Illusions, Transformations, and Iterations:

storytelling as fiction, image, artefact

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INTRODUCTION

This creative practice research project proposes that books may act as performative artefacts, and simultaneously discovers the narrative potential of fragmented fictional texts. The hybrid processes used during this research incorporate artistic practice and fiction writing. Throughout the duration of this project, there have been presentations of work across different modes – print publication, live art/performance, conference presentations, articles/essays, workshops, installations and readings. The most significant outcomes of the project are a small collection of physically transformed books, which stand as hybrid art/fiction artefacts. The reader/viewer is encouraged to performatively engage with the books by exploring what is visible, partially visible, and concealed. To spend time touching and reading words, whispers, silence.

My background is that of both an artist and a writer. On my degree course (BA Hons Visual Performance, Dartington College of Arts, 1990-94) my projects combined creative writing and artistic practice. These projects were shown as either installations or durational live performances. At that time Dartington was known as an educationally experimental establishment, with a philosophy which embraced cross-media activities and had an emphasis on *process* in all art-making[1]. Often, the process itself was considered to be the 'product' or 'outcome' of a creative project. At that point my practice was as a visual artist with a strong crossover into writing, so much so that in my final year, my work was used as a pilot for the development of a new degree course entitled Performance Writing.

Later, during 2008-10, I studied Creative Writing on an evening course at Sussex University, and went on to publish three literary fiction novels between 2012-2017[2]. Here, I discovered that in the academic study of creative writing, the focus was less on process and more on product – the publication of a novel / short story / poem as "a fixed or "definitive" text" (Bryant 2005, 3)[3]. However, at public novel readings, fiction readers are interested in writing processes, and appreciate having them demystified. A further development in my practice has been that since 2015 a performance collaboration with artist Sally J Morgan has resulted in the presentation of live art performances under the name of Morgan+Richards[4]. In this collaboration, Morgan is responsible for the imagery, and I the text, which sometimes takes the form of narrative documentation.

Having drawn much from these three disciplines (Visual Performance, Performance Writing, and Creative Writing) process and product are now of equal importance within my creative practice. This exegesis focusses on the overlapping interdisciplinary processes used during this hybrid research project. These are a combination of fiction writing processes, and artistic processes which incorporate text using visual, iterative and performative methods.

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[1] For a full account of the history and educational philosophy of Dartington, see Sam Richards's *Dartington College of Arts, Learning by Doing, A Biography of a College* (Richards 2015) (no relation).

[2] *Snake Ropes, Cooking with Bones*, *City of Circles*, Sceptre, Hodder & Stoughton, London (2012, 2014, 2017).

[3] The focus on textual process in creative writing is explored within some literary disciplines – European textual scholars, known as *geneticists* (see, for example, Hans Walter Gabler's genetic edition of *Ulysses*, by James Joyce (1986) and those involved in the academic study of authorial intention (Bryant 2005)*. These areas are beyond the scope of this research project.

[4] E.g. *Drowning/Undrowning* (Morgan+Richards) was shown/performed at: Triggering Memory Symposium, Wellington (NZ) 2015, Sullivan Gallery Chicago (USA) 2016, Performance Arcade, Wellington 2016, *Deep Anatomy,* Auckland Silo Park, 2017 (NZ).

The exegesis is structured in three parts, with relevant theories referred to in this introduction and then embedded in the narrative as they become applicable. Part I: Illusions, primarily explores aspects of fiction writing. Part II: Transformations, focuses on the hybrid visual/iterative/performative writing processes and visual/textual outcomes (transformed books and sets of altered pages) which develop as the research project progresses. Part III: Iterations, discusses the presentation modes which are explored for these outcomes. The choice of these thematic section headings is based on my position – that storytelling in whatever form it takes, involves all three of these themes. In my view, fiction writing is inseparable from its historic roots of iterative storytelling, and one of the aims of this hybrid project is to explore how writer/text/reader can interact in non-hierarchical ways.

My three novels, written prior to this research project, have been described in various contexts as literary fiction, speculative fiction and magical realism. When discussing my writing process in public forums such as readings, audience members often ask about my imagination in terms of building the fictional worlds in my novels. My response is simple – I use magical thinking because I've got an inner child who's never grown up. Though magical thinking in childhood is often related to causality, as an adult I constantly seek 'magic' or strangeness in apparently ordinary things. 'Thinking' is a significant aspect of creative processes, as, "Thinking and performance are not separate from process and presentation of works" (Browne 1989).

Recently, I was also asked to define what the term, speculative fiction, could mean[5]. To me, the answer is contained in the word speculative. To speculate – to ask, *what if?* This questioning of magical possibilities leads to magical thought. What if… a dress could talk. What if… memories flooded for a while, and then dripped away. What if… a boy could travel with a ghost into the mind of a girl. With these speculative questions, followed by magical thoughts, new fictional stories have emerged. Throughout this exegesis, I will use the phrase *what if...* to indicate these moments of speculation – the spark which ignites magical thinking during the fiction writing process.

During this research project, short fictional texts are written which incorporate ideas of the 'magical' and exploit what I believe to be the latent impulse of both author and reader to engage in magical thinking. There are many theories about magical thinking, and at what age it either disappears or is replaced by more logical thoughts, and current opinions differ across several subject areas[6].

> In adults, magical thinking can be a sign of a mental health condition. However, some cultures encourage magical thinking about certain things. For example, a tribal religion might encourage members to believe that carrying around a fetish will cause it to rain. This sort of magical thinking is not symptomatic of mental illness because it is part of a cultural norm. (Goodtherapy 2016)

Many people are raised in cultures in which the 'norm' is that folkloric texts are read to children, and versions/adaptations of folkloric texts (and/or allusions to them) are also encountered by adults within film, television and literature, etc. Father Christmas and the Tooth Fairy are unseen magical beings who apparently provide tangible gifts within many homes, and children are encouraged to believe in them from a young age. It seems remarkable that children can co-habit with adults who tell stories of magical

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[5] Speculative Fiction is often used as a general catch-all term for fiction which crosses genres such as fantasy, sci-fi, literary fiction, and Young Adult fiction.

[6] According to cultural psychologist, D. Thomas Markle, magical thinking is considered "to be an aspect of early mental development by Jean Piaget (1928) yet more recent research suggests magical thinking is retained at the stage of cognitive maturity" (Markle 2010, 18). However, an educational website for teachers states that magical thinking is present in children "up to age 6" (Miller 2017). As Markle explains, "The study of magical thinking is complex and muddled." In the social sciences and popular psychology the term is often used to describe irrational beliefs in adults (Valdesolo 2010).

beings in one moment, and expect them to wash up without any magical helpers in the next. But with the gift of magical thinking, invisible helpers are waiting to be called out from under the sink. Children's imaginations might respond in unpredictable ways to various magical elements within folkloric texts, yet the idea of magic and the magical is also deeply *known* to us as adults. There are also cultural norms and ritualistic aspects of magical thinking that are so ingrained we barely notice them. When we read fiction, for example, perhaps we do so because we need immersion within imaginary realms – to travel from this world here, to the story's elsewhere world. When discussing the imagination in relation to poetry, Gaston Bachelard's use of the word, 'reveries,' is also worth briefly mentioning. He describes the 'poetic fold' as a place where "reveries replace thoughts" (Bachelard 1971, 5-16). The use of reveries is important in relation to my intention to evoke aspects of magical thinking, as the imagination (according to Bachelard) is activated within early stages of development which occurs before people are "educated by experience". It is a return to reveries which I evoke in myself as I write, and simultaneously wish to evoke in the reader.

Somewhat unusually, developmental psychologist, Eugene Subbotsky, separates the terms magical thinking and magical beliefs when he says they are "different psychological constructs" (Subbotsky 2014, 1). His overall view is: belief in magic is "a fundamental property of the human mind". I would suggest that magical thinking can be strengthened beyond reveries/visions or imagination by the force of belief. Whether we are reading a story, or writing one, we step inside an imaginary world in order to inhabit it. My magical belief as a fiction writer is that narrating characters have their own agency.

Developmental theorists Taylor and Mannering conduct research which compares the creation of fictional characters in children (as imaginary friends) and adult fiction writers. The perspective of the relationship of writers to characters is described within their study as "the illusion of independent agency" and Taylor and Mannering observe that,

> Writers report that their characters sometimes take control of the writing process; characters tell their story to the author who then writes it down. In addition, writers sometimes develop personal relationships with their characters in which the characters are experienced as real, separate, independent beings with minds of their own. (Taylor & Mannering 2006, 240)

Within this exegesis, "the illusion of independent agency" will be frequently referred to in relation to the creative processes explored during the research project. Taylor and Mannering hypothesise that this illusion is related to extended durations of pretence (in children maintaining friendships with imaginary people and fiction writers relating to their characters) and expertise (measured by whether the writers are published or not). The writers score significantly higher from a 'dispositional perspective'[7] (dissociation and empathy are mentioned specifically) than would be expected within the general population. If fiction writing involves frequent pretence, dissociation and empathy, these three things might explain why it is possible for writers to experience a magical belief in the agency of characters. There is dissociation involved in describing and creating a parallel fictional world. Deep empathy with characters is essential in order to express their emotional responses. And fiction is frequently described as pretence or lies[8]. As writers, we also want the reader to be able to dissociate from their 'reality' and feel empathy for the characters:

> The act of reading is a special place in which human beings are freed from themselves to pass over to others and, in so doing, learn what it means to be another person with aspirations, doubts, and emotions that they might otherwise never have known. (Wolf 2018, 43)

Religious educator, Heinz Streib, suggests earlier studies of magical thinking were confined to childhood because it is generally accepted that scientific rationality has prevalence in the ways people

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[7] Measured by using the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis 1983).
[8] Fiction has been described as pretence or lies by many established authors, for example, Neil Gaiman, Stephen King and Albert Camus (Marks 2018) (Arch 2013).

in Western societies think about magic. Streib is firmly of the opinion that this 'devalued' view of magical thinking needs to be revised (Streib 1994, 75). Certainly, across the fields of religious studies, ethnology and social anthropology, terms such as 'mythical thought' (Levi Strauss 1962, 14) appear to correspond with 'magical thinking'. Interestingly, Jacques Derrida warns against understanding 'writing' as a distinction between 'nature and culture', instead seeing 'writing' as a binary opposition to 'speaking' (Namaste 1994, 223). And yet, when I write a new text, someone is always speaking. Either I am speaking, or the character is speaking, or the completed text is speaking, depending on where the illusion of independent agency is focussed at a particular moment. Within this context, writing and speaking are one and the same thing – storytelling.

I propose that magical thinking can be evoked in both writer and reader via fictional narratives which incorporate elements such as animism, belief, visions/reveries and speculation. These magical elements are often found within folkloric texts (which have emerged from oral storytelling tradition) so I will use these as a starting point for the initial fiction writing stage of this research project. If we trace folkloric texts back as far as we can, they seem as elemental as air. They alter as they spread and disperse, whether told orally or in written modes. Within both theory and popular usage, the words folklore, folk tale and fairy tale are often used to describe the same texts. Throughout this exegesis, I use the term, folkloric text, to refer to texts which incorporate magical elements.

We can see from these studies (Markle, Streib et al.) that magical thinking is retained in adulthood, and there is a psychological need for it. What would we do without it? Would any of us ever be able to dream, wish or hope, would we be able to imagine? Magical thinking also has the potential to provide relief from anxiety and induce reverie, empathy and dissociation via immersion in imaginary realms.

If magical thinking is actively used within the fiction writing process, the content of the text contains folkloric elements, and the reader is able to experience being immersed within the fiction, the transformative power of language becomes highly significant. Language, writer and reader are all involved in the process of textual transformations, and relationships between texts also become important – this relationship is often described according to the concept of intertextuality[9].

As fairy tale scholar, Cristina Bacchilega explains,

> The concept of intertextuality is key to approaching fairy tales in a folklore and literature framework and, even more broadly, in a web of cultural practices that crosses media, genres, and languages. Tales mingle with one another, anticipating, evoking, interrupting, and supporting one another in unpredictable ways that have to do with each teller's and the storytelling's situation and purposes, the teller's story chest, the various discourses in which the tales participate, and the narratives that listeners/readers/viewers bring to them as well. (C. Bacchilega 2015, 79)

The number of ways in which the relationships between texts can be interpreted or analysed are myriad and complex, as demonstrated in 1997 by literary theorist, Gérard Genette in his attempts to categorise "the different types of hypertextual transformations possible" and simultaneous warning about "more infinity than we can handle" (Dillon 2007, 90). Among several other neologisms, Genette uses the term, transtextual, in 1997 as an umbrella term. He includes Julia Kristeva's (1966) term, intertextuality, as one of many types of potential relationships between texts.

