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# Peripheral knowledge and feeling: the Perimeters poems

Abstract:

A great deal of what any of us know and feel is elusive, and much of what we 'know' is at the periphery of consciousness. Sometimes this (often subversive) knowledge or feeling is composed of nearly inaccessible memory material; sometimes it consists of bodily knowledge still being formed into mental concepts and searching for the language in which it may be expressed. This knowledge is often situated on the outskirts of our usual modes of apprehension and – to the extent that we access it at all – is experienced as an intuition, intimation, mood, hint, inkling, suggestion or glimpse. In the right circumstances, writers are able to bring such knowledge into their creative compositions – and, indeed, there is occasionally a sense that art is the medium that finally permits its full expression. As a way of exploring some of our 'peripheral' knowledge through an intuitive creative process, in early 2018 we embarked on a collaborative project to write prose poems (which we exchanged as text messages) exploring the idea of perimeters. To date we have produced a series of prose poems for this ongoing collaborative project.

Biograpical notes:

Paul Hetherington has published and/or edited 27 books, including 13 full-length poetry collections and nine chapbooks. Among these are *Moonlight on oleander: prose poems* (UWAP, 2018) and *Palace of memory* (RWP, 2019). He won the 2014 Western Australian Premier's Book Awards (poetry) and undertook an Australia Council for the Arts Literature Board Residency at the BR Whiting Studio in Rome in 2015-16. He was shortlisted for the Kenneth Slessor Prize in the 2017 New South Wales Premier's Awards and commended in the Surprise Encounters: Headstuff Poetry Competition 2018 (Ireland). He is Professor of Writing in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra, head of the International Poetry Studies Institute (IPSI), and one of the founding editors of the international online journal *Axon: creative explorations*. He founded the International Prose Poetry Group in 2014.

Cassandra Atherton is an award-winning writer and scholar of prose poetry. She was a Visiting Scholar in English at Harvard University in 2016 and a Visiting Fellow in Literature at Sophia University, Tokyo, in 2014. Her most recent books of prose poetry are *Pre-Raphaelite* (2018) and *Leftovers* (forthcoming) and she received a VicArts and an Australia Council grant to work on a book of prose poetry about the atomic

bomb. Cassandra co-wrote *Prose poetry: an introduction* (Princeton UP, forthcoming) with Paul Hetherington and is co-editing *The anthology of Australian prose poetry* (Melbourne UP) with him. She is a commissioning editor for *Westerly* magazine.

Keywords:

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## 1. Introduction

As people try to ascertain what they think and feel, a commonsense assumption is that they merely need to look inwards in order to identify their thoughts and feelings.[1] This assumption makes good sense in terms of the more conspicuous emotions and a great deal of daily decision-making. For instance, if someone is elated, this emotion is usually recognisable and its cause – perhaps a recent success – is readily understandable. Or, if a person is hungry and, as a result, decides to buy food, their associated thoughts and emotional responses may be fairly straightforward. More generally, people's capacity to read their own emotions is an example of what John D Mayer, Peter Salovey and David R Caruso identify as emotional intelligence, which includes:

> the ability to engage in sophisticated information processing about one's own and others' emotions and the ability to use this information as a guide to thinking and behavior. That is, individuals high in emotional intelligence pay attention to, use, understand, and manage emotions, and these skills serve adaptive functions that potentially benefit themselves and others. (2008: 503)

However, when it comes to making art – in our case, writing prose poems – the driving ideas and feelings behind a work may be obscure; they may remain obscure even after a prose poem has been written. In other words, while as Susan McLeod has argued, 'writing is an emotional as well as a cognitive activity – we feel as well as think when we write' (1987: 426), authors do not necessarily know where a particular work 'comes from'. Even as creative works are being made, these works may speak of kinds of experience that the author feels, at best, are only vaguely familiar. Susanne Knaller argues that:

> Emotions on the level of production are among those least explored. They fall into two categories: specific emotions specifically generated and experienced during the writing process and generalizable emotions. The former can be identified through direct empirical experiments, documents, and via potentially very speculative conclusions based on generally valid social patterns, biographical circumstances, poetological features etc. The latter depend on the respective aesthetic models and epistemological presuppositions applied and entail distilling a "poetics of emotion". (2017: 20)

