How I quit writing: spontaneity and creative writing

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Abstract

My thesis consists of a collection of creative works and a critical component. My practice-based research explores spontaneity as a creative writing method as informed by the methods of Jack Kerouac described in his ‘Essentials of Spontaneous Prose’. In terms of content the collection is concerned with subcultures, and the spontaneity of individuals within them. The thesis develops my own poetics of spontaneity which provides an alternative to the literary mainstream. I extol the energy-charged writing it produces and describe the enjoyment and creative stimulation it brings to the author. I aim to demonstrate that spontaneity can provide equally good, if not better, results than heavily edited literature produced over long stretches of time. The title, How I quit writing, relates to the frustration I felt from creating in a way that would satisfy the requirements of a PhD that led me to a short lived decision to quit writing

This research consists of my own original work and has been ethically approved.

Fear and loathing in the Czech Republic

Growing up Moravian

Teachers

and community workers

used to tell us

how drugs would fry our brains,

alcohol harden our liver

and cigarettes blacken our lungs.

One time

two guys with electric guitars

came to do a drug prevention gig.

‘You’re the class with the ice hockey players, right?’

one of them grinned

when we put our chairs

the wrong side of their amps.

Honourable efforts as they were,

seeing my 14-year-old classmates

sneak out for a cheeky cigarette

during lunch break

or come to school stoned

towards the end of the year

when everything went

made me seriously question their impact.

Our city seemed to have

a five drink minimum policy

for working men

after their shifts

before they even

took off their

sweat and smoke infused clothes.

It’s not like

they weren’t told the same things

as us.

The loud

skin and bone meth-heads

with the shakes

who don’t know

what to do

with their hands.

It’s not like

they weren’t told the same things

as us.

In a school

on the other side of the city

a couple of 13 year old girls

got peppered on slivovitz

in the bathroom

which ended up

a nationwide news story.

It’s not like

they weren’t told the same things

as us.

Still,

me and my friend Dom

stole bottles of beer

from his mom’s boyfriend’s stock,

poured white wine into a watermelon

and ate it

in an attempt to get both fed and drunk,

tried to cook up

weed egg omelettes,

listened to metal,

played San Andreas

and thought we were solid.

I suppose

that’s what growing up Moravian

does to a person.

Ass on the road

I.

We arrived in Pisa at sunset

10 minutes on foot away

from the Leaning Tower.

‘I don’t understand

why people come here for this,’

I heard someone in the group say,

‘they couldn’t even make the fucking thing straight

and all these other buildings around it

are far nicer.’

We laughed at tourists

taking those silly photos

that make them look

like they’re holding the tower.

The Geography teacher decided

to take one

of him kicking it down.

Pet Shop Boy went a step further,

briefly pulled his pants down

to snap a shot

of his ass next to the Leaning Tower.

That was nothing new,

he had an Instagram account

called ‘Ass on the road’

where he uploaded photos

of his skinny pale hairy ass

near various sights

he visited.

Leaving Pisa

after dark

we noticed a curious amount of women

by the side of the road

and when one flashed her tits

at our car,

we finally realised why.

Pet Shop Boy had vast experience

with this sort of company –

he’d use private services,

he’d visit brothels

after liver hardening amounts

of Caribbean rum –

but he had never picked up anyone by the side of the road.

Having recently shaved

his already balding head

for a bet

he asked me to write down the sentence

‘How much to shave your hair

and cum on your bald head?’

in English.

He had no grasp

on the language,

so –

knowing he wouldn’t get past the first two words

but wanting to see him try –

I obliged.

The car pulled over,

the woman who was closest

approached it,

he got through two words,

as predicted,

before bursting out laughing

as she flipped him off

and the Geography teacher

hit the pedal

and got us out of there.

Once,

after a pub quiz,

having drank the beer

we had won

that no one else fancied on a Tuesday night

by myself

I ended up playing slots with Pet Shop Boy.

He was partial to a bit of gambling,

I had never played before

so he gave my broke ass

a small amount of money

and was shocked

when a few minutes later I had

eight times as much as he put in

and immediately suggested we go

see some hookers –

first thing that came to his mind.

I took a few more spins

and lost a bit

so I raised the bets

and lost all of it

before we managed to withdraw anything.

II.

I was enjoying a nightcap

on a balcony

Brasov, Romania

with Pet Shop Boy

and our redneck friend

where they drank half a bottle of rum

and half a bottle of peppermint liquor

each

in the time it took me to finish

two cans of beer.

The next morning

Pet Shop Boy had bread and chorizo for breakfast

washed down

by a strawberry milkshake.

We got into the car

and headed for Bran –

the home of Dracula’s castle –

where none of us were willing to pay

15 Euro to get inside.

Only a few miles away from Bran

Pet Shop Boy

asked the driver to stop.

‘Do you need to throw up?’

the redneck asked.

‘That as well,’ Pet Shop Boy answered.

‘Take a dump?’

‘Yes,’

Pet Shop Boy was using

as few words as possible.

When we finally found a place to stop,

he got out of the car,

took three steps,

and a wave of liquid-ish pink mess

came out his mouth.

He then crossed the railroad

we parked next to,

walked what he deemed appropriate distance,

squatted down

and took a shit in a potato field.

III.

On the first road trip

we’ve ever taken

we ended up in a flat

in central Marseille

and after a few drinks

Pet Shop Boy challenged me to a dare.

At that time,

I was in charge of our ice hockey club’s Facebook.

Pet Shop Boy

wanted me to make a post

calling the owner of the club

a boujee farmer –

a loving nickname given to him

by rival fans

we found hysterically accurate.

I hated dares

so I immediately refused.

He offered me 50 Euro,

I turned it down,

as the night went on

and he got drunker and drunker

the pool of money went up to 2000 Euro.

Now, that was tempting,

but I still said no.

Knowing now

I’d get sacked a couple months later,

I should have taken it.

The next morning

we went to visit

Olympique Marseille’s Stade Velodrome.

They only did stadium tours in French

so Pet Shop Boy just took a picture of his ass

outside the main entrance

and we returned to our rental Skoda,

fired up the engine

and set off towards more adventures

on the road

like Kerouac

but better.

Big dreams of a hungover mind

Hungover,

returning from a festival

and reeking from three days of sweat

I stopped at Masaryk’s square

to watch Zrni

play a midday gig

booked by the city council

to make it look

like they’re doing something for culture.

The same bright minds thought

getting rid of half the trees

that used to stand there

in favour of a concrete slab

was a good choice

making the Sun of June

unavoidable.

Still,

I hypnotised the stage

through my shades

with a hungover mind

lost in a daydream of violins

and echo.

Partly cured

by a shower

and a ham and cheese pizza,

I returned to the city centre

to catch the last day

of an Andy Warhol exhibition.

All the pieces have been borrowed

from private collections,

the leaflet said

and price tags were

attached to each painting

if you wanted to purchase them

or know how much they cost their owner.

Can’t really say

I cared about the purpose either way

because Campbell’s soup

and Marilyn Monroe

are supposed to be on the walls

of galleries and museums

not locked away in someone’s mansion.

Private art collectors,

just like

investment bankers,

payday lenders,

fat old men with portfolios of houses,

the heads of movie studios,

record labels

and publishing houses,

daytime television,

board rooms,

energy suppliers,

pro Russian personified STDs

and all authoritarian bastards of the world –

I oppose.

After staring at the paintings long enough

I signed my name into the visitor’s book

and stepped out onto the first floor balcony

overlooking the boiling concrete slab

with a dream of a poem

that would make me enough money

to free at least one Warhol, Dali or Monet,

break all hollow concrete slabs

and fill the space with trees

well aware

it was never going to be reality.

The greatest way to avoid an ID check

One of the legendary,

if blurry,

New Year’s parties at Dom’s flat,

I left in the early morning hours

and he drank until dawn

with a couple friends.

When the booze ran out

they decided to hit The Kangaroo –

a pub that opened at 6AM

so the old alcoholics

could get their first drinks of the day.

In his state

he made do with wearing only

a vest,

one flip flop

and a tablecloth around his waist.

The barmaid asked him for his ID

when he ordered a beer,

calm as you like

he smiled

and said:

Ma’am, I don’t even have trousers,

where do you think I’d get an ID from?

Unable to do anything

but shrug her shoulders

at Dom’s impeccable logic,

she brought him a beer

and he got to start the year

with a big W.

Kalimotxo

Young and moneyless

we used to get drunk

on dirt cheap red wine

sold in

one litre boxes.

We joked it contained more

engine oil,

petrol,

and denatured ethanol

than grapes.

To make life easier

for our taste buds

we used what we thought

was an old hillbilly trick

and mixed it fifty-fifty

with Coke

Our dirty little secret,

most regular wine drinkers

considered it barbaric

even if the wine was grim

and I’m never in the mood

to argue with snobs.

Years later

I found out

red wine and Coke

is served in Spain

as a posh looking cocktail

called Kalimotxo.

Life is all about perspective,

the cliche goes

and we move.

Take the money and run

For a few months

The White Pony

was our go to hangout.

Owned by a nearby brewery

it always had

a wide selection

of specials and classics

and even a decent kitchen

we didn’t use very often

if the liquid bread

wasn’t enough.

11 PM closing time

but there were

no opening hours

for us,

regulars

allowed to stay in drinking

joined by the manager.

One night

we didn’t leave until five in the morning

spending most of it

laughing at one girl

complaining about her boyfriend’s

big balls small cock combo.

Weekend drinking was for lightweights

so we went out

four times a week

on average

partly to spite those

who wouldn’t

and partly to avoid

some life defining choices

we were supposed to be thinking about.

What university?

What course?

Sack it all off and start working?

Stay and do 12 hour shifts in factory

and 8 pints after each of them

like all the previous generations?

Move to Canada

and become a park ranger

surrounded only by woods, wildlife

and finally some peace and quiet?

Our heads were spinning either way

so it may as well have been from beer.

The White Pony days

came to a close

one fateful night

when the manager shut down the pub

and took everything from the cash register

never to be heard from again.

Under new management

the place became a family restaurant

and we were off to new hangout,

our up in the air future could wait

but as far as planning for it

take the money and run

didn’t seem that bad of an option

then and now.

In on a secret

Me and Mikey

convinced Ronnie

to drive us to Olomouc

and see a hardcore band

from Brazil

on a Sunday evening.

Mikey in his Good Night White Pride hoodie,

Ronnie in a Pro-Pain shirt

and me wearing one of the many tees

of DIY bands I bought at gigs like this,

all looking the part.

The venue was on the outskirts

hidden in a corner

of a complex of

warehouses

and industrial buildings.

On one side,

workers were finishing their shifts

loading up final planks

and boxes

into trucks

and on the other

20 excited punks

beer bottles in hand

already waited for the Brazilians.

It turned out

the guy who organised gigs

in our town

and played in the opening band

was also the main act’s tour driver,

when he spotted us,

he immediately came over

smiling bright

with words of thanks

to us for coming all the way over here

as if we drove 90 miles

not nine.

Not long after,

he became a tour driver and manager

full time

and there weren’t safer hands

you could put your band’s fate in.

Upstairs

where the show took place

it was every bit

the rundown industrial building

it looked to be

from the outside,

not even a tap

at the makeshift bar,

only a fridge with bottles

and you had to walk down

two flights of stairs

to get to the toilets

but it was good enough.

When the Brazilians hit the stage,

almost the entirety

of the tiny room

turned into a mosh pit

with various band members

running into it themselves

and jumping from their equipment

they climbed

refusing to give less than everything

even if it was for just about 40 people.

Speaking to the singer afterwards,

I bought their T-shirt

with an antifascist slogan in Portuguese

from him

and got a signed poster with it

which I still have on my wardrobe

and he told me

about the trouble they had

with Russian Police

for selling anti-homophobic merch

on their tour

few years prior.

Later,

I learned they had a cult following in Brazil

playing club shows for decent crowds

and Max Cavalera

listed them

as one of his top 10 heavy bands

in an interview

and seeing them play that night

for 40 people

suddenly felt even more special,

we were in on a secret

that whoever doesn’t come

to small gigs of bands they’ve not heard of

in rundown venues

on Sunday nights

has no clue about

so for anyone looking for a reason

to get off their ass

and live it –

here you go.

Our living room

Apollo – our living room

was the slogan

the only noteworthy live music venue

in our town

during my teenage years

used.

Several feet under ground,

no source of natural light,

a rusty motorbike hung from the ceiling,

two huge metal fans behind the stage

to bring some air to the unventilated space

rarely used,

broken old guitars on the wood decorated walls

alongside posters of Kurt Cobain,

Amy Winehouse,

Chuck Berry,

Jimi Hendrix

and Rage Against the Machine.

No false advertisement,

there were weekends

when I spent as much time there

as I did at home

seeing small DIY bands play for 30 people

and staples of the Czech club scene

pack the place out.

Our bands

went abroad,

befriended other musicians

who toured Europe

sleeping on people’s floors

usually playing specific early 2010s

brand of melodic speed punk

and invited them over,

one week there was

a band from Slovenia,

then Germany,

then the UK,

then Sweden…

The first time I spoke English

out in the real world

was there with these bands.

The first time

I felt I could make something

was there

watching these almost exclusively post office workers by day

kill it on stage by night

and champion everyone to get involved.

The first time I got drunk

was there

on rum

with the local metalheads.

The first time I stagedived

was there

at a Vypsana fixa concert.

The first time

I’ve ever been backstage

was there

on my friends gig –

a glorified basement

where we poured our knock off Kalimotxo

into our throats

and smoked so much weed

we finally began to forget

who we were.

Good things

tend to get ruined by greed –

one of the great injustices of the world –

and when the rent doubled

it was curtains for our living room.