Kristeva's intertextuality is not focussed on source-study (though the term is still used in this way in many contemporary discussions) but represents a more holistic understanding of the relationships present within any specific text.

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[9] First coined by Julia Kristeva in her essay, 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' (1966).

In 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' Kristeva uses the metaphor of a 'mosaic' to explain what a text is, and goes on to more definitively explain that, "Any text is the absorption and transformation of another".

And yet while texts may interact in infinite, un/predictable and web-like ways, it seems impossible to view Genette's overwhelming infinity as a threatening space, unless the quest for finite transformative categories is the elusive grail of either writing or reading, which I suspect, for many, it is not.

The origin of the word 'text' is tangled through with many meanings: "Text, book, gospels. The Scriptures, treatise. Written account, content, characters used in a document. Textus – style or texture of a work" (Harper 2001). The most relevant definition in relation to my own interpretation of intertextual as a concept is this one – "thing woven. Texere. To weave, join, fit together, or braid. To interweave, construct, fabricate" (Harper 2001). Any fabric or web, though it may be woven, interwoven, and potentially tangled, contains 'fabricated' threads which can be unravelled.

This exegesis is being written during 2019-20 – years in which we are enmeshed in the World Wide Web, online and print-based news media, social media apps, and books which can be obtained in electronic, audible, or material forms. There are millions of textual webs in which we can be caught.

In his famous essay, "The Death of the Author", Roland Barthes argues the case for removing the notion of a 'god-given' authority of the author (author-as-divine-inspiration-weaver) from interpretations of the text. (Barthes 1967). Authorial 'authority' died long ago, and in an era of 'fake news' trust in the reliability of many online textual sources is now also dying as 'facts' become fictions and complex ideological battles are fought in short phrases on social media apps.

One of the advantages of being a fiction writer in this digital age is that through writing it is possible to dissociate from the languages of online textual noise, and reconnect with the nostalgic role of the storyteller: to write in the language of stories, for anyone who wishes to read. One of the disadvantages of being a fiction writer in this digital age, is that getting people to deeply engage with written texts for long durations of time is problematic. As the ways people read are changing, due to a rapid "transition from a literacy-based culture to a digital one" (Wolf 2018, 3), the ways stories are told also need to be explored.[10]

The idea for working with folkloric texts as a starting point for this research initially came from a short text I wrote while engaging with a writing exercise set by the poet, Cliff Yates. This exercise was to write a response to John Glenday's poem, *A Fairy Tale*[11] from his poetry collection, *Grain* (Glenday 2009).

This short text is an experimental reversal of my inaccurate memory of Rumpelstiltskin:

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[10] For further reading on the materiality of the book, textuality and communication, see Jerome McGann's *Radiant Textuality* (McGann 2001).

[11] A poem based on *Beauty and the Beast*, with the plot told backwards.

SKIN STILT RUMPLE

A backwards fairytale, remembered wrong.

A young woman cries after forever making a stranger of her baby. Half-sized in silhouette, a crumpled man enters through the barn door, carrying a baby in a cloth. The man is rumpled, stilts-for-legs, wrapped in skins. Arms outstretched, the woman collapses backwards into bloodstained straw. Her dress rises above her thighs and bloods rush back into her. She exhales the smell of the sea. The man places the baby between her thighs, saying 'born-first, an undemanding'. The baby is pulled back into her body, it clenches and curls head-down inside her womb.

The crumpled man walks backwards out of the barn as the woman stares at him in recognition and swallows screams as her contractions are fast and violent, slow and then stop; she is soaked and then dry. She's thinking of threads and the distortions of magic. The baby kicks, her swollen belly flattens as the baby shrinks. Her breasts unswell, her hipbones reshape themselves and her body is thin. She wishes she could name a fertilised egg in a glow of love before it splits and splits and splits. Her period doesn't come. She hides, ashamed.

In a forest, half naked, she takes lust from a disguised farmer against a stone wall. His sperm rushes away from her egg and he pushes and pulls until his body is separated from hers. They back away from each other, getting dressed as they eye one another with feral curiosity which fades into fear as they startle each other. The woman breaks down the door of the barn which mends itself behind her and locks her inside. Through a crack she watches autumn leaves blow back up onto the trees. Something shakes in the air. A feeling of Wrong. She thinks of guesses. An impossible game; she regrets all her attempts at choice. Her thoughts split hint from clue, puzzle from maze, key from lock. Final try. Wrong. A second guess. She is clever, she knows this. The first guess is wrong.

Night after night, the crumpled man is with her. Through her dreams she hears him suck in the words, 'name my guess.' He hands her the spindle and is gone. From midnight back to dawn she unravels strands of gold from the spindle till blood runs into the cuts on her fingers. Wiry threads soften into straw which fills the barn with warmth. This is an impossible task. She is choked, unravelling, alone.

A wind pulls away from the sky and an old woman unlocks the barn door and steps inside. She removes the spell from the spindle, empties the straw out into the fields, and pushes the young woman through a forest all the way to her childhood home. Tears roll into her parents' eyes as they embrace her. They throw gold coins into the hands of the old woman who disappears, leaving the young woman staring at a thickening sky in anticipation.

Inside their cottage her mother and father sit by the fire, starving, poverty-stricken and strained. She begs them for time. They explain to her that they are welcoming her home. She feels young, small as a child.

She pushes herself upon them. Cries like a baby, at least once.

By choosing to specifically read folkloric texts as a starting point for this research, I can select magical elements, symbols, objects or themes from these texts to incorporate within my fiction. The iterative and performative tradition of folkloric storytelling can be alluded to, and distortions (such as the above example of writing backwards) can defamiliarise or make a recognisable narrative strange so it can be experienced afresh. This relatively narrow field of reading also allows for any deviations and reversals of this 'reading rule' to be considered and assessed for their potential. The writing process initially appears to end when a complete story exists in a textual form. However, during this research project, new fictional texts will be developed further through visual, textual or material iterations. If a fictional text is not fixed, closed, or static, but can be taken through further iterations, what a story is – what it looks like, what it can become, opens up to infinite possibilities. *Asking the story what it wants to become* is another example of a temporary belief in the illusion of independent agency. The illusion starts with the narrating character, and is continued with the fictional text, as if it were a character.

This exegesis is written as a narrative which interweaves the concepts, processes and outcomes explored throughout the research project. A survey of relevant literature is embedded throughout, responding to the shifts and development of the processes explored during the research project. Though a range of purely textual outcomes are produced during this project, many of them will only briefly be discussed in this exegesis. Extracts/samples of creative writing will be provided at relevant points and these are differentiated by being *italicised* throughout.

As noted earlier, the most significant outcomes of this research are a set of transformed books with textual/visual/material qualities which are hybrid art/fiction artefacts. Along with this supporting exegesis, these books are presented for examination as an original contribution to the field of creative arts.

PART I: Illusions

Writing as a Performative Process

My position is that the act of writing is itself a performative process – and each fiction writer is a storyteller who uses and adapts the processes they have found to work best for them. My use and interpretation of the word 'performative' comes from my academic background in visual performance (also described as 'performance art' or 'live art'). In this discipline, performance often involves ritualised actions taking place during a durational / live event, and emotional affect is negotiated between performer and audience[12]. Though the words *performative, performance,* or *performance art* are sometimes used to refer to inauthenticity, acting, or theatrical productions, the difference in meaning is quite profound. The distinction is clearly defined in this famous quote from Marina Abramovic:

> Theatre is fake… The knife is not real, the blood is not real, and the emotions are not real. Performance is just the opposite: the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real. (O'Hagan 2010)

For this hybrid project, 'real' actions occur and 'real' emotions are felt while using artistic processes in tandem with fiction writing processes. These processes interweave with one another in various visual, iterative and performative ways. Writing can be perceived as a performative process if we consider the writer's body performing a ritualised action for a long duration of time, writing and re-writing texts with the intention of another person (an audience/reader) experiencing them at a later date. The process of reading could also be seen as a performative process when it involves an awareness of the body, duration, and the action of reading.

Though all texts refer to other texts, on either a surface or subconscious level, no one text is exactly like another (even if it is copied or plagiarised in full – as that version could be defined as another iteration)[13]. Methods of writing are dependent on the writer's personal style, processes, other reading, opinions, politics, aesthetics and life experience, etc. It is the methods of expressing these things in a textual form, the ability to be solitary for long enough to read, write and revise texts, and the drive to show these texts to other people, which allows the text to be read, heard or seen. As Barthes says, this is when the reader is 'born'.

Writers are also readers, and as writer-readers, we choose which texts we want to engage with. We can examine texts by spending time with them, get the gist by reading a word or phrase, or have a glance and move on. In this digital age, we can communicate to others about how we have experienced a text in the form of an online review, a 'star' rating, or via a five character text message: "tl;dr" (too long; didn't read) (Wolf 2018, 2). Literacy academic and author, Maryanne Wolf expresses grave concerns about the 'atrophy' of cognitive processes (including our capacity for empathy) occurring in 'reading brains' due to the effects of what she describes as a "digital dilemma" (Wolf 2018, 204). In contrast, Barthes's 1960s reader is a solitary character, who has no *psychology*… "only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted" (Barthes 1967).

All of the paths? Barthes's 'paths' might be too infinite to hold on to, even more so, perhaps, in this digital age, as "our ways of processing written language have altered dramatically" (Wolf 2018, cover blurb). However, there is a useful image contained within Barthes' description of the reader as a 'solitary character'. While reading or writing, solitude is one way of deeply and slowly engaging with a text. We might choose to switch off our digital technology in order to engage with a text in such a manner, or seek out quiet environments, or attempt to clear a duration of time for the sole purpose of

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[12] For a thorough discussion on emotional 'affect' in relation to performa*nce* art practice, see Sally J Morgan's PhD thesis (The Poetics of Labour: The Processual Artworks of Sally J Morgan, 1993-2017) 2019.

[13] No "reproduction or repetition" according to Jacob Edmond, "is ever quite the same: the afterlives of a text, an image, or a person are manifold" (Edmond 2012).

writing/reading. Within a place of solitude, we can choose to pause, think, and begin to read or write again. We can impose limits or time constraints, make choices on whether to focus on particular words, ideas, images, metaphors, etc., and become more aware of the depth of our reading (or writing) processes. When discussing the cognitive benefits of "deep reading", Wolf expands on Wendell Berry's "conceptualisation of the sentence as a '*feelable* thought" and links this to "one of deep reading's most tangible, sensorially evocative processes: our capacity to form images when we read" (Wolf 2018, 40-41).

In the following paragraphs, I will demonstrate on the page how reading one sentence can provoke the 'capacity to form images' when we write deeply, as well as when we read deeply. This is to illustrate a concrete example of how texts are engaged with to write fiction throughout this research project – I would describe this textual demonstration as a process of 'slow writing' which adds depth and layers to the fictional narrative.

What if… after a duration of reading, our mind forms an image, and we write one sentence, describing this? Here is a sentence from some of my recent notes in which I was attempting to grasp some of Kristeva's ideas surrounding intertextuality:

Textuality, intertextuality, textual visuality, multiple-geno-text and singular-pheno-text, text as image, text as print: as book text, as one version of 'hypertext' and more recent meaning(s) of 'hypertext' – all of the texts within the world-wide-web… loosening threads expand through infinite infinities…

If, in this lengthy sentence, the word 'web' is substituted for the word, 'text', the sentence could be revised as follows:

Webuality, interwebuality, webual visuality, multiple-geno-web and singular-pheno-web, web as image, web as print: as book web, as one 'hyperweb' and another 'hyperweb' – all of the webs within the world-wide-web… loosening threads expand through infinite infinities…

By substituting one noun for another, an image emerges of this repetitive and infinite intertextual web. To develop this sentence into fiction, the image would need to be taken further, or expanded via other images. (For example: a storyteller sits on a stepladder in a derelict library, weaving a web from pages torn from books.)

An aspect of this sentence can also be reversed, in order to explore its opposite:

Turn away from vast things, and examine small things. Detailed things. Precise things. A book web. A page web. A paragraph web. A sentence web. A clause web. A word web. An image web.

