

RESPONSE

- the Haptic Tacit exhibition writing workshop at Oriel Myrddin Gallery, August 2018.

Writing, in its literal sense, is the making of marks that symbolise things. It is abstract - an abstraction of the things it writes about. Or is it? As someone who hand-prints her poems by letterpress I am also aware of the fetishist appreciation of the 'thingness' of typeface – ampersands, the satisfying shape of the letter Q, in Baskerville, the @ symbol when formed of melted, moulded lead. And the shape of a number 2 or 5 or 7 in Jensen Old Style or Bembo italic; of embracing typos when they accidentally enhance the print, and resemble the knitting they describe, of being forgiving of my flaws and imperfections, mirrored in the imprint. Or the content of my own writing.

My current favourite writing medium - alphabet pasta shapes - was spread over our kitchen table on the morning I was due to run the first RESPONSE writing workshop at Oriel Myrddin Gallery. I was still allowing the session plan to form in my mind, as it does almost up to the moment a workshop begins. It also may be influenced during the actual delivery by something that occurs or arises from participants' writing. I was pushing the letters around. I formed the words Haptic and Tacit, one above the other. Only then did I see the patterns of their form and spelling. Up till that point I had found these two words had made me frown slightly. A little obscure. A little abstruse in their meaning and association with each other.

Fast forward to the day after the workshop, when I woke early on a drizzly day in the middle of the August holiday season. On a whim, I decided to put on my swimming costume and dressing gown and drive to Penbryn beach at 6.30am. I took a flask of tea and a towel and set off to see if I didn't get the place to myself. This can sometimes be the case, if I am lucky.

As I arrived some bedraggled campers, ill-prepared for their night, were retreating from the beach. They were dressed in onesies, shaped as a rabbit, a Tigger, a cat. Bottles clinked. The soaked remnants of a fire from the night before spoke of more convivial moments.

A single tent at the other end of the beach remained zipped in sleep for the whole time I was there.

Alone at last in a landscape that offered everything sensuous – warm, wet, sharp, dark, skin, hair, eyes, salt, indigo, depth and danger, slap, criss-crossing wings, sand and grit - I suddenly took delivery of the afterglow benefits of the day before.

During the workshop I had written alongside the participants, but remained in service to the shape and structure of the day, listening intently to the words of others, only aware of my own words as I was writing them.

There, at the sea, the whole gift of the experience of the day before was visited upon me. Haptic – touch, and Tacit – implicit. The silky warmth of the sea; the relief of having delivered a good workshop; the outrageous beauty of the colours; the brooding, saturated rocks and vegetation; skin, and its outrageous possibilities; free-floating limbs; being rocked free of all tension and anticipation. It was as if the collective experience of people who had taken part in the workshop, opening out their senses and subjective associations in response

to the objects in the gallery, was coming home to me in the gallery of galleries: the sea and the beach and the cliffs and the sky and the birds and the air. The attention of my companion writers had been drawn to the spaces between the objects, the places the objects took them to, associatively, other things they noticed in the gallery apart from the exhibits, things in the exhibition that made them uncomfortable or which they disliked (vital information, in my opinion), the tension of a timed framework, the stimulation of the words of others. Twenty four hours earlier I had awoken to seeing and recognising patterns in the letters that represented the exhibition. There with the sea, I was experiencing the embodiment of their meaning. For me, this was the reward of entering into a process of personally responsive writing. It was akin to, but different from, times when I have become completely absorbed in an artist's work and emerged from a gallery with my neural pathways reformed. For a little while after such intoxication I experience the world as if through the artist's mind. Like that, but in this case the artist was and remained me, helped and influenced by the Haptic Tacit exhibition, but experienced more fully through what happened in the workshop.

I would be fascinated to know of the more long term 'aftergift' experiences of other participants at the workshop. The appreciative feedback given at the end of the session included this statement:

'The creative writing was a wonderful way to engage more deeply with the Haptic Tacit exhibits, the gallery space and my responses from different perspectives. It makes a 3D exhibition 4D. Engaging senses via the imagination, as well as in activity adds to the experience.'

Other participants reported feeling 'revved up', 'buzzy' and stimulated at the same time as feeling calmed and relaxed. It was considered a 'thoroughly exciting, engaging and thought-provoking workshop.'

Well, it was for me too – thanks to all who participated for making it so and to the Oriel Myrddin Gallery team for venturing this new approach to exhibits in the gallery.

I look forward to the next such workshop on Saturday October 27th. This will have a completely different stepping off point, in the sense that the exhibition will be the wonderful, annual Makers' Market. I will enjoy finding ways to lead people into their more oblique and subjective responses to the objects in the gallery then, and to finding out what effect the workshop has when I write alongside participating writers.

Join us if you wish to be part of this creative, reflective and expressive experiment in words.

Kate Pawsey. August 22nd 2018

Kate Pawsey is a writer and founder of Writing Time, a service enabling writers and would-be writers space to explore their writing within a structured and stimulating framework. She has an MSc in creative writing for therapeutic purposes (CWTP) from the psychotherapy training organisation - Metanoia Institute. She works both freelance and collaboratively, with groups and individuals, in person and by correspondence. As co-founder of The Imperfect Press, she hand-prints her own poems using an Adana press. Her website is www.writingtimewithkatepawsey.weebly.com An interview with her in the Cardiff Review is at <http://goo.gl/urr4qC>