

The International
JOURNAL
of the ARTS
IN SOCIETY

Volume 2, Number 5

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Experiences Through Filmmaking

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THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF THE ARTS IN SOCIETY
<http://www.arts-journal.com>

First published in 2008 in Melbourne, Australia by Common Ground Publishing Pty Ltd
www.CommonGroundPublishing.com.

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ISSN: 1833-1866
Publisher Site: <http://www.Arts-Journal.com>

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF THE ARTS IN SOCIETY is a peer refereed journal. Full papers submitted for publication are refereed by Associate Editors through anonymous referee processes.

Typeset in Common Ground Markup Language using CGCreator multichannel typesetting system
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Illuminating the Word: Visualisation of Poetic Experiences Through Filmmaking

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Abstract: Freud acknowledged that poets have explored the unconscious much before he himself developed it into his psychological theories (Jay, 1984: 23). Visionary poets such as Blake and William Wordsworth suggested the psychoanalytic process much before Freud himself practised it (see also Shengold, 2004: 28). In my research I propose to direct this psychoanalytic inquiry, which I suggest to term 'Psychopoetry', towards making explicit and visualising the creative process that visionary poets undergo before they put words down to paper. 'Visionary poetry' is defined as a form of poetry written as a result of experiences that provide a strong sense of the beauty of life (Raine, 1975: 36-37). Within those experiences, I am interested in the process of poetic inspiration, and less in the 'final product', the poem itself. The process of inspiration is visualised, turned inside out in my research – visible for all to see. Drawing on my own experiences as a researcher and a poet/filmmaker, I create films, poetry, installations, performances and graphic designs that act as case study, combining a 'diary' form of documentation of experiences with critical analysis. Observing every step of the poetic experience through means of technology (creating stills and moving images) allows me to distance myself and enable as objective an analysis as possible. In doing so I invite others to be critical of the creative self and to be conscious and active participants in the process. The academic literature tends to discuss poetry to its final form while disregarding the process, thus methods of poetic experiences are not shared and not developed. In my ongoing interviews with poets I observe that poets often argue that they flow within a creative power 'larger' than themselves, but cannot critically reflect on it and share it with others. This article deals with three elements of the process of poetrymaking: Word, Image and Channeling. These elements are exemplified with short films, which can be viewed online (links are provided in this article).

Keywords: Words, Thought, Inspiration, Vision, Image, Self Reflexivity, Films, Creativity, Channel, Emotion

Chapter 1: Word

THE SEARCH FOR self-knowledge through the poetic experience is driven in me by a need to understand and use better the thinking consciousness which is wedded to the poetic creative power. Both thought process and writing poetry employ words as a tool of expression.

Susanne K. Langer, in her translation of Cassirer's *Language and Myth* (Cassirer, 1946: ix), argues that language reflects on an intuitive nature of man and his emotional capacity. According to Langer, the forms of reason, which underlie common sense, do not seem to have a crucial part in the process of thinking as it may seem. Instead, emotion is considered to have a more important role than reason in the process of thinking. However, with the development of language, people seemed propelled to move

from emotional thinking to logical thinking, with an emphasis on the conception of facts. This emphasis has been constantly challenged by the poet, which attempts, according to The Nobel Prize winner poet Derek Walcott (2005), to describe the framework of emotional thinking, not just emotion itself. That attempt suggests that poetic experiences provide for a self-reflective observation of emotions and thoughts that pass through the poet.

In a short film titled *Quantum Words* (2006, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvqPPwMrITg>) I have attempted to visualise such self-reflexivity through the use of words, emotions and symbols of light that 'pass' through the poet. Feedback on that film, obtained at conferences in the UK and Germany, suggested that there is a need for a further exploration of how words are articulated specifically in the poetic experience.