I felt genuine sadness

at the closedown party

explaining to a couple of Finnish exchange students

the significance of that place

but the truth is

I could never really convey

to them

or you

what it meant

but I am not lying when I say

without our living room

I probably wouldn’t be writing this – or any – poem

six years after it shut.

A special fraction of time

for underground music and life

you had to be there for

to truly understand

but word on the street has it

that if you look

alongside the old railroad

towards that disused heavy metal door –

ideally, with the right kind of eyes,

as Hunter advised –

you’ll see glimpses of youthful me

with ten or more long haired figures

stumbling, singing, laughing,

right in the face of this No Future town

and all of life’s horror

and you’ll know that whatever it was

it happened

and that’s all that matters.

My first reading

Some time after H and I

ended our on again off again relationship

her boyfriend

invited me to do a feature gig

after she showed him some of my stuff.

Between then

and the event

they had split up

and she picked me up

fashionably late

at the end of my six hour

Haná to South Bohemia

bus ride.

At her place

she made us coffee and scrambled eggs

before a glass of wine over a South Park episode

to take the edge off

and while she was getting changed

she asked me

if her boobs got bigger

since I last saw her.

They did.

A bus took us

to the Moon in the Daylight –

tonight’s venue –

where I shook hands with the other performers

before calming my nerves

with a couple of beers.

A pianist

played his own 1950s styled piano tunes

between each poetry set

and had more talent in his thumb

than I did in my entire being.

Quite demoralised

I tried to encourage myself with a little more beer

before being called up.

No microphone,

think I was a bit too quiet early on,

can’t remember what poems I read

but the set finished by me and the ex

acting out a short segment

from a play I wrote

after reading Waiting for Godot.

I dread to think

what I deemed good enough

to present to the public

back then

but you gotta start somewhere.

The 30 or so people in the crowd

seemed satisfied,

most of them stayed late,

drank with me

and talked to me about all sorts

but I was celebrating so

all I remember are waves of laughter.

One of the other poets

took me around the corner

to a pub

where I could buy cigarettes

and on the way told me

a story of him getting stoned

in a forest

with a friend

who began to think he wanted to hurt him

and ran away.

The poet chased after him

getting lost in the process

emerging from the forest

in a town he did not recognise,

when he asked an elderly woman

how to get where his friend lived

she told him

he is already there.

He found him

several hours later in his house,

the Fear Thompson wrote about

was gone

and they were buddies again

spending the rest of the day playing video games.

After we came back

from the cold

I had hot wine

and in the very early hours of a new day

H and I took on

a blurry walk through the city

back to her place.

Our night ended

in her makeshift bed

from two wooden palettes

and a mattress.

Unsurprisingly,

we had several failed attempts

at getting up the next day

and I only just made it in time

to catch the bus I needed

to finish another six hour trip

at a reasonable time.

Waiting in the queue

I noticed

a sticker on a bin

of a songwriter

from my hometown

I was used to seeing in Apollo

and felt proud

how far our scene has reached.

Suspiciously cheap ticket

raised my eyebrow

as I took a seat on the bus

with a horribly dry mouth.

The price

started making sense

when after 45 minutes

we had done 20 miles

since the bus only went on old roads,

no motorways

and stopped in every little town

picking up students

making it packed

and hot.

In a place

famous for its ponds

they gave us a break,

I finally found myself some water

and accepted my fate.

Back in the seat

music in my ears

with memories of a night

representing the life

I wished to have

I realised

this was the only option

and there was no going back.

My second reading

Jorgi met me in town

and we had a couple beers –

one of the stupidest ideas

we’ve ever had

making us both desperate for a piss

for the second half

of our hour-long bus ride.

We counted minutes

and cursed every stop

the driver had to make

with our bladders

in serious pain.

After finally getting off

in Zlin

we attempted to run

(our condition made actual running impossible)

towards a wall

where we’d be further away from the station

but not at all hidden.

We might have actually broken the world record

for the longest piss in public

with both of us

pushing two minutes.

With a great sense of accomplishment

from not wetting our textile

we met up with our promoter

and the other two performers.

The three of them found some cafe

to hide from the rain.

Unimpressed by the prices

Jorgi and I found a supermarket,

bought a box of wine and Coke

and waited outside.

A small derelict building caught our eyes,

we thought we might use it

to shelter ourselves

and finish our drinks

but once we got in

and spotted a sleeping bag,

countless empty alcohol bottles

and a variety of miscellaneous trash

we swiftly backed away.

The reading was at a student bar,

organised as a model project

for our guy’s marketing module

and most people in the audience

were future accountants.

We drank enough to not care

and decided

the order we’d go in –

the South Bohemians first,

me last

and Jorgi filling out the breaks

with his black guitar

with nylon strings,

an Adio sticker

and his deep voice.

The evening went relatively smoothly

and at the end

each of us got roughly

50 Czech koruna

from voluntary donations.

We closed down the bar

around 2 in the morning

after spending a solid hour

explaining to the poor confused bartender

what the event he just witnessed

was all about

drinking unholy amounts of Kingswood cider.

I used the money

we were given

to buy a burger

at an all night

fast food window

and a beer at the train station pub.

Just us,

tired talking

and three silent figures

on bar stools.

No more lethargy,

one of the figures

must have thought

as he approached the jukebox

and in a minute

a voice began to resonate through the room.

An impressed look

flew from me to Jorgi and back –

the man put on Bruce Dickinson’s Tears of the Dragon

peppered at 4 AM

in a train station pub

and flawlessly hit

every fucking note

of Bruce’s wide range.

That moment

only shared by him,

Jorgi, me

and a few half asleep drunks

provided us with the energy

to stay up until the first morning train

and still is one of my favourite gigging memories.

A quick goodbye

to the South Bohemians

and we got on our train to Olomouc,

whipped out the remainder

of our wine and coke

in a heroic,

but futile,

effort to finish it

before passing out on the train

and after nights like that

being a writer

felt alright.

No future (could get in the way)

The fourth time

I saw the Guildford boys

was in Brno

in a small punk venue

near the historic centre.

Accompanied by Jorgi

and three others

before we even managed

to enter the space

I was greeted by

a bunch of bearded figures

who happened to play

some of the best melodic hardcore

I knew

and I invited the bassist

to smoke some weed

with me and Jorgi.

A Swedish band

opened the night

playing fast

before the Guildford boys

came up

and played even faster,

tapping on the necks of their guitar

in unison

between their anthemic choruses.

The Swedes

had their album

on a yellow cassette tape

which I bought

for 5 Euro

and notified my English friends

I’d be moving to their realm

very soon.

The club closed its doors

and we moved to a park

where our friends drank

and me and Jorgi

kept taking

not at all suspicious

walks to ‘look at the stars’

but in fairness,

glass pipe in hand,

sometimes we did.

Bored of the park

and the menacing shadow people

whose outlines we kept seeing

in the distance,

we answered the call of the city centre

and found a place that stayed open

until 5 AM.

Half asleep

but drinking on

we got awakened

by one of the guys telling us

some woman he didn’t want

much to do with started hitting on him

on his way from the toilets.

Naturally,

the good friends we were

we tried to get him

to speak to her again

and hit it off

to no success.

The bus station –

the night’s final destination –

where the others

went home from

and I got picked up

by my parents

to go to Prague

and attend a meeting

to finalise my move to England

on two hours of sleep in the car

because no future

could get in the way

of a hardcore night.

Our Vietnam

On a blanket

just past a forest edge

in an abandoned village

with zoots getting passed to me

from two sides

I lay down

and watched clouds for an hour

because of the story in them

with the white fluff

turning into rabbits,

deers,

ducks

and hunters with bows and arrows.

A situation I got into

with Annie and Jorgi

in a curious manner,

picked up in a random town

by two people I’ve never met before

after stocking up on as much supermarket goods

as our backpacks could take.

‘This is a smokers’ vehicle,’

the guy behind the wheel said,

‘so if you are one, congratulations,

if not, well, that’s a shame.’

In response

we all lit a cigarette

and the girl in passenger seat

put on Stones’ You Can’t Always Get What You Want

on full blast.

‘Have you come up yet?’

He asked her.

‘It’s kicking in,

I wanna drive.’

She responded

and he pulled over.

‘Do you even have a licence?’

He said

switching seats.

‘No,’

she smiled.

Now,

the girl with a head full of ecstasy

and no licence

was in charge,

she fired up the engine

and did 150 yards

before it stalled.

‘Maybe it wasn’t the best idea,’

she commented disappointed

returning to the passenger seat.

Somehow,

Annie knew everyone

who was already gathered

by a fire pit

outside the somewhat repaired church –

the only building remaining

of the original village –

and someone immediately

whipped out

a huge jar of weed

and rolled a fat one.

Over here,

if a joint wasn’t your breakfast

it was as if you weren’t there

and if you asked politely

weed was pretty much public property,

almost a human right

as it should be.

To get me awake

for the evening

when the bands played

I bought some MD

from a guy

in swimming trunks and goggles

and partied with the crowd

made up mainly of people

who had a similar idea.

Once the music stopped,

we returned to the tent

for more weed

and to the amazement of Jorgi and Annie

I fell asleep

within an hour of smoking up

despite the amphetamines

in my system.

All of this on repeat

for the next three days:

wake n’ bake,

try and eat whatever little we brought

or got offered to us,

smoke more,

lie on a blanket

or in a hammock

and watch the clouds

tell their tale

before the madding evenings.

When the time came,

the three of us

made our way to the nearest village

via a bridge

over a little stream separating

Czech Republic and Poland

and remembering the little bag of MD

in my wallet

I realised

I accidentally became an international drug smuggler.

A storm came

the previous night

and our ride got stuck in the mud

so me and Jorgi

went to help get him out

and Annie stayed in the village

as an elderly woman

invited her for coffee.

Walking,

at points ankles deep in mud,

in scorching heat,

Jorgi said:

‘Are we in Poland or Vietnam?

This is how the Americans must have felt.’

And we laughed

because after four days of drugs

during which we ate one warm meal

this was our Vietnam.

Pushing the car out of the mud

the wheels threw

a hefty amount of it

at us

covering everything

from waist down

and then some.

‘Let’s not make the car heavier

so this doesn’t happen again,’

the driver said and pointed in a direction

for us to go

where he’d wait

on a proper road.

Jorgi and I

back in the mud –

literally and figuratively –

too resigned to be bothered anymore

giggled at the idea

of him just leaving us here

in our Polish Vietnam

deep down desperate

for it not to happen.

Driver kept his promise

as me and Jorgi –

the two filthiest humans

this side of Mississippi

on that August afternoon,

head to toe in sweat and mud –

finally hopped in the car,

we picked up Annie

where she met the old lady

and told her about our exploits.

‘I just had coffee

and she gave me lunch,

it was super sweet,’ was Annie’s answer

for which we didn’t like her very much

but it didn’t matter,

the four days of dope

made it nearly impossible

to keep my head in the real world,

all I knew

this last bender

with Annie and Jorgi

before the move,

the two people

I spent

damn near every afternoon that summer

in a green haze with,

was the best send off

I could have asked for

because proper things

are meant to be done properly.

One step forward, two steps back

Unintentional heroes

One of the first nights out

in Derby

since I moved from the Czech Republic

and JD from Gibraltar

we ended up

in a three storey nightclub.

Despite being down

for pretty much anything

it didn’t take long

to realise

places with a DJ

blasting deafening monotonous tunes

weren’t for me.

The appeal

in going somewhere

someone plays shit

you can listen to at home

over seeing a live act

will always be one of life’s great mysteries

to me.

In an attempt

to take a little break from it

I ended up

stood on a piece of pavement

confined by some metal barriers

generously named smoking area.

Finishing my roll up

I noticed JD

and some man

holding each other

by the scruffs of their shirts.

JD took exception

to him spitting

under some girl’s feet

from what I gathered

as I remained an observer.

Suddenly,

another guy

came out of nowhere

and started scrapping JD,

too

so, despite not being a fan of drunken violence,

I had to back my boy.

Having quickly downed

what remained of my Jagerbomb

I pulled the newcomer away

and threw the hardened plastic cup

in his face,

we both got a few punches in

and he comically still tried to kick me

while being dragged away

by the security service.

Immediately,

we were surrounded

by the at least 20 people

in the smoking area

all saying things like

‘you dealt with it so well,’

‘those two were right dickheads’.

I wasn’t so sure

getting involved

in a violent altercation

within our first days

in the country

should have been classed

as dealing with it well

but I allowed it,

we became the unintentional heroes

of that night

without ending up in Police custody

during our first week here

and no matter

what way you look at it

that was a success.

GOATed pub

The friendship

with Magpie

began in a GOATed pub.

In a small street

near the centre of the city,

the posters

and tickets

for ancient gigs

all over the walls

looked like the only thing holding them together

and they had

punk and metal bands

playing every weekend

for a fiver,

a pint for £2.50

and snooker and foosball tables.

Probably the dirtiest place

I ever set foot in

was the gents room

with a

‘Watching Rams,

snorting grams’,

sticker

on the toilet tank

and a leaflet informing guests

anyone caught with drugs would be reported

hidden among the band posters

about as pointless

as a sandpaper dildo.

That undefeatable beer garden

behind all of it

with disintegrating furniture

where everyone gathered

in the breaks between bands

and someone shouted

‘does anyone have some fucking weed?’

was where

for the first time

England felt like home.

Riding with Magpie

Magpie lived with me

for a year

before the world shut

and most of the time

it was all about

delivery pizza,

drinking beer,

getting stoned

and playing Fifa

on his old Xbox 360.

Slightly bored,

on an autumn evening

Magpie proposed a drive.

Clueless about where to go

after a while of phone scrolling we settled

on an outlook in Cromford

despite it being pitch black outside.

Having driven us

out of the city

Magpie complained

about being able to see fuck all

for a solid few minutes

before he noticed he forgot

to switch the headlights on.

A wrong turn here and there

and we stopped somewhere

that wasn’t where we were going

but offered a glimpse of the skyline.

