work moves outside traditional forms, but equally clearly, the reliance on language to convey the experience keeps it firmly in the realms of the poetic.

Digital and Installation Poetry

While it is often not difficult to see the dominant partner in concatenations between disciplines, difficulty in delineating a work of literature generally begins when artistic elements usually distinct and separate from literature, such as sculpture, visual images that do not incorporate text, sound other than music or words, and so on, are integrated into the development and presentation of a poem. Experimental forms, too, where more traditional elements of poetry, such as sound or individual words, are foregrounded in such a way that traditional syntactic meaning is sacrificed may be more difficult to define. It is at these edges where distinctions between forms begin to blur.

Digital poetry is a form that inhabits one of those bleeding edges. A form that uses new, computerised media in both the construction and the presentation of work, its definition is complex:

Digital poetry in a proper sense employs hyperlinks, visual and/or kinetic elements, machine-generated text and [...] other features [...]. The term should be reserved for innovative works with specific qualities that cannot be displayed on paper (Bachleitner 303)

But, while it is certainly true that digital poetry cannot be adequately displayed on paper, it is often presented as text in such a way that a reader can examine and re-examine it in a similar fashion to a paper-based text.

Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, I will only be looking at digital poetry insofar as it applies to genuinely off-page presentations: ones where the audience interacts with the text in a way beyond the one-on-one interaction they would experience reading a book. I refer, therefore, to the context of performance and, more particularly, installation.

Installation, is, perhaps more than any other off-page form, likely to be misrepresented as 'art' rather than 'literature'. Indeed, there is no definition of 'installation' in any reference work relating to poetry. However, what I mean to convey in using the term echoes what is generally understood as an 'installation' in a visual art context: an extensive work, inhabiting and transforming a specific space in such a way that the audience can enter into that work and experience it as a participant rather than an observer – to interact with the work in some way (Reiss xix).

There are many reasons that an installation may be perceived as non-literary. The first is that it is likely to use multiple presentation methods and media, and mixed media presentations are often considered to be distinct and separate from the various elements they incorporate, as if those elements are transformed by combination. Rives, as a well-known slam and performance poet, describes himself on his website as "the world's first 2.0 poet". This title acknowledges the way he uses technology in his work; but he also uses the term 'multimedia artist' when he is referring to the work he does that extends the incorporation of technological and multiple media elements further than simply supporting his spoken word stage performances. It doesn't matter that such work is all centred around poetry he told me, because, "People get the idea of multimedia art. Multimedia poetry is more baffling." (Rives, Personal Interview). Even though most of the media used in a poetry installation are likely to be textual in some way, such as printed or projected text, or take the form of a combination of other off-page poetry presentations such as filmed poetry, digital poetry, recorded spoken word or musically structured performance, the literary element is likely to be disregarded by the audience and reviewers, he says: multimedia work tends to be perceived as art.

Another issue with installation as a presentation method for poetry is the extent to which the audience of the piece become the drivers of the way it is perceived. In some installations, particularly those which are digitally based, 'readers' may even be invited to physically play with the exhibit to change and manipulate the meaning of the poem. However, in taking this approach, control of the final text can pass from the poet to the audience, which means that in certain types of presentation, any specifically intended meaning of the work may shift or be lost altogether. Simanowski suggests that a digital approach to text often transforms it beyond recognition. He describes the process as *cultural anthropophagy*, wherein meaning of the text is consumed by the process in which it is presented. He says, "This 'consumption' is not carried out by displacing the text (i.e. replacing it with images) but by transforming text into image, sound, action or into a post-alphabetic object (i.e. depriving the text of its linguistic value)" (1).

