

Barrie Tullett – Caserom Press

Biography

Barrie Tullett has taught at the Edinburgh College of Art, The Glasgow School of Art and the Lincoln School of Art & Design.

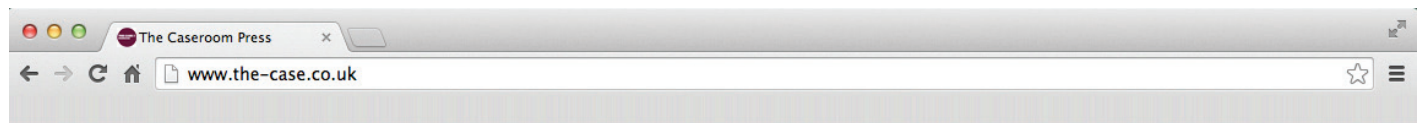
He is part of a collective called The Caserom Press; an independent publisher whose work explores the function and format of the book, from single limited editions to multiple copies; from poetry to prose; from the artist's book to traditional print; from stencils, to typewriters; from wood and metal type to litho and digital print processes. They collaborate with a number of illustrators, designers, painters, poets, sculptors, students and musicians.

For more information about the Caserom Press please see: <http://www.the-case.co.uk/>

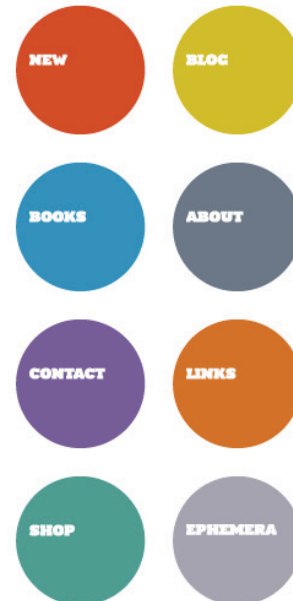
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THE CASEROOM PRESS

Barrie Tullett | BEYOND THE BOOK | Thursday 15th May, 2014



the caseroom press //



‘... if more than one person speaks at the same time, it’s just noise, no one can understand a word. But with opera, with music... with music you can have twenty individuals all talking at the same time, and it’s not noise, it’s a perfect harmony!’

Peter Shaffer: Amadeus

I think that the nature of Graphic Design is exactly this. You are the means by which a number of voices can sing and not argue. And rarely, as a graphic designer, are you the most important voice. The client, the poet, the artist, the author, the audience... They all come first. This is why the Artists’ Book as a medium is so appealing. Even though the majority of work we produce through The Caseroom Press is still about collaborations, we get to choose with whom we work, and (I hope) our voices are harmonious without anyone feeling that they’re relegated to the chorus.

So this collective, The Caseroom Press, is an opportunity for Philippa Wood and me, to put our skills to use to work on projects that would not otherwise get published, or ones that give us an opportunity to play with format and convention, an opportunity to experiment. But a graphic designer traditionally needs content and that’s where the collaborations usually come in. A Fine Artist however, they are their content are they not? And this is a constant issue for us... We are Graphic Designers who makes Artists’ Books. We are not Artists.

Therefore, do we make Artists' Books?

At the Museum of Modern Art panel, '*Artists' Books at the End of a Dream*' (May 1994), Lawrence Weiner stated 'if an artist made it, it's art'. In *The Century of Artists' Books*, Johanna Drucker argues that 'if it ain't a book it ain't a book, no matter what'. So where does that leave us? It is a book, but it ain't art.

Philippa Wood and Barrie Tullett are Graphic Designers that are part of a collective called The Caserom Press.

We make ... books.

This is one of the core issues for us. The nature of Art: and the nature of Design. Both Philippa and I teach Graphic Design at the Lincoln School of Art and we have a very open attitude to what can be considered Graphic Design. We want our students to know their subject, to know the rules of typography and the rigour and craft if it, but we also want them to have lively minds that appropriate elements of Fine Art, Science, Psychology... The more the students push the boundaries, the better their work tends to be, and, oddly enough, despite the designers desire to collaborate, I think that our own work is at its most successful when it's purely about what we want to say rather than our collaborators. When it moves further and further away from the commercial, or the practical, or for that matter, in my case, the 'sensical'.