We argue the poetics of emotion experienced in the writing process can, and often does, include an element of surprise for the writer. Indeed, this capacity for creative works to surprise their authors has often been remarked upon. Margaret A Boden states that the 'three roads to surprise are the three forms of creativity: combinatory, exploratory, and transformational' (2011: 1). Willis Harman and Howard Rheingold write, 'The moment of illumination almost always comes as a surprise, without warning' (1984: 45). Such surprise has been explained in various ways, most often by connecting creativity and the making of art to unconscious feelings and impulses – broadly speaking, the argument is that because we cannot know our unconscious thoughts until they emerge, they often surprise us when we finally gain access to them. Thus, Todd I Lubart describes illumination as occurring 'when a promising idea suddenly becomes consciously available' (1994: 316).

These ideas can also derive from a person's store of knowledge, some of it well known and some at the elusive margins of thought. Part of this knowledge may belong to the unconscious mind, but much of it inhabits consciousness while remaining partially inaccessible to a working artist – except perhaps through intuitive creative processes. It exists in a peripheral space of mind – and by this phrase we mean more than Carole L Palmer does when she discusses 'core and peripheral knowledge' (2001: 110) in her study of scientific research. We mean a space that sits apart from the day-to-day existence of the artist or writer and belongs at thought's boundaries. Furthermore, in this paper we reflect on our creative practice and analyse each other's prose poems, exploring the 'chain of associations' that Jason Tougaw argues 'writing elucidates [in] the dynamic exchange between the intentional and the peripheral' (2018: 189).[2]

## 2. Creativity and peripheral knowledge

Theorists of creativity emphasise that creativity involves ways of thinking that extend beyond the usual cognitive processes we employ for our daily tasks. However, many writers struggle to define creativity in any detailed way, often trying to understand it after the event in terms of the ideas it produces. For example, James C Kaufman and Robert J Sternberg give a fairly standard definition, writing 'creative ideas must represent something different, new or innovative'; they must be of 'high quality' and they must be 'appropriate to the task at hand' (2010: xiii).

More challengingly, Mauro Mancia connects creativity to processes that originated in the child's construction of their world, arguing the creative artist:

> goes through all the stages of the internal process by which he has constructed his internal world: he recreates objects belonging to his "ideal" or "sublime" world, but he locates them afresh in space and time. He grants them an autonomous life. (1993: 137-38)

Albert Rothenberg takes his cue from Freud's work in connecting creativity to dreams and contends '[t]he heightened sense of consciousness during the course of the creative process constitutes a distinct mirror image of dreaming' (1979: 131), and that creativity is characterised by 'janusian' and 'homospatial' thinking. The former term is '*actively conceiving two or more opposite or antithetical ideas, images, or concepts simultaneously*' (1979: 55; emphasis original). The latter term 'consists of *actively conceiving of two or more discrete entities occupying the same space, a conception leading to the articulation of new identities*' (1979: 69; emphasis original).

These insights into creativity all emphasise the way in which creative processes yield new combinations of material or the invention of new (or transformed) material. However, studies of creativity are often troubled by the question of where the ideas (or knowledge) and structures for new creative works come from, as well as how disparate ideas are joined – and creative artists are not always helpful when addressing this matter. Many artists are vague about where they get their creative ideas, and others speak about their work as a form of immersion that eventually, and rather mysteriously, yields new work.

In an interview with Hila Ratzabi, Jorie Graham discusses knowing and feeling in her creative practice, arguing 'the border – of thinking and feeling – [is] an artificial border as we all know'. She asserts:

> There is no knowing without feeling. As Keats reminds us, all our ideas are tested on the pulse of our senses. There is no other way to know which ones, of the many great-sounding ideas one might have, might be "true". I put that in quotes because it's also a compromise. But as Frost says, "there are roughly zones," and in that rough, no-man's land between thought and sensation lies "feeling." I think *of feeling* as born out of sense data, but inching closer, in the end, to *thought.* (n.p.; emphasis original)

In this way, the unexpected can be said to dwell in the space or 'rough zone' between emotion and knowing. Further, the identification of an emotion can be a way of beginning to demystify surprise. Australian poet Lucy Dougan delays this awareness (or demystification) in her creative practice by stating she has:

> Always worked in a dreamy magpie-ish sort of way. For me a poem may be based on an experience that has settled deeply and then niggled itself to the surface. Along the way lots of loved, filed scraps may also make their way into the poem: snippets from songs; small details in paintings or movies; or quotes from books. (cited in Hetherington 2010: 6)

Dougan's representation of her creative approach is reasonably consistent with many other accounts of creativity in that it emphasises an extended process of gestation involving the incorporation of new information that eventually leads to a new work. This conforms to the classic general model for creative problem-solving which, as Lubart says, identifies 'four stages: Preparation, incubation, illumination and verification' (1994: 316). Lubart comments that this model derives from 'proposals' by the theorists Hadamard, Poincaré, Ribot, J Rossman and Wallas (1994: 316) and, further, he indicates that the model posits the way illumination usually only occurs after a considerable period of waiting.

However, creative problem-solving of the kind that occurs in the drafting of poems does not have to follow this relatively slow and reflective path. In some cases, the drafting of works may happen quickly, and need not rely on what Dougan calls a process of being 'niggled … to the surface'. In their recent paper, 'Microfoundations of knowledge recombination: Peripheral knowledge and breakthrough innovation in teams', Martine R Haas and Wendy Ham explore the way in which 'breakthrough innovation in teams' may be aided by 'seemingly irrelevant knowledge'. They introduce 'the concept of "peripheral knowledge" to describe domains of knowledge that a team initially perceives as irrelevant to its task' (2015: 50). They suggest:

> The importance of both novelty and usefulness for breakthrough innovation suggests that two distinct and complementary stages must occur when recombining ideas from peripheral and core knowledge domains: first, identification of a highly novel connection between the domains, and second, development of the usefulness of that connection for the task at hand. Without identification of a novel connection, development of a breakthrough innovation cannot occur; but without developing a novel connection into one that is also useful for the task, identification will not generate a breakthrough innovation. (2015: 55)

We would like to adapt the ideas of 'peripheral knowledge' and 'novel connections' for our own purposes – using the first phrase to name the knowledge that a writer possesses but which he or she does not initially consider as relevant to a particular creative task or problem; and the second phrase to name the way in which writers may link apparently unlike or unconnected material in novel and creative ways.

## 3. The Perimeters project and an intuitive creativity

We established the Perimeters project through a simple informal agreement that we would write prose poems on the 'perimeter' theme, exchanging short works by text message as spontaneously as possible, and with little prior consideration of a work. In other words, we decided to spend no time in planning or writing preliminary ideas for our works, but to write immediately into the text message screen as soon as we encountered an inkling of an idea for a prose poem. (We have worked together on previous projects, and trusted each other to accept any work we wrote, however unformed.) We also agreed that once one of us received a prose poem text message, the other would reply with their own prose poem as soon as possible – preferably immediately.

We wanted to reduce to a bare minimum the amount of preparation and incubation involved in writing these prose poems (aware that the existence of the project may, in any case, lead to some incubatory activity, at least at an unconscious level) in order to create work that mainly relied on what we already knew and had already incubated. This meant we depended to a considerable extent on an intuitive creative process – so much so that, had we not trusted our intuition, the project would have yielded almost no creative work. We agreed that we would have faith in our instincts and feelings and would try to ensure 'nothing was out of bounds', focusing instead on finding novel combinations of ideas and feelings.

We chose to write prose poetry as we have both published extensively in this form and acknowledged that it was easier to write sentences rather than poetic lines in text messages. Arguably, it is also faster to write sentences as they do not require decisions about line endings, and wrap automatically at the right margin. As we began, we were aware that the prose poem form was well suited to the inclusion of daily, or quotidian, imagery and ideas because the prose poetry paragraph or 'box' is often imagined as something quotidian, which identifies the prose poem as utilitarian and accessible.

We wanted to import ways of thinking into our works that ranged broadly, not only incorporating 'everyday experience', but ranging into territory that yielded unexpected metaphorical connections. However, we did not wish to force these connections. Rather, we wanted to write swiftly while letting our creative process dictate our content, embracing meanings that extended well beyond the denotative. Our aim was that our works would have the surprise of unexpected metaphoric connections. We understood that this process would yield prose poems of varying quality (all of them first drafts) and that some would be more successful than others.