*Image 1: Light 'Passes' through the Poet. Still Image from the Film *Quantum Words*, 2006.
www.youtube.com/gldek*

Cassirer (1946: 44) explains that language and the basic forms of community are originally tied up with mythico-religious conceptions. As verbal structures are also symbols endowed with mythical powers, the word assumes a sort of primary force. In all mythical cosmologies as far back as they can be traced, this supreme position of the word can be found (Cassirer, 1946: 45). Poets seem to articulate such primary force through words, yet when it comes to poetic experience, poets have been pointed out as using creative forms that are separated from their conscious intelligence in the act of writing (Skelton, 1978: 1). The poet is seen as having certain moments of creativity, characterized by denial of objectivity and intellect. However, my research shows that the actual

act of writing poetry is not merely 'unconscious/creative' but also a conscious intellectual formulation and choice of words. Poetic writing contains rational acts of observation of the poet's emotional experience, and the adaptation of words to describe it. The poet critically chooses words to fit and describe his emotion. This involves linguistic choices and the selection and analysis of non-verbal experiences, in a process which is intellectual. The short film *Interview with authorial – Self* (2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKzjLwrsDQ4>) portrays a conversation between a poet and his own source of creativity, discussing the stages of translating inspiration to the physicality of words.



*Image 2: A Poet in a Conversation with his own Creative Self. Still Image from the Film *Interview with Authorial-Self*, 2007. www.youtube.com/gldek*

The film acts as a confrontation between the ‘academic self’ and the ‘artistic creative spirit’. Both are presented as one personality in the film, but split into two aspects of that personality for the purpose of research. I invite the viewer to ask questions by presenting myself as a case study for this dialogue that seems to occur within visionary poets. Visionary poets seem to bridge chaotic inspiration with logical and structural verbal expression in order to convey the intangible spark of the passion of creativity. Yet, it seems that in the process of connecting chaotic inspiration and verbal expression the poet introduces another component – images. I have set to explore the role of images in the process of poetry making, as discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Image

The term ‘image’ has a long and embattled history (Morris, 1989: 337). When one mentions the word ‘image’, does one speak of a mental image or of an optical one? What about perceptual image or the verbal image of metaphors? To consider the sense data and appearances of the perceptual, or dreams, fantasies, memories and ideas is to review the entire Western philosophical discourse. Warner’s work *Phantasmagoria* (2006) seems to embark partly on such an endeavour. My concern in this chapter is the place of the perception of images in poetic experience, trying to clarify the process that the poet undergoes in the creative flow of poetry as explored through the case of my practice and that of others.

While writing poetry the poet seems to create mental images that are bound to emotional states. These images are not necessarily bound to one’s memories or past experiences (Jay, 1984: 26). Indeed, past experiences seem to play a part, yet only in that they are related as a narrative, a framework, in which words play a significant role of composing images. Poets such as Rumi, Blake, Yeats, Rilke and Kathleen Raine reject a ‘memory’ that is forced by societies and is under the rule of reason and logic. Instead, these poets follow a sense of inner knowledge that is often visionary and non-verbal (Jephcott, 1972: 14-15). Non verbal imagery is a primary substance of poetry (Kermode, 2002), and indeed poets are perceived as communicating by the ‘grace of

imagination’ (Kermode, 2002: 54). Through imagination poetic images transcend memories and reflect on a concrete intimate sense of experience of the moment in the poet (Davies, 1998: 67, 85).

I have examined the notion of the transcendence of poetic images over memories in the short film *Whispers in the Dark* (2006, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Isj0alzeVz0>).

This film portrays a personal and intense experience related to war. The war images in the film are close to the poet, thus can be argued as relating directly to the poet’s experiences and memory. Yet, I have noticed that the poems in the films create a separate set of images that are visionary, and that would not be expected to emerge from experiences of pain such as in wars. Moreover, the poetic images indicate a direct relation to reality, yet enable an overflow of emotion to release pain by lifting them above that reality.

One must be receptive to the image in poetic experience at the moment it appears. In such a moment the poetic image receives a sudden significance on the surface of the psyche (Jung, 1990: 75). The poet’s task is to record precisely the moment when his creative impulse delivers a sensation of images. In moments of poetic creativity, the image acts as a faculty for ordering rational thought, and is in an inverse proportion to that of the conceptual intellectual faculty. The poet opens up to an immemorial domain where flashes of images are perceived in a form of knowledge that connects the reality of the external to that of the internal (Bachelard, 1994).