Philippa and I both had the pleasure of being at Art School during the 1980s, where my tutor, David Strickland, once described the experience as 'a period of creative discovery, intellectual expansion and intensive indulgence'.



The Onion MerzPoem #8

Barrie Tullett: 2012

Part of Irvine Peacock's Merzbox project – a series of responses to the Fairy Tales of Kurt Schwitters; The Onion Merz Poem #8 is by far the oddest of these tales, and I felt that an incomprehensible snakebook made perfect sense.

Or at least as much sense as anything else about the story did.

Student numbers were low, our courses had around 40 Visual Communication students in each year and there wasn't a great distinction between the pathways (typically Graphic Design or Illustration; Photography was something you did in the same way you would draw as part of the discipline of being an art student).

(I actually graduated as an illustrator, who was really a printmaker of sorts... But don't tell anyone).

Although much of our education seemed to be by 'osmosis', rather than 'design' – it did instill in us a wide-ranging sense of what Graphic Design can be and how open-ended our influences and inspirations should be. The current nature of Art School, although far more focused and concise, does seem to have lost something of this 'joy of discovery' – and perhaps students are more concerned with jobs than we were? Perhaps the industry has become too self-reflective. Graphic Design students used to be inspired by art, now they're inspired by graphic design. Or is it because students, who were once inspired by Libraries, are now 'inspired' by Google.

But I guess that's a symposium for another day.

FORM AND FUNCTION

During a talk at the Scottish Poetry Library, I was asked 'how do you know how big a book is going to be?' Which was a wonderful question. How do any of us even know what shape our books are going to be, let alone how big?

So, is form driven by text?

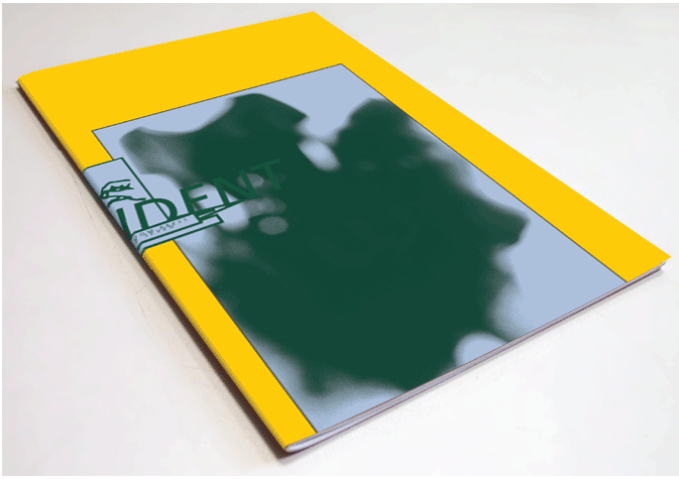
Is it a book of poetry or prose? Each has its own conventions. And the odd thing about setting texts, is that people are used to it all being the same. As soon as you deviate from convention, people notice it. As Zuzana Licko once said 'We read best what we read most.' – we will happily read a 500 page novel, with each page exactly the same, but if you change the way the text is laid out, you run the risk of it quickly becoming jarring and you begin to notice the typographic games and not the narrative.

This needn't be the case though – historically a magazine was very much like a book. The only differences being that the magazine had a softer cover and a number of stories rather than a hard cover and one single story.

But then – everything changed. In the early years of the 20th Century, magazines discovered the pregnant white space of the page. Magazines discovered the double page spread. Magazines discovered signature typographic stylings. Magazines discovered images; illustrations, photographs, texts that became pictures, pictures that became texts. Magazines discovered sequential narratives. Magazines discovered how to combine radically different elements; fashion, reportage, fiction, opinion. Magazines discovered how to be unpredictable.

Magazines discovered how to be cool.

Books, perversely, became the exact opposite of this and whilst there are some novels, such as *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, *Gentleman*, *The Raw Shark Texts*, *The House*



The Case Magazine.

Art Directors: Barrie Tullett and Zoe Patterson, Cover Design: Dave Slack, Cover Photography: Cathleen Campbell-Robson: 1998

I'd been interested in Artists' Books since a student at Chelsea, but this was the first serious engagement with the process. Originally the magazine was an opportunity to show student work that would otherwise not be seen. Its content was drawn from work left out in the studios for assessment.