One result – a prose poem by Cassandra Atherton – connects the idea of baking cookies to the idea that friendship may be 'cremated'. The prose poem's pursuit of the

implications of its main metaphor proceeds via a series of lateral connections rather than through an appeal to daily logic. Readers are soon aware that the work may not be read literally, yet it makes perfectly good sense as each shift in the prose poem stretches the main metaphorical idea into territory where language indicates – but does not fully capture – significant strands of feeling. This is aided by the work's allusion to Marcel Proust's madeleines and the associated suggestion that its persona is trying to obliterate all remembrance of her relationship.

By its conclusion, the prose poem's 'tiny sliver of red, plastic heart' is, irreducibly, a complex image of alienated emotion that, once a peripheral trinket, now symbolises the crisis at the core of the work:

> In between baking batches of cookies I cremate our friendship. It doesn't take long, the years combust in 15 minutes on 350 degrees in my Smeg oven. I don't have an urn, so when they cool, I place the ashes in a snap lock bag. Tiny souvenirs of our time together somehow survive the heat: fragments of keychains from places we travelled; the top of a tin that contained caramels; part of the Golden Gate Bridge from the top of a pen. I change the baking paper and bake some madeleines, their golden shell-shapes remind me of sand dunes and honey. When the oven timer chimes I crush the madeleines, add their crumbs to the bag and drop them from my sixth floor balcony. As the bag hits the ground, ashen cake crumbs memorialise our time together. I think it's over but neighbours track remnants around the outside of the building and four days later, on the way to get coffee, a tiny sliver of red, plastic heart sticks in my shoe.

This prose poem was written quickly, and follows an intuitive creative path, making its primary connections not through developing a usual logic, but through an associative process where the linking of two disparate and unlike ideas – baking and a relationship's cremation – leads to further developments of both concepts. In this way, associations generate metaphors that become a conceit and/or an allegory. While many poets give priority to the associative process in their practice, the speed with which the associations were made in this prose poem – and in the Perimeters project generally – results in a number of laterally-derived and wide-ranging metaphors. This may have been because the validity of the associations was not much considered but, instead, rapidly posited in the writing process.

Such swift, intuitive writing is consistent with Ruth Richards' statement that 'intuition and the subsequent moment of insight that may follow …[are] considered by many to be the "core" of creative functioning' (2010: 200) – and the sense of surprise carried by this prose poem is certainly connected to its use of an intuitive and associative creativity. However, despite Richards' endorsement of creative intuition, intuitive processes are neither well understood nor always unambiguously connected to creativity. The online *Cambridge dictionary* defines intuition in rather trivial terms as meaning '(knowledge from) an ability to understand or know something immediately based on your feelings rather than facts' (n.p.). Kenneth S Bowers, Peter Farvolden and Lambros Mermigis write that while creativity and intuition 'constitute two important routes to new knowledge ... both very dependent on prior mnemonic encodings', creativity relates to the generation 'of a novel form or product' (1997: 27), whereas intuition 'implies' a pre-existent 'pattern, structure, or organization' (1997:

28).

Intuition is thus often represented as inferior to real creative insight or illumination, and even Richards qualifies her endorsement of intuitive creative methods by quoting Emma Policastro's remark that '[i]ntuition entails vague and tacit knowledge, whereas insight involves sudden, and usually clear, awareness' (Policastro 1999: 90). However, Policastro does acknowledge that in 'the context of creativity, intuition may precede insight'; that 'there may be various forms of intuition'; and that 'it might well be the case that only certain forms of intuition are related to certain forms of creativity' (1999: 90).

Despite the apparent difference between illumination/insight and intuition, it is possible to closely connect the moment of creative insight directly to the intuitive, if one accepts that creative insight may sometimes be reached swiftly and almost solely by intuitive processes. This is likely to be more often the case where experienced creative artists are concerned, because they have well-developed skills. In the case of such experienced writers, Bowers, Farvolden and Mermigis' understanding of intuition may be especially useful. They define intuition 'as the perception of clues to coherence that tacitly activates and guides thought towards an insight or hunch about the nature of the coherence in question' (1997: 29). In the Perimeters project, the rapid intuitive writing process guided the direction of the compositions towards 'coherence', so that in the best examples, such as Atherton's prose poem quoted above, the first three stages identified by the standard model for creative problem solving – preparation, incubation and illumination – happened almost simultaneously in the creative process.

