

‘Transient Feelings’: Creative Response

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A painful story of dislocation, of isolation, and of alienation in a landscape lacking in physicality. Yet these creative autoethnographic vignettes which describe this state of limbo with great feeling and imagery, inspire in the reader vivid dreamlike memories of past physical experiences.

Are such vivid memories which prompt muscle memory, inspired by the vignettes, less affective and meaningful than tangible experience?

The vignettes provoke questions around the tension between the potential freedom of digital ‘limitlessness’ and physical bounds of place; physical isolation from other bodies yet the opportunity to connect with any number of people across the globe digitally; and the screen as mediator, gatekeeper of emotions, in the digital landscape.

The vignettes fully describe the loneliness at the heart of a web of spun threads, seeking others to create a connective tissue of threads to build community in a human response to lockdown isolation.

Despite the traditional themes associated with digital life, there is hope and emotion, love and connection.

i.

Numbers deceive

Trick the heart into believing order of time and structure

Lead you by the hand? Not here

Numbers do not exist

Time does not exist

Create your own world

Start anywhere

i. can be i., ii., iii., iv., v., vi., vii., viii., or ix.

Travel freely with no borders

in infinite space and time

bask in an endless ocean

ii.

‘Lying on the floor (again)’ or as you float on the surface of an endless ocean, the temperature and hardness of the tiles provoke physical sensations in the writer while inspiring in me a muscle memory and echo of feelings of sensory deprivation. I feel the memory. In a floatation tank, water hard under me as granite. I flick a little finger when the water has turned to solid stone, my back responding to it, hard and sore in response. At my finger flick, all physical feeling rushes back into my body. All nerves, heart, and soul are one body again, held softly, caressed in supportive water.

Time passes slow in the tank. Your flowers sag and wilt. Time did not mark your 22nd birthday. Clock hands turn, digital clocks blink but do not mark events which celebrate us, our humanity, the way we expect and desire. The ‘blinking’ eye of the cursor’s gaze? You stare at it. It stares at you.

The cursor, stopping at each ‘sentence unfinished’, cutting the flow of your words, is ‘a blade of precision’ leaving invisible and unsaved marks on your screen where you and time stopped. Loneliness is a hunger, the ‘wave folding inwards’ is sensuous imagery of a devouring which repeats to infinity. The imagery elicits a response in me. I see the eagle swooping down to devour the liver of Prometheus as he is bound to a rock, forever. Every day, the liver created anew. Our loneliness is faced every day, anew, as we experience a hollowing out like the wave ‘folding inwards.’

iii.

The quotes expose thoughts and actions in a digital performative landscape contrasted with perceived real life. One quote is shared to a group chat, seeking confirmation and affirmation of existence.

I share therefore I am?

In contrast, the other quote is recorded privately, in handwriting, to own the statement marking it as personal. The thoughts and fears we bury in journals contrast with the lives we are seen to live online.

iv.

GIFs devour themselves

An infinity of beginnings

Fresh at first play

And endings which never find closure

We engage and dis-engage

Interest lost

Scrolling on and on and on

v.

The singularity of the Garden Rose image ‘pixelated and stretched’ recalls insect collections with movement pinned, time halted, decay banished, all under glass screens. The rose image, although replicated countless times on other devices and platforms contains an authenticity on the ‘refurbished 11” screen’, a singular biography and image on the writer’s screen. Is it that the HD image is too real for our eyes to bear?

vi.

Do we all travel nowhere? We travel through the night in dreamscapes, in our thoughts of people and places during the day. We travel backwards and forwards in time to escape the devouring present loneliness and longing, exchanging images and memories online to remind ourselves that other places and people still exist in the physical world. Is this imaginary travel less real for being intangible? We hold shells and stones from beaches, fir cones from forest walks, books gifted by friends, all to bring tangible experience to our memories of people, places and times.

vii.

We float

Individually

Alone

Apart

Still

The cradle of water transforms under and around us

Hardening

Unyielding

To recall the softness of the water

Move

Stretch

Imagine

viii.

‘My face framed by the light of the screen is your face framed by this window’ shines with humanity. Our capacity for love and building connections will triumph, perhaps. Love continues to be felt in our ‘somersaulting heart’. Despite the mediation of screen (simply a window to other worlds) and ‘insufficient intimacy’, painfully acknowledged, we still fall in love.

ix.

In the digital landscape of pure imagination, we can be anyone we choose. In so-called real life, are we not allowed to choose? Is it only in the digital landscape that we can start fresh every day, reinventing or perhaps devouring ourselves anew? We hear and read “New year, new you”, “Every day is a new beginning”. Is this only for digital lives?

The awful loneliness experienced painfully with ‘describing my images tenderly to no-one’ ends one vignette*.

Yet the digital realm is soul full, filled with eyes and ears eager to devour afresh images every minute of every day.

*It may not be the final vignette for every reader.

Biography

Morven Gow is a writer and a doctoral researcher at the University of Stirling, researching authenticity in 21st Century book publishing cultures. She has read her poems on *BBC Radio Scotland* and in online poetry events. She spent 30 years in the advertising industry planning and buying campaigns for cultural organisations and media companies.

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