It was only when I met Philippa Wood at Lincoln that The Caserom Press really found its feet.

of Leaves, The People of Paper, Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife or Woman's World that push the boundaries and conventions of the form, these are rare things – few and far between – whereas there have been hundreds of magazines that experiment, take risks and reinvent themselves over and over again.

So, why, as a designer who loves magazines enough to start his own one, do I feel so inhibited when I deal with text matter? Why don't I liberate the page? Why am I so respectful to the traditions of typesetting as soon as I sit in front of InDesign? Why do I design what Ulises Carrión refers to as 'an old book', where all the pages are the same. Whereas 'in the new art every page is different; every page is an individualized element of a structure (the book) wherein it has a particular function to fulfil ... A book of 500 pages, or of 100 pages, or even of 25, wherein all the pages are similar, is a boring book considered as a book. No matter how thrilling the content of the words of the text printed on the pages might be.'

That's me told.

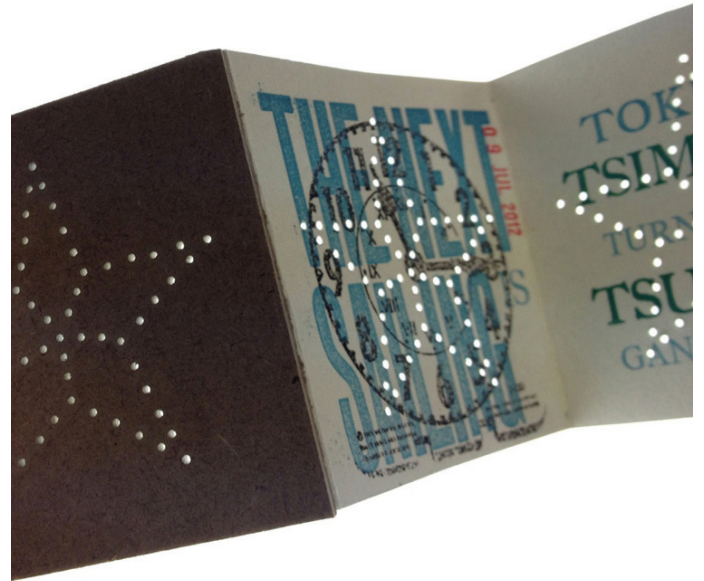
And I've found this reluctance to interpret texts in a visual or expressive manner especially true when I work with poetry, where the 'voice' of the poet and the metre and rhythm of the line is the most important thing of all. As a designer of poetry books, you really are reduced to the chorus. Even in The Caserom Press poetry collaborations we are very respectful to the form of the poem.

But then I'm a bit scared of poets.

There is also the nature of the content we choose to work with. A lot of the texts I typeset are quite formal, they are stories that require a level of respect from the designer. David Carson said that the liberties he was allowed in *Ray Gun* came about, to some extent, because it was the same article every week... another piece of pop pap about another band. So it

didn't matter what he did with the words. And eventually the writers and bands actually wanted him to be creative with their content. 'The layout came to signal something worthwhile to read, so the writers came to look forward to see how their words were interpreted'. (David Carson, *Columns*, November 2007).

The Caserom Press books that have more experimental typographies tend to be Philippa's: *Annoy Brian*, *From Hobnobs to Ear-rings*, *The Last*, *The First*, *8 Minutes Across*, *Delia Taught Me To Cook...* They all have a joy and delight and that 'thrill of discovery' when it comes to typographic layout – one that creates a visual narrative that adds to the experience of the reader.



8 Minutes Across

Philippa Wood: 2013

An 8 page concertina book with pages that decrease in size to denote the passing of time on the short Star Ferry journey between Kowloon and Hong Kong Island.

Each page represents one minute of the voyage across Victoria Harbour and is a typographic exploration of the crossing, the ferry's environment and the surrounding landscape. The drilled wooden covers replicate the onboard seating.



Delia Taught Me To Cook

Philippa Wood: 2012

This book celebrates everything we love about Delia Smith. Delia devotees share their Delia-signature dishes and explain why they are happy to put their trust in Delia, and her no nonsense approach to cookery.



Feathers & Lime

Philippa Wood: 2007

Feathers and Lime features work by Thomas Brasch, Rudolf Bussmann, Christine Marendon, Arne Rautenberg and Tina Stroheker.