That reality is explored in the short film *The Prince of Hampshire* (2006, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-Chxzltfbs>).

The character ‘Prince of Hampshire’ asserts the power of poetic experiences as a link between images of a dream-like inner state and a waking outer state. This duality allows the poet to draw from the abstract while staying within the physical. This duality of abstract/physical is expressed in the film’s graphic language which I tried to develop in the hope that it will allow the viewers to react to the forms and bring their own experiences to the images. The film investigates visual motifs and the formal possibilities of space, composition and colour.



Image 3: Inner State and Outer State of the Poet. Promotion Poster for the Film *The Prince of Hampshire*, 2006. www.youtube.com/gldek

These visual motifs were tested in the film *Explorers of the Heart* (2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3rtbs0Xbds>),

which documents a collaboration between a poet, a performer and the audience at a poetry event held in Southampton, UK.

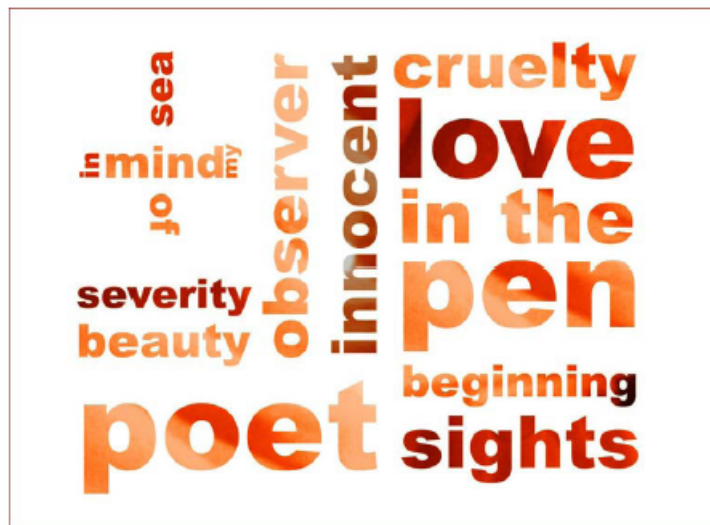


Image 4: Words as an Image in the Process of Poetrymaking. Still Image from the Film *Explorers of the Heart*, 2007. www.youtube.com/gldek

The 'journey', or process of visionary poetry, as observed in the event as well as the making of the film, seems to indicate on stages of creativity. Creativity seems to 'move' from visual inspiration to the poet and from the poet to the paper, where it is read by the audience. This journey was illustrated with graphic visuals created in the editing process, in response to the poetic collaboration. While collaborating, I have come to acknowledge that poetic experience consists of both giving and receiving. It involves the conception of ideas and images, and the bearing of them – the process of writing. I have tried to unify these aspects in one film, one process – the author,

the performer and the audience. The emotion, the intellect and the unified sense that receives the message. I was then intrigued by this unified sense that receives the poetic message, and set out to examine how it affects the poet, as described in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Channeling

Wordsworth was writing his poetry at a time when art and self-consciousness were shaking themselves free from a specific theological epistemology (Jay, 1984: 33). I observe my case of poetrymaking in a

similar situation, where I am trying to shake off religious and cultural bounds. Removed from a specific faith or dogma, it is then possible to reveal what Hegel called the ‘practical activity’ of aesthetic representation that is spiritual and self-transforming. The journey of self-awareness seems deeply rooted within the activity of the poem’s composition, and the growth of a poetic mind. I have noticed that by writing poetry at every stage of my life, the language becomes automatic and ‘wisdom’ seems to flow through the words. That ‘wisdom’ seems to behold knowledge that suggests a connection to what Kant

([1781] 1964: 27) sees as a ‘larger’ source of information. In the very activity of writing poetry one may open up to a wider flow of creativity and transform not only oneself but perhaps the reader as well. The short film *Unfolding Hearts* (2006, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zw2bd1ro8nw>) tells the true story of ‘opening up’ to a source of infinite poetic knowledge that rushes through the poet. Being in awe to that source, as experienced by the poet, poses the question of the nature of that source. Recent research on the English Romantic seems to address this question.