The example Simanowski uses to illustrate this 'cannibalism' is an installation by Camille Utterback and Romy Achituv entitled *Text Rain*[14]. It is centred on a poem about bodies and language, the full text of which is the following:

> I like talking with you,
> Simply that: *conversing*
> A turning – with or –around
> As in your turning around
> to face me suddenly...
> at your turning each part
> of my body turns to verb.
> We are the opposite
> of *tongue-tied* if there were
> such an antonym;
> we are synonyms
> for limbs' loosening
> of syntax,
> and yet turn to nothing
> *it's just talk.*

In this installation, however, participants do not, at any time within the installation itself, get the opportunity to read or hear the text as a whole, or

---

[14] A film of this installation is available at http://camilleutterback.com/projects/text-rain/

even to encounter complete words. Rather, letters from the piece are shown falling down a projection screen, with images of participants projected onto the same screen; when the letters encounter an obstacle (a section of the screen darker than a certain threshold) such as a projection of a part of a participant's body, for instance, the fall of the letters is arrested and the text 'lands' on the obstacle until that obstacle moves. The effect is that the participant appears to be playing with the falling letters, as a child might with rain or snow.

Simanowski identifies a clear relationship between text and installation, given that the text of the poem installed explores the connections among bodies, language and conversation, and the installation of that poem makes those connections physically manifest. The section "we are synonyms/for limbs' loosening/of syntax", describes in text the effect of the installation in realisation, for instance; the words falling apart in the presence of a physical body. However, the connection between poem and installation can only clearly be made by exploring the poem separately in a book or a website, given that the text is not available inside the installation itself. Simanowski says "The installation turns out to be a performance of the poem from which it gains its meaning. To say it with the special terms introduced above: the text is devoured in the sense of ritual anthropophagy. However, it is important that the dismembered text remains readable (in a book, on the website for *Text Rain*), since only its perception as intact poem reveals how the installation has digested its meal" and continues, "most visitors experiencing *Text Rain* never look up the text, which is not provided at the installation venue. The majority engage with the installation only on the level of a joyful play with falling letters and hence miss the deeper meaning of the installation as interpretation of the text." (5)

Can the installation itself then be described as poetry? Is the consumption, the transformation, too complete? Does the process move the work from literature to art or some other kind of hybrid? In the end, Simanowski seems to conclude that the consumption and digestion of the text does result in something other than literary: "Text", he says, "requires

concentrating on what it signifies; its appearance itself has, typically, little fore grounded appeal"(8) If this is the case, and if 'consumers' of digital poetry in installation are apparently disinclined to provide that concentration, then, as Marjorie Perloff says, digital poetry of this type may "fetishize digital presentation as something in itself remarkable, as if to say, "Look what the computer can do!" (142) rather than providing new perspectives and forms of poetry through the application of new media.

It is not always the case, however. Digital presentation is not necessarily "fetishized" nor is direct audience participation necessarily destructive of textual meaning. In direct contrast to *Text Rain* is an installation called *open.ended* by Aya Karpinska and Daniel Canazon Howe. This was presented in 2004 in galleries in New York and Philadelphia. The digital text continues to exist as a javascript application available on the internet[15]. In this installation, audience members/readers can manipulate two nested, semi-transparent, hollow digitally rendered cubes that, when not being controlled by a reader, are constantly in motion around each other. On each of the four solid faces of each cube, a text phrase is provided. On the inner cube these phrases are: WE UNFOLD/ THIS FANTASY / BREATHE SOFTLY / AND SURRENDER on the outer, EYES CLOSED I AM ANYWHERE / AN INSTATIABLE NEED TO REPEAT / GET EMOTIONALLY UNDRESSED / COMPRESSING EVERY FACET. Two voices, one female and one male, repeat these phrases, seemingly at random, their voices overlapping, and in the spoken word section other phrases, similar and connected in sound and meaning but not those visible on the facets, can be heard.

Manipulating the joystick (or mouse controls on the computer) to bring the faces into alignment in all possible juxtapositions with each other reveals the complete list of phrases:

> Eyes breathe so softly here
> Insatiable breath that softly repeats
> Press every face softly
> A breath is soft pressure
> When motion unfolds us

---

[15] available at: http://www.technekai.com/open/

Unfolding each facet in fantasy
We may well unfold here
An instinct we feed repeatedly
This is a need for touch
Get this fantasy undressed
Coming to hold each fantasy
We close in on a fantasy
A new need surfaces
And again surrounded
Sing through every surrender
Open again to emotional surrender.