'[The poets] live in different parts of the German-speaking world, and work out of different literary traditions. This disparity is real, but the poems do share certain qualities: an insistence on activity coupled with a need for silence; the use of personal images and metaphors to articulate a public language, and conversely the use of the language of public discourse to assert a personal space; and always the terrible magnetic pull of the past has to be negotiated.'

from the Afterword by Ken Cockburn

Again. I think this comes down to the 'voice'. Philippa is I think an equal partner in her books, if not the soloist, and the 'authorial voice' is something she constantly questions. Is she a designer making artists' books, or an artist making designer books? This is an issue she turned to time and time again in her MA.

I think her working methods also add to her creativity within the typographic content. She often engages with the physical processes of Screenprinting, Letterpress and Typewriting. And I think this allows for a more intuitive use of language as typographic form, which is something that I miss when I work digitally.

It's interesting to note, however, that Philippa's most formal book, in terms of the typography, if not the format was *'Feathers and Lime'*, a poetry book she worked on with Ken Cockburn. The concertina form of it, the cover boards, and the sublime use of colour on the end papers are all in keeping with the rest of her work, but the typesetting of the poems, remains very traditional. And so well judged the book ended up in the *Klingspor Museum Offenbach Archive* for international book and magazine art.

Perhaps she's a bit scared of Poets too.

Another reason for this might be because we can only really exploit technology when we are in charge of it. When we really understand it. The wood and metal type of Letterpress, or the fixed typesetting of Typewriters have remained unchanged for so long, that we more than understand them, we can see beyond them. The software we use on the Mac, however, keeps changing and updating. Requiring the user to keep relearning, keep re-thinking. And perhaps as teachers who design we are simply not immersed in the virtual world

consistently enough to ever feel that comfortable with the software and its constant updates.



A Song for an Art School

Barrie Tullett: 2014

A text poem based on the 8 letter codes used to identify courses during exam boards at the University of Lincoln.

The book is taken from an original site specific artwork, which was on display in the ProjectSpacePlus at the Lincoln School of Art & Design.

In both my relationship with typography, and my relationship with the writers, artists and poets I work with, I think I tend to behave in a very formal manner. With hindsight, the only books I produce that are experimental have to fulfill two criteria. They have to be my own work and the method of production has to be through a direct physical process. Not software led. I recently made a book called *'A Song For An Art School'*. It's my work, a text for a sound poem inspired by the course codes at Lincoln. But it's produced digitally. Therefore the typesetting is traditional. *The OnionMerzPoem*. A book inspired by a surreal Kurt Schwitters Fairy Tale is again, my work – using letterpress and it's very exuberant typographically. *A Poem To Philip Glass* is my work, it's produced on a typewriter and it's completely divorced from traditional narrative form or content.

The *Glass Works* are also the pieces that I most want to develop further. I started it by listening, over and over again, to the music of Philip Glass. I then began to type repeated patterns using one of my Brother Electric Typewriters (I feel a bit dirty because I used an electric typewriter, but anyway...); I found this an immersive and quite hypnotic process – one of those moments where you truly forget yourself. Unfortunately for Philippa we share an office and I think the experience was a little less engaging from her point of view.

I then took the patterns, and photocopied them and overprinted them into a sequential narrative; and a very old-fashioned, very long, piece of paste-up. This became the basis for the book itself, which was eventually thread sewn with a wrap-around cover that referenced one of my favourite books – Karel Martens' *'Printed Matter'*.

In an ideal world of course, I'd have an Elliot Book Typewriter from 1902, fifty coloured ribbons and I'd type the

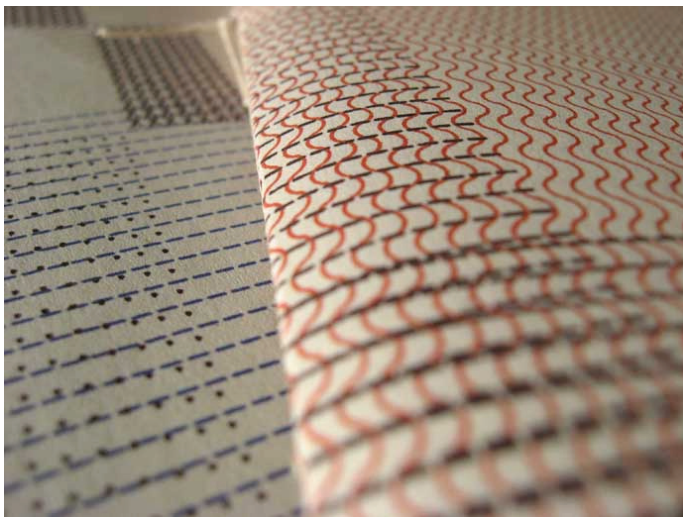
book directly into the bound pages whilst Philip Glass swirls around me.