*Image 5: Experiences of ‘Opening Up’ to Sources of Poetic Inspirations. Still Image from the Film *Unfolding Hearts*, 2006. www.youtube.com/gldek*

In the Romantic period art, thought and self-consciousness transpose religious matters into a secular form of everyday experience. With no ‘God’, divinity seems to come closer to be identified with a privileged form of nature (Jephcott, 1972: 30), and the poet’s abilities are perceived not as coming from an external source but from within himself, his being (Jay, 1984: 40). Hegel asserts that the content of art can no longer be viewed as divine, but rather that divinity is to be found in the process of artistic production. That process reflects the ‘deeper truth’ of the sacred (Steiner, 1972: 33), and is inherent in the development of self-knowledge.

Self-knowledge urges the mind to go through stages whose ground is an idea itself; a process in which the mind of the poet presents to itself the consciousness of itself (Rilke, 1950: 25). The consciousness of the poet is formed by feelings (Piirto, 2005: 9-10). Its poetic wisdom begins with metaphysics, not rational and abstract but emotional and imaginary. The first point of visionary poetry experience is an absence from a mind frame of precise intellectual definitions. Looking back on my poetic experi-

ences, I find that the initial sense of receiving poetic language for me is found in a ‘natural’ detached observation of life, which is not focused on intellect or judgement, and thus allows for an experience of nature and the environment (see *Petals of Trust*, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-2pGrCNUMU>). Wordsworth (*Prelude*, 1805, II: 326-330) explains:

I would stand,
beneath some rock, listening to sounds that are
the ghostly language of the ancient earth,
or make their dim abode in distant winds.
Thence did I drink the visionary power.

Wordsworth seems to have found his way to channeling the poetic wisdom by remembering the wisdom of the earth and divinity, whilst forgetting the mindful critical observation of the physical senses. He begins by declaring his method: “I would stand”, which can be understood as a physical stop, and also as mental stop – a suspense from attachment to the thinking thought. He would concentrate on observing

his inner reality as well as the external one (Jay, 1984: 53) in a process, which produces coherent meanings in a form of a poem. Moreover, meanings and eternity turn into a concrete experience. Observation of the inner being seems to provide a sense of timeless. That sense links directly with a natural mode of existence of man, rather than the one inhibited by judgement where the analytic mind traps people into a fixed pattern of beliefs and expressions.

It seems to me that to become a poet one needs not be born a poet, but rather listen to one's heart and intuition, and observe reality through these inner senses.

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About the Author

Gil Dekel

www.poeticmind.co.uk Gil Dekel was born and raised in Israel, and lived in Greece and The Caribbean, before embarking on a research at Portsmouth University, UK, exploring the creative process of poetry-making. Gil is a Reiki Master, visionary poet, graphic designer and filmmaker. His films and visual poetry are shown in Mexico, USA and Britain, and aim at exploring the correlation between artistic creativity and scientific/psychology understandings. Gil describes his field as "psychopoetry". Gil's experiments in automatic-speech, together with wife and researcher Natalie, seek to inquire the stages of poetic creativity where an Idea is seemingly noticed through a Feeling, turns to meaning through Reflection, and then undergoes Choice of Words, which become a poem.

Conclusion

This research implies that a connection to an inner wisdom is available to everyone who is ready to tap into the unknown by means of communicating with the self through words, images and emotions. People use words every day in their thinking process (thus, igniting a creative flow) and in communicating it to others (thus, applying creative flow to action). It may take one only to notice the pattern of these two processes and to guide them in a positive direction for the word to turn poetic. I would like to suggest:

If word is the creation of this world
then communication is its poetry.

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