Vocalisation continues to be random. However, each time the faces are brought into alignment to reveal phrase, the vocalisation returns with that particular phrase, with the other lines then rippling in no clearly discernible pattern from that phrase. As the permutations continue, the piece becomes reminiscent of repetitive printed forms like pantoum or sestina, in which the repeated elements shift meanings in relationship to other elements. As the authors say, in the material introducing the web presentation of the work, "Meaning is generated collaboratively as the reader works through the poem and lines of verse appear, vanish, and combine. New potential for juxtaposition, association, and layered meaning are enabled via real-time interaction which becomes a primary component in the poetic experience." This installation illustrates that this particular method of delivery is as likely to be constructive of textual meaning as it is to destroy or consume it.

While it could be argued that syntactic sense is not necessary in achieving poetry — much language poetry, for instance, does not adhere to conventional syntax — in determining whether a piece of work can be considered poetry, it is necessary to consider whether the work invites the audience to engage with the text *as a piece of text,* whether the *language* of the piece is, as Perrine suggested earlier, "used as a gear for stepping up the intensity and increasing the range of our experience and as a glass for clarifying it". When the work fails to do this, and the text of a piece is so far subsumed as to be only an object of "joyful play" divorced from linguistic meaning or the experience of language *as language,* as in Text Rain, then the piece clearly moves beyond poetry into intermedia: just as not all work with

possessing a visual aesthetic is art, so not all work with a textual element can be considered poetry. Making these distinctions allows one to begin to critically consider those works that *can* be seen to be extensions of poetic form.

Off-page tools and techniques

If one accepts that the contemporary off-page forms outlined here can be considered to be extensions of earlier poetic traditions, both oral and written, it follows that they can, and should, be analysed critically as works of poetry, if critical discourse in poetry is to be considered complete. However, in extending the traditions of poetic form the techniques used to achieve the emotional effect in these forms are also extended. Traditional linguistic techniques such metaphor, or sound techniques such as alliteration and onomatopoeia still serve to convey emotional centre in off-page forms as they do in written ones, but there are additional, and sometimes quite different, techniques that need also to be considered in assessing the various forms critically, especially in terms of visual elements.

As I have explained, many of the extended techniques realised in performance can be considered as directly analogous to written techniques, particularly in those used in primarily live performance off-page forms such as slam, musically structured performance and dramatised/multi-voice live performance, since they seek to achieve the same effects in 'sound' as the written techniques. When I interviewed poet David Eggleton in Dunedin in December 2010, for instance, he said that he considered music, recorded voice, visual stimuli and performance elements such as movement, gesture, voice tone and volume as tools that he uses in the same way in his off-page work as the more conventional linguistic tools he employs in the development of his written work. (Eggleton, Personal Interview). In spoken-word performance and musically structured performance, these vocal, auditory and physical elements need to be considered as craft techniques in delivering the work, as do performance elements. Competitive poet Jason Pettus identifies a range of

performance techniques to enhance the delivery of the poem in his book on how to win a poetry slam – considering how well these sorts of techniques are applied provides a framework for critique in the context of live performance. Like David Eggleton, he mentions gesture, for instance, as a visual technique both to convey emphasis, and to underline tone or meaning.   An example of the latter in action might be seen in Rives performance of "Kite" in which he holds his hand up like a sockpuppet and has a conversation with it (the 'voice' of the hand being high and suggestive) to underline a section of the poem concerned with the phrase "I played with myself" – the combination of gesture and tone underlining the double meaning of the phrase and also, in introducing a childlike dialogue between poet and 'puppet' character, adding a literal level of playfulness to the performance which supports the meaning of the words: he does, quite literally 'play with himself' .