At the moment this particular project is in its very early stages. In fact it's so early in its development it's almost an echo of the thing rather than the thing itself.

I'm not adverse to a long running project – I've been working on the Typographic Dante for about 25 years. The project is all about my relationship with the 100 Cantos of the Divine Comedy – *Inferno*, *Purgatory* and *Paradise* – and I respond to the texts as an illustrator, using the typographic forms of letterpress and typewriters. They are the most expressive typographic works I've ever produced and the most satisfying.

And these are my most successful pieces. The ones I make for me.

But, I do enjoy working with other people and with other languages.



A Poem To Philip Glass

Barrie Tullett: 2011

The book is a typographic response to the music of Philip Glass. The original patterns were created on a Brother Electric Typewriter, then photocopied and overlaid to form patterns responding to a particular piece of music. These were then taken, edited and selected to form a sequential narrative across the pages of the book.

It is the first exploration into a larger project.

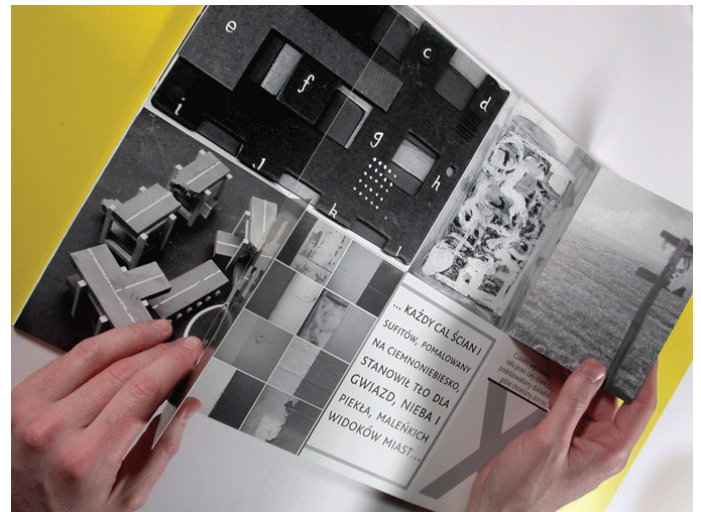
IS FORM DRIVEN BY LANGUAGE?

We've worked on a number of books that have been bi-lingual or multi-lingual. *Tales To Change the World* is in both Italian and English. The book contains six of Gianni Rodari's fairy tales, all translated, by Jack Zipes. Robert Mason, who taught me when I was studying at Chelsea School of Art, then illustrated them. The project was a joy, to work on, both in that I got to work with Jack – whose writing I've long admired, and Rob who I've been in awe of ever since I met him.

I decided that the book would be designed so that it would be read on the right hand page only, and flipped over depending on whether it was to be read in the English or Italian. So each double page spread has one language/text the right way up and one the wrong way up. I'm reliably informed it's very, very annoying to read. But the form of it was driven by the desire to explore solutions to the nature of

a publication that contains both the original and translated texts. I didn't want to have them side-by-side and didn't want to flip the book over as I'd already done that in *The Seasons Sweetens* – a book of Football Haiku we gave away during the World Cup of 2006.

All Points North was a poetry book that documented a translation workshop in Shetland. There were six languages in the book: Shetlandic, Estonian, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian and Latvian. The book was designed as a landscape format on a six-column grid – each of the columns being 'owned' by one of the languages. Not all the poets translated all the poems and the structure of the different languages meant that the poems all ran to different lengths. This gave each page its own unique feel. The idea being that it would reflect the landscape of Shetland. Sometimes lots were going on, sometimes nothing. The decision to have the six-column grid dictated the size of the book and other decisions, such as the size of the landscape photography were based on nothing more complicated than the resolution of the images we had.