Move away from the screen, find a book of fairy tales and open it. Sit down at a table and lean closer. Smell the paper. Examine individual letters as the light from a dusty window falls on a page, and there is the image of a letter, a shape made of dark ink printed on pale paper. Read the word 'silk' and notice it makes you think about the substance cobwebs are made from. Silk begins with S. A soft sound, a silver sound. Strength. Synesthesia. Story.

I am now writing my way into writing a story. But now I need to find a character with agency, and the right text to work with. And as well as symbols, metaphors, moral messages, folkloric texts often contain clear binaries. Big and small objects. Evil or good characters. Im/possible tasks. So…

To focus the writing / tasks in a particular direction, I often write process lists, e.g.,

Choose a folkloric text and read it slowly.
Choose at least one element from the text (character, image, theme, etc.).
Choose a binary.
Imagine a character.
Start writing:

In a time that could be long ago or in the time which is now, there is a giant beanstalk. The beanstalk climbs from a field to the sky, entwining itself through clouds, through some distant heaven which is probably designed for giants. And down in the field from which the beanstalk grows, a small boy stands on the soil looking upwards, thinking about the magic contained within one single bean. When the boy climbs the beanstalk, he might destroy it. If he climbs it and destroys it from within the clouds, he will fall to his death, and never know what would have happened next. Instead, he crouches, parts the soil with his fingertips, and tries to find the bean. He leans closer, listening. He smells the fresh scent of growth and notices the colours and textures of the stems at their source. The boy has to understand the magic within the bean, so he knows which part of the beanstalk will best support his weight when he chooses to climb it. His heart contains curiosity, wonder, and hope. These things mean he must climb upwards, or stay on the ground, forever wondering.

And now, I am developing empathy for this boy, as he is a small thing who is about to climb a big thing. To write myself more fully into his mind (or into a temporary belief in the illusion of independent agency) I can make further alterations to the style of his voice, and give his character more depth by adding details about what psychologically drives this particular boy's decision to take action, and climb the beanstalk:

A boy's outside in a field. There's a giant beanstalk growing and he's never seen anything like it before. No one's around to ask about it as it's dawn and his mam's still asleep and dreaming. Is he dreaming, too? Pinching his fingers to test he's awake, he's feeling the pinch. The beanstalk is so giant it makes him feel small. He can't blink, in case it's not real, in case it disappears. It spreads as wide as the whole sky. Something terrible might live up there in the clouds. He's never been higher than a tiled roof and neither has anyone in his village, or they'd have said. Are there monsters, or gods, or giants, waiting for someone to climb, waiting for someone they're hungry for? He grazed his knee last night on the stairs helping his mam up to bed and he's not put a plaster on. Maybe the giants can smell his blood.

The beanstalk is tangled in clouds. The leaves are wide and strong, but will they grab and strangle him, or can he climb them like stairs? Maybe the beanstalk's growing into a heaven that's only meant for giants to walk through.

If he climbs the beanstalk, he might break it. Some of the stems are thin. If he climbs the beanstalk and breaks it while in the clouds, he'll fall, crack his head on the ground, and die. He's too small to go to giant heaven. Giant ghosts probably eat boy ghosts and they keep eating them and eating them for the rest of all time, till the boy's just a sliver of air.

There must be a bean that started the whole thing growing. Like the runner beans his mam planted in the garden after his dad took off and never came back. The bean must have magic in it. He crouches

and parts the soil with his fingertips, looking for it. He leans closer, as the bean's likely so magic it'll talk back to him if he asks it something. He can't find the bean. There's a bitter smell, and his heart beats so loud he can't hear anything but blood. No one will ever know what's up there in the clouds, unless he climbs the beanstalk and comes home to tell the tale of it. If the news of what he's done goes far and wide enough, his dad might get to hear how brave he's been, and will finally come home.

He climbs it slowly. The leaves smell of bitter lemons and pepper…

At this point in the fiction writing process, it becomes possible to ask the character: what happens next? The momentum builds as conflicts occur which the character has to resolve, which gets the first draft written – and the narrative arc worked out. This beanstalk boy character, even without a name or physical descriptions is now clear enough to temporarily believe in. If I were to develop his beanstalk story, I might walk around outside for a while, smelling soil, or thinking about how it feels to not know if your father is ever coming home. I might stand under the tallest trees I can find, looking upwards and feeling fear while a gale is blowing. I might use charcoal to draw a picture of the beanstalk as a dark and imposing image. I might stamp like a giant on some moist earth, and take photographs of what happens to the soil. These processes of engaging with the character in a slow and empathic way while incorporating artistic processes are what I would describe as the performative aspects of my writing process.

In demonstrating the above writing process (how a web becomes a beanstalk) I have come to an understanding of what Kristeva was referring to when she used the words: pheno-text and geno-text in her 1969 essay, "The Engendering of the Formula"[14]. In looking up the roots of these words and being drawn to the most interesting description – one of the definitions for pheno is shining, and is the surface / material layer of a text, and one of geno's meanings is birth. The geno-text can have infinite meanings – and its multiple strands contain all the directions the text could have taken. Kristeva's work is intertwined with psychoanalysis, so it seems appropriate that my own projections and vulnerabilities are documented here: contained within the geno-text of this emerging beanstalk story is my own projected fear of the vastness of intertextual webs, represented by the words and phrases[15] used to describe a small boy's fear of a vast beanstalk.

In allowing the image of intertextuality as a web to emerge, a useful understanding of texts being multi-layered is gained. There is also an understanding that subconscious emotions are present within fiction, and choices are made about whether to dissociate from them or expand on them in the written form. When this story is finished, I will ask someone else to read it without telling them anything about it. In his 1936 essay, "The Storyteller", cultural critic Walter Benjamin explains this necessary separation of 'information' and 'story':

> …it is half the art of storytelling to keep the story free of the explanation as one reproduces it… the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks. (Benjamin 2006, 362)

A reader's experience of my story might result in them mentioning something personal and subjective which the story reminded them of. At this point, I quietly listen, enjoying hearing these associations and connections. The momentum to write another fictional text builds again, while reading.

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[14] First published in French in J Kristeva's *Semiotike: recherches pour une semanalyse*. Publisher: Éditions du Seuil, Paris (1969).

[15] "Kristeva calls the linguistic elements that mark the operation of the geno-text in the pheno-text 'signifying differentials' (when they are at the level of the minimal phonic unit) and 'signifying complexes' (when they are at the level of the sentence, phrase, or 'extract')" (Dillon 2007, 90).

Folkloric Texts: from *Once Upon a Time* to *Now*

This section discusses textual relationships within an established tradition of retelling and adapting folkloric texts. It also explains my reasons for using the present tense (and some arguments against this) in the fiction writing for this research project. The intertextual practice of allusion is introduced to describe the relationship between folkloric texts and the short stories written during this research project.

The referencing of other texts (in any media) is a good example of *intertextuality* within popular culture – where pre-existing texts such as newspaper reports, adverts, films, etc., are alluded to, referenced, or quoted from. The term intertextual is often used at this superficial level – to describe any mention of one text within another. Though Mary Orr makes a thorough defence of Kristeva's ownership of the term intertextuality she also says:

> the purloining of Kristeva's term by rival theorists[16], and the presence of parallel terms exploiting the same prefix, also make clear that a single definition or delimited application of intertextuality are impossible. (Orr 2003, 60)

The texts selected for this stage of my research project are mainly European folkloric texts. Though many classic European folkloric texts such as *Rumpelstiltskin* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* were first written down in the 17th and 18th centuries, recent research between anthropologists and folklorists via Durham University (2016) has established they can be traced back to anywhere between 2,500 and 6,000 years ago. These European tales which arose from oral traditions continue to be rewritten, retold, analysed and catalogued. In 1927, structuralist Vladimir Propp criticized the Aarne Thompson (AT) indices for ignoring the 'functions' of motifs in their cataloguing process (Propp 2004, 74). The AT classification system became known as Aarne Thompson Uther (ATU) when it was updated in 2004 to include more international folk tales. Tale types are grouped together into categories and sub-categories such as *Tales of Fate, Tales of Magic, The Obstinate Wife Learns to Obey, Stories about a Fool,* etc.[17]

Retellings and re-interpretations of European folkloric texts continue to emerge in the twenty-first century in many commercial and/or creative modes. Maria Tatar says that "each new telling recharges the narrative, making it crackle and hiss with cultural energy" in her introduction for *The Cambridge Companion to Fairy Tales* (Tatar, 2015, 1-10) and in contradiction to this, within the same book, Jack Zipes states "the mass-mediated hype of fairy tales (is) too often turned into trivial pulp for the masses by the globalized culture industry" in his chapter, *Media Hyping of Fairy Tales* (Tatar 2015, 202-235).

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[16] In particular, Orr demonstrates Barthes's plagiarism of Kristeva's words and phrases. Barthes was Kristeva's PhD Supervisor, and Kristeva's writings appeared alongside Barthes's in the magazine *Tel Quel*, the "crucible of post-structuralist thinking" (Prayer 2015, 78). There is great diversity within the work of various post-structuralists, and for this research project I have chosen to focus on Kristeva's term *intertextuality* because it is the most appropriate in terms of the evolution of this particular creative project. Post-structuralism was referred to substantially during my time at Dartington College of Arts in the early 1990s (particularly in relation to the broad-ranging topic 'deconstruction') and so might be considered part of the background context of this research project, operating often at an instinctual level within the creative processes that are explored. The following quote provides a good summary of the type of influence that post-structuralist approaches have had on my creative practice: "They set out to develop revolutionary ways of thinking that would keep systems open-ended, heterogeneous and dynamic, thus clearing the way to alternative playful interpretations, alternative ways of seeing, being and working. This led to notions of reading/writing undergoing significant changes. Traditional notions of the Author, of the Reader, and of the Text, and thus by implication of truth and body, were called into question." (Schostak 2005)

[17] Many of the texts used as source texts for this stage of my research project are accessed via online databases which follow the AT and ATU classification systems.

In *The Guardian* newspaper, there have been many articles about folkloric texts being revised for Hollywood films, some of which are described as 'escapist' or holding 'primarily economic' value (Samadder 2012). However, (in anticipation of *Beauty and the Beast*, 2017[18]) another impetus emerges which is more concerned with cultural messages: "The amount of sheer feministing that has to be done, to unpick the centuries of careful work that have gone into smothering the female spirit is astonishing" (Williams 2016).

Part of the storyteller's role is to make meaning which is relevant to a contemporary audience: "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own, or that reported by others." (Benjamin, 362) This quote is from 1936, when Benjamin laments the "decline of storytelling" due to the "rise of the novel". Though Disney versions of folkloric texts frequently use contemporary contexts in simplistic ways[19], there are many other examples of retellings with more cultural and psychological depth being produced within the wider film industry. *Pan's Labyrinth* (Toro 2006) is rooted within war. "On first viewing, it is challenging to comprehend a movie that on the one hand provides fauns and fairies, and on the other hand creates an inhuman sadist in the uniform of Franco's fascists" (Ebert 2007). And more recently:

> Director Agnieszka Smoczynska's stunning feature debut, *The Lure*, relies heavily on Hans Christian Andersen's version of The Little Mermaid but is imbued with Poland's cultural climate during the 1980s under Communist Russian rule… Quietly released last year was Italian filmmaker Matteo Garrone's adaptation of fairy tales by seventeenth century poet Giambattista Basile… *Tale of Tales*. With much of Basile's work overshadowed by Grimm's adaptation, Garrone took the tales back to their mediaeval beginnings, honoring the Neapolitan history behind the stories. (Navarro 2017)

These films are examples of how folkloric texts can gain depth when combined with other texts (such as texts written about a specific social context or historic period) and cross disciplines (from oral storytelling, to written text, to film script, to film) in their outcomes.

In the fictional texts I write for the first stage of the research project, the settings and sense of time are deliberately ambiguous – like the 'once upon a time' traditional phrase – which time do we mean? A time that was once. We stumble upon this other time, momentarily displaced from our own time. And this displaced sense of time in my fiction is also the time which is now, when fictional texts are written in present tense. Present tense amplifies the illusion of independent agency of the characters because their story is occurring in the moment it is written or read. Traditionally, European folk tales are told in third person point of view and past tense. This combination results in an invisible 'storytelling' voice – so familiar that it is unnoticeable.[20] In many contemporary 'retellings' of these texts, this tradition is maintained.