The purpose of all these techniques is to add emphasis, focus audience attention on particular words and phrases, and enhance the effectiveness of the sound of the poem; all concerns clearly important in a written 'performance', too. Thus, in assessing them, they need to be considered as analogous to those techniques used to achieve the same effects in written work are assessed: they can be considered in the same way that italics might be used to convey emphasis, omission of space between words might create a sense of increased pace, punctuation or line breaks might insert pauses, or white space might isolate particular words and phrases. Techniques specific to live performance can clearly be seen to parallel the functions of techniques used in written poetry — even visual stimuli are often provided by accompanying pictures or photographs in books of poetry — so applying them to analysis presents relatively little problem.

In addition to extending techniques that are already in use in on-page poetry, off-page forms offer new techniques of their own. Because these might appear to expand poetry into forms where it might begin to be perceived as a new art form it is important to clearly establish the kinds of techniques they have developed from, and how they can be said to enhance the language of the piece, to help it achieve the distillation of experience poetry requires. For

instance, the use of visual enhancements such as use of light, film, projection, environment and animation, do not obviously mirror techniques applied in written poetry as directly as sound and emphasis techniques do, and their assessment becomes particularly challenging in the context of installation where a number of such innovations are likely to be applied simultaneously to achieve the overall effect of the work.

Stepping back from installation for a moment, one can consider some of these techniques individually: the use of animation, for instance, while it displays text in a moving form, can clearly be seen to have similarities with the application of visual enhancements such as typography as demonstrated in shape poetry, insofar as it transforms text from pure words into something that also has a "picture" aesthetic, but in the same way as visual, shape and concrete poetry, that visual element is still firmly focused on the text itself and the language remains visibly and incontrovertibly central to the understanding of the piece. Incorporating film is, in much the same way as animation, calling on the technology available to apply a visual aesthetic to poetry. However, unlike animation, the visual element here is not textual, so if it is to serve the language of a piece it needs to provide stimuli that resonate with that language of the piece to enhance the centre of the piece through the emphasis of key elements in the 'text' (written or not). This can be achieved simply by the use of film that illustrates the imagery directly, or it can draw attention to the language more obliquely through some kind of complementary action. An example of this can be seen in a sequence of a middle-aged couple reading together without conversing, communicating through small gestures and facial expressions, were used to focus the audience's attention on a section of the filmed poem "So They Say"[16] that spoke of the comfort of familiar relationships and the pleasure of growing old in companionship.

Site-specific textual work, such as David Eggleton's *Waipounamu*, Sue Hubbard's *Eurydice*, or Mary Louise Browne's word chains, in using the environment in which they are placed as an enhancement extend traditional

---

[16] Manawatu Festival of New Arts 2010

techniques by not only calling upon the visual aesthetic of the site, but its connotations: the history of Lake Wakitipu, in the case of Eggleton's piece, or the perceived threat often experienced in public spaces like an underpass, in the case of Hubbard's. The success of technique in a site-specific work might, then, come largely from the extent to which its imagery is intensified by its placement, and on how the environment and objects within it are used as images in and of themselves, with connotations of their own to draw on, to contribute to the concentration of 'meaning' within the text.

In showing how techniques might be combined in the context of installation, I'd like to consider an installation, *Murmur of Words,* described in an article by Craig Lurberry. Lurberry, as creator, identifies the work as installation poetry and describes it as, "imagining (and manifesting) alternative forms of text, alternative means and methods (other than upon paper or computer screen) of inscribing language onto the environment." (139) In this project a group of students, led by Lurberry, developed an idea originally inspired by the wish to literally "write on water" at the university of North Florida into a full-blown "poetry installation". Lurberry and students used environment, sound and vision in realising the project. After the first experiment of physically placing the physical words "Water on Water" on water (cut from plastic and floated on a pond), the group, inspired by the effect the words had when viewed through the stairwell window at the University's Library, envisioned a poem coupled with sound to take advantage of the connotations of the site and simultaneously enhance the library environment. In the second incarnation of the project, the floating letters spelled the phrase A MURMUR OF WORDS and were placed so as to be viewed from above, centred in the stairwell window. As students used the stairs the visual stimulus of the words was augmented by a literal murmur made up of overlaying the recorded voices of 25 randomly selected students, reading randomly selected passages, into a single choral recording. This murmur was broadcast through hidden speakers to create a soundscape. The environmental placement of the installation took advantage of the library "as an archive of language, a traditional repository of available, promised knowledge, and the dynamic site