Benedetto Croce observes, '[i]ntuition is the undifferentiated unity of the perception of the real and the simple image of the possible' (1995: 1), while Allan Schore – following Volz and von Cramon (2006) – writes that intuition 'is not expressed in language but rather is "embodied" in a "gut-feeling"' (2010: 191). These comments are both directly applicable to Atherton's poem, which depends on the idea that, at the level of poetic language, what is imaginatively possible may be made as 'real' as anything else. Her example demonstrates that a prose poem (in this case) may follow an embodied process of creation where a creative work is largely conceived in the moment of its writing.

## 4. The Perimeters project and rapid, elusive spaces

Intuitive and speedy creative processes such as we used in the Perimeters project do not conform to the generally accepted model for creative problem-solving mentioned earlier, simply because they are primarily made out of creative moments rather than longer periods of time. Importantly, rather than focusing on preparation or incubation of an idea, when we began writing we searched swiftly and intuitively for some 'peripheral knowledge' that would prompt a creative work, and we tried to make a 'novel connection' between this knowledge and ideas that we would usually consider more central or 'core' to our creative writing.

This meant that our creative process employed strategies akin to what Rothenberg calls

'homospatial' thinking – which is to say, 'conceiving of two or more discrete entities occupying the same space, a conception leading to the articulation of new identities'. Such homospatial thinking enables the intuitive creation of 'novel connections' and allows a creative work to emerge through the way in which these connections interact and develop exponentially – in a manner that has some resemblance to a chemical reaction – as words, phrases and their various meanings intersect and interact. There are also aspects of Mancia's idea at work: Atherton's prose poem is an example of the creative artist 'recreat[ing] objects belonging to [her] "ideal" or "sublime" world', because the foundation for this prose poem is a view of intimate relationships that have their origin in childhood – even if the prose poem problematises any vestigial, childish 'idealisation' by questioning whether friendships may remain intact.

The rapid creative process prioritised in the Perimeters project led to prose poems with emphases on the elusive, and on what was beyond the reach of more considered, studied or reflective modes of thinking. In this way, the themes and preoccupations of the prose poems – in emphasising what was glancing and unresolved – represented a kind of mimicry of the quick response time of composition and the need to express ideas that were nascent or not yet well understood. This compositional process, involving a rapid exploration for the right word or image, manifested itself in one of Hetherington's prose poems as a quest narrative. Here, the elusive is idealised in the search for the mermaid of 'local legend' who haunts the protagonist's peripheral vision:

> For the first year he repaired fences and dug silt from the smaller dams. He straightened the eaves and planted a new garden. And he walked the property's fence line once a week. It took three and a half hours, crossing the creek on a path of flat stones, climbing the hill at the northern end. In the lake he looked for the mermaid of local legend, thought of strong fins; a cresting of water. Occasionally he saw blue movement at the edge of vision. He camped there, listening to ripples, imagined her fishy life swimming into dry air.

Importantly, the mermaid is never found and so the 'fishing' expedition – the search – is ongoing. In this way, that which is desired remains permanently 'at the edge of vision'. This idea is further explored in Hetherington's choice to make the mermaid metonymic by emphasising a series of parts ('strong fins; a cresting of water … blue movement [and] ripples') that stand in for a whole – to such an extent that, in one sense, the mermaid exists primarily as an absence in the prose poem. In a Prufrockian sense, the protagonist is isolated and lonely; trying to make order out of disorder in 'repair[ing] fences; straighten[ing] the eaves [and] plant[ing] a new garden'; and in searching for a fantasy. Furthermore, this prose poem's meaning turns on its borders and edges, its emphasis on the perimeter. The protagonist 'walk[s] the property's fence line'; 'cross[es] the creek' and camps by the side of the lake. These territorial demarcations work to create a sense of outsidership for the protagonist, locating him at the periphery of his own life.