Determined to find the outlook,

we hopped in again

and Magpie drove uphill.

‘Why is it so dark again,

God damn it…oh.’

He stopped ranting

before he even started

spotting the lights

being off again.

Reaching a better place

to see the lights

of Cromford

on the hilltop,

we smoked a cigarette

and asked the eternal question:

what’s next?

Since the view was so elusive

seeing the mystical Cromford

first hand

turned out to be

the most logical solution

so we hit the tight village roads again.

‘Why is it so damn dark here?!

This is actually kinda dangerous

on a road like this …’

He complained

and took three more minutes

to clock that

he should turn his fucking headlights on.

After thinking

he’s just joking

the first couple times

I had to start asking myself:

is he an actual idiot?

Who gave my guy a licence?

In Cromford,

we took a short walk

around the pretty silent

town centre,

since Magpie was already driving

as if he was pissed

we considered trying one of the local pubs

but I didn’t want to risk him

becoming an even bigger menace.

A blunt noise

seconds after we left our parking spot

as Magpie

took off

someone’s rearview mirror.

Not even upset,

just baffled

and struggling to hold in laughter,

I let him decide

what to do about the situation

and we finally drove off towards Derby,

to no one’s surprise

he didn’t turn his headlights on

for at least the fifth time that night

but somehow we made it home

in one piece

and that’s as much as you can ask for

when you ride with Magpie

even though

we never found that outlook.

The old place

Tucked away

in a small street

off the beaten path;

a haven

for poets, singer, rappers, outcasts

sharing the microphone,

words

and thoughts

in a backroom

far too hot

whenever it held more than 15 people.

My territory –

the beer garden –

usually with more welcoming temperatures

where I inhaled deeply

air smelling like a warm evening

turning into night,

listened to muffled sounds of a band

practicing next door

and shared countless pints and spliffs

with the artists

talking philosophy,

music,

roots,

conspiracies,

drinking stories

and ancient aliens.

After hours,

the Jamaican landlady

used to plug in a mic

and sing her heart out

on an Etta James tune

or other jazz ballads.

Leaving one night

a long haired poet

whipped out a joint

and told me:

you know how the world

was supposed to end in 2012?

I thought about it and realised

if it was really going to happen

the thing I’d like to do the most

would be to spark up

and watch it unfold.

Since then,

I don’t leave my house without at least

a little bit of weed on me,

just in case.

A moment of silence followed

in which he lit it up,

passed it to me

and I realised

what he just said

would forever remain

one of the greatest things

I’ve ever heard.

The sandpit man

The day after I came home

for the summer

after my first year in England

I met up with a former classmate

for a beer

in a dingy casino

where he worked

to set me up with a job.

Nobody else knew I was back –

I liked to take a few days to adjust

before I let people know.

My knack for unplanned encounters kicked in

and after an hour

Jake –

skinny and loud –

and Carlos –

short, chubby, quiet and always in a hoodie –

walked in.

Before I moved,

me and Jake

regularly ended up drinking

until not so early morning hours

being nuisances to working society

who tried to ignore us

on their daily commutes.

The drinks kept flowing

and by two in the morning we ended up

in The Submarine –

an infamous haven for drunks

who had nowhere else to go;

it opened late in the afternoon,

closed at 10 AM

and their kitchen

(meaning microwave)

ran all night long.

Their garlic soup

was the only thing about the place

that ever got positive reviews.

When we left The Submarine,

it was bright outside,

Carlos went home

and me and Jake

walked in the same direction.

Seven in the morning,

the supermarkets were already open

so we both got a bottle of beer

and wanted to drink them

watching people on their way to work

like we often used to

but a short man with two bottles of his own

approached us.

‘You boys look like reasonable people,

you’ve got beer,

could you tell me what day is it?

Sunday?’

‘Fuck, man, more like Monday,’

I answered amused

not really sure

if I was correct.

He joined us for a drink

by a sandpit.

‘I’m not working right now, man,’

he said,

‘I’ve had jobs before,

good jobs,

in Germany,

on good money

and I probably could again

if I wanted to

but right now,

I just can’t be bothered.’

A wise man;

sitting by a sandpit

drinking beer with us

at 8 o’clock

on a workday morning,

he must have been.

‘How old do you think I am?’

He asked us.

Jake and I shared a look,

neither of us brave enough to answer.

‘I’m 52,’ he said with a smile,

well aware he looked far younger.

‘I was dating three women at the same time recently

but it fell apart,’ he said,

‘do you know why?

Because I accidentally

told two of them to come over at the same time,

they met at my front door

and the third one –

still with me inside –

answered it!’

An old anecdote

I heard countless times before

and didn’t believe a word

but then again

he was sitting by a sandpit

drinking beer with us

on a workday morning

so who knows?

‘Listen, boys,

it’s been a pleasure,

take my number,

if you need a place to crash

or anything,

call me,’

and Jake took his number

knowing full well he’d never use it.

A couple days later

my former classmate said

he got me a job

at the casino

and I took it.

I didn’t have

the sandpit man’s wisdom,

yet.

The place was derelict

for most evenings,

apart from a few addicts

playing slots,

so Jake often kept me company

drinking until early morning

and spending obscene money

at the bar.

We often fondly thought back

to the morning with the sandpit man,

his aura of genuine joy

and enjoyment of life,

the sort that the world beats out of most people

by the time they turn 30

and we sincerely hoped he was doing well;

with daydrinking,

women –

imaginary or not –

and life

as a whole

because

he was sitting by a sandpit

drinking beer with us

on a workday morning

so we knew

he was a good one.

The battle of Edmund Husserl Square

A summer night

in a parking lot

surrounded by a couple of banks,

a butchers,

a charity shop,

an old hotel,

a travel agency

a pawn shop

and the third worst bar in town

where a fight broke out.

A spectacle through the huge windows –

two men going at it

hands, legs and a pint glass

flew through the air

and the shouts

of everyone inside

clashed like the two men.

They managed to get them out

but the battle continued,

sort of.

A stand off –

both in fighting positions,

one short and furious

the other tall and calmer.

‘Go on then, coward,’

the feisty one shouted.

‘Man, I already told you,

I don’t fucking wanna…’

Before he could finish the sentence

the smaller one raised his leg

and tried to kick him in the ass

falling over on his own backside

in the process.

Outside our casino

me, my old classmate Jake and a couple others

were at a safe distance

but we couldn’t watch in silence

no more

and burst out in loud laughter.

The scene was far more amusing

than my night shift ever could have been.

‘You want some too,

you little shits?’

He shouted

as he stopped paying attention to his nemesis

and took a few steps towards us.

Suddenly,

red and blue light

and the sound of a siren

behind our backs.

Angry boy suddenly looked scared,

walked a couple steps away from us

but the cops pulled up

right next to him.

They didn’t care about us –

we didn’t call them,

we weren’t in the fight –

but they spoke to him for five minutes,

got him into a taxi,

ordered him to go home and left.

With satisfied smiles

we were processing

the events of the last few minutes

over a cigarette

and as we were ready to go back inside

a familiar figure

emerged from the shadows.

‘Are you the bastards

that laughed at me?’

‘The most fun I’ve had all night,’

Jake shouted back

and took a couple steps forward..

He was streetwise enough to know

what was coming

way before a word was spoken.

Jake didn’t like to fight

but he knew how to

despite his skinny stature

and half a minute later

he had our friend

in a chokehold.

‘Should I TKO you?!

Should I fucking TKO you?’ Jake yelled,

kneeling on the guy’s back.

‘Should I call the cops back?’

I asked far more calmly

and someone nodded.

In the movies,

they show you

how the hero deals with the bad guy

and the police taking away the villain

but never the few minutes in between.

I’d describe them as quite awkward –

Jake kept holding him down

as the rest of us were looking at each other

in silence

only interrupted by Jake occasionally repeating his TKO line

when his catch made faint attempts at escaping.

The red and blue lights

came from around the corner again

and for the first time in my life

I was quite glad to see them.

The old man and the horse

Ozzy Osbourne once said

he stopped doing acid

after a horse told him

to fuck off.

I’ve only ever met one talking horse

in my life.

Having discovered that there is not a law

banning you from riding a horse drunk

an old man decided to ride the one he owned

to his bar of choice and back.

The horse stayed outside

loosely tied to a tree

with a grass patch

he ate from

around it

and a big bowl of water

from the barmaid.

He passed the time

by insulting the winos

who,

unaware of the talking horse,

foolishly fought amongst each other

defending their drunken honour

from the unknown aggressors

as the horse laughed to the bank

which went bust in this town

in 2000

after the Czech 1990s free for all.

He never told me to fuck off,

probably because I always walked on the opposite side of the street

and he didn’t want to shout

and wake up the people in nearby houses.

A mischievous but considerate horse.

In the earliest morning hours,

the old man would struggle up on the horse again

who always pleaded with him

not to throw up on the back of his neck.

The sound of horseshoes on tarmac

echoed between the flat buildings in the heart of Haná

as he carried the old man

past an observatory

where we were taught about

planets and constellations as kids

and drank cheap white wine as teenagers

on a concrete stage by the side of it.

He carried the old man

past the pond of violence –

a daytime swimming pool for swans

a boxing rink for men after dark,

amateur, all the more vicious

where a friend of mine

left a guy in a pool of blood.

The horse carried the old man past many trademark Prostějov roundabouts

with flower patches in their centres

the bakery shop my mom worked at,

the school standing on an old Jewish graveyard

destroyed by the Nazis

who ripped out the gravestones

but left the bodies

so the children of Now

learn about Maths, Biology

and Obedience

on the bones of hundreds of Jews.

He carried the old man past a petrol station

where Ozzy Osbourne

tripping balls

asked him:

what planet am I on?

The horse told him to fuck off

and carried the old man

through the madness of the night

all the way to the outskirts of legends.

Dumb enough

I met V during dancing lessons

my mom forced me to take

when I was 17

because it was a tradition.

The only thing

she ever forced me to do

and I hated it since

there is not a molecule of rhythm in my body…

that might not be entirely true,

I played drums for a year

and got half decent at it,

so it probably was just ‘cause I hate dancing –

at least when I’m the one who has to do it.

I had to be led by a small blonde girl

with a Miley Cyrus Wrecking Ball era type hairdo

I’d known since we were children

because our parents vacationed together

and she did a great enough job

for me to not get completely embarrassed.

The drinking that happened in the meantime

was the only thing I found some enjoyment in.

I couldn’t be arsed to try

and get around the ID checks

in a pub

and since V always had a flask

with some rum and Coke

or Grant’s and Coke

someone told me

to ask him for a drink

He said he’d let me have some

if I promised not to throw up on my dad’s shoes

which is something that may

or may not

have happened

at a festival about a year prior

and my good friend –

V’s classmate –

told him about it.

I wouldn’t see much of him

for the next year or so

until I started hanging out

with the musicians in my hometown.

He was related to one drummer

in a somewhat complicated way,

cousins once removed

or some shit like that.

V would always pop out of nowhere

and caused an enjoyable type of mayhem –

no fights, just the stupidest things

that crossed his mind

executed with full commitment.

In a small music venue in Brno

he ran on stage

during a song intro

fully nude

swinging his dick

in front of his cousin’s face

behind the drumkit.

With over 25 thousand views

the video of this performance

remains that band’s most successful release.

Another time,

he would bust into the room

and start making out with all the guys

while his girlfriend watched in shock.

I lost contact with V

among many others

when I moved away

but through the grapevine

I would hear

about his misadventures.

V applied to be a policeman

in our hometown

but they turned him down

because he failed the background check.

They found a picture of him

pointing a gun to his head.

Imagine being so dumb

you get turned down for a job

that only consists of driving around

looking important

during the day shift

and sleeping in the car

on a night shift.

What do you do when that happens?

Apply for the army,

they were happy to take him,

the bigger the nutjob

the better.

Around the same time

he had his first kid

aged 22,

the mother dumped him

for some reason

and he barely got to see the child.

Me at 22,

I was trying to deal with the reality of

working 25–30 hour weeks in a kitchen

while being a supposedly full time student

with the help of any mind altering substance presented to me.

Much closer to being a child

than someone able to take care of one.

That’s not really changed since.

V somehow found someone else

to have a second child with,

I’m guessing it’s going well,

now and then I see pictures of him

looking quite content,

amateur rally racing

with the friend

that told him the

throwing up on dad’s shoes story

existing as he’s always been –

too dumb for the Police,

dumb enough for the army

and I still haven’t learned to dance.

The search for the spirit of Allen Ginsberg

Jorgi and I

turned our backs

to Olomouc’s train station

crossed the tramlines

to join a long road

towards the heart of the city.

Knowing what we were looking for,

unsure how to find it.

We strayed from the main road

for a little while and

stopped by a river

where Jorgi whipped out

his trusty glass pipe.

Homegrown weed

to the lungs

and the story

of his acid trip

where time stopped

and realities multiplied

that made him understand

how it makes people lose their minds.

The long and wide road again

small and narrow ones on the sides

we hear a voice asking us:

what do you want to find here?

‘The spirit of Allen Ginsberg,’

I said and laughed,

‘he came here in 1965.’

‘Can you tell me where you are?’

‘Next to a church of sorts,’

I responded

looking around for a strategic point,

clutching at straws.

‘What architectural style was it built in?’

The spirit thought to ask.

‘How the fuck are we supposed to know?

He’s a guitarist and I’m a writer,’

I chuckled in disbelief.

It was lucky

absurdity is my favourite thing in life.

Ginsberg’s spirit

asked us to wait

near a plague column

in the centre of the town.

It took us to its apartment –

a cosy jungle

full of plants

and a kitten jumping everywhere

gently biting my finger

as it played.

The spirit put its bong in front of us

and we smoked through most of its weed.