of study" (Lurberry 142), emphasising it as a place where "individuals engaged with language in one form or another" (143). The intention of the placement of visual and voices was, according to Lurberry, to create a situation in which:

> From one floor to the next, viewers would [...] be engaged synasthetically as they moved up or down the stairs, seeing the words *outside* as they are heard (MURMUR), while hearing the words *inside* as they are seen (MURMUR). The sight and sound of the library's own language, the recorded residue of its contained thinking, might thus be telepathically transported from its interior 'quiet zones,' to the transitional nonsite of the stairwell (147)

After a week, the words on the water were altered, slightly, to read A MURMUR OF WOUNDS: "A minor material adjustment of the poem's letters [...] that would nonetheless constitute a major adjustment of its tone and trajectory" (152). This reading of the ideas and intentions behind this particular project shows that the various media (in this case sound, visual and environmental) being used in the installation were chosen to communicate the intended emotional centre of the piece in much the same way that language tools, such as metaphor, assonance, line-breaks and onomatopoeia are chosen to communicate the emotional centre of a written poem.

The potential effect of these techniques in this context is extensive. The placement of the vantage point for viewing the installation within the library, for instance, uses the environment as an image and calls upon the connotations understood by the idea 'library' — not only the repository of knowledge that Lurberry identifies, but also a place where sound is hushed, so that words <u>can</u> only murmur. The embodiment of the word "murmur" by creating a random overlaid sound inhabiting the environment could serve four separate and distinct purposes over the course of the installation, therefore. First, to embody that quiet sound connoted by 'library', next, to illustrate and underpin the visual of the word "murmur" on the lake, then, with the structure of that murmur, being made up of overlaid voices that prevent clear identification of

words, lending a 'gossip' connotation to the not-quite-heard words, that could provide an impetus and origin for the 'wounds' that transmute from 'words' when the installation changes. Finally, as the wounds themselves murmur in the ultimate visual and textual incarnation of the piece, the sound could connote the persistence of regret. Certainly, the language becomes highly concentrated by the use of the multiple connotations of the soundscape.

Critique of this piece would consider how far these techniques had been successful: had the combination of elements in this installation created an emotional sense of shifting from words to wounds, and if so, how? Did the combination of all the elements in the installation — the words chosen and their placement on the pond, the changing of them later, the selection of the vantage point from the stairwell and the resonance of the idea of words emphasised by the murmured recording and the library location — add up to a piece of work that was effective as a poem? Specific questions it might raise would include whether it was possible to access the emotional centre of the piece when the transformation of the text from words to wounds could not be observed as they happened; instead, it relied on 'readers' visiting the installation twice at appropriate periods. Since the work was not cumulative, one might also question whether the multiple connotations of the environmental images would be comprehensible to the audience in the absence of a full text to contextualise them and consider whether the meaning of the transformational element, the movement from words to wounds, might be said to be consumed in the process of that transformation. Much like *Text Rain*, the full text of *Writing on Water: A Murmur of Words* was not made available to readers within the confines of the installation, although, unlike *Text Rain*, the focus of Lurberry's piece remains undeniably on language. That this particular self-identified poetry installation might, when thus assessed, fail to successfully realise the installation form, however, does not devalue that form: rather, it proves that defining installation and other off-page forms

clearly provides a framework and vocabulary against which work can be critically assessed in a literary context.