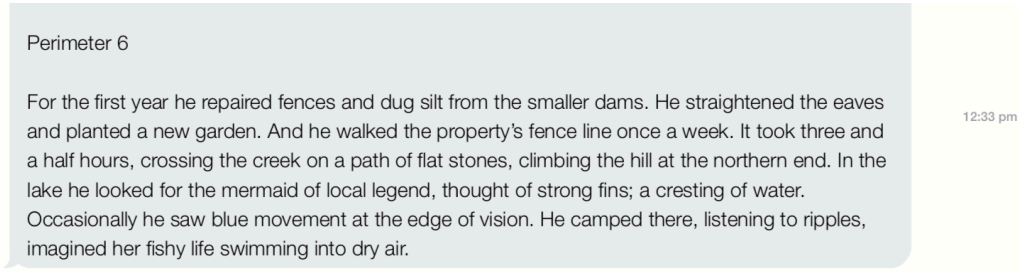
In her discussion of Veronica Forrest-Thomson's poetry, Alison Mark argues:

> The periphery is the liminal area, the cross over point between two sites, states or places. It is both frontier and boundary, depending on how one is positioned. Being

> on the periphery is perilously near to being close to the edge. Such liminalities [are] suggestive and rich in potential … The periphery is a location that can permit the twilight and the transgressive … A periphery is a limit and yet permeable at the same time: a poem, however semantically instransigent, can never make a truly hermetic seal between itself and the reader, and it would be a very odd poem indeed that sought to be utterly impermeable rather than simply to resist recuperation. In this respect the periphery invites comparison with another borderline, that between consciousness and the unconscious. (2001: 43)

This teasing out of meanings connected to the word 'periphery', and its associations with the liminal, understands the peripheral as a threshold. Peripheral locations and liminal moments represent entry points through which the reader passes to gain access to a poem and its meanings. In Hetherington's prose poem, this act is emphasised in the protagonist's transgression of boundaries when he crosses the creek and climbs the hill. Furthermore, the unruliness and chaos of the natural world becomes a frontier the protagonist must first tame in order to safely traverse it. This demonstrates the way in which the 'periphery' is often difficult to access but ultimately permeable.

Mark's definition of periphery may also be read as a description of the prose poem form, which is instantly identifiable by its justified margins; its borders which are chosen by the poet or, sometimes, the publisher. While composing text messages does not allow for a right justified margin, it adds another border to the prose poem's perimeter by encasing it in a coloured (often blue or green) box against a white background. In this way, the prose poem that is composed as a text message is a box inside a box. This is different from the page or computer screen as the text message box is emphasised by its shading, as this screenshot shows:




The reader has two 'cross over point[s]' here: the prose poem's initial masquerade as a text message and then the visual subterfuge of the poem appearing as a paragraph of text. These multiple boundary crossings culminate in outsider/insider polarities where the reader is initially positioned outside the prose poem – or on the margins with the protagonist – only to gain access to the poem's inner workings and 'permeab[ility]' once this dual masquerade is uncovered through the act of reading.

## 5. An accidental case study into memory

The Perimeter project became, almost accidentally, a small case study into how intuitive creative processes may work, and how a project exploring the peripheral took our imaginations into marginal territory. It is not that the quality of our writing changed in any extreme way – we both have established poetic voices – but some of our usual

preoccupations were unsettled. The idea of the perimeter meant that as we wrote prose poems for this project our imaginations were always tending to gravitate towards the 'outside', or the boundaries, of what we knew and felt. This not only enabled us to bring 'peripheral knowledge' more readily into our works, but meant that the works were also a way of considering the contrast between the outside and inside, enabling us to step back, as it were, from our 'group' identities (as prose poets; as writers more generally; as professionals; and so on) to inhabit a creative space where we were looking (in imaginative terms) from the prose-poetical borderlands.

In Hetherington's case, this led to a number of prose poems that presented a persona quizzing their position as a creative writer vis-à-vis language, memory and the making of meaning:

> I am not looking towards land, but towards the wide explorations of insouciant verbs. They've carried me far out, and I'm cresting on their momentum. The day is unnameable; my solace is the memory of a girl straddling my chest. Was I thirteen then; did we feel waves fall over us like sentences? She spat out a mouthful of sea as I hesitated on the perimeters of new expression. The salty hemline of her dress lifted, dipped and dragged.

This work incorporates memory material that had been forgotten prior to the writing of the poem, dragged to light by an intuitive writing process that, in seeking an image for being 'at sea' with language, found a 13-year-old's deeply-felt experience of a nascent, bodily intimacy. This image resonates in various ways in the prose poem, because it simultaneously signifies the kinds of embodied experience that exist outside of language; the hesitancy and uncertainty associated with intimate encounters; and the way in which so much acquisition of knowledge involves crossing from the outside to the inside, or hesitating at the border (the 'hemline') between what we know and what we would know.