We spoke about the years that passed

and it told us about the job it had

in a vegetarian restaurant

and the art exhibition it organised

in its favourite bar.

Then it took us there,

no knives or guns allowed

was the sign

on the door,

a hallway,

steps leading underground.

‘Are you feeling stoned?’ Jorgi came and asked.

I told him I was feeling fine

but it was getting to his mind.

‘Peanuts is all we need to fix this,’

I said and went to the bar.

‘Two beers, cuba libre and mescaline,’

I said and sat back down.

A man walked out of the restroom

and leaned on the bar,

Ginsberg’s spirit told us

he was undergoing cancer treatment

kept telling people

he was gonna die,

but he drank there every night

to the point where nobody knew

what was true.

The spirit, Jorgi and I

blew smoke into the winter night,

hugged and said goodbye,

the spirit out of sight

and the same way back for the two of us,

a train through the dark,

at the end to a journey

with the oddest of guides.

The good ol’ days?

On my way

back to England

I always switched buses

in Brno

where Jorgi studied his jazz guitar.

He’d take half an hour

from whatever he was doing

and meet me

by a black penis shaped sculpture

in the centre.

From there

we’d find a more remote spot

to smoke

and talk about

what’s ahead.

Unmistakable sign

the time for me to leave

the nostalgia reunion tour

of old friends,

pubs,

homegrown pot,

and throwback memories of the good ol’ days

has truly arrived.

How much melancholy

can a bench

in the Czech Republic’s second city take?

A long hug

and a sinking feeling in my guts

as he went back to studying

or teaching kids guitar

and I made my way

back to the station

to take one of the many buses needed

to get me

from the comfort of home cooked food

and old buddies

to Derby

and a different life.

Writing this poem,

the clock ticked over midnight

and as freshly 26

as one can be

I asked myself

aren’t these supposed to be the ol’ days?

How I quit writing

My generation

*With apologies to Roger Daltrey and Pete Townsend for seeing their gig from behind a fence and nabbing their title. RIP Keith Moon and John Entwistle.*

Through my open window

I heard the muffled sounds

of UB40 coming from a distance

on a rainy mid-July evening.

Preoccupied with submitting documents

telling my university I’m ready to hand in writing

I’ve hardly begun,

my mind pushed away the fact

there was a The Who gig happening that night.

Having 90 quid to spend on a ticket

was a utopia for a student

so I rolled a joint

and headed out in hope

of finding a spot outside the stadium

I could see and hear from –

after all,

they were the loudest band in the world

at one point.

I smoked half my joint

while going through the ends

I roamed with Magpie

humming along to Who Are You?

I could hear

as clear as the night sky

I’ve seen above an unlit parking lot on the coast of Albania.

After passing

two of the most bored looking

security guards

of all time,

a place from where

I could see the big screen

caught my eye.

The orchestra they brought

was overpowering Pete Townsend’s guitar

so I wasn’t too upset

when they left the stage

for the big hits.

Hope I die

before I get old …

Roger Daltrey couldn’t have known

when he wrote those lines

in the mid 60s

but it wasn’t just his generation

it was also the generation of Ian Curtis and Sid Vicious,

the generation of Kurt Cobain and Layne Stayley,

the generation of Amy Winehouse,

all the unknown ones throughout the generations

and finally, my generation, too.

They moved on to Won’t Get Fooled Again

and here was hoping we wouldn’t

but there was still a war in Ukraine

and mutant communist regimes in China and North Korea

and late stage capitalism in the West

and pseudo religious terror in Iran

so it looked pretty bleak.

A 79 year old Daltrey

pulled off that iconic scream

as if he still had the pipes

of a 25 year old

and that was at least something

to draw an impressed smile on my face.

Baba O’Riley was the last hurrah

before the crowd emptied the arena

and I got lost in it

walking past bootleggers selling T-shirts

for 10–15 pounds

and there I knew

that I certainly wasn’t the one causing the rock giants

the most economic harm that night.

I split off from the stream of people

towards the dodgy looking Cut Lane

and somehow was the only one

as if the dimly lit underpass

was a repellent

and with sporadic raindrops

hitting the ground once more

I lit up the second half of my joint

and realised

I just shithoused seeing one of the most legendary rock bands

on perhaps their last tour

and that made the day worth it.

En route to nowhere

So many poets

I get on with

spend their time

walking en route

to nowhere.

No real destination

just a path

to just be travelled

and seen.

Potential track in mind

ready to,

at any point,

be altered

by previously unseen directions

I set about

properly exploring my city

after half a decade in it

and saw

a Derby County left back

walking his two dogs,

kids and old men playing cricket,

afternoon sun glistening in lazy Darley,

cherry trees,

squirrels,

bunny rabbits,

industrial complexes,

railroad bridges

and alleys full of empty cans

and drug bags.

I find great meaning in things

that appear to have no purpose,

I heard someone once say

and they might have been

onto something.

Meditating on madness

Don’t let all my talking

about the drinking and dope

lead you into thinking

we were just degenerates

who didn’t care about anything else.

That’s just me,

fact is

without a beer or a joint

I’m hardly ever comfortable

and I gravitate

towards similar types.

Among the madness

there was money raised for animal shelters

or food banks,

straight edge bands,

songs against fascism,

fucking up the environment

and animal cruelty,

sometimes even learning

how deep that shit runs

in other parts of the world

from foreign bands.

The truth,

perhaps somewhat sad,

is,

those things don’t make for interesting writing

nearly as often

as the mayhem

and it didn’t get serious that often anyway,

90% of the time

we were pissing about

but never forgetting

there was more to it.

Half jokingly

I often tell my friends

I’m gonna live like this

until I’m 40

and if that doesn’t get me

I’ll live out the rest of my days

as a Buddhist monk

to make it balanced.

Only time will tell

if I’ll make it that far,

so until then

let’s crank up the volume

and have another one.

A good bad influence

Thinking

that skipping classes

to argue with strangers was a good deal,

we formed a college debate club

when I was 18.

The headmaster arranged

for an experienced debater

from the best college in town

to train us.

A fairly short

Christian school kid

with curly hair,

well spoken,

well mannered,

well dressed

with a gap between his front teeth.

After one practice session –

revolving around arguments

about increasing the budget

for the Czech army –

a teammate of mine shared a story

from the past weekend

observing meth-heads

in Ginsberg’s Spirit’s bar

for students and junkies.

I added my own story

from my friend’s band’s gig

where we spent the whole time backstage

drinking wine,

smoking weed,

trying to hook up with anyone willing.

Our coach listened to all this

without speaking a word for solid 10 minutes

before finally mumbling:

I think I’ve signed up for the wrong school.

Some six years later,

at 2:34 AM,

the coach sent me a message.

‘Dude, what are the pictures of you

with the microphone all about?’

I explained the strange images to him.

‘That’s cool, dude,

do you know of any poetry happening in London?

Or the Czech Republic?’

I told him I knew fuck all about London

and recommended him to see Simon Leitgeb

in the Czech Republic –

a poet I did my first two gigs with.

‘I’ll try,’ he said,

‘and by the way,

do you know about a place I could crash in Oxford?

Been travelling around,

couch surfing

and it didn’t work out tonight.’

Sadly I didn’t,

he was doomed

until the first morning train.

A few months later

I noticed

he was delivering a talk

on the use of magic mushrooms

in mental health treatment.

It was probably the London life

but looking back

on that years’ old conversation

I like to think

it was a spark

and I was a good bad influence.

Fresh freedom

After reading an article about it

I went down a rabbit hole

of early 90s Czech shoegaze.

Fresh freedom,

new influences,

the desire to experiment

finally not repressed

with an open world

of possibilities

and suddenly

even our little piece of land

did something significant enough

in the world’s soundscape

even MTV Europe

and UK labels noticed.

Things unthinkable

for a Czech artist nowadays

making the fact

hardly anyone seems to recall

the 90s wave

even more baffling.

It made sense

for it to happen then –

the Iron Curtain just fell

and they were finally free

to keep up with what was going on

abroad

desperate to discover new alternatives,

now,

you wanna make it – play it safe for the moolah,

experimenting is reserved

for the underground weirdos.

Sometimes, I wish

I was born earlier

and could live through

that boom of new possibilities

but then I realise

I would have had to grown up in Communism for that

and that’s a hard pass.

Sometimes, I wonder

if all those Western writers

and pseudo-intellectuals

who romanticise that ideology

realise

they would be

one of the first

shipped off to the gulags

simply for engaging in something

that requires thinking.

Sometimes, I wonder

if they see the irony

in banging their chests with anti fascism

while advocating for something

equally despicable

or if they stay blind on purpose.

The Czech 90s,

challenging times

full of uncertainty

and organised crime,

considering most of those bands

broke up after one album

I doubt

trading my birth year for that

would be a good deal.

Imagining a packed club

full of smoke and

flannel shirt wearing long haired people

I let The Naked Souls

resonate through the room.

The song was called Sleep

and I stayed awake.

Lazy nights

People can say

what they want

about football in America

but there’s something about

sparking one up

in the middle of the night

and watching a mixture

of past it big names

and players at any point

prone to a schoolboy error.

Throw Lionel Messi amongst them

and what you get

is box office.

I watched his second game

for Miami,

after just five training sessions

he looked like a seasoned pro

playing against second tier under 18s from

somewhere like Slovakia.

Summer is when

the big clubs go to America

to show off and secure the bag,

I was one of those

on the verge of getting violently sick

when the money hungry suits

tried to make it a permanent thing

but once a year

is a different story.

Man United versus Real Madrid

from Texas at 1:30 AM?

Arsenal versus Barcelona

from California at 4 AM?

I’m here for it.

Some might say

sports are no subject for poetry

but Bukowski regularly wrote about

boxing and horse racing

so maybe I’ll get away with it.

It’s not what you write about,

it’s how you write about it.

People say all sorts,

Liam Gallagher said

it is the duty of an artist

to live an interesting life

and most of the time I’m trying

but I’m afraid

there will always be nights

where the most interesting event

is a brace from Messi against Atlanta United,

a midnight duel with a mosquito,

a helicopter overhead at low altitude,

an animal shriek in the distance

or a hedgehog stomping all over my backyard.

No matter,

Bukowski said

that sometimes

a shit poem has to make the cut

so here’s this one.

Another poem and hoping

Preteen me

loved to flick through an encyclopaedia

enthralled by images of planets,

constellations,

and galaxies

hardly able to grasp the explanations.

When I was 12

my parents bought me

a small paperback book

about the universe

I could understand better.

It had a little alien

as a guide

and a picture

of Jupiter’s North Pole

always making me imagine

falling down the vicious

endless

atmosphere of gas –

unnerving like a bad trip.

The celestial fascination

never left me

hence the crescent moon and stars tattoo

on my forearm.

Some 14 years later

I looked at the sky

from my Derby window

trying to spot some Perseids

with the mostly cloudy night

making it seem a vain effort

until it wasn’t.

I’ve never seen the likes,

this wasn’t the usual slim silver flash across the night sky,

there was a clear round object

at the forefront

followed by a thick blueish tail

yet, the whole thing lasted a second

but the image stayed etched in my memory for ages.

At times like that

you think about probability:

what are the chances

of it being a bigger rock

that would wipe us out like the dinosaurs

or the chances of a far larger rock

becoming capable of sustaining life

and shielding itself from collision with air

or the chances of the only Perseid

I saw that night being

my most spectacular one to date?

Probably still lower

than those of a small town Czech boy

making a living off writing

yet, it still happened for our

little space pebble

so here’s another poem

and hoping.

Homage to *In Utero*

30th anniversary of *In Utero*

and I saw a picture

of a 58 year old Krist Novoselic

posing with the LP

under pictures

of Kurt Cobain.

Simultaneous warmth

and a sinking feeling

in my chest

at the sight of that stronger than death friendship

and thoughts of

what could have been.

On my way to the airport

moving to England

drinking an early morning can of beer

to settle the nerves

I listened to *In Utero*,

going back to England post Christmas

after relentless stress

from trying to accustom myself

made me live

four months with a persistent stomach ache

like Kurt Cobain used to

I listened to *In Utero*

and chances are

it will be the soundtrack

of future significant moments, too.

If you ever see

a missing comma

an odd line break; a line or a sentence just a little bit too long to match the rest of the piece,

a misplaced Capital letter

or another forgotten in a heartbeat detail

in my writing,

listen to those raw and raunchy riffs,

the guitar solo dadaism in Milk It

the cryptic words saying everything and nothing

at the same time,

the ear piercing screams,

all of it putting the watered down

radio friendly rock

that preceded and followed it

to shame,

and tell me it doesn’t hit harder.

Waiting for words

All the different types

of poets

I’ve encountered

and I

seem to have one thing

in common –

we like to disappear.

When all our words

escape us

onto the page

and none are left

for the real world

better not say anything

and wait for their grand return.

The things

others occupy themselves with

are for them

to tell you about,

I like to wait for my words

hidden in a back alley

of the mind

in complete silence

just for the satisfaction

of emerging suddenly

in a cloud of smoke

defiantly grinning at all the

bright coloured heads,

tattooed and pierced bodies,

hippies in baggy trousers,

old stoners,

young stoners,

the hopeful and the hopeless,

asking:

guess who made it through another month?

Which way?

If the drinks,

the joints,

the lines,

the pills,

the hangovers

and comedowns

get too much to bear

or were never of interest

to begin with,

people turn to

growing tomatoes,

making furniture,

ornaments,

clothes,

hill climbing,

wild camping,

skinny dipping

or urban exploration

to breakaway from the world

like many of the poets

I know.

Highly unlikely,

a day might come

when I’ll live

in a village

by a forest

able to handle

what they call

a quiet life.

Maybe,

I’d rather build myself

a cosy cottage

in a poppy field,

a greenhouse

of indica flowers

taller than me,

plant a field of coca plants,

surround myself with pet animals

of all types,

and build

replicas of

the Eiffel tower,

Prague Castle,

Tower Bridge

and the Colosseum

in my backyard

if I ever decided to

just to show the world

I can.