As well as present tense, I often use first person narration at various stages during the writing process because by using the 'I' pronoun, the character's agency becomes even stronger, and this also helps to write a strong narrating 'voice'[21]. If I were to address the reader of one of these texts by writing in the style of the voice of an oral storyteller, but using a first person voice and present tense, I might say:

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[18] Directed by Bill Condon, 2017.

[19] Such as in the Disney films: *Cinderella, Aladdin, Tangled, Frozen*, etc.

[20] In the Grimm brother's seventh edition (1847), there were a total of 211 texts. Of these, two very short texts are told in first person; one of these originated from a mediaeval tale in verse: *The Tale about the Land of Cockaigne*, and the other originated from a dancing song: *The Tall Tale from Ditmarsh*.

[21] My first two novels were written using first person narrators. My third novel was written in third person. At times during the writing process for the third novel I struggled with the male character in particular, I couldn't maintain the belief that he was telling his own story. To give him more agency, I wrote some of his sections in first person, then re-wrote them into third person.

I am wearing murderous red shoes. Come with me as I dance us into this time which is now, with the illusion of a character who leads you here. You read as 'I' and step into a parallel world. You are here as the 'I' that is yourself, and as an illusion who is 'I', simultaneously. So now, let's begin…

Though acclaimed novelist Philip Pullman is highly opposed to writing in present tense, seeing it as an "abdication of narrative responsibility" as in his view, "the storyteller should take charge of the story" (Pullman, The Guardian 2010), other acclaimed novelists disagree in a 2015 *Guardian* article, and defend its use. The following two quotes coincide with my own views of what is gained by writing in present tense:

> …it is a case of trying to plant a voice inside the reader's head, to make him or her hear the words as they read them… to make them read with their ears, essentially. You're aiming to mesmerise, and for me that's the quality that the best fiction has. It's a mesmeric force. (Kevin Barry)

> The present tense seems natural for capturing "the jitter and flux of events, the texture of them and their ungraspable speed", (Hilary) Mantel explains. "It is humble and realistic – the author is not claiming superior knowledge – she is inside or very close by her character and sharing their focus, their limited perceptions. It doesn't suit authors who want to boss the reader around and like being God". (Lea 2015)

Present tense provides a sense of immediacy in terms of the narrative style – as Mantel suggests above, it can be perceived as less 'bossy' or hierarchical than past tense.

Within literary adaptions of folkloric texts the present tense is fairly rare, though this narrative style is frequent in many contemporary novels, as the debate within the articles mentioned above demonstrates. Present tense works well in narratives which span days, weeks, or months, rather than years or decades of the character's life. With present tense, the reader also won't know in advance if the character will still be alive at the end of the story, whereas with past tense, we usually know from the outset they have survived[22].

Present tense also has the potential to reveal the magical thoughts of the characters in the present moment, which could empathically induce 'magical thinking' in the reader. The immediacy of the present tense can be challenging for some readers, as they may not want to empathise with the character's intimate thoughts in the moment they are being thought. Presumably these preferences are also influenced to some extent by the personality of the character and the plot of the story: an immersive experience of wearing red shoes and dancing a dance which never ends could be euphoric. On the other hand, dancing in murderous red shoes and fully experiencing exhaustion and pain could be intense. "I feel claustrophobic: always pressed up against the immediate." (Pullman, The Guardian 2010) It is also a difficult style for those whose preference is for a more objective narrative which involves a deep sense of reflection. Pullman describes the present tense as having a "limited range of expressiveness" and I would agree with this, especially when present tense is combined with first person narration. The range of expressiveness is limited to each narrator's viewpoint and voice.

Though Pullman's preference is for the writer to "take charge of the story" by using "the full range of English tenses", I would argue there are many ways to take charge of a story. Some might involve high

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[22] An exception being when the narrator is speaking (in either present or past tense) from the afterlife – for example, see *Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold, 2002, and *Sum, Forty tales from the Afterlives*, by David Eagleman, 2009.

levels of control; others might involve at least the illusion of relinquishing control. In my own practice, it is a combination of both. When relinquishing some control over the idea of what a story should look like (by temporarily believing in the character's agency) control can be located in the constraints used during the writing process. Though it might be paradoxical to say that limits create freedom, constraints enable ideas to go beyond the habitual into a fuller range of narrative possibilities and further speculations. This method of working with creative constraints (often now expressed as process lists) is a result of my time spent at Dartington College of Arts – where the interdisciplinary boundaries between art / writing / performance / installation and other creative practices were fluid.

Often cited in any discussion on writers who work with folkloric texts is Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber.* Carter writes third, second and first person narratives and actively works with the tenses, as author and academic Marion Mary Campbell describes in her thorough intertextual analysis of *The Bloody Chamber.* According to Campbell, within Carter's short stories, the unconventional shifts from "the preterite tense associated with the folk fairy tale to the immediacy of the present" have a powerful effect:

> this, coincident with the irruption within the third person narration of the second person address, interpellates the reader as present participant, as if to assert, now you too are plunged into winter. (Campbell 2014, 121)

Elaborating on Carter's active use of tenses (and first/second/third person) Campbell states, "the breaking of rules of continuity and discursive cohesion… become functional political signals." This results in a "break with the reader's immersion in the fictional illusion" (Campbell 2014, 124). Carter describes her intention in re-telling these folkloric texts as: "… not to do 'versions' … but to extract the latent content from the traditional stories and to use it as the beginnings of new stories… the latent content is violently sexual." (Carter 1979, Introduction) As readers who have had our fictional illusion disrupted by Carter breaking conventional grammar and storytelling rules, we are prompted to consider several things simultaneously:

DISRUPTED FAIRY TALES: A LIST OF VIOLENCE

Memories of fairy stories, a rumpled bed, book pages, a voice.
The violence of desire transformed into violently sexual stories.
This violent and sexual world.
Personal experiences of violence and sex.
Silent stories which can't or won't be told.
The unspoken rules which tell us what we are and are not allowed to speak about.
Stories that end immediately after the suspicious event of marriage.
Fear: of the knives of huntsmen and kings; of the guts and teeth of wolves,
of hunger and mirrors, apples and poisons, of the path away from home, of the homes of strangers,
of needles which have no haystack to be lost in.
The disruption to language, to familiar phrases and the shape of stories.
Traumatic memories, nightmares: the horror stories of the mind.
The violation of innocence, magic, nostalgia.
The distortions of language and story-threads and reversible magic.
The violence of any story that is impossible to forget.[23]

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[23] The writing of lists – process lists, or lists that explore a particular subject/theme is an important part of my creative writing process. These lists are sometimes posted online when they are relevant to current events. An example is here: http://jessrichards.com/panic-buying-list/

In a short fiction collection of retold folkloric texts by Emma Donoghue, *Kissing the Witch*, Donoghue "… endeavors to rewrite the heterosexual love plot so central to the fairy tale tradition … (and to) show the consequences that the lack of fairy-tale depictions of same-sex desire and the heterosexist usage of traditional fairy tale love plots have had on gays and lesbians" (Hasse 2008, 852). *Kissing the Witch* (Donoghue 1999) is perhaps one of the most original amongst retellings, due to her depictions of same-sex desire and her stories being written in first person, which is surprisingly rare in retellings (first person breaks with the tradition of the invisible third-person/past tense storytelling voice). Her use of past tense in the majority of these tales provides a sense of reflection within each narrative.

Like Donoghue, the poet Anne Sexton also uses the 'I' voice at certain points as she vividly re-imagines seventeen Grimm's tales in poetic form. (Sexton 2001) While Donoghue uses traditional folkloric settings which are of nondescript time and location, Sexton sets her poems in her own contemporary world, using concrete details to indicate this as she "draws on American consumer culture" (Fruit machines, Coca-Cola, etc.) (Bolaki 2010, 190). This is similar to my own approach – I often refer to contemporary objects (though without naming 'brands' as brands expire) in order to place the narrative in the present time, but in a present time which won't date too quickly. Sexton refers to other writers, mythical characters, famous actors and characters within her poems[24].

We can look at the surface of a text – the references to other texts, quotations, individual words and phrases, or the similarities of plot, characters, structure. We can also find references to other texts at a deeper level – in figurative language, symbols, or allusions. In terms of the fiction writing for this research project, the content drawn from the folkloric texts would best be described as *allusion* rather than retelling or quotation.

At times allusion involves an obvious symbol, plot strand, image, or character, and at other times, is an aspect of the folkloric text which functions at a deeper psychological level – often connected to the theme or the conflict between characters. This could also be described as the *geno-text* (or a strand of its multiple, infinite possibilities) of the folkloric text becoming part of the *pheno-text* (the surface / shining layer) within a new piece of fiction. Gérard Genette's (1981) re-definition of the term intertextuality[25] (held firmly beneath his umbrella term, transtextuality) is worth expanding on here, as he re-focusses this term. He describes intertextuality as:

> a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts. In its most explicit and literal form, it is the traditional practice of *quoting…* In another less explicit and canonical form, it is the practice of *plagiarism…* which is an undeclared but still literal borrowing. Again, in still less explicit and less literal guise, it is the practice of *allusion:* that is, an enunciation whose full meaning presupposes the perception of a relationship between it and another text, to which it necessarily refers by some inflections that would otherwise remain unintelligible. (Genette 1997, 2)

Campbell praises the richness of Genette's work on this subject, while simultaneously pointing out what is missing from this analysis:

> While Palimpsestes offers an extraordinarily rich range of analysis of textual parody and other practices of intertextual allusion, it does not account for the dynamic force through which the congruence of stylistic, structural, narratological or scenographic features can magnify the effect of the intertextual allusion… (Campbell 2014, 23)

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[24] Hesse, Joe Dimaggio, Medusa, Isodora Duncan, etc.

[25] Including *intertextuality,* Genette recognises five types of *transtextual* relationships.

This dynamic force: allusion, combined with stylistic features associated with language and narrative voice, is pursued via fiction writing at this early stage of research. At a later stage, other features (visuality, materiality and performativity of text, etc.) will also be explored.

In deliberately selecting folkloric texts (and creating via allusion a "relationship of copresence" within my fiction) decisions need to be made in order to ensure the originality of the fiction. To this end, stylistic and poetic devices such as language constraints, defamiliarisation and kennings are used to experiment with language. The illusion of independent agency is deliberately applied to the narrating character of each new piece of fiction – this involves sustaining a temporary belief that the character decides where the story begins, what happens next, and where the story ends.

Via use of allusion and experimentation with language and narrative voice, I can influence *how* these stories are told. But by using the illusion of independent agency, it isn't possible to predict in advance what stories will be told.

The first thing to do, is to listen to the characters' voices.

Channelling Voices

This section discusses just a few of many short stories written during the early stages of this research project in terms of the processes used to write them, and includes some short extracts. In addition to speculation and the deliberate use of the illusion of independent agency, the writing process also includes literary devices such as allusion, poetic devices (kennings), and experiments with language restrictions and narrative voice with the aim of 'defamiliarising' each written text.

Within any text there is visuality: horizontal and vertical lines, individual sentences, clauses, words, letters, punctuation marks. Removing a word from within its visual context of a linear sentence, changing the way a word appears, inventing new words, or recontextualising them can enable us to 'see' a text differently. When a word appears to be strange in some way, our perception is challenged and we might take more time to examine it. Compound words, use of dialect, concrete and visual poetry, textual collage, cut-ups, blackout/whiteout poetry, redaction, and neologisms are just a few examples of some transformative practices which involve text being perceived as strange, or 'defamiliarised'.

Viktor Shklovsky (who coined the term defamiliarisation in 1917) was one of the Russian Formalists. The Russian Formalists' approach to literary theory is influenced by Futurist poetry, and is in opposition to Symbolism's "mysticism of poetry" and "the New Criticism's isolation and objectification of the single text" (Rice 1996, 16). The Russian Formalists' approach to literary theory centres around literariness (what makes a text 'literary') and they emphasise method – analysing texts in terms of their literary 'devices': the writer's processes are thus brought into focus.