This is also explored in one of Atherton's prose poems, where buried memories are unearthed and re-interred with the threat of permanent exposure, evident in the rising tide mentioned in the last sentence. The 'trail of sand' and 'the shoreline' are two permeable boundaries for the narrator as she crosses the road on the 'wet sand from the shoreline':

> I remember the trail of sand across the road, pieces of shell and seaweed speckling the yellow path, my bare feet always seeming to find something broken. I would use the wet sand from the shoreline to build chains of hearts, protecting them with a wall of sand covered in scallop shells. But the water always eroded the structure and eventually the hearts would be buried. I'd squash them back into the sand before re-building them again and again, but the tide was always at my heels.

Here, memory addresses the idea of what is 'broken'; the sand hearts are the protogonist's treasured recollections. As these hearts are slowly uncovered inside the wall, they are entombed as the narrator 'squash[es] them back into the sand before re-building them'. Through this process Atherton acknowledges the complexity of memory and its negotiations with feeling, and the role of the unconscious. The protagonist's hearts are hidden, protected, exposed, eroded and rebuilt, leaving a residue or sandy palimpsest.

## 6. Peripheral visions

At the periphery of each of the prose poems in this project are other prose poems read directly before its composition. In this way, every Perimeters prose poem bears the impression of previous poems in the text message chain. The chain of three prose poems below exemplifies the way images and ideas are repeated or re-interpreted within the chain, exploiting both conscious and unconscious peripheral knowledge. 'Perimeter 7' and 'Perimeter 9' were written by Hetherington and 'Perimeter 8' by Atherton. They all feature the experience of flying and are all set in the liminal spaces of an airport terminal or those that occur during a flight:

> Perimeter 7
>
> The fumes from the aircraft strike him in the lungs. He is rising over a pack with the kicked ball in sight as someone punches him in the stomach. Falling is the smallest failure and the ball brushes a hand as he descends. He sees the wide sky and the boughs of a eucalypt; the earth roughly cushions him. As he stands he thinks he sees a boy in the sky with lit wings; believing he sees the boy climb. It may be a bird; it may be old stories repopulating the earth. Now he is ushered on board and the plane's engines churn.
>
> Perimeter 8
>
> Long lines of people inch around gate lounges and through doors to jet bridges as flights on the departures board scroll upwards. You stand beside me watching people walking to the carpark or rushing to collect their baggage from the carousel. I remember yellow iced doughnuts, Joni Mitchell songs and gin and tonics in long glasses. For a long moment I think about asking you to sit down with me again, to play me songs on your iphone, to linger a moment more. But you kiss my shoulder and stride ahead, the flight attendant scanning your boarding pass. I inhabit the eye of the storm as you fly into a tropical cyclone.
>
> Perimeter 9
>
> The small plane lurches, lifts as if on a cushion of air. He stifles his sense of illness, settles uncomfortably; and is cocooned in words, though nobody speaks; noisy engines burr. Extravagant things they said are magnified as he continuously fails to understand. A hostess offers a snack, and the pilot apologises for the three-hour delay. He trawls memory for what he's believed, and for something beautiful in speech. There are sentences she wrote; there are intimacies that language shaped.

'Perimeter 8' and 'Perimeter 9' demonstrate the preceding prose poems' influence on their composition. Adrianna M Paliyenko defines influence as:

> Generally signifying power exerted over others, impl[ying] authority. Literary criticism, assuming this sense of the term limit *influence* to the transmission of themes, ideas, images, style, and so forth from earlier to later creative artists. (1997: 3; emphasis original)

She takes this further by arguing, 'Creative artists strive for originality, that is, to influence rather than to be influenced' (1997: 3). Certainly, discussions about poetry

and influence generally focus on the relationship of influence to originality. Harold Bloom's *The anxiety of influence* (1997) and *A map of misreading* (2007) famously focus on an Oedipal struggle with a (male) 'precursor', while Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The madwoman in the attic* critiques Bloom's theories by exploring women's 'anxiety of authorship' (2000: 48) and the need to create a female poetic tradition of influence.