Most days,

my future

takes shape

of a heroin overdose

in a crack den of an apartment

somewhere in the dirt of Paris,

buried by Jim Morisson’s side

or thrown into an unmarked grave.

So,

which way do we go?

A plea to St Columba

St Columba,

despair with me,

as I have to explain

for the thousandth time

why I don’t like to rewrite these.

The shapeless entity wants a plan

as if anything in writing

or life

ever went

as you schedule it.

They review my progress,

make me fill out

a form after form after form,

read an alien language

to tick their boxes

and describe my methodology.

St Columba,

my method is a shithole of a room

after midnight,

silence

and altered mind

channelling the energy

of euphoric sleepless nights

or feeling of misanthropic doom

poured from the heart

as pure

as it comes.

Will it be enough for them?

All that on my shoulders

life turned artless –

nine months without a word

and I thought they wanted me to write,

why do they do everything to stop it?

St Columba,

they want me

to originally contribute

when most writers have agreed

everything’s been done

since the 1970s.

Leave the creators

to their own devices,

the value comes from exploration

not sticking to the outlines

and meeting demands.

St Columba,

they’re not the only ones,

the publishers tell writers to make changes

to help marketing and promotion

as if it wasn’t their job to sell

what we give them

and that’s if you’re one of the lucky few

to make it past the gatekeepers.

Is it even worth wanting anymore,

St Columba?

The rent is going up,

the bills are going up,

frozen pizza is going up

and we’re supposed to spend years

on a book

that won’t pay for any of it.

Do you still blame me

for wanting me to create fast?

It’s not quality over quantity,

it’s both

(let’s hope)

just to spite them.

St Columba,

everybody gets a shot lately

and I will always be glanced over

like roadkill.

Penniless,

on a grey British November evening

I felt like leaving it all

for the first time

and putting all these on the internet

free

for the few who care

and pull a Rimbaud –

disappear fuck knows where,

never write another word.

Three weeks later

I realised

there was nothing else in the world

I knew how to do but write –

as if I was ever gonna be satisfied

by an actual job.

Terrance Hayes wrote

he loves poems more

than money and pussy

and I don’t think I’m on the same page,

the time poems could get you those things

are a distant memory

so I’ve never had enough of either,

which one do you prefer,

St Columba?

You lived in the 6th century,

I’m sure your heart bleeds for me,

I write to you

because I know you can’t read me

and there is no God,

times are tough,

morale low

and our only hope is

you’ll guide us through it,

St Columba,

after all,

it is your job.

The madman was right again

# *‘I haven't found a drug yet that can get you anywhere near as high as sitting at a desk writing, trying to imagine a story no matter how bizarre it is, or going out and getting into the weirdness of reality and doing a little time on the Proud Highway.’ – Hunter S. Thompson*

As someone who has

licked bitter crystals off the tip of his finger

in an abandoned village,

stage-dived

to an indie rock band

in a church turned venue

and stargazed with mushroomheads,

someone who has

snorted coke off stranger’s keys

on what was meant to be a slow Tuesday

around a pool table

and done a line with four random blokes

I met at a gig

that made my teeth feel too big for my mouth,

someone who has

felt the mind buzzing

body relaxing

touch of codeine

browsing charity shops

for jeans,

someone who has

felt the world move at double speed

and hallucinated BoJack Horseman

after a pill,

someone who has

spent countless days and nights

in a haze of green and brown

giggling life away,

someone who has

had enough dumb luck

to even do

a little time on the Proud Highway,

I confirm –

the madman was right again,

as they tend to be.

Simple man

Thinking about

all the times

I felt relatively content

after

watching Derby County win a football game,

Prostejov win an ice hockey game,

discovering a band

few have ever heard of,

having my ego boosted

by compliments

after leaving the stage,

finding a loophole

to get one over the system,

receiving nudes,

smoking with an allied soul

on a warm summer’s night

observing flickering points in the heavenly veil,

getting a bargain

or rewatching *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

for the Xth time

makes me wonder;

maybe,

I’m not that complicated

after all.

Biathlon alternatives

Great thing

about meeting up with Jorgi

after I left my hometown

was that even after all this time

it usually felt

like we’d never been apart.

Going to the same pubs we used to,

talking the same shit we used to.

‘When I say a trumpet player,

what sort of a person

do you imagine?’

he asked

out of the blue.

After noticing my raised eyebrow,

he continued.

‘Let me rephrase,

when I say a trumpet player,

do you imagine

an absolute animal?’

I didn’t.

‘Played a gig with one recently,’

Jorgi said,

‘we picked him up at a pub,

on the three hour car ride,

he knocked back three cans,

half a bottle of Jack,

and constantly smoked a THC vape,

at the actual gig,

he did a bit of snow before we went on stage,

drank shots that people from the crowd

brought him,

on the way home,

he went back to the THC vape

and we dropped him off outside a bar again

where he drank until the morning.’

Nodding my head at those impressive stats,

smoking pot from a glass pipe

at the nearly empty pub’s patio

I noticed

the TV inside was showing biathlon

and we started making up variations

that could be more intriguing

than skiing and shooting.

My personal favourite

was to make it a sport played in pairs

where one throws a boomerang

and the other

has to shoot it with a machine gun

before it returns to the thrower,

the closer to their hands,

the more points,

it would probably cost a few arms

but we reckoned

that’s a price worth paying

for the thrill.

These stoned conversations

rarely within the realms of reality,

often unintentionally emulating those

between Raoul Duke and Dr Gonzo

created a bond

that no amount of time

or distance could break.

Was it the weed or the words?

Couldn’t care less

as long as it’s there

and every time I return

to my home ends

it gets re-lit

and with Lady Luck on our side

there’ll be a next time,

when we’ll make up more

biathlon alternatives.

Drinks, dope, and the city

Magpie and I met outside Nando’s

where a group of people

was trying to get the attention

of a Police van

to tend to someone lying on the ground.

We fled the potential crime scene

into Old Blacksmith’s Yard

where we discussed

the Wagner group uprising,

Pete Doherty’s charm

and the summer transfer window

over monotonous EDM

and pints of Czech lager.

Glasses were getting shattered

at an impressive rate

all around us

in part thanks to

a waved balding man in a black shirt

who started a scrap

with a couple of donnies

Magpie saw

snort coke at the toilets.

The situation settled down

after he got escorted

while violently hugging the bouncer

and Magpie

shared the story

of a toothy blowjob

and him losing his virginity

aged 23

for 50 Euro

in Amsterdam’s red light district.

I was in stitches,

yet,

oddly proud of him.

After 10

we moved to Darley Park

to smoke a joint

followed by a late night walk

through Chester Green

down a couple of sketchy low underpasses

echoing our voices

before reaching Racecourse Park

where we heard dogs barking near us

and the sound of something heavy hitting the ground

in the distance

as we moved past the foundations

of another pointless concrete structure

on a once green land.

Having found our way back to the city centre

we grabbed one more drink

in Derby’s oldest pub

where I told Magpie

about the criminal underbelly

of Dynamo Berlin hooligans

whose sticker I saw in the gents’ room.

Mildly annoyed

the take away we wanted to get

was closed

we parted ways

and as I set on my way home

once again

long past midnight

I realised

I was animal

released from captivity

back into its natural habitat

of drinks, dope

and the city

after dark

and finally felt

at home

again.

Critical component – A poetics of spontaneity

Introduction

I have produced a collection of poetry and prose exploring spontaneity: of individuals, subcultures and individuals in subcultures, namely on the spoken word and underground music scene. My work builds on the idea that there is a transfer of energy that happens during creative serendipity which should not be diluted by huge amounts of editing. This idea is communicated in Kerouac’s (2015) *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* which is one of the key texts in relation to my project. I focus on Kerouac’s points of Scoping and State of Mind that encourage writers to entertain a trance and submit to free associations with these two concepts being the best fit for what I wanted to achieve in this project creatively. I am influenced by the culture of spontaneity (Belgrad, 1999) that started developing in the USA in the 1940s and believed spontaneity is the true alternative to the rigid structures of corporate capitalism. My work continues this tradition but remains open to contemporary influences.

The idea of spontaneity as an alternative to the establishment is not specific to the Beats; it is also, for example, present in modernism. While some modernists denounce spontaneity as something undesirable, others such as William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens or Wyndham Lewis have fascinating, more positive and complex views of spontaneity. They do not focus on the spontaneity of individuals which is the common way of exploring spontaneity, rather, they look outwards at the spontaneity of the people in so-called multitudes – self-organised networks of individuals – which they believed to be the catalysts for social change and progress. The idea of multitude is often attached to post-modernism but Nickels (2012) demonstrates it plays a significant part in the writing of the aforementioned modernist authors. Multitudes are defined by Negri and Hardt (2009) as singularities that act in common. The key fact of this definition is that there is no contradiction between singularity and plurality. In other words, multitudes preserve and encourage individuality whilst functioning as a whole.

Through creative writing using the influences of the Beats I explore how multitudes provide alternative ways of living in contemporary capitalism. I understand subcultures through the conceptual framework of multitudes as defined by Hardt and Negri (2009) and expanded upon and applied to modernist literature by Nickels (2012). The influences of the Beats have been long present in my work but now I explore how I can use them to create writing that fits in the 21st century and how their world views still hold value in the current social climate.

I aim to further spontaneous methods in the production of creative writing, drawing on both the improvisatory approaches of the Beats and the sensibility of underground, anti-establishment musicians, writers and social movements. My objective is to develop a poetics that explores and furthers spontaneous and improvisatory methods in creative writing. This portfolio of creative work is generated by and explores such methods, contextualising both the poetics and portfolio in relation to contemporary capitalism through a theoretical framework drawing on the idea of the multitude.

Background

While my earlier work was concerned with writing a novel, I have been surrounded by accomplished poets in the months leading up to composition and I felt like this influence needed to be utilised in my project so I decided to dedicate my portfolio to poetry. I had wanted to expand upon the tradition of Anglophone Czech writing but my goals kept changing with pretty much every supervision. Humour played a crucial role in my initial ideas. I wanted to explore how contemporary creative writing could be richer by adopting the approach to humour some Czech authors like Milan Kundera used. This kind of humour often appears in situations that are not humorous in their nature; there is an air of melancholy in the Czech use of humour and it can occasionally be considered quite dark. My project became clear when I landed on the subject of spontaneity for my creative work and the development of poetics for the theoretical part. Spontaneity as a method enabled me to pursue my desire for a simpler creative process which is in opposition to current approaches to creative writing that put a large emphasis on drafting, editing and rewriting. This does not mean completely eradicating editing or drafting, rather, they become smaller parts of the process that accompany writing itself, which is the most important element.

As I was reading up on spontaneity, I encountered the subject of the multitude and realised that various multitudes living by different rules to the neoliberal establishment – mostly, but not exclusively, underground artists – frequently appear in my work. All these groups function by different rules where each individual plays their part to make the whole function while they still remain individuals with their own personalities that do not get lost in the crowd. The decisions of multitudes and the way they function are often grounded in spontaneity so I decided to include this topic in my project. I became fascinated by how these groups enable individuals to express themselves (often through creative means) while remaining individuals because, as Hardt and Negri (2009) explain, singularity is not in contradiction with plurality therefore the preservation of individuality is no threat to the ability of the whole to function. This does not mean multitudes have no rules, each multitude has its own specific set of rules different to the establishment, meaning the focus is neither on progress nor profit, which is what makes them so intriguing to me.

The entirety of my project is concerned with methodology. I have written a body of creative work and a critical reflection which explores the new understandings coming from this portfolio in an 80/20 split (the larger part belonging to the creative work). There is a strong and coherent relationship between the two components which makes them a unit with the critical element contextualising the creative work. I use practice based research as my methodology as described by Skains (2018) and develop the critical element alongside the creative portfolio as well as keeping notes of impulses that lead to serendipity but also explore what the work is trying to express. Spontaneity in my work is both the method and the theme, I write spontaneously about spontaneity and the ways multitudes enable it.

Methodology

A strong influence on the methodology of my research came from the article *‘Agnostic’ thinking: creative writing as practice-led research* (Webb, Brien, 2008) which defines practice based research in creative writing as ‘focused on exploration and accident rather than on hypotheses and pre-negotiated approaches’. This form of research is much less concerned with hard evidence and rather focuses on exploration of certain situations and does not feel the need to provide answers to everything and can leave certain things ambiguous and open to interpretation.

I encountered Wanda Pillow’s (2003) *Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research* which includes a definition of the difference between reflection and reflexivity with reflection being seen as not needing an ‘other’ while reflexivity demands both the ‘other’ and self conscious awareness. This influence comes through in the latter stages of my creative portfolio where the conscious awareness takes the form of my own thoughts on writing and life at the time of writing and the ‘other’ is in the shape of things that prevent the desires of the self from being fulfilled such as money (or lack of) and doubt. In the critical segment of my project the self is me wanting to create the way I wish to struggling against the ‘other’ being the mechanisms of a research degree that made it difficult.

Another idea from Pillow’s text which was highly influential on my work was her questioning of objectivity in research and the attempts to take a ‘non-position’ in the pursuit of objectivity which, ironically, can end up distorting the research and the idea that considering the writer’s own position both social (age, gender, economic background) and intellectual (influences, philosophies and personal tastes) can provide much clearer research and makes it easier to understand the point of the research. This self-awareness creates research that is able to question itself and bring to question an idea that seems to be embedded in the university sphere that if something is academic research, it can’t be wrong.

Both texts by Pillow and Webb and Brien shaped my position as a researcher who considers his own position in relation to the research subject and relies far more on exploration and interpretation rather than cold hard evidence.