In discussing defamiliarisation as a literary device which counteracts life-deadening 'habitualisation' in his famous essay, "Art as Technique", Shklovsky states:

> The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (Shklovsky, 1917)

It is worth also noting Bachelard's statement:

> Imagination is always considered to be the faculty of *forming* images. But it is rather the faculty of *deforming* the images, of freeing ourselves from the immediate images… (Bachelard 1971, 19)

Once one method of defamiliarisation becomes familiar, another must replace it. As a writer who is focussed on processes, I would argue that any evolving writing process which causes the writer to maintain interest is beneficial to the text, whether this manifests in the text being perceived as highly original, or thought-provoking, or slightly odd. When a text becomes 'habitual' or dull to write, it will be equally dull to read. However, to intentionally aim for an increased 'difficulty' in the textual form might result in 'literary' texts which seem deliberately complex, wordy, or ambiguous. This could potentially disrupt the reader's attention (in pursuit of information) away from the fictional narrative. A deliberate 'difficulty' in the narrative could also be perceived as an attempt by the writer to gain a hierarchical position of 'authority' over the reader.

The term defamiliarisation (ostranemie / остранение) is translated from Russian in some versions of *Art as Technique* as 'enstrange'. There are many words which either already have, or could, describe this conceptually driven technique of defamiliarisation; estrange, make-strange, estrangeword. Ostraciseword, replaceword, dislocateword, decentraliseword might more specifically explain defamiliarisation at word level within a sentence, when individual (or compound) words appear at odds with our understanding of textual visuality or grammar conventions.

In terms of defamiliarising a short fictional narrative, there are many possibilities – such as the choice of narrator (can salt tell its story of being eaten?) or various rules being applied to the narrative voice (can salt tell its story of being eaten without using the word 'eat'?). The resultant strangeness can mean we take time to pause, pay attention, and re-read. To prolong the perception.

In my short story, 'Shiver/Sugar', the narrator doesn't have hands, and can't therefore type or hold a pen. After writing the first draft (which incorporates aspects of the plot of the Grimm brothers' version of 'The Girl Without Hands'[26]) I consider its oral origins. Is it possible to transform my written story into an oral story and back into a written form again, using contemporary tools? After considering which tools a narrator who has no hands could use to tell their story, I experiment with recording my voice speaking the first draft into a malfunctioning talk-to-text app[27].

The mis-represented words become nonsensical, yet there are several which are worth using. Language is mistranslated into a sound-alike word. 'Shiver' becomes 'sugar'. 'Severed' becomes 'silver' or 'severe'.

I use some of these sound-alike words in the next iteration of the story, to explore the space between written and oral storytelling in a written form. In the beginning of the story, the faulty app is set up as a device, so the reader anticipates some incorrect words.

The following extract is from the end of the story:

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[26] Aarne Thompson Index: Tale Type 706.
[27] The talk-to-text app was chosen from many free options in Google Play, and I selected this particular one because it had the worst customer reviews, indicating low-level success in accurately selecting the correct spoken word.

Over time, I've learned how to take care of myself. I have a home now. A job. But this is the first time I've spoken my whole story. The talking book claims to teach me how to self-help myself, in language for emperor meant and in courage meat, or plait attitudes I'm meant to recite until they're no longer clichés. Perhaps it's the telling of the story which helps, not necessarily having a witness. But I do like the idea of this invisible reader – you – I can imagine your kind eyes reading my words, moving from left to right, making sense of my memories mis-translated into language.

I've just re-read the section I spoke with my eyes closed. If I look for the words that are written down wrong, it doesn't hurt me to read what my story really says. There are so many words out of place or missing. But there's some truth in them. Heart is sometimes hurt and hurt is sometimes heart. Severe is sometimes severed. Shivers are occasionally sugar, and bandages can be bondage.

If you've read these words all the way to the end, you are now my best friend because you know my true story better than anyone else in this whole whirl. You don't see the absence of my hands, but you see me.

This is a spill. A spell.

The extract (below) is from the beginning of another short story, 'Drenched Bone'. The narrator has a distinctive voice – some words which would usually be present within sentences are missing, and many compound words are also used. This requires the editorial stage to be focussed on consistency in the language restrictions and alterations. As the narrator expresses, certain small words are now absent from her memory – the ones with 'no meaning' (such as 'and'). Her name and the personal pronoun 'I' are missing because her sense of identity has been damaged prior to the events described in the story.

On a moor. Silhouette wolves hilledge dancing for dusk, howling. Freezing, this storm. Worst storm since ran outside, away. Gloves torn, throwaway. Blue-red hands. Fingerfat. Wedding ring pinches. Can't remove.

Distant under tall cliff, house made from iron. Window light says fire inside. Coat wet through with blowrain storm. Boots socks freezewet. Dyingfear heartbeat thud thud bang. Chase warm. Climb higher want fire inside house. Don't blink house away. Stare. Stare. Climb. Stare.

Knock door. Door opens.

Small Lost has blue eyes – she frowns, says, 'who are you?' Her voice beats pulse.

This first voice hear for ages. Long time no talk. Wordjumble head.

She says, 'you're drenched to the bone.'

Drenched Bone me replies, 'can you give me shelter, just one night?'

'How long,' says Small Lost, 'have you been on this moor? You're in a state – I'm probably not the best person to help you–'

Interrupt not rude too much shivering stamp foot ice say, 'can be inside iron house?'

She shakes her head with no understanding. 'Do you want me to phone someone who knows you? Or do you need medical help?'

'No.'

Suspicion stings her eyes.

'No phoning.'

Hailstone pins hit hair-head. None hit her. She wears red hood coat for warmth.

Look around. No trees here for underneath. Heatherblown. Grasses arguing with sharpwind. Ask but won't beg, 'can Drenched Bone me come inside?'

Indoors, sound tapping. Small Lost looks overshoulder back.

She's unalone.

Reading this narrator's voice is disorientating – her difficulty with vocabulary is as a result of memory loss due to trauma, and as her missing 'small words' destabilise grammar conventions throughout the narrative, her compound words defamiliarise sensory perceptions. These descriptive words evoke a visual image or physical sensation using various combinations of nouns, adjectives and verbs, e.g. 'fingerfat', 'heatherblown' and 'sharpwind'. Over the course of the plot, it is unclear whether the inhabitants of the 'house made from iron' will harm or shelter her, which mirrors the narrator's lack of trust. Towards the end of the story (once she is warm, rested, and has eaten) some of the words she has lost return to her, and as she grows still stronger, her language returns to a more familiar written form. The last line of this story is:

I remember I.

After reading the 'tabooed words' section of *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 2002)*,* I write a short story based on the idea of words disappearing from the language of a community. Anthropological studies and texts which are focused on aspects of mythology, belief and language[28] provide rich source material for creative explorations of the ideas contained within certain magical beliefs. Within the field of social anthropology, myths (of primarily non-western cultures) are studied in a structuralist way by looking for binary contrasts and transformations, which link myths together 'into coherent sets' (Carroll 1978, 467-486). The following passage from *The Golden Bough* is used as a starting point:

> Further, when the name of the deceased happens to be that of some common object, such as an animal, or plant, or fire, or water, it is sometimes considered necessary to drop that word in ordinary speech and replace it by another. A custom of this sort, it is plain, may easily be a potent agent of change in language. (Frazer 2002, 252)

What if… Specific words go missing from language? *What if…* The punishment for speaking a taboo word is equal to the crime? *What if…* Fire is no longer called fire… *What if…* I am a man who loves fire more than anything else… A sense of a community is emerging – a group of 'outsiders' who have chosen to live far from hierarchical social structures. Yet for them, there is no complete escape from these structures, as the hierarchy of their language is still influenced from afar. My short story 'The Naming of Kings' is set in an imaginary location and uses the idea of tabooed words in relation to never speaking the name of a dead king. In this story, each king chooses his own name when he is crowned. As each king dies, his name is removed from language, and he also chooses the word which will replace it.

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[28] Such as Robert Graves's *The White Goddess.*

The folkloric elements within 'The Naming of Kings' are found in its intertextual relationship with the myth[29] which prompted speculations. Language is defamiliarised at word level: the word 'fire' becomes the word 'water'. 'Sword' becomes 'no-no'. 'Wind' becomes 'passing-gas'. 'Wives' become 'husbands'. A word, viewed as marks on a page, and the object the word describes are often so commonplace we no longer notice them. "The object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it – hence we cannot say anything significant about it" (Shklovsky 1917). In my short story, we are forced to see individual words and the objects they are describing in unfamiliar ways – for example, when the word 'fire' is substituted with the word, 'water' and placed alongside other words (flames, burning, sparks, etc.) which are usually associated with the word 'fire', images and words are defamiliarised. Water burns faintly, a bonwater has thin flames[30].

To experiment with writing a story by using two texts simultaneously, a children's book of fairy tales (Boswell 1970) and the thesaurus are selected to work with. A draft of a new story is written which contains many allusions to the 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarves' story. Experimenting with the narrator's vocabulary (by giving her a love of the thesaurus) produces some intriguing phrases. The narrator is self-absorbed and annoying – she is determined to laugh at her own jokes. The first draft is printed, cut into strips, and pasted onto the story within the fairy tale book. Some text within the book is left visible, other phrases are covered with new ones. After this another draft is worked with on screen, using combinations of these phrases.

In editing this short story, called 'Mirror rorriM', the most obscure references to the thesaurus are toned down so they don't overwhelm the central story. The narrator is grieving her mother, and can't say her own name, her mother's name, or even the word 'mother' until towards the end of the story. Humour is added to mix with the sadness, so the narrator becomes less irritating and more complex. She views death as something simultaneously beautiful and terrible, which will reunite her with her mother. "When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful…" (Burke, 1757). In the following extract (from the end of the story) the narrator is half-dead. She lies in a glass coffin, surrounded by people who are observing her. She is trying to distract herself from her decaying body:

I think of birch saplings in frosted soil, slowly expanding their roots. I think of white birds flying in front of a backdrop of pine trees. Snowdrops. The songs of larks. Sea foam blowing in clumps along a beach. Apple pulp. The Thesaurus. The sound of paper, tearing.

My mother's name, Alva, means white. It is also my real name. She named me after herself. I say it over and over in my mind. Practising in case I die soon, and can go to her. Practising in case I wake.

If I ever wake, I will say my mother's name to the first person I see. And if any stranger can grasp how desperate I am when I cry from grief, how far I fall into it, and if they can still bear to hold me close, warming me…

I will love them for the rest of my life.

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[29] Folklorist, Maria Tatar, recognises that myth and fairy tales have a "shared repertoire of motifs", although Joseph Campbell sees fairy tales as 'entertainment' and myths as being "to do with the serious matter of living life in terms of society and of nature…" In contrast, Levi-Strauss believes that "all versions of a story belong to a larger mythical narrative" (Tatar 2015, 5).

[30] This short story. 'The Naming of Kings' was accepted for print publication via a global call-out for submissions from the Dark Mountain Project, and was published in a hardback anthology *In the Age of Fire* in April 2019. The short story is included as Appendix IV.

While writing a short text titled 'The Moth Bride', archetypal character types, symbols and images from several European folkloric texts[31] are explored within one short story. I also incorporate memories of my own magical thinking as an adult (while in an unhappy long-term relationship, I could often feel invisible moth wings growing from my back) and also from childhood (I spent much time talking to frogs and toads, but wouldn't kiss them in case they transformed into princes). These uses of memory are a way of giving emotional depth to a narrative which contains character 'types' instead of more complex characters. 'The Moth Bride' is ambiguously narrated by a silent moth who may have the heart of a woman, or a woman who believes she is a silent moth. She marries a toad who starts speaking when she kisses him for the first time at their wedding. She is shocked by the toad's persistent speeches, as she never expected to hear him talk. This extract is from the middle of the story:

Now we are married, we set up home together. It's a derelict, dust-soaked cottage. I try to believe we're happy, but as I collect husks of dried flies, I guiltily wish for three wishes, but only need one. I constantly wish my toad would unlearn speech. Or not speak quite so much about all the things he wants which we don't have.

He doesn't like how much I flit and flutter around all the rooms. He prefers me to crawl.

I grow more silent as his speeches grow louder. He wants servants, it seems, more than anything in the world. Hiding all the gathered dust under our bed takes time, but I love listening to its quietness. As we lie in our bed, what can he be dreaming of with his eyes wide open? His stomach rumbles, and I'm fearful of his hunger. My wings ache like dying things.

While my toad takes afternoon naps to aid his digestion, I move through silent rooms, wishing for cold air, half-dreaming of smashing all the sealed windows. I linger in the highest corners of our home, flexing my wings, avoiding cobwebs.