Summary

Given the many ways that poetry can be presented off the page, it is difficult to define specific and limited new off-page forms categorically, in the tight way a form like, say, a sonnet can be defined. Certain overarching genres such as 'slam', 'performance over music', 'public texts', 'film/video poetry', 'animated poetry' or 'installation poetry' can be allocated; under these general headings a huge variety of sub-genres may arise. These new forms, genres and sub-genres can be seen to have precedents in one (or, more often, several) earlier poetic forms. I suggest, therefore, that the technological, spatial and environmental tools these forms employ are no less valid in the creation and writing of poetry than are those arising from earlier technologies, or those language tools currently designed to convey, emphasise and enhance more traditional poetry forms, providing they are employed in such a way that their focus is on distilling the audience's experience through the medium of targeted language. I suggest that traditional analysis and academic critique can, and should, be applied to these forms with the same rigorous attention to detail that it is to traditional poetry, and that accepting and clearly defining the forms and the various techniques they employ allows for this analysis and critique to be carried out.

Works Cited

Bachleitner, Norbert. "Virtual Muse: Forms and Theory of Digital Poetry." Rubik, Margarethe. *Theory into poetry: new approaches to the lyric.* Amsterdam: Rodophi, 2005. 303-346.

Bartlett, Lee. "What is Language Poetry." *Critical Enquiry* 12 (1986): 741-752.

Bartley + Company Art. *Artists: Mary Louise Browne.* April 2010. 8 June 2011 <http://www.bartleyandcompanyart.co.nz/artist.php?artistID=304&artist=Mary-Louise%20Browne>.

Bohn, Willard. *The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry, 1914-1928.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Books Blog. "Save a great London poetry landmark." 2009. *The Guardian.* 12 October 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2009/nov/04/poetry>.

Brewster, Scott. *Lyric.* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009.

British Arts Council. *Poems on the Underground.* June 2011. 30 July 2011 <http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-literature-poems-on-the-underground.htm>.

Browne, Mary-Louise. "Body To Soul." Wellington: Wellington Sculpture Trust, 1996.

Browning, Robert. "My Last Duchess." *Dramatic Lyrics.* 1842.

Cancer Views. By Jim Lindsay. Perf. Joanne Hall, Cole Hammil, Danu Sefton, Tom Ryder, Tessa Pratt, Mark Kilsby. Manawatu Festival of New Arts, Palmerston North, New Zealand. October 2010.

Chakroborty, Suman. "Meaning, Unmeaning & the Poetics of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E." *The Indian World Review of Literature in English* 4.1 (2008): 16-17.

Crumbley, Paul. *Inflections of the pen: dash and voice in Emily Dickinson.* Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1997.

Crunch. By Janis Freegard. Perf. Lana Sklenars & Phil White. Manawatu Festival Of New Arts, Palmerston North, New Zealand. October 2010.

Culler, A. Dwight. "Monodrama and the Dramatic Monologue." *PMLA* May 1975: 366-385.

Daiches, David. "The Poetry of Dylan Thomas." *College English* 16.1 (1954): 1-8.

Darrow, Kate. "Meteorol." 2006. *Brick Bay Sculpture Trail.* 31 July 2011 <http://www.brickbaysculpture.co.nz/Sculpture/Mary-Louise-Browne/Meteorol.aspx>.

Death for Sophisticates. By Rex McGregor. Perf. Sarah Anastasi, Tom Ryder, Adam Dodd. Manawatu Festival of New Arts, Palmerston North, New Zealand. October 2010.

deLahunta, Scott. "Virtual Reality and Performance." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 24.1 (2002): 105–114.

Draper, R. P. "Concrete Poetry." *New Literary History* 2.2 (1971): 329-340.

Dunn, Michael. *New Zealand Sculpture: a history.* Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2002.

Eggleton, David. *Personal Interview* 8 December 2010.

—. "Waipounamu (Wall poem): The Lakes District." *Quay Wall, Lake Wakatipu.* Queenstown, 1994.