Kevin Brophy provides an interesting discussion of imitation, mimesis and influence in *Patterns of creativity: investigations into the sources and methods of creativity.* In his discussion of TS Eliot's 'Tradition and the individual talent', Brophy interprets Eliot's thesis as arguing '[i]f we were more self-critical and more open-minded, we might discover that the best parts of a poet's work are those in which predecessors assert their presence and influence most vigorously' (2009: 77). Indeed, Brophy extends this important point to claim:

> Poets do not attend to the writing of poetry with an ordered and always intelligently detached attention to the process of imitation, nor need they be locked in fierce and shameful battle with a father-figure … Just as evolution cannot proceed without reproduction, I suggest the poet seeks influence, longs for influence, needs influence and creates influence. How else can one become an artist? (88)

Of course, the Perimeter poems are not responding directly to poet predecessors in the traditional sense because we are contemporary poets and colleagues who responded to one another's prose poems often minutes after reading them (many chains of the Perimeter prose poems were written with only about 20-minute intervals between works). Therefore, in this project, influence and the predecessor's poetry take on new meaning – one where influence, as Brophy acknowledges, 'creates [further] influence' (88) and, in this instance, hastens the composition of the next poem.

While 'Perimeter 7' introduces the airport, aeroplane and jet bridge, 'Perimeter 8' responds to these major elements by choosing to recast the narrative in a similar space. As 'Perimeter 7' ends with the protagonist being 'ushered on board', 'Perimeter 8' explores moments in an airport gate lounge before a parting of ways. Both prose poems use the aeroplane and the liminal spaces of an airport terminal and jet bridge as triggers for memories. In 'Perimeter 7', these are childhood memories, 'old stories repopulating the earth' in Icarusian splendour. In 'Perimeter 8' the memories are of moments in airports previously shared with others. The reverie is cut short when one remembered person 'stride[s] ahead' to have his boarding pass scanned. Finally, in 'Perimeter 9', the two narratives are brought together. The protagonist in this prose poem has started his flight and the 'fumes' from 'Perimeter 7', as well as the plane lurching, might be understood as being connected to his 'sense of illness'. However, this time the associations sparked on the aeroplane are of a relationship in crisis. The sense of intimacy introduced in the 'Perimeter 8' prose poem is reinflected in the final line of 'Perimeter 9': 'there are intimacies that language shaped.'

Thus, and more generally, these three Perimeter prose poems use the image of an aeroplane as a metaphor to explore the process of circling around knowledge before landing at any sort of conclusion. The works establish and play upon their interconnectedness as they proceed – importing, transforming and elaborating

particular aspects of previous works. As they do, they create new meanings and extend the poetic chain or conversation, adapting 'peripheral knowledge' and making 'novel connections' over a very short period. The borders of every prose poem created in this way are defined and separate, yet there is a great deal of crossing over from one work to another; as if each work is made of permeable or porous material.

## 7. Conclusion

The Perimeters project tested our ways of making work and led to a new understanding of the importance of the periphery in our creative processes. We had both previously been interested in what was on the edges of our imaginative and creative lives – and had written about such matters – but it was only with the Perimeters project that we consciously placed ourselves in an intuitive creative relationship that explicitly searched out what we had imaginatively neglected or forgotten. As we did, and as we made various new works incorporating 'peripheral knowledge' and creating 'novel connections' from the incorporation of this knowledge, so we discovered that we had not known ourselves quite as well as we thought. And, while not all of the Perimeters project prose poems were equally successful, they all took us to places that were both salutary and productive of new creative work.

After completing the first stage of the Perimeters project (we are currently having our first pause in writing Perimeters prose poems), we concluded that intuitive creative processes do not, as Policastro writes, always involve a 'vague and tacit knowledge', but rather that they may be the immediate conduit to the 'sudden, and usually clear, awareness' of illumination and insight. Although we had to journey away from many of our usual creative processes to find this out, it was a useful process. In the Perimeters project the periphery looks back towards the centre and, then, as new prose poems are made, the periphery and the centre are joined in new relationships. They are, in poetic terms, relocated 'afresh in space and time' (Mancia 1993: 138).

## Endnotes

1. We use Antonio R. Damasio's definition: 'feelings are the mental representation of the physiologic changes that occur during an emotion' (2004: 52).

2. Tougaw wrote 'Brain memoirs' which is largely about illness and disability narratives. We are not claiming our prose poems are about either of these things, just that his theory about the intentional and peripheral is relevant to writing, more generally, and to memory which is one of the emphases of this paper.

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