He seems constantly irritated, and I'm no longer certain he loves me. He tells me I'm clumsy so often, I become clumsier. When he's angry with me, his shouting makes me tremble. Sometimes I deliberately bump my head. Concussion dampens sound; a foggy mind is protected from noise.

There must have been a witch, some once upon a time. A witch who hurt him. Everything about him seems hurt, from the stripes on his back to the cracks between his toes. His lips pout with disappointment. My toad is secretly a prince, waiting for the right transformative kiss.

My short story, 'Giants' uses the Grimm brothers' version of 'The Story of a Boy Who Went Forth to Learn Fear'[32] as a starting point.

This story was contained in a book I had given my father just before he died in 2014, and he had left a bookmark half-way through this story.

In 'Giants', two teenage narrators tell a story about their absent fathers, and some of their memories are of the same events. Their perceptions of these events are different, but slightly – like distorted images. The narrators occupy two opposing sides of a fictionalised version of my home town, and they share my own recurrent nightmare.

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[31] Aarne-Thomson Index 440 *The Frog Prince, The Tale of a Queen who sought a Drink from a Certain Well, A Frog for a Husband*, etc.
[32] ATU Index 326 is German in origin, and is a tale about a boy, fear and mortality.

This is the male character's description of the nightmare:

There's this dream I often get. There's a dead man and it's me who killed him. He's only ever half-buried. In this dream, I'm trying to keep him hid, keep him still and silent. I shovel soil all over him, again and again, but he always sits up in his grave, skin hanging in strips from his bones, wanting his voice heard. When he talks, it's not in words. It's the sounds of waves, or flames, or cracking stones. I feel so much guilt for killing him, I can't stand the sound.

He's bigger in each dream. Last time, he was double the size of any normal man, and I couldn't get enough soil to bury him with. I shifted a whole mountain to cover him with, and it still wasn't enough.

And in each dream, there's a moment when I'm so exhausted, I give up. A kind of surrender or something. I tell someone official that he's dead and it's me who killed him, and he shrinks back to the size of a man again. After confessing, my relief is as big as the sky, yet I always jolt awake.

The dream comes over and over again. I shiver when I wake. Get the terrors and feel better once they're over. I've seen it happen with other kids at school. They get massive-scared, and then they're all right again. I've got fear trapped in my head like an unexploded bullet. If it would only go bang, the dream would explode itself away.

This is the female character's description of the same nightmare:

Since dad left me and mum, there's this dream I keep having. There's a tiny dead man and he's only ever half-buried. In this dream, I'm trying to keep him safe, keep him still and silent as if he's a doll or a baby. But he always sits up in his grave and he's wanting his voice to be heard. But inside I'm screaming when he talks, because he tells me why he's dead, that he did it to himself, and he talks about the violence of his father, and he's got all kinds of pain I don't know how to mend.

I try so hard to listen but a moment always comes when I can't hear it any more. I put my hands over my ears and feel so guilty but by then I can only bear to hear real sounds: bathwater running, twigs cracking in a bonfire, or the crunching of pebbles. Someone needs to help the tiny dead man – he's so small and broken I don't know what to do for the best.

The moment I tell someone he's dead, someone who's wiser and cleverer and older than me, is the moment he comes back to life. He has pin teeth and his mouth gapes as he cries. But I'm so fearful of his bite, I can't even touch him.

He's taken away from me in a white van, and though I should run after it to check he's being taken care of, I never do. The relief I feel when I tell myself: he's safe now, is what causes me to wake.

I shiver when I wake. In an odd way, the shivering is far more frightening than the dream. Sometimes I think the shivering means I'm dying. Other times, I think it means I'm poisoned or sick in the head. I don't know what to do, to make this dream go and never come back.

Within this story, I had intended to use the idea of a character seeking out fear, to allude to the plot of the Grimm brothers' version. However, while writing it, the plot became very sad, as the town is violent and drugs are rife. The male narrator's absent father is unlikely to ever come back, so there is a sense of hopelessness throughout the narrative. The female narrator's father dies during the story, and his ghost wants her to know what has happened to him. As a story, it functions – there is a narrative arc,

emotional content, an interesting setting, and the narrators are simultaneously vulnerable and strong, they have agency and are fairly compelling. At this stage, I am uncertain of what the purpose of telling this particular sad and hopeless story might be, so I will set it aside for now.

What if... I needed to write about my recurrent nightmare to clear space in my mind for other writing? *What if...* the fact that my father (who was at times highly fearful himself) hadn't lived for long enough to finish reading a story about fear contributed to the sense of hopelessness within mine? *What if...* my home town is a place I am not yet psychologically ready to write about within fiction? *What if...* the terms geno-text and pheno-text are applied to this narrative in a psychological sense? Due to selecting difficult memories to work with alongside this particular folkloric text, a strand of the geno-text overwhelmed the pheno-text, entwining hopelessness throughout the narrative.

What if... I dissociate from this hopelessness by shifting my focus outwards, instead of inwards. *What if… *other styles of texts can also be used in combination with folkloric texts? *What if...* these texts are about the 'real' world?

As well as defamiliarisation, I often use poetic devices within my fiction writing process. In my novels in particular, I've extensively used a literary technique which is usually associated with Anglo-Saxon poetry. 'Kennings' (also known as 'circumlocution') combine two or more words. In the Old English epic poem, *Beowulf* (Quasha 1965) (about one third of which is composed of kennings) "battle-sweat" is a kenning which means 'blood' but adds / expands on meaning in an ambiguous way. A "joy of a bird" is a feather (Preminger 1965). First used as synonyms and a form of metaphor, 'simple kennings' were two words which referred to one thing. They developed into 'compound kennings' – kennings within kennings, and eventually became so complex and cumbersome, they fell out of use in the thirteenth century[33]. Kennings are used surprisingly rarely within contemporary prose[34], but I've found them particularly useful where a character has an ambiguous mental state or fractured personality[35]. If the words chosen to be combined as kennings are simple (i.e., habitually used and generally understood) their clarity and the strangeness of their potential meanings when combined can reveal a character's highly unique way of seeing the world[36].

An article has appeared on Facebook which is titled, *The Emperor has No Vocabulary* (Huffington Post 2017). In a press conference, the US President has just added the word 'very' to the now famous term, 'fake news.' Alongside his other terms (e.g. 'nasty woman') many other adjective-noun combinations are hashtagged and trending on Twitter. Via social media, kennings might be returning to our language. Viewed as poetic kennings: these words are ambiguous, and are odd metaphors – the adjectives describe the noun in a way which is not always literally applicable, e.g., 'alternative facts'.

To make individual words ambiguous is fairly easy to do. If a noun is used as a verb – its meaning becomes open to interpretation. For example, if a character says: 'There is a rose,' we imagine a rose. If the character says, 'I will go rosing,' we start to wonder what they mean. Are they going to prune roses, or will they act in a rose-like way?

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[33] Around the time that Icelandic historian, Snorri Sturluson, deciphered a number of them in the *Prose Edda*.
[34] They are, however, sometimes used in contemporary fiction. I use them in all three of my novels. A short text formed by kennings and framed as a diary entry is the Prologue of Ros Barber's second novel, *Devotion* (2015). Another example of a contemporary fiction writer who uses compound words is Anna Smaill in *The Chimes* (Sceptre, 2015).
[35] As demonstrated in the previous extract from my short story, 'Drenched Bone'.
[36] Combining words which aren't used in ordinary speech would have the opposite effect - of obscuring potential meanings and hindering perception, e.g., antithetical-abstruse, barbiturate-historicity, etc.

Likewise, we can change adjectives into nouns, etc.[37] e.g.,

Here is a gentle. You're going to need a soft. Come into your office and look at this. It's a prickly ambiguous. When it arrived, it introduced itself by the name of R. Stone, and growled at your computer screen. The computer screened code right back at it. And now look at them. They need to be separated. Should we use the impasse?

When words and phrases are perceived as being *deliberately* ambiguous, the intention of the writer comes under scrutiny. Are the President's tweets displaying his lack of language skill, are they a smokescreen, a way of sounding 'authentic' to a specific group of people, or a covert communication device?

What if… a President is using un/intentional kennings, *what if…* he is trying to avoid the consequences of his visibility on social media, or *what if…* he is writing poetry? Either way, his narrative voice will continue to be scrutinised for at least as long as he remains in the archetypal role of 'Emperor'[38].

Many theorists have devoted their careers to exploring *meaning* via the ways in which folkloric texts are psychologically interpreted by the reader, and within Jungian literary criticism, recurring archetypes in narratives include symbols, images, and character types. According to Marie-Louise Von Franz, story threads carry meaning, and archetypes carry their own force. (Von Franz 1997).

My decision to write a story transforming a President into a fictional 'Emperor' character ties into notions of magical thinking belonging to the realms of 'meaning making' and 'coping with existential problems' (Streib 1994). The narratives surrounding this particular President (I don't want to use his name) are upsetting, so storytelling becomes a way of coping with current political events. In this story the President character is recognisable – but magically distorted – as if through a lens. The lens is Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Emperor's New Clothes' (Andersen 1914). The plot is as follows: tailors tell a naked Emperor that he is wearing beautiful clothing. Though he can't see these clothes, as the tailors continue to flatter him, he *believes* them. (Displaying his own magical thinking.) Outside in a large crowd, he is proud of how he appears as he parades through the streets, with everyone praising his invisible outfit. A child speaks the truth, the crowd admit what they see, yet the Emperor continues to pretend he is clothed.

In my short story 'New Clothes' the Emperor character (Rex) is not present in the scenes, but is spoken about more than any other character, particularly with regard to the *way* he speaks. I decide not to write 'as' Rex, because it would be easy to fall into the trap of using ambiguous language to obscure his story, and difficult to feel any empathy for him. Three copies of the President's inaugural address are printed out and a process of redaction is used to compose lists of adjectives, verbs and nouns:

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[37] E.g., the current US President (in 2020) has been known to use the word 'cyber' as a noun.
[38] It seems important that his language is scrutinised. Especially phrases that are repeated and therefore 'go viral'. In looking at the language of anyone who desires popularity and power and shows no apparent empathy, there is great potential for danger in the repetition of their speeches.
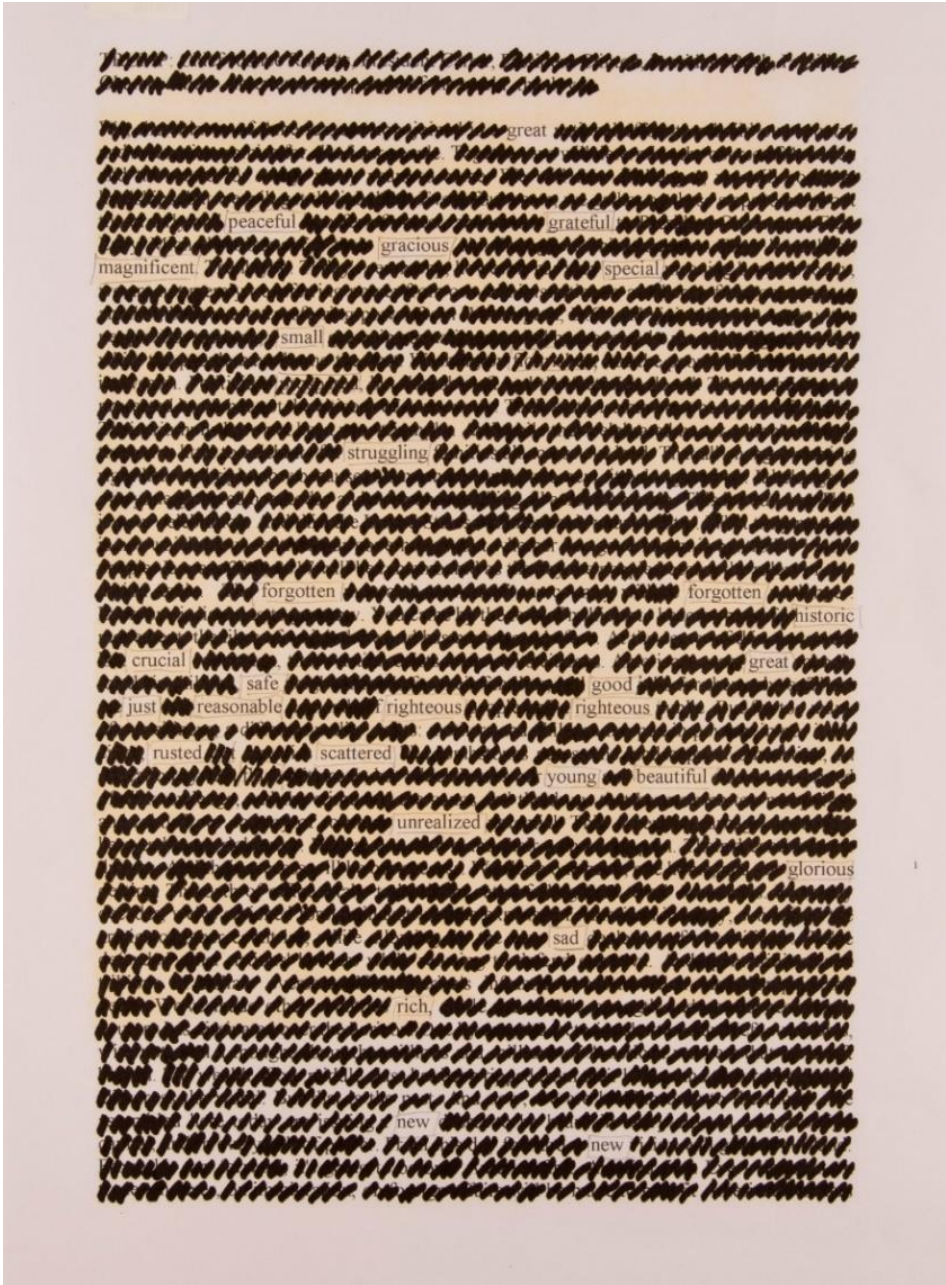
Inauguration Adjectives page 1. (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