FlatPack|PłaskaPaczka

Gordan Brennan & Barrie Tullett: 2006

FlatPack|PłaskaPaczka is a book of component parts: journeys, sketches, photographs and notes; connections and associations; art and designs. It can be read in a number of ways – as four separate books, as a series of larger narratives or as a random series of connections and statements.

The most complex of my bi-lingual books was one of the first I worked on. *FlatPack|PłaskaPaczka*. Published in Polish and English, it was conceived by Gordon Brennan as the record of a road trip, and a true collaboration between four people. His idea was that the work should interact and interlock, rather than having four separate bodies of work contained within one binding.

The first problem was that it only the other three that got to go on the road trip to Poland. When we first spoke about the project we all worked at the Edinburgh College of Art (who were funding it). By the time it came to pass, I'd moved on. It had taken so long, I'd taught at Glasgow and then gone to Lincoln. So I wasn't able to do the same level of immediate research the others had. The next problem was that of the

connections between the different pieces of work. Gordon was adamant he didn't just want a page of his work followed John Browns followed by mine followed by Mike Docherty's. To solve this problem we came up with the idea of four small books bound into one flat 'pack'. The small books would be bound on the opposite edges so that they faced each other and opened up from four A6 booklets into one A3 page.

So, I worked out various permutations of A6, A5, A4 and A3 pages that the *FlatPack* could display and gave each contributor a set number of images to create at a variety of sizes.

Simple. Apart from that fact that one of the contributors had to also design it all, work out how to get it bound, lay it all out and send it to print. It was one of those moments where the harmony of voices seemed a little... discordant and I had a rather more extensive workload than the others.

And I didn't get to go to Poland.

FlatPack was sent back to the printers to be re-bound twice, as the first time the pages all fell out when it was opened, but eventually we got something we were all pleased with and – even better – we 'launched' it at the ICA bookfair and it was purchased by The Tate to become our first piece of work in a major collection.

IS FORM DRIVEN BY THE ILLUSTRATIONS?

When I designed *Other People's Dogs*, a novel by Robert Mason, we had all these wonderful drawings by Ian Pollock. So I thought the book would need a larger format to showcase them. The standard format of a novel just wouldn't do. I thought that the book could be printed and set into a gatefold sleeve so that the illustrations would be included as separate prints ready for framing should you so desire. But. The budget wouldn't stretch to that so it had to be a more



Other People's Dog's

Robert Mason & Barrie Tullett: 2014

A dog book with a difference. *Other People's Dogs* is about devil dogs, posh dogs, chav dogs, foreign dogs, arty dogs, literary dogs, stuffed dogs, pickled dogs and the dog next door. Sniffing its way from rural Kent in the 50s, via punk-era North London to present day Andalucia and France, it's also about illustration, inebriation, procrastination and a phobia or two.

Dogs are the stars, though, and they're always Other People's Dogs.

traditional illustrated novel and it turned itself into a 7 inch single of a book. It gave us a nice space for the illustrations to sit on, and I kind of think of Rob Mason as a 7 inch single kind of man.

The only way to produce the book I originally intended would have been to make a smaller, hand-made edition. But I wanted the book to be disseminated to a wider audience. So the compromise was an Artists' Book that made more of the book and less of the artist.

IS FORM DRIVEN BY MONEY?

Of course it is. If you've got a budget you can have what you want. But we never have what we want.

Or do we. One of the pieces of advice I've so far ignored was from Michael Johnson – he wondered if it might not be better to forget traditional forms of printed matter and instead explore the idea of the virtual book. Really engage with the possibilities of the Internet and e-books. If you accept that you won't be paid for your time, they are almost free – and the opportunity to disseminate them goes far beyond anything that a print edition could achieve...

As long ago as 1923, El Lissitzky wrote the *Electro-Library Manifesto*, which told us that 'the new book demands the new writer', and Michael Johnson is right, with the advent of virtual print technologies and the viewing platforms of the iPhone, the iPad and the Kindle, the new book is undeniably here. Lissitzky's vision of the Electro-Library demands that we reconsider every aspect of page design – from the details that we understood represented the craft of typography, to the elements of the page itself: the running heads, the folios, the paragraph and chapter. The 'design of the book-space, set according to the constraints of printing mechanics,' no longer matters to us. This new page is an undiscovered landscape of opportunity and possibility... If you choose to do so, the surface can now truly transcend space and time – the 'printed' surface must be re-invented and the infinity of books embraced. The rules no longer apply. Everything about the page is new again. Everything we 'know' about the conventions of book design and typography demands to be re-invented for the new kind of writer, reader and designer.