My critical analysis takes the form of a poetics. Some creative writing scholars such as Kim Lasky (2013) argue that development of poetics should be a key accompaniment of creative work at PhD level (in my case a project which started as a PhD and later dropped down a level). This idea is grounded in the fact that many writers – mainly the ones who pursue the craft through studying at universities – struggle with how they should critically look at their work. I am no exception to this rule and the development of poetics seems to provide a solution for me (and many others) since it doesn’t push writers to the detachment that comes with trying to observe your own work as a literary critic – a situation many creative writing students fall into. Attaching accompanying critical or theoretical writings to works of fiction or poetry is no new concept and it far predates creative writing becoming a subject of teaching at universities. Modernist writers who concerned themselves with collective spontaneity such as Williams, Lewis, Riding or Stevens have used this approach to expand on their creative work. Lewis and Stevens have both accompanied their writings with essays whilst Williams restaged the ideas of his epic poem *Paterson* in later prosaic writings. Even the postwar authors who felt a strong sense of detachment and rejection from academia have engaged in developing a theoretical side to their writing and poetics, namely Jack Kerouac who wrote *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* upon a request from Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs who asked him to lay down the foundations for their desired approach to writing after Kerouac wrote his novel *The Subterraneans* in only three days.

Out of the critical works I mention, *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* is the one closest to a poetics since it defines Kerouac’s attitudes and provides guidance for authors who want to adopt this method. This makes it similar to what I am producing in my project, albeit with some key differences. Kerouac manages to say all he wants in a couple of pages and with very little explanation to what he means. His points are often very loose which makes some of them difficult to understand or even appear nonsensical. My poetics is far more extensive in order to meet the requirements of an MPhil project: 20% of my word count. Secondly, even though there is a concrete novel that was the catalyst for Kerouac to write *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose*, it is a general work; in other words, it applies to spontaneous writing in general, not just his novel. My poetics shift between the general and the specific. There are some general rules that nearly always apply. However, there are parts that concern themselves specifically with the creative work it accompanies.

This research includes no live participants; however, it is important to note a few ethical considerations. This body of work does not promote any hateful, discriminatory or extremist or in any other way freedom limiting ideology. It does not attempt to push any sort of a political agenda onto its desired reader and attempts to represent events accurately with the use of creative license.

This project presents accurate information when necessary to provide historical and/or political context and does not spread misinformation or historical inaccuracies. As a work of contemporary realistic literary fiction, it aims to paint an accurate picture of our time without pushing an agenda onto the reader.

Influences

Since the relatively early stages of this project, I have been undergoing a mentorship with the Derby poet Sophie Sparham who is helping me develop both creatively and professionally. This mentorship consists of discussing creative ideas and approaches to writing, reading suggestions but also applications for professional opportunities to add more practical experience to my writing CV. I also continue to develop my creative practice as a performing poet by attending and sharing my work at local spoken word nights. This especially is crucial to my development since performing poetry was an essential part of the culture of spontaneity from which I take inspiration.

The Beat Generation writers have been a huge influence on my writing ever since the early stages of my development. I explore not only their writing but also their approaches to writing with special focus on Allen Ginsberg’s (2001) *Howl and other poems*, Hunter S. Thompson’s *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (2005) and Jack Kerouac’s (1994) *The Subterreneans* written in a mere three days, this novella is a key text in relation to exploring spontaneity.

Daniel Belgrad’s (1999) book explains how the culture of spontaneity developed into being an alternative to the American establishment of the 1940s and beyond. I focus on literature and how spontaneity can be utilised in contemporary writing mainly with the use of the idea that a transfer of energy occurs during spontaneous creation which then transfers to the reader. This text also discusses the idea of gestalt therapy which saw the American lifestyle of the time (defined by suburbanism and materialism) as a form of social neurosis which can be combated by living spontaneously. This idea also led the authors of the time to travel with close to no money, taking jobs for only short periods of time and creating spontaneously. *The Culture of Spontaneity* also explains how it was used in other art forms which offers me a better understanding of the capabilities of spontaneity as a method across all forms of art.

The culture of spontaneity encourages gathering inspiration from a variety of art forms, music being one of the main ones. The music of Nirvana was my first introduction to a DIY approach to creating. What I found so appealing was the accessibility. Acclaimed virtuoso musicians across genres made me appreciate their skill but also made me feel like art is not for me as reaching that level of skill wasn’t possible with my resources. When listening to Nirvana I felt like music and writing was something I could engage in myself, it made me feel like creating doesn’t have to require formal training or technical flawlessness in order to have a significant impact. I soon realised that my potential in music was very limited and decided to carry over Nirvana’s attitudes to writing. Nirvana’s goal was to write songs as simply and memorably as possible, which they succeeded at. Yet, despite its simplicity, their music was unique and especially on their last studio album *In Utero* (1993) very raw and experimental. This simplicity, uniqueness, rawness, and willingness to experiment are key elements which I try to carry over to my writing. Kurt Cobain’s lyrics were often spontaneously produced lines of poetry (especially on *In Utero*) sometimes written in the studio shortly before recording which provides a neat overlap with the focus of my project. I also pay further attention to this subject in the poem *Homage to In Utero*.

Looking elsewhere in the grunge subgenre of rock music, Pearl Jam’s Eddie Vedder wrote the lyrics for three songs on their debut record *Ten* (1991) (*Alive*, *Once* and *Footsteps* aka *‘the Mamasan trilogy’* or *‘Momma-Son trilogy’*) after a sleepless night of surfing in San Diego and for another (*Black*) on the way to meet the rest of the band for their first rehearsals in Seattle. *Black* and *Alive* remain amongst the most popular songs written by the band over 30 years later.

Amanda Boulter’s (2007) book offers a comprehensive and easily understandable explanation of approaches to contemporary fiction writing. Whilst my project aims to provide an alternative to these approaches, *Writing Fiction* offers useful definitions and establishes terminology. *Writing Fiction* effectively describes contemporary methods of creative writing that claim that activities such as drafting or editing are equally, if not more important, in the creative process than the act of writing itself. This argument stems from roughness, flaws and a feeling of underdevelopment that unedited writing contains. I do not deny these issues exist but I believe that over focusing on eradicating these elements takes away from the spontaneous energy that comes from writing and I argue that trying to get completely rid of roughness or flaws is not desirable since, in my opinion, these things can make writing feel more human and approachable. In other words, they make it feel like creating is something achievable similarly to the roughness in Nirvana’s music.

Joel Nickels’ (2012) work on spontaneity in modernism provides a fascinating and radically different understanding of spontaneity to how the subject was approached during and after the Second World War. Whilst the postwar authors, and indeed most authors who concerned themselves with spontaneity outside of modernism, looked at the spontaneity of the artist as an individual, the modernists either denounced spontaneity altogether or in their understanding of the subject they looked outwards rather than inwards. They looked at the spontaneity of the multitude – a self organised network of individuals – as the real catalyst of social change and progress (typical image being of workers spontaneously deciding to go on strike). Spontaneity in the modernist view is seen as something highly political, yet, authors like Williams, Riding, Stevens or Lewis who engaged in this look at spontaneity rarely express any of their political views. I aimed to maintain this neutrality to an extent in my writing in order to avoid the issues of pushing an agenda onto the reader. However, in certain sections I let them see what side of the proverbial barricade I am on, mostly to avoid confusion.

I am also fascinated by the idea of the multitude, however, my writing doesn’t necessarily see it as the catalyst for social change, rather an oasis providing an escape from the structures of neoliberalism. In my view, for example, our local poetry and spoken word scene in Derby is a multitude of people who live inside the neoliberal system, yet as individuals and as a group they function on entirely different principles.

Despite being only two pages long, Kerouac’s *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* is a key text for my project. Written in 1953 – still fairly early on in the era of the Beats – it provides a rare piece of insight into the creative processes and philosophies of the Beats from one of the authors himself as opposed to academic research.

Kerouac lays down the essentials in nine points each accompanied by an explanatory paragraph on the first page before noting down 30 techniques and beliefs of spontaneous writers on the second page. I concern myself mainly with two of his nine essentials, the first one being Scoping which encourages writers to write based on free association and swim in the sea of thought and language, jump from topic to topic and to satisfy themselves first because this satisfaction will almost telepathically transfer to the reader.

The second essential I put above others is State of Mind which encourages incorporating subconsciousness in the creative process and to create in an excited but relaxed manner. The most desired state of mind is a type of trance which was described by the likes of Yeats before Kerouac, achieving this trance is not easy and for that reason I believe it should be distorted as little as possible and therefore edited as little as possible. These two were selected because they were most relevant to what I wanted my writing to achieve in this collection.

Ever since the early days of my writing, performing my work was a key part of my development. This desire to perform largely came from my frequent visits to punk rock concerts in my hometown of Prostejov. A community formed around these events which always created a friendly and encouraging atmosphere for the performers but also for anyone new who came to watch to become a part of it.

This was exactly what I found when I started attending poetry events in Derby and Nottingham after moving to England. It also opened the door for me to become influenced by authors the general literary public has no idea about. Among the writers I’ve grown to admire are Sophie Sparham, Jamie Thrasivolou, Miggy Angel, True Colours or Pippa Nayer.

Seeing skilled authors like this perform on a monthly basis made me push myself to firstly improve on my writing in English (in my early days of performing) and to develop further my own unique style without trying to conform to any established norms as these writers often push boundaries and their writing and performance is full of experimentation.

Performance in itself is an influence on my writing as when I’m stuck between a couple of different ways of writing a line I test out these variations during performances and based on the way the audience reacts or how the words feel to say I might choose what stays on the page. Occasionally, I also have to adjust the way I deliver some lines on stage as they don’t translate well into performance and figuring out a way of writing that works for both is something I am continuously working on. Both performance and page poetry are things I keep in mind when writing.

One of the biggest issues I have encountered – and it applies to both segments – was establishing the overarching themes and ideas. I have spent a considerable amount of time figuring out my approach but struggled to find something to apply it to, or, in other words, I tried to figure out how I want to write without knowing what to write. This uncertainty is often a part of my process and the switch to poetry helped to accommodate it in this project since poetry offers itself to fragmentation and the themes can be explored through different means rather than just plot or character.

I knew that my writing is semi-autobiographical from the point of view of someone born in the post-communist Eastern Bloc who moved to England in an attempt to better his life prospects and the excitements and disappointments that came with it. But I still couldn’t establish a theme, merely coming up with vague, undercooked and not very interesting ideas.

As I struggled to figure out my theme, I realised, it is actually not that important in relation to the academic value of my work. Rather, this value comes from my approach to creative writing which strays from the established composition methods in the discipline. Therefore, I have decided to build my project around developing a poetics of spontaneity in contemporary creative writing based largely on Kerouac’s methods of Scoping and State of Mind. I believe these methods democratise the artform, they encourage authors to conform to nothing but their creative energy and write in a trance which means they can freely create larger amounts of work and make the creative process far more time efficient than the contemporary approaches which encourage a lot of rewriting.

Afterwards, I encountered the largely post-modern idea of the multitude during my reading and I realised they often appear in my work, yet, I’ve not paid all that much conscious attention to them. I grew fascinated by the idea and the practical functions of the multitude and decided to include them in my exploration of spontaneity in this project. The multitude is intriguing because it often operates on the basis of spontaneous decision making and combines singularity and plurality. This means it operates as a whole, yet encourages individuality, therefore an individual in a multitude can be a valuable part of the whole without the necessity to conform and with the ability to maintain their individual personality. I find this idea really beneficial not only for creative writing but for society in general so I quickly decided to incorporate it in my project.

Process

For obvious reasons I saw the recommendation to drop my project from a PhD to an MPhil as a complication. With the way the first approximately 18 months of a PhD are structured and the constant bureaucratic distractions forced onto the students, I found it almost impossible to focus on my creative work and I still struggle to see how a creative person could thrive in this environment. Especially a creative person focused on spontaneity, exploration and experimentation – how should I explain my project to someone a year and a half before it’s submitted when I have no real idea what it is going to be until it is done? Why am I getting distracted with making timelines and Gantt charts I mostly have to make up anyway because the whole project is about exploration with as little planning as possible?

My initial hope was that I’ll somehow sneak my way through the Transfer of Registration process and use the remaining period of time with fewer distractions to produce most of my work.

When it turned out, this wouldn’t be possible, I initially had no interest in carrying on this project – at the very least not in a university environment. After all, when I was on the PhD path it was the first time I ever seriously considered quitting writing altogether (something I speak about in the poem *A plea to St Columba*). Having taken some time to gather my thoughts, I started connecting certain pieces together: my project is about spontaneity and if I was to walk away with an MPhil, I would have to write the vast majority of my project in roughly three months. Surely, this is a great opportunity to explore the true effectivity of spontaneity as a method. Can it carry me to a successful MPhil or an unsurprising failure?

With the volume of work compared to the amount of time I had to produce it, it seemed impossible to complete, however, there was something that made me believe otherwise. I first encountered the idea of ‘productive anxiety’ in an episode of *The Big Bang Theory* where the main character Sheldon Cooper with his neurobiologist girlfriend explored various means of making him uncomfortable to increase his productivity. In more specialised terms, this phenomenon is known as The Yerkes-Dodson Law of Arousal and Performance which claims that a person will achieve better results when reaching the right level of stress (Nickerson, 2023). While this is referred to as a law, it is still very much a theory, yet, I’ve observed signs supporting it in the past on myself.

Somewhat fittingly, I noticed this pretty much every time it came to completing my university assignments. When there was a long period of time left until the deadline, I couldn’t bring myself to write a word, when I left it too late, the stress was overwhelming. There was a sweet spot though when there was stress, I felt pressed for time, the workload was challenging but it all felt like there was an end in sight and that’s where I usually found myself at my best. A lot of the time I knew, I would only have a very short period of time for edits and this put me into a sort of ‘you only have one try’ mindset which would force me to make the first version of a piece as good as it could be and whatever edits were needed would only be cosmetic.