Epstein, Joseph. "Who Killed Poetry?" August 1988. *Commentary.* 3 June 2011 <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/who-killed-poetry/>.

Foucault, Michel Trans. Richard Howard. "Ceci n'est pas une pipe." *October* 1.1 (1976): 6-21.

Funkhouser, Chris. "Augusto de Campos, Digital Poetry, and the Anthropophagic Imperative." July 2007. *Ciber Letras - Journal of literary criticism and culture.* 23 March 2010 <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras/v17/funkhauser.htm>.

Genette, Gérard Trans. Ann Levonas. "Boundaries of Narrative." *New Literary History* 8.1 (1976): 1-13.

Gioia, Dan. "Can Poetry Matter." *Atlantic Monthly* 267.5 (1991): 94-106.

Glazier, Loss Pequeño. "Poets|digital|poetics." Foster, Edward and Donahue, Joseph (eds.). *The World in Time and Space: Towards a History of Innovative American Poetry in Our Time.* Talisman House, 2002.

Glover, Dennis. "Extract - Welllington Harbour is a Laundry." Wellington: NZ Society of Authors, 2007.

Gorski, Hedwig. *Hedwig Gorski.* n.d. 6 April 2011 <https://sites.google.com/site/hedwiggorskisite/>.

—. "Interview with Robert Creeley." *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* (2008): 73-81.

Gregory, Helen. "(Re)presenting Ourselves: Art, Identity, and Status in U.K Poetry Slam." *Oral Tradition* 23.2 (2008): 201-217.

Habekost, Christian. *Verbal riddim: the politics and aesthetics of African-Caribbean dub poetry.* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993.

Harris, Robert. *Virtual Salt Glossary of Literary Terms.* 5th February 2010. 4 June 2011 <http://www.virtualsalt.com/litterms.htm>.

Herbert, George. *Easter Wings* . 1633.

Hollander, John. "Idea: Old Mazda Lamp, 50-100-150 W." Hollander, John. *Types of Shape.* Yale University Press; Expanded edition, 1991. 37.

Hošek, Chaviva & Parker, Patricia, ed. *Lyric Poetry.* New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Hromack, Sarah. "Fun with Public Art UPDATE: North Beach Installs Plaza, Flying Books." 24th September 2008. *Curbed.* 14 October 2011 <http://sf.curbed.com/archives/2008/09/24/fun_with_public_art_update_north_beach_installs_plaza_flying_books.php>.

Huisman, Rosemary. *The Written Poem.* New York: Continuum, 1998.

Iser, Wolfgang. "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." *New Literarary History* 3.2 (1972): 279-299.

Kac, Eduardo. *Media poetry: an international anthology.* Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007.

Karpinska, Aya and Howe, Daniel Canazon. "open.ended." *"New Media Poetry and Poetics" Special Issue, Gallery, Leonardo Electronic Almanac* (2006).

Kaye, Nick. *Site-specific art: performance, place and documentation.* London: Routledge, 2000.

Lanham, Richard A. "What's Next for Text?" *The Economics of Attention.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. 78-129.

Larson, Kyle. "Relations of Time and Space in Concrete Poetry." *Speechless* 2 (2009): 6-14.

Lindley, David. *Lyric.* London: Methuen, 1985.

Lurberry, Clark D. "Writing on Water: A Murmur of Words." *New Writing* 7.2 (2010): 139-159.

McCahon, Colin. *Urawera Triptych.* Te Urawera Museum.

Messerli, Douglas, ed. *"Language" Poetries, An Anthology.* New York: New Directions, 1983.

Not Alzheimer's After All. By Joy Green. Perf. Tara Buckley, Laura Beauchamp & Jackie McKenzie. Square Edge, Palmerston North. October 2005.

Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy.* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1982.

Oxford English Dictionary. "Imp." December 2011. *Oxford English Dictionary Online Version.* 11 February 2012 <http:http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/view/Entry/92032>.

Perloff, Marjorie. "After Free Verse, The New Nonlinear Poetries." Bernstein, Charles. *Close listening: poetry and the performed word.* New York: Oxfory University Press, 1998. 86-99.