Selections from these lists are used within my story, in the order in which they occur. The main texts being worked with for this new fictional story are therefore 'The Emperor's New Clothes' and the President's inaugural address. In my short story, the first person narrative voice belongs to the wife of the Emperor.

The following extract is from the middle of the story:

I've been worried for a while, but now I'm finally letting myself feel it. Rex has been growing bigger and bigger, of late. It's not that he's fattening from too many expensive meals, as he's always eaten like that. It's a kind of all-over bigness. He's taller, wider, and brighter than ever. He's recently bought five pairs of new shoes, two sizes larger than the size he usually wears. As he gets closer and closer to achieving his lifelong ambition, the bigger he grows.

But another strange thing is, as he's been getting bigger, how he talks has changed. I've rarely seen him for the past few weeks – he's been at work all day, and spends the evenings with colleagues or visitors or officials or lovers, or whoever. But three days ago, a meeting had been postponed so he was here for brunch. I cooked him scrambled eggs on cubed potatoes.

He nodded appreciatively at the food, and with the attitude of delivering a complement, said something along the lines of: 'great peaceful grateful gracious magnificent special, small.'

Feeling flattered, I laughed and said, 'you're enjoying it, then?'

'Bigly,' he replied. Fork to lips, he grinned at me as if he'd said exactly the right thing and it had been well received. Then he simply returned his attention to his meal.

It was only after he'd gone out I realised I had no idea what he'd really meant.

An additional character is added, called 'Slave'. Slave unsettles the Emperor's wife by revealing the Emperor's actions and words which were previously unknown to her. The relationship between Slave and the Emperor's wife is ambiguous in terms of power and control: Slave has a submissive fetish, and visits their home while the Emperor is out, to be verbally chastised by her while he does the household chores. By the end of the story, at the instruction of the Emperor's wife, Slave kills and skins the Emperor, and the Emperor's wife dresses in his skin in order to become the Emperor.

The process of redacting the inauguration address has (in addition to the story) resulted in the production of several pages containing hand-drawn black lines. These resemble lines of forward slashes with only a few printed words (lists of verbs, nouns, adjectives) left uncovered. Each hybrid image/text page in some ways resembles the altered pages found in artists' books[39]. The practice of making artists' books *complicates* the book, the page, the tension between content and form. Conceptually, the artists' book is made at "an intersection of a number of disciplines, fields, and ideas – rather than at their limits" (Drucker 2004). The visuality of working with text on pages, and the materiality of books as objects, sources of text, and hybrid art/fiction artefacts will be explored further at a later stage during this project. This is fully documented in Parts II and III of this exegesis, Transformations and Iterations.

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[39] The work of Bob Cobbing is worth mentioning here, as a writer who was highly influential in experimental publishing in the UK. Cobbing was a London-based poet, whose practice involved concrete, sound and performance poetry. For more information on his life, publishing imprints, and writing, see *Boooook: The Life and Work of Bob Cobbing*, by William Cobbing and Rosie Cooper. (2015) Some contemporary artists' books which are of particular relevance to this hybrid project are referenced during parts II and III of this exegesis. These include works by Sally J Morgan, Marcel Broodthaers, Tom Phillips, Yoko Ono, and Mary Ruefle.

Performance Art and Texts

In my role as a 'Live Press' writer at the Performance Arcade in Wellington, I write a folkloric text which is based on a 'real' event. The Performance Arcade website announces that it "offers new encounters between artists and public" and the 12 Live Press writers are also treated as 'artists' – there isn't an expectation for our writing to offer review or have a journalistic style. The Performance Arcade is an annual live art event on Wellington waterfront – the Arcade hub is built from shipping containers, and looks like a strange miniature city. As well as artists and Live Press writers, there are also musicians playing each night. Inside (and around) the shipping containers, national and international performance artists engage with the general public who are a combination of passers-by and people who have come specifically to engage with the artists' work and/or hear the musicians.

For this publicly available piece of writing, I decide to write a magical story based on 'real' people, to experiment with what happens to the agency of the characters. Will I still be able to maintain the illusion of independent agency or will this experiment produce 'notional' characters[40], whose narratives appear self-conscious?

The characters are chosen: the Director of the Performance Arcade (Sam Trubridge), his brother (William Trubridge) who is a free-diving champion, and the artists whose work is being shown. My source material for the folkloric elements (the strange or magical, liminal spaces, binary oppositions, transformations, archetypes and symbolic objects) is therefore on this occasion not a written text. It is the entire Performance Arcade, viewed as a text, which I am attempting to read.

The tale of these brothers in 'real life' is already a beautiful story – a shared narrative which belongs to them and their family. Initially, there is some anxiety about using their real names, as my writing (or my role as a writer) could be viewed as judgmental, sentimental, or invasive. But for this particular piece of writing, it is inherently 'right' they should be named because they have admirable achievements. There is also a lot of respect for their narratives – each brother is successful in his own field of expertise[41]. 'Free-diver' and 'Performance Arcade Director' are descriptions of roles/identities, and yet these aspects of their personal narratives can also help develop the plot and their fictional characters:

> Narratology proposes that the objective meaning of each human action and the meaning of human life as a whole is best understood when viewed as a narrative. This implies that the acting subject defines himself and describes his identity to other people with his actions within his personal narrative. (Ogunyemi 2014)

William's diving achievements, and Sam's annual construction of the Performance Arcade are such actions – these current achievements will have their foundations in early experiences, reveries and memories, actions and events which have constructed their identities and personal narratives.

A decision is made about the content and title of the story – 'A Tale of Two Brothers' will have only two characters, and their distinct identities will be defined by Sam's and William's actions – fictional William will explore a miniature city within the depths of the ocean while learning to dive, and fictional Sam will ask him questions about what he observed, so he can imagine and reimagine, and later invent and reinvent a land-based city in miniature.

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[40] J David Velleman provides an interesting discussion on the first personal pronoun in relation to writing as a 'real' character as opposed to a 'notional' one (he uses the example of Napoleon, and focuses on the importance of using his own *memories* of images/places Napoleon might also have seen (Velleman 1996, 60).

[41] For more details about Sam Trubridge's artistic practice, see https://www.samtrubridge.com/ To read about William Trubridge's freediving achievements, see http://williamtrubridge.com/profile/

My time at the Performance Arcade is spent hunting for magic, and as I walk around making a list of potentially magical things, fictional William swims invisibly alongside me. I evoke a sense of curiosity and wonder in my search for magic and find much within the Arcade which I either perceive as being magical already, or as having the potential to be made magical within fiction:

A fortune teller,
a figure holding a gun,
a man searching for poetry along the waterfront.
A story about loneliness pasted to a wall as a wild wind rips the corners of its pages.
The smell of the sea.
A woman crying about her friend as if her friend is secretly her lover.
The phrase 'long white cloud' chanted eerily, repeated on a loop.

I am given three hours to write the first draft, and will edit it overnight. The story will be printed and distributed tomorrow morning. It is night-time. I am in a metal container, where other people are working on computers. From outside, I can hear a band playing, and the sounds of people laughing and talking. There is a smell of beer. I dissociate from these things, and slip away from myself as I imagine myself clearly 'as Sam'. To give fictional Sam agency over the style and content of the narrative, as with other narrators, I have to go beyond imagining – in order to evoke empathy and retain a temporary belief that I am him. This belief allows me to walk boot-shod on concrete while feeling the deck of a boat under Sam's bare feet, and to allow myself to feel his emotions. I am filled with Sam's anxiety for William's safety. I am in a draughty metal container at night-time. Outside, a mobile phone is ringing and the smell of chips wafts past. Wrapping myself in the blanket I brought with me, I keep typing. I am a boy, lying on my belly on the edge of a boat, and my brother is deep underwater. While I am waiting for him to surface, I am breathless.

To make the story appear folkloric, when the underwater city is described, magical elements within the Performance Arcade artists' work are alluded to or described, and a 'voyage and return' plot structure is used[42]. The story is printed and distributed at the Arcade, and posted online[43]. I am reminded of the power of storytelling to connect people, as I am humbled by the Trubridge family's responses as they describe it as a gift to their family. Over time, they share further narratives about their lives[44].

A collaborative live performance (on the theme of grief) is presented by myself and my partner Sally J Morgan on Matiu/Somes Island, as part of *Performing, Writing: a symposium in four turns*[45]. The title of the performance, 'Love Like Salt', is from a folkloric text with many versions[46]. The plot is as follows: A king has three daughters and he wants to know how much they love him. The older daughters compare their love to diamonds/eyes/the world, but the youngest compares her love for her father to salt. He doesn't understand the significance of this, banishes her, and she later prepares him a meal without salt. The flavourless food makes him realise the extent of her love for him, and they are reunited. In King Lear[47], Shakespeare references the same folk tale[48]. Another significant text which influenced the creative writing for this performance was Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (Kafka

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[42] For a comprehensive description of plot structures, see Booker's *'Seven Basic Plots'* (Booker 2004).
[43] A link to this short story, *A Tale of Two Brothers*, is included as Appendix I.
[44] William Trubridge published his memoir, *Oxygen,* (HarperCollins) in 2017. During 2018, Linda Trubridge published her memoir, *Passages,* and Sam Trubridge completed his PhD thesis. David Trubridge received the NZ Order of Merit for services to design in 2019.
[45] We present this work (and previous live art/performance collaborations) using the name: Morgan+Richards.
[46] Aarne Thompson classification: AT510 Love Like Salt.
[47] Date unknown, but the first performance noted on the Stationers' Register was in 1606.
[48] A king disposes of his kingdom to two out of his three daughters, with tragic consequences. The third daughter has not been able to adequately declare the extent of her love for him.

1915). Metamorphoses and transformations occur frequently in folkloric texts, often as a result of a curse from a malevolent character, or as a form of punishment for thinking or acting in a particular way. Grief could also be described as a transformative or reconstructive experience[49].

Performance has a different relationship to time and audience than individually experienced written texts. It is a shared activity, where time and duration is dictated in the present by the performer as a 'live act.' A further defining feature of performance art has been identified by Amanda Coogan who has noted that although "Performance Art employs strategies such as recitation and improvisation associated with theatre and drama, it rarely employs plot or narrative[50]…" (Coogan 2011).

Written during the early stages of this research project, a series of short texts 'Love Like Salt I-X' form an experimental sequence. The text selected for use (due to lack of plot and thematic link to grief) in this performance is as follows:

Love Like Salt

Grief is a metamorphosis inside the body. First it seals the mouth because words gain wrong meanings. Euphemism, euphemism. The word dead is xxxxxx out. Transformed into lost

eyes are layered with salt condensation,

ears have selective rules.