The term productive anxiety has been connected to creative writing by scholars such as Magee (2009) and Garber (2016), however, it is in mere passing mentions and the term is only used to describe phenomena the authors couldn’t find a better phrase for. In my project, productive anxiety is explored far more in depth and in a very different context.

After putting together the small amount of usable writing from my time on the PhD path, I knew I would have to write roughly 30 poems and 6000 words of theory in the space of three months. Initially, I saw this task as falling firmly into the too much stress category until I realised I had absolutely nothing to lose. If I don’t do it, I’m not getting any degree. If I do it and fail, I at least have a volume of writing I can start building my career on. My lecturers probably don’t think I will succeed, I am almost certain I won’t succeed and the person marking this project at this point of the text definitely thinks I’m destined to fail and that brought me enough comfort to take on something which would be by far my biggest creative writing project with three months to complete it.

The Yerkes-Dodson law, however, is not the subject of my project, it merely provides encouragement and theoretical reasoning as to how it could yield good results and why it makes sense to take it on. My project is about exploring spontaneity as a creative writing method and also as a theme.

When I began to write with the knowledge I am writing for an MPhil, my initial focus was purely on myself and the way spontaneity manifests itself within my life, largely influenced by the subcultures I engage with. This wasn’t a conscious decision, rather, it was a pattern I have spotted after writing a few poems. What was a conscious decision was to make something I would enjoy creating. After more than a year of trying to satisfy the university’s requirements for a PhD student, I didn’t care about pleasing anyone with my writing but myself.

This did not result in any sort of wildly experimental and barely coherent pieces, the result of this creative period was writing which felt very loose in areas such as line lengths and the tone of the piece which sometimes changed from stanza to stanza. There was also a sense of energy and excitement which I believe comes from subconscious application of Kerouac’s method of Scoping. I noticed myself going deeper into subjects I had only brushed over in the past or would not touch at all such as criticism of political decisions or regimes.

After the long creative drought I went through on the PhD path, writing like this was exactly what I needed even if it would have been just to rediscover my love and passion for writing. The fact it actually produced some exciting pieces of writing was an encouraging added bonus.

One of the things I was told I should do that didn’t include writing was to read what the authors I consider influential said about their writing and what their philosophies were. I initially expected this to mostly help me complete the theoretical element of my project and maybe point me towards some new ideas for my creative writing, however, I ended up writing pieces which are in active dialogue with thoughts of other artists.

This was a foreign approach to writing for me, I’ve always tried to produce writing which is proactive, meaning, I, as the author, actively seek out something to turn into a creative piece. I had a certain degree of skepticism towards writing which was reactive. This came from watching countless spoken word performances of poets reacting to current affairs with the writing being often uninspiring. There could be several reasons for this such as the writers trying too hard to make sure the audience gets the point or taking on topics just because they are current affairs without the authors really being affected by them themselves. Both can be traced back to the reactive nature of the writing.

However, I felt that actively seeking out these quotes and philosophies provided a proactive element to what I would have previously considered reactive writing which led to pieces like *The madman was right again* and *Lazy nights where* I enter a conversation about creativity. That was also a new theme to appear in my work but I felt that with the nature of the project and the frustration I often felt from my inability to write, it was the right time to put some focus on this topic.

A lot of the reactive writing I’ve encountered on the spoken word scene is in opposition to something (idea, event, politics), in my pieces I enter a conversation where I agree. *The madman was right again* is the prime example of this, I found a Hunter S. Thompson quote which expressed what I believe better than I ever could but I felt like I should have a piece which expresses that sentiment because that gives the audience a clearer idea of what I stand for as a writer and I thought that including the original quote and writing a response which is effectively poetic nodding in agreement was a good way of borrowing Thompson’s thoughts without blatantly ripping him off creatively.

After writing approximately 10 pieces since resuming the project, I started noticing my creative process shifting. Normally, I would think about a piece for a considerable period of time and develop a rough idea of certain points I want to hit in that piece before letting the creative spontaneity do the rest and there would always be a maximum of two or three pieces developing like this at a time. I didn’t entirely abandon the structure, however, the whole process did speed up massively. I still had certain points in my mind prior to writing that I was going to include but they became far more vague, often reduced to a mere phrase or image.

This lack of clarity pushed me towards more experimentation and gave me a sense of creative freedom. Writing so many pieces in quick succession also played a part in my willingness to experiment as I would have otherwise simply got bored by creating too many similar pieces, therefore I started delving into themes and forms I previously haven’t explored. The best example of this is *A plea to St Columba* which takes a very different tone to most of my past writing and voices a lot of my frustrations with the world of creative writing, both academic and professional much better than I could do in this section. The fact that it is a poem which was born very quickly and largely out of frustration means it has a great amount of energy which I found encouraging since energy in writing, and how spontaneous writing produces it, is a significant part of my project.

Another change I noticed was the amount of pieces I was developing at once. As I mentioned earlier, I only used to develop a couple of pieces at a time to avoid getting overwhelmed and making sure I knew what to include to reduce the need for rewriting. Here, – partly out of necessity, partly from discovering my creative flow – I had a plethora of pieces brewing and being written at the same time with relative ease. I certainly feel like this is where the Yerkes-Dodson Law I discussed earlier came into play, too. I think that the awareness that I simply had to be coming up with loads of ideas and executing them very quickly made me stop overthinking writing and just get on with it. From experience I highly doubt I would have reached this level of productivity under normal circumstances.

Challenges

So far I have focused on the positives that I believe spontaneous writing has but in this section I am going to address some challenges it brings. The main one I have been battling has always been sustained productivity. Creating spontaneously often meant for me bouncing between two extremes: short bursts of huge productivity and sizable dry spells.

What are the possible solutions? This is where the Yerkes-Dodson Law comes into play. Having observed how increased stress affects productivity in the final stage of this project, I genuinely believe that a right amount of stress where you feel challenged but not overwhelmed leads to increased productivity. How to achieve this right level of stress which, I will admit, is a very abstract term? I am afraid there is no universal answer to this as everyone responds to stress differently, however, what I’ve found really effective – in all of my years of practice, not just this course – is a deadline. Simply knowing you have a limited amount of time to produce something creates a degree of stress which will at the very least force you to do something. I would recommend keeping an eye on submissions to magazines or publishers. For example, if there is a magazine whose deadline is two weeks away and asks for a maximum of five poems, that is an achievable challenge. Setting your own deadlines for yourself could potentially work as well, however, my project worked with a stern outside deadline so it cannot provide a definite answer on the effectiveness of a self-imposed deadline.

One thing to keep in mind when applying the deadline method is that trying to maintain this degree of increased productivity for a long period of time could lead to a burnout. I refer to it as increased productivity for a reason, you will likely be creating at a higher pace than is normal for you and following a productive spell with a little break from writing is certainly recommended.

Another challenge of spontaneous writing is reducing the need for editing. Roughness and inclusion of passages that could have been cut out are common criticisms of spontaneous methods and I do not deny this does happen. What can writers do to prevent it? And are these even inherently bad things?

The answer to the first question is not simple and it probably comes down to each person’s individual preferences. What I can offer is what works for me. As I have mentioned above, I often like to let ideas brew in my head before putting them on the page. Simply thinking about what you’re writing before you do it is no groundbreaking concept, however, writers experimenting with spontaneous methods might be tempted to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) as soon as they get that lightbulb moment. I think this is a mistake and is what can cause the roughness and mainly the passages that do not do much for the piece as the author is trying to squeeze something out of a half baked idea. Taking some time should help you answer two main questions: is this idea worth pursuing and what points do I want to hit? Why you need a positive answer to the first question is obvious, regarding the second one, there is no need to have a full road map for the piece, the points can be quite vague but they will automatically stay in the back of your mind and your brain will figure out how to connect them during spontaneous creation.

Above, I also asked whether roughness and redundant passages are inherently a bad thing. Redundant passages are named such for a reason and yes, I think writers should make an effort to avoid them, that is why I described how I attempt to achieve it in the previous paragraph. Roughness, however, I don’t think is something that needs to be completely eliminated from one’s writing. What I mean by roughness are little things that would have probably been changed in a heavily edited piece but are not significant in relation to what the writing is trying to convey: a missing comma, a sentence which could be split into two carrying on as one, or unconventional sentence structure just to name a few examples.

What things like that do for me is make the writing endearing and human. My issue with heavily edited writing is that it often becomes over-polished, has the soul sucked out of it and feels like it was produced in a boardroom. Writers often want their books to inspire other people to write. What always inspired me was imperfection, seeing imperfection made me feel like I can do this, too. I can appreciate a well polished piece of writing but it usually makes me feel like that is a level that will never be possible for me to reach because I will never have that amount of time to spend on producing a book.

I am aware that, with its elements of stress and sometimes abstraction, my method won’t be for everyone and it’s not meant to be. There will never be a creative writing method that will suit everyone. Rewriting, editing and spending months on a piece does not work for me and that is why I try to describe what can be an alternative for writers dealing with a similar issue. I do not even claim this is an objectively superior method – it subjectively works better for me – I simply aim to prove that, utilised correctly, this method is equal to more conventional methods and at times can even produce better results, because it can channel energy.

It also must be stressed that this approach doesn’t eradicate the issue of bursts of productivity followed by less fruitful spells, rather, the idea is to take control over how long these periods last based on what works best for each writer. Contrary to what many people might think of spontaneous literature, this is a method which requires a lot of self-discipline with recognising when to take a break and when to return to creating.

Starting again after some time off is, in my experience, one of the most difficult and intimidating things about writing. There are many ways I have felt after writing a piece in my life but when I wrote *Drinks, dope and the city* – the first poem of this wave of productivity which created my portfolio – it was the first time I ever felt relief after writing something. The reason was that after not creating for the previous nine months, writing something felt so intimidating that I started to think I had forgotten everything I ever knew about it.

Admittedly, it was strange to feel this way after writing a piece since I’ve always considered writing to be a source of fulfilment and excitement. I have included this segment mainly as a warning of what taking too long to return to writing can cause and why trying to have at least some form of control over how long these time periods of not creating are can make your life easier.

Avoiding extremes is what I believe to be the most important thing about this method that makes it tricky by offering itself to them. There is a downside to being over-productive too. I’ve always been against the opinion that a writer needs to write every day. For writing to feel natural, it has to come naturally, if you force it, it will feel forced. When I was in school, we had a saying about Maths that if it feels easy, you’re doing it wrong. Writing is the opposite of Maths in this sense because if it’s going smoothly that’s when you know it’s going well. The words need to flow out of you like a river: sometimes vicious, fast and full of energy, other times calm but still very much moving. Once writing feels like you’re going against the stream of the river, that’s when it’s time for a break.

It is again something I have experienced myself during the period of high productivity in the final few months. Initially, I took advantage of the fact I still had plenty of ideas in my head from the past which I, for whatever reasons, haven’t done anything with until now but once that well started to dry up, it was harder and harder to make myself do some writing. I didn’t really have the luxury of being able to not write for a few days so whenever I felt like I needed at least a little bit of time to figure out more creative pieces, I turned to writing this section of the project.

In the past I mostly disliked writing about my writing but using this as a little getaway from the absurd amount of lines and verses I have produced in such a short period of time actually made creating this much more enjoyable even though I will still not become an academic writer any time soon.

Multitudes

The final way in which I explored spontaneity was in its relation to subcultures and the idea of the multitude. I have selected underground music (mainly, but not exclusively, punk) and the spoken word scene as the focus as these are the two subcultures I have the most extensive experience with. Having had my life shaped in many ways by these subcultures, I dedicated a big part of my portfolio to mapping out how I’ve been influenced by the multiple forms of spontaneity that get manifested by these groups. It is perhaps somewhat ironic that as a writer I spent more time writing about the music scene but there are logical reasons for it.

My engagement with underground music in my hometown was what really swayed me towards the idea of creating and becoming a performer. Most likely, I would never have become involved in the spoken word scene if it wasn’t for being in touch with that scene first. Since this portfolio is meant to be the foundation for my first collection of poetry, it is in many ways an origin story, an introduction to me as an author, what I am about and where I come from and that’s why there is so much focus on music.

Writing about the spoken word scene – or about doing things having been influenced by that scene – was something relatively new to me. Previously, I focused mostly on the music scene or simply myself. Those poems often revolved around bohemian lifestyle after dark which stemmed from most of the characters in them being young and restless. There is a much larger variety of ages, backgrounds and interests in the spoken word scene than there was in our little local punk scene therefore the way in which spontaneity is expressed is also far more diverse and doesn’t revolve around use of substances nearly as much. Make no mistake, the writers are no strangers to that way of living but with many of them being at different stages of their lives, a significant portion has moved on from it but their spontaneity remains in different forms.

I tried to focus on these manifestations of spontaneity mainly in the pieces I created towards the end of this portfolio’s development and it actually proved to be a welcome challenge. By that point, I needed poems that didn’t revolve around things like drinking because I didn’t want to make it appear like that is the only thing we get up to in these subcultures as that would be a terrible misrepresentation. In multiple pieces I have attempted to communicate reasons why we (meaning me and my friendship group) were expressing ourselves that way and tried to make it clear that it was our ethos, rather than the subculture’s.

It turned out to be a welcome challenge as I seemed to have a certain formula for writing about excessive partying but writing about new topics also made me write in new ways. Poems like *My generation*, which is simply about the spontaneous decision to leave the house to watch a concert from over a fence alone delves into things I had not written about before and in certain parts really offered themselves to flexing my poetic muscles since I didn’t feel like I should stick to the story which sometimes happens with the ‘party poems’. It is safe to say that the forms of spontaneity I engaged with through the spoken word scene have given the portfolio more diversity in more than just the topics.