—. "Screening the Page/Paging the Screen:Digital Poetics and the Differential Text." *New Media Poetics: contexts, technotexts, and theories.* Ed. Thomas Swiss Adelaide Morriss. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006. 142-164.

—. "The Word as Such: L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poetry in the eighties." *American Poetry Review* 13 (1984): 15-22.

—. "Writing as Re-Writing: Concrete Poetry as Arrière-Garde." July 2007. *Ciber Letras - Journal of literary criticism and culture.* 23 March 2010 <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras/v17/funkhauser.htm>.

Perrine, Laurence. *Literature: Structure, Sound and Sense.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1956.

Pettus, Jason. *How To win a Poetry Slam: The ugly truth about competitive poetry.* Chicago: eGAD, 2002.

Pignatar, Décio and Tolman, Jon M. "Concrete Poetry: A Brief Structural-Historical Guideline." *Poetics Today* (1982): 189-193.

Pinsky, Robert. "Responsibilities of the Poet." *Critical Inquiry* 13.3 (1987): 421-433.

Preminger, Alex & Brogan, T.V.F., ed. *The New Princeton Encylopedia of Poetry and Poetics.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Rabelais, François. *La Bouteille Dive.* 16th Century.

Reiss, Julie H. *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art.* Boston: MIT Press, 2001.

Rives. *Personal Interview* 14 May 2011.

Rives. *Playing Favourites* Kim Hill. 14 May 2011.

Rudd, Michael. *Personal Interview* 14 December 2011.

Schmid, Julie. "Spreading the word : a history of the poetry slam." Foster, Edward and Donahue, Joseph (eds.). *The World in Time and Space: Towards a History of Innovative American Poetry in Our Time.* Talisman House, 2002. 636-645.

Sessions, Ina Beth. "The Dramatic Monologue." *PMLA* 62.2 (1947): 503-516.

Simanowski, Roberto. "Digital Anthropophagy: Refashioning Words as Image, Sound." *Leonardo* (2010): 159-163.

Smaill, Anna. *The Drum Beats Itself: Poetry in London.* Ed. Brian Flaherty Michelle Leggot. March 2008. University of Auckland. 18 March 2010 <http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/kmko/05/ka_mate05_smaill.asp>.

So They Say. By Sacha Norrie. Dir. Joy Green. Perf. So They Say Ensemble. Prod. Luke Anderson. 2010.

Somers-Willet, Susan. "Authenticating Voices: Performance, Black Identity and Slam Poetry." *PhD Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin.* May 2003.

—. *The cultural politics of slam poetry: race, identity, and the performance of popular verse in America.* University of Michigan Press, 2009.

Steiner, Wendy. *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation Between Modern Literature and Painting.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Templeton, Fiona. "Recognition: A Poetic Play." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 23.3 (2001): 103-121.

Torres, Fredrich W. Block & Rui. "Poetic Transformations in(to) the Digital."
2007. *epoetry.* 24 March 2010
<http://epoetry.paragraphe.info/english/papers/blocktorres.pdf>.

Turnbull, Arthur T. and Baird, Russell N. *The Graphics of Communication:
Typography--Layout--Design.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.,
1975.

University of Cambridge, Faculty of English. *The Virtual Classroom Glossary of
Literary Terms.* 2008. 23 May 2011
<http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/vclass/terms.htm>.

Utterback, Camille and Activ,Romy. "Text Rain." Louisville, KY: 21c Museum
Hotel, 2000.

Wesling, Donald. "Difficulties of the Bardic: Language and The Human Voice."
Critical Inquiry 8.1 (1981): 69-81.

Williams, Emmett. "Like Attracts Like." *Poems for the Millennium: The
University of California Book of Modern and Postmodern Poetry, Vol. 2: From
Postwar to Millennium.* Ed. Rothenberg & Joris. University of California Press,
1998. 307.