But. As Chip Kidd said in his March 2012 Ted Lecture – 'much is to be gained by eBooks: ease, convenience, and portability. But something is definitely lost: tradition, a sensual experience, the comfort of thingy-ness – a little bit of humanity'. (Chip Kidd, *Designing books is no laughing matter*).

And I think that The Caserom Press books have that comfort of thingy-ness and that humanity. Of all the work that we've done, the book that, for me, really captures everything about the harmony of voices to produce music, the sensual experience, the comfort of thingy-ness is one that I never even worked on (well, I hand a hand in it as a printer's assistant, but I don't think I was essential to the process).

Open House is a perfect collaboration. The project was created by Philippa wood and Angie Butler, two voices



Open House

Angie Butler & Philippa Wood: 2012

Open House is the result of collaboration between multi-disciplinary artist Angie Butler of the Pet Galerie Press and Philippa Wood.

This two-volume set of artists' books – No.18 and No.42, was created especially for the *Sense of Place* exhibition, curated by Karen Kinoshita at the University of Minnesota. The books are accompanied by an on-going blog: <http://www.yourplacemyplaceproject.blogspot.co.uk/>

No.42 is a visual exploration of my living environment. Personal objects and belongings, and the space they inhabit, are described in what initially appears to be a rather abstract or impersonal manner. Further memories associated with the house or objects within, are hidden away in small envelopes stitched into the book, to be revealed only if and when the viewer feels tempted to discover more.

The 24pp book is encased within grey-board covers with an exposed spine and decorative endpapers. The book is printed using both traditional letterpress techniques and digital technology. In addition machine stitching, self-adhesive stickers and rubber stamps are used to embellish the pages of the book.

No.18. is an intimate selection of creative interpretations (twelve blog post headings) from our online house 'tour' – descriptions and stories about items and objects from an everyday (but much loved) spoon rest, to the 'extravagance' of eating liquorice. The experience of looking through this book has parallels with viewing a house: in turning pages/opening doors, different thoughts and narratives are revealed, depending on how you navigate your way, and if caring to delve deeper, or look closer.

The 24pp book is hardback cloth bound in three sections with decorative endpapers. It is letterpress, silkscreen and digitally printed, with additional manually typewritten text, and ornamented with both badges and buttons.

working in absolute harmony, and both perfectly equal partners in the process. It took the form of an online 'tour' of their houses (number 18 and number 42), and accompanying artists' books. One made by Philippa, one by Angie. Created at a distance of 150 miles, the creative collaboration used letters (snail-mail), e-mails, blogs and Skype.

As Angie says, 'the experience of looking through this book has parallels with viewing a house: in turning pages/ opening doors, different thoughts and narratives are revealed,

depending on how you navigate your way, and if caring to delve deeper, or look closer.' Philippa's book had similar layerings of information and discovery 'further memories associated with the house or objects within, are hidden away in small envelopes stitched into the book, to be revealed only if and when the viewer feels tempted to discover more.'

Once finished the books were sent on tour – where twelve people were asked to 'host' them in their own 'open' houses.

These are Elizabeth Willow's thoughts after her tenure: 'They speak to me of comfort and they were and are a comfort ... They are a couple of witchy old grannies in wing-chairs with gin-laced cups of tea, and they are laughing girls, and they are coolly clever, and they are generous, and they might have tears stitched into them too, and spilt things, and the stains and stories of the years and perfect imperfections and things unravelled and knit together and bargains and lost things. And they also have space in them, the space regained when a drawer or a cupboard is

opened then closed again, and the space cleared by gathering things together, the space for a breath and for a nice sit down. The space to look at things, the room to divide the comfort from the clutter, to lay out the small pieces of loveliness.'



Open House is a dream of a project – and as Armand Mevis says: 'You need to dream about the books you would like to design, and this dream is what drives you; it is what keeps you going, wanting to do the next book and the book after that' (*Every Book Starts with an Idea: Notes for Designers*).

I don't dream about designing websites.

I don't dream about e-books.

I dream about music.

I dream about print

I dream about paper.

I dream about ink.

I dream about the book.