Another thing I believe led towards me writing that way was using Kerouac’s method of Scoping which encourages authors to stray from the topic and go as deep as they wish about things that interest them. The more challenging topics such as politics or my relationship with writing are often discussed in stanzas that go off topic and feel perhaps a bit more abstract.

I knew even prior to beginning this project that spontaneity plays an important part in both of the subcultures I’ve engaged with so it was no surprise to see certain overlap between the way it manifests itself in these communities which is helped by the fact that it is not rare for a person to be engaged in both at the same time much like myself. There are certain differences though, I have noticed while creating this portfolio. In my experience, spontaneity in the punk scene was usually connected to the music in some shape or form. Whether it was organising, travelling to events, the things people get up to while there or simply just hanging out with other musicians or people engaged in that scene. Spontaneity on the poetry scene, compared to that of the DIY punk, often doesn’t have a connection to writing, the people seem to act spontaneously on their own or when doing things that don’t seem connected to writing at first. It is not rare for a piece of writing to emerge at the end of those activities but they don’t necessarily set out with the intention of having something to write.

Around these poems are a few that don’t revolve around subcultures but explore spontaneity of individuals who act that way of their own accord without any real engagement with any of them (pieces such as *The sandpit man* or *A good bad influence*). I have included them almost as a reminder that while a lot of influence to act and create spontaneously might come through engaging with subcultures, people who act this way simply because it is their nature are a valuable source of inspiration and even if a person is engaged in a subculture, not all of their spontaneity, creative or otherwise, has to be linked to it.

There are, of course, plenty of ways in which spontaneity is actually connected to writing but I am pointing out the variety of spontaneous actions outside of writing because it is an interesting trend that I have noticed while creating this portfolio which I haven’t really thought about before. It is difficult to pinpoint what is the reason for it and I am quite sure if you were to ask a hundred writers, you’d receive a hundred different answers. To put forward my two theories: writers often spend a lot of time on their work with planning, editing, rewriting and so on and spontaneity, being radically different, might provide them with a form of escape, my other theory is that it is an escape from the social structure in general and it’s this second idea that neatly brings me to the next point.

Should spontaneity still be considered an alternative to the mainstream? It is no longer a revolutionary idea, we’ve known about it for a solid 70 years, is it not part of the mainstream now?

Researching what led into spontaneity being used as an artform in its initial wave of popularity led me to, what I believe to be, the answer. The people who first began the culture of spontaneity in the USA during the 1940s did so out of frustration with the rigid structure of the country at the time. Many artists during that time worked for a government agency producing pamphlets with various news from the war and most of them lost those jobs when the American government decided these pamphlets would be better used as a propaganda machine and hired a Coca-Cola director to oversee this change. Spontaneity was their response to these backwards ways (Belgrad, 1999).

As sad as it is to admit, it doesn’t seem like too much has changed since then. Writers are still in many ways limited by the structures of the society, granted not in the same ways as they were in the 1940s, but things like publishing books barely paying any money and the entire process of making and publishing books with all the rewrites, editors, agents often taking years (at least when it comes to the mainstream publishers) or having to try to develop your writing outside of your actual job are huge obstacles for authors in the current system that doesn’t value art despite the fact it consumes it non-stop. All of those issues I’ve described are caused by the bureaucracy of the corporate structures that dominate our society which favour the moneymen on top and as long that is the case, spontaneity will always be the natural answer, the natural opposition, the proof that there is another way.

Conclusion

Spontaneity has had over 70 years now to overthrow these corporate structures but they are still around: doesn’t that mean spontaneity has failed? I believe it has been pushed aside after its initial boom and was criticised by many even during it. Spontaneity has been marginalised by the mainstream and academia and insultingly labelled as an excuse to be a lazy writer, as something to be looked at through fingers. Many do this subconsciously, but they do it nonetheless.

Whether they genuinely believe spontaneity is for the lazy, or are just repeating an assumption their minds picked up somewhere along the way, I dare any one of these people to see what I have done in order to create this project and find a drop of laziness.

Some might say this project might prove I’m not a lazy person but does it prove I am not a lazy writer? Being a lazy writer and a lazy person are two different things, but how do you want to define a lazy writer? For some people it might be the spontaneous ones but can someone who chooses to focus their energy on creating more work more quickly be really called lazy just because some of their lines or sentences may not be polished to perfection? As long as they say things that need to be said, explore different methods, forms and ideas, they are not a lazy writer to me, no matter if they spent a year or 15 minutes on the piece. Someone who writes in a box ticking way just to fall under the umbrella of a certain genre, doesn’t try to expand it, doesn’t challenge themselves, doesn’t explore new forms or ideas only to be accepted (by public or publishers) or for other dishonest reason will always be much more of a lazy (and gutless) writer in my eyes even if they spend a decade on their book.

Finally, I must address this false notion that spontaneous writers are ‘anti-craft’. Perhaps, it might be true for some of the more radical practitioners but in my model of spontaneous writing, the method is not anti-craft, it is anti-elitist. I take no issue with a writer dedicating a long period of time to one piece or book if that’s what works for them, what I do have a problem with is this idea which seems to be embedded into the literary mainstream and academia that a good piece of writing must take time. They often act like they accept spontaneity as a method but their acceptance of it is, pardon the non-academic term, all fur coat, no knickers.

This is where I express my criticism and disappointment with the university sphere. Creative writing and the way it is taught at universities has been subject to critique from the likes of Ghidotti (2020) or LaFemina (2011) but neither are concerned with my big issue. On the surface, spontaneity seems accepted at universities but when you actually attempt to use the method, it becomes a different story. Judging by my experience, in the university environment you always get nudged towards these more established methods that often include a lot of revision and for undergraduate level (especially the first three or four terms, which is roughly how long it took me to find my feet) this makes sense as you should have at least a basic understanding of them to know what you are rebelling against. I have shared classrooms with many aspiring fantasy or crime writers or poets within more traditional forms and whilst they may have been questioned on their character development, structure or language, their methods have never been doubted nearly as much as mine, especially (but not exclusively) on PhD level. Why would that be the case if spontaneity as a method was really accepted? Why do I have to spend so much time and effort justifying a method which produced some of the most successful pieces of writing of the last century?

Spontaneity as a method has been doubted from its very inception and while it was very popular for a while, even during that time it was hugely criticised by the mainstream and academia and I would argue it never got properly accepted by them. Right now, the best I can say is that spontaneity as a method is allowed, but I certainly wouldn’t call it accepted or respected. At least not to the degree it deserves to be.

Unlike the many, who act like the established methods are the superior ones, I do not claim my method is better than any other, I claim it’s equal. I am not even saying it should not be questioned but it should be questioned equally to other methods. Spontaneity is (and always has been) an alternative for those who, just like me, feel dissatisfied and disillusioned with the creative writing establishment. It is our way of showing we can produce results just as good with far more limited resources compared to the establishment and that there is a way to survive outside of it. It is not a method without a rhyme or reason, as many seem to falsely assume, and deserves the respect and understanding that I feel it still does not receive.

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Appendix 1 - Ethics application

Ethics ETH2223-3680: Radim Nemela

Date Created 30 Mar 2023

Date Submitted 30 Mar 2023

Date forwarded to committee

31 Mar 2023

Researcher Radim Nemela

Student ID 100448322

Category Postgraduate research student

Supervisor Matthew Cheeseman

Project Nine Grand: spontaneity and creative writing

College College of Arts, Humanities and Education

Current status Approved

**Ethics application**

**Project information**

**Project title**

Expanding the tradition of Czech Anglophone creative writing

**What is the aim of your study?**

To expand spontaneity as a method for contemporary creative writing using the exploration of subcultures through the conceptual framework of multitudes.

**What are the objectives for your study?**

To develop a poetics that explores and furthers spontaneous and improvisatory methods in creative writing.

To create a portfolio of creative work generated by and exploring such methods.

To contextualise both the poetics and portfolio in relation to contemporary capitalism through a theoretical framework drawing on the idea of the multitude.

**Are there any research partners (NOT including your supervisor) within the University of Derby involved in the project?**

**Are there any research partners external to the University of Derby involved in the project?**

No

**If yes, please provide details**

**Initial screening**

**Does this project involve human participants?**

No

**If yes, should your research adhere to the British Psychology Society (BPS) code of ethics and conduct?**

No

**Does your study involve data collection with any persons who could be considered vulnerable (under 18 years or the elderly, or those with physical or mental disabilities)?**

No

**Does your project involve collecting data within NHS organisations or from any NHS employees or patients?**

No

**Does it involve collecting or analysing primary or unpublished data about people who have died, other than data that is already in the public domain?**

No

**Does your study involve direct access to an external organisation?**

No

**Does your study involve species not covered by the Animals Scientific Procedures Act (1993)?**

No

**Does your study involve ionising radiation?**

No

**Does your study involve the evaluation of medical devices, or the testing of medicinal and pharmaceutical products?**

No

**Does your study involve Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service?**

No

**Does your study involve serving offenders, professionals who work with them, or questions relating to criminal offences?**

No

**Does your study involve a need to see, acquire or store material that could be viewed as illegal or that may attract the interest of the police, security or intelligence services?**

No

**Will your study have any impact on the natural or built environment?**

No

**Funding and previous applications**

**Has this research been funded by an external organisation (e.g. a research council or public sector body)?**

No

**If yes, please provide the name of funder:**

**Has this research been funded internally?**

No

**Name of internal fund Funding amount Term of funding**

**Date funding agreed**

**Have you submitted previous requests for ethical approval to the Committee that relate to this research project?**

No

**If yes, please provide previous application reference:**

**Study**

**Brief review of relevant literature and rationale for study**

My project explores spontaneity in subcultures which I understand through the conceptual framework of multitudes as defined by Hardt and Negri (2009) and expanded upon and linked to modernist literature by Nickels (2012).

I use spontaneity as a method grounded in Kerouac's (2015) ideas of Scoping and State of mind which encourage authors to entertain writing in a trance-like state, stray from the topic if they wish to and limit the amount of editing they apply to their work. Spontaneity as a method has its theoretical backing in Belgrad's (1999) The Culture of Spontaneity which explains how it became an alternative to the literary establishment from the 1940s onwards. I explore how spontaneity is still an alternative to the methods of the establishment which are described in Boulter's (2007) Writing Fiction.

For my critical compononent I am developing a poetics of spontaneity. As discussed by Lasky (2013), many authors face problems when critically analysing their work and the development of poetics helps them gain a different perspective and eliminate the issues they otherwise face when adressing their work. All of the above is a part of creative practice as research defined as a methodology by Skains (2018).

**Cited references for any sources in the sections on rationale, methods etc.**

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Skains, R. L. (2018) Creative Practice as Research: Discourse on Methodology, Media Practice and Education, 19:1, 82-97,

**Outline of study design**

My creative practice as research will consist of a portfolio of creative work (poetry and prose) and a poetics of spontaneity as the critical component. My project is divided into an 80/20 split of 64 000 words of creative work (or equivalent since poetry is a part of the portfolio) and 16 000 words for the critical element.

By creating my portfolio I explore how spontaneity manifests itself in subcultures, specifically among spoken word artists and punk fans and musicians. Subcultures are, in my project, understood through the conceptual framework of multitudes. I also explore spontaneity as an alternative method to the establishment of contemporary creative writing which is the main topic for my critical component.

**Outline of study methods**

I am using practice based research which explains why my creative work forms 80% of the project. The entirety of my project is concerned with methodology as it explores how spontaneity is still a valid method in contemporary creative writing. This is further explained in my critical component which will in the form of poetics address the topic of spontaneity as a method and will work in tandem with my creative portfolio.

My research is informed by both authors who have used spontaneity as a method in the past and academics like Belgrad or Nickels who have analysed it in their works. I see Kerouac's Essentials of Spontaneous Prose as a key text to my research since it provides guidelines to spontaneous literature from an author who succesfully applied it in his writing.

**Do you propose to carry out your project partly in a non-English language?**

No

**If yes, please provide details**

**Ethical considerations**

**Research undertaken in public places**

I am not conducting any research in public places.

**GDPR - collecting personal data**

I am not collecting any personal data as a part of this project.

**Basis for collecting data**

Not applicable (only use when no data is being collected)

**Data retention**

There is no data.

**Rights of data subject**

There are no data subjects in this project.

**Commercial sensitivity**

Not applicable.

**Are you using non-standard software to store or analyse data?**

No

**Are there other ethical implications that are additional to this list?**

Yes

**If yes, please provide details**

As this project addresses topics connected to politics there are a few ethical consideration.

This body of work will not promote any hateful, discriminatory or extremist or in any other way freedom limiting ideology. It will not attempt to push any sort of a political agenda onto its desired reader and will attempt to represent events accurately with the use of creative license.

This project presents accurate information when necessary to provide historical and/or political context and does not spread misinformation or historical inaccuracies. As a work of contemporary realistic literary fiction, it aims to paint an accurate picture of our time without pushing an agenda onto the reader.

**Have/do you intend to request ethical approval from any other body/organisation?**

No

**If yes, please provide details**

**Do you intend to publish your research?**

Yes

**Have the activities associated with this research project been risk-assessed?**

Yes

**Attachments**

**Informed consent from other parties/organisations**

**Relevant testing materials**

**Other**

Appendix 2 - Ethics approval

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Sponsor License No: QGN14R294

Dear Radim ETH2223-3680

Thank you for submitting your application to the College of Arts, Humanities and Education Research Ethics Committee, which has now been reviewed and considered.

The outcome of your application is: approved.

Feedback on your application is available [here](https://research.derby.ac.uk/9xy4y/ethics-application-eth2223-3680).

If any changes to the study described in the application are necessary, you must notify the Committee and may be required to make a resubmission of the application.

Please note that ethical approval for this application is valid for 5 years. On behalf of the Committee, we wish you the best of luck with your study. Yours sincerely

Jonathan O'Donnell