Inside the body, Grief morphs into an insect with a sharp sting. It is endangering – it grows articulated legs, and crawls through the cage of stacked ribs, squeezing abdomen through wreckage.

The rhythm of its wings mimics shallow-breathing.

There are no bruises or grazes and yet skin feels scab-ripped-off raw. It yearns for oceans to float in. If there was any mineral which could kill grief, it would be salt.

The insect buzzes inside tight shoulders, the tremor in hands is a bone-deep nothing. Arms ache to hold something big enough to fill them.

Nothing is enough: enough is Nothing.

At night, the brain misfires. The insect prods the amygdala with antenna and claws, creating emotional remembrances of un/known ancestors: trenches and earthworms, magnified images of photosynthesising cells. Summer lasting for sixty-seven years, roses blooming on a woman's blouse.

Heaving the heart into the mouth, it has already been bitten by mandibles. But its flavours are preserved: there is something of blood. Something of plant stems.

Something of salt.

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[49] S.S. Rubin's Two-Track Model of Bereavement (TTMoB) "suggests that two parallel processes occur in grief, as individuals oscillate between experiencing deep feelings of grief and fostering a restorative focus on reconstructing their world (Stroebe & Schut, 1999)." (New Zealand Journal of Psychology, Vol 40, No 3 2011, 80)

[50] While I would agree that performance art rarely uses 'plot' I would argue that various forms of *narrative* might often occur, particularly when text is involved. See my later discussion (in Part II Transformations) concerning Sally J Morgan's accumulating narrative in her live performance series, *A Life in Diagrams* which is also reiterated in her artists' book of the same title.

This text is a subjective example of magical thinking – a description of how grief feels like an insect within the body. (My father died suddenly in 2014, and much of Morgan's previous work has explored her grief for her father.) Now the performance is over, the written/printed words which were read aloud still exist as the 'Love Like Salt' text, while the unrecorded dialogue of us speaking to each other, asking questions back and forth now only exists within memory. *What if…* Memories of conversations fade, and die. And then what remains of the live performance, when both speech and writing were so present – over time will it become half of a thing, with photographic images and one short text continuing to exist, while speech and ritualised acts fade to insignificance like the ghost of a voice?

I write a journal article to more fully document the performance as a multi-layered text, in line with Tony Schirato and Jane Webb's view: "Visual culture incorporates texts, the reading of which involves the body and the emotions, and which therefore are a sensate rather than a purely intellectual means of communication" (Schirato 2004, 65-66). This article enables the performance to be documented as a story narrative and simultaneously gives form to the ghosts of our spoken voices[51].

Reversing the Illusion

In order to fully test to what extent the illusion of independent agency is intrinsic to my fiction writing, I write a text which instead uses the practice of retelling as a form of translation (into present tense and first person).

Giambattista Basile was a seventeenth-century poet from Naples, and the written (fifty) texts forming *The Tale of Tales* was the first authored collection of Western European fairy tales. Basile wrote this collection in the dialect of Naples, but it has only recently been translated into English from dialects, rather than standard Italian, by Italo Calvino. 'The Sleeping Queen' (Calvino 2004, 207-213) story is chosen because I haven't ever read it before, so I can approach it without predicting the plot in advance.

Initially, I only read the first paragraph, which is written in past tense and has an omniscient third person narrator. My first task is to choose a first person narrator. Several characters are present (fathers, sons, soothsayers), but there is no mention of a mother figure. So, without reading onwards, I decide that the narrator will be an omniscient ghost mother (so subsequent events can be observed and interacted with).

The next stage involves reading only three paragraphs at a time, and re-writing them into first person and present tense, while keeping the plot points which seem most relevant in terms of advancing the story.

This whole process is awkward, particularly due to the following problems: The mother/queen character makes a brief appearance as a living person at a later point in the story. The omniscient ghost is too much of an observer, and isn't involved enough in the action. My version of the story grows to become much longer than expected, due to having so many characters and an epic plot. Some of the plot points are disturbing, and though I try to contain my own emotional reactions within the 'judgements' of the narrating character, it doesn't read in an authentic way. Another significant problem is that the logic of the magic doesn't make any sense. In Calvino's version, Morgan Le Fay appears out of nowhere towards the end as a deus ex machina who explains why everyone is static on the Isle of Tears. Within

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[51] This article is published in *Performance, Research: A Journal of Performing Arts, Volume 23: 2018 Issue 2*, and the link is included as Appendix II.

my story I change Morgan Le Fay into an archetypal wizard figure and make this character the same person as a 'stranger' who is present at the beginning of my story.

The lengthy short story, 'Sleep', will be left alone now, and treated as an experiment which enabled me to understand the relevance of empathy within my writing process. I have learned from this that without evoking the illusion of independent agency, I can't produce a new text which is complete as itself, even while attempting to 'translate' or retell an existing narrative. The main reason for this is that the narrating character is inauthentic – because I don't feel genuine empathy for her I have mechanically produced a contrived version of her story. Without empathy for her as a character, she has no agency to be able to tell her story, and I also have no agency in this process of reproducing an existing narrative. As a writer who relies on evolving processes, on defamiliarisation, on magical thinking and the agency of narrators in order to maintain an interest in the text, I am now practically asleep.

I am at my desk, reading black words on a white screen. There are islands and oceans which exist as fleeting images. The characters exist as sentences formed by words made from letters. They exist as punctuation marks. *What if...* agency is absent, during the process of writing? *What if...* the writing process has been dull, taken a substantial amount of time, and yet nothing worthwhile has been written?

What happens now, in this space of no agency, is that I am remembering. I am remembering vulnerability. I am remembering being at art college. I am remembering who I was when I first started writing stories. Back then, the story I was writing was a personal story – one I couldn't speak about. The story I couldn't tell. And during that period of my life, I could barely speak at all, about anything.

So I wrote my story down, reversed the words as images, and used turpentine to print them as ghosted letters on white fabric. Fragmenting it. Tearing it apart, so gently.

I printed these fragments of my ghosted story onto pillowcases and bedsheets, night-dresses, underwear, shirts, blouses and handkerchiefs. These intimate fabrics had all been stolen or bought second-hand. None of these fabrics touched any part of my body apart from my hands. I never wore white, back then. I believed my body was a stain. White fabric gave my ghosted story space to breathe on and threads to cling to.

I hung all this fabric on music-room walls which became like padded-cells, or crammed it into a suitcase so that people were surprised by how many words and objects came out of such a small container, or strung the fabric by pegs on lines across a lecture theatre as people in tiered seating reached out to touch the fabric, and were tangled in my ghosted story.

A man who could see read my words aloud to a young man who was blind. The blind man held a bra in his hands, stroking it as if he had never felt such a thing before. I was mesmerised by the expression on his face, but never told him.

Some of the people who read my story were wearing white clothing as if it meant nothing.

And when it was all over, I silently took all my words away with me.

Without agency, I am remembering vulnerability. I am remembering fragments.

But I am also remembering images, objects, and text, and the strength of the silence that wraps itself all around these things when there's a story which can't be told.

PART II: Transformations

Un/Tellable Stories

This section describes a process of printing texts as multiple layers onto pages cut from old books. 'An Untellable Story' is repeatedly printed on three vintage book pages till the text becomes illegible and the pages become images. A short story, 'The Three Dresses'*,* is written and taken through an iterative process which engages with 'palimpsesting' as a conceptual term as the story is transformed textually, visually, and materially, resulting in antique book pages being shown as part of an installation, titled 'Palimpsests: An Exhibition of Pages'[52].

In 1991, I was accepted as the first student to enrol on the Visual Performance degree course at Dartington College of Arts. As Sally J Morgan (the course leader of Visual Performance at that time, and now my performance collaborator and spouse) recalls in an article we recently co-edited together, I told her during my interview I wanted "to be somewhere that people were interested" (Visual Performance, A Way of Being 2019). I consider myself lucky to have been able to attend the course, as people *were* interested. The materials used within my installations and performance works between 1991-1994 were photographic images, printed text, domestic objects, grey slate, and white clothing. During my final year my work was selected to be used as a pilot for the Performance Writing degree course (which commenced in September 1994). Ric Allsopp writes about the field of Performance Writing as follows:

> The field of performance writing defines writing in its widest sense as the investigation of the performance of language. By acknowledging that textual events are produced not only through a syntactical and semantic exploration of language but also through the impact of its material treatments, Performance Writing is highlighting the great diversity of artistic and writerly practices, both within and outside established literary traditions, which rely on the use of text and textual elements… The term performance writing brings into focus that interactivity, the transformative play of text as performance. (Allsopp 1999, 76)

Jacob Edmond has recently published *Make it the Same* in which he explains how the term, performance writing, evolved into the term 'conceptual writing' in the UK and US after Caroline Bergvall's time as the performance writing course director at Dartington (1995-2001). *Make It the Same* explores the history, politics and social contexts of textual practices involving repetition, copying and iterative poetics. Although performance writing at Dartington could be arguably described as being focussed on the Anglo-American avant-garde, in *Make it the Same,* Edmond expands the research on iterative poetics by comprehensively revealing that copying practices and iterative poetics are a global turn within literature.

In discussing Bergvall's use of multiple textual iterations and versions across media within her artistic practice, Edmond describes how repetition is understood within the practice of performance writing when he says:

> These many versions and repetitions in turn underscore a fundamental tenet of performance writing: that a repeated text is never the same, that it is always inflected by the medium and body through which it is enunciated. (Edmond 2019, 135)

In June 1994, I graduated at the age of twenty-one. For the past three years I had performed 'silence' in durational performances over several days and nights. This was because the personal stories I wrote at that time were affected by my inability to speak them. They were 'inflected' by "the medium and the body" of a silent and silenced young woman. I didn't yet believe in the independent agency of

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[52] *Palimpsests - an exhibition of pages* was presented by Madaleine Trigg and Jess Richards at Te Pikitanga Gallery, Massey University Library, Wellington (March 2019).

characters. I believed in being able to hear a voice inside my head when I was writing, who sounded a little like me. I encountered a great sense of safety when I removed the expectation of verbal speech from my interactions. I wrote pages and pages of words in an art studio after five days and nights of being silent and not writing[53]. Hours of frantic handwriting about the madness of not writing, about the comfort of silence. Paper filled, thrown on the floor, later typed up and pinned to a gallery wall. During those three years at Dartington I also printed repeated phrases onto intimate white garments I'd never worn, pasted fragments of writing onto lightbulbs that didn't work, and wrote postcards which were never posted[54]. The story I was repeating was violent, and not once did I read it aloud. What I realised during that time was that any story could be told, and in any style – but I could only ever speak my own story, by writing it.

In 2015, John Hall, the poet, academic, and founder of the Performance Writing BA Hons course showed me a poem[55] he had written twenty years previously, which was published in his book of essays about Performance Writing. This is how he described my work:

> Z saw the words that came out of her hands
>
> she saw that once they were there
>
> on the fabric or on the paper or on the post cards
>
> from that moment on they were there to be seen
>
> she saw that she had made something
>
> and that she had made something that passed beyond itself, swinging
>
> from garments on a line, say, but linking messages one to the other,
>
> suggesting stories of personal violence
>
> she saw that she had made something
>
> that in controlling she couldn't control;
>
> in putting her words out into a space
>
> which others moved in and out of
>
> there was a performance space in which these others had to perform,
>
> caught in a narrative of swinging things and meanings. (Hall 2013, 29)

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[53] My first durational 'Silence' performance lasted for three days and nights. Though I wouldn't speak, I wrote in a notebook which the audience could ask to read at any time. The second durational 'Silence' performance didn't allow speech or writing. This performance lasted for five days and nights, and was a collaboration with another Visual Performance student (Sara Rees) who also worked with themes of silence.

[54] These objects were shown as installations in various locations around the college – a music room (cell-like, sound-proofed and small) and in a lecture-style room where the installation was set up while the audience were still sitting on the tiered seating. The performance involved the audience being tangled in thin rope, on which I pegged white clothing containing fragments of text.

[55] Though I describe this text as a *poem,* John Hall finds this description surprising. After reading my reasons, he kindly agreed that I could call it a poem, and has also given his generous permission to include it in full.

All these years later, these fragmented 'stories' John Hall wrote about are still an unspoken, untellable story.

The story is fragments, it is memory trapped inside the body as multiple ghosts. In 2016 I tracked down an email address for the violent man whose actions had prompted those 'stories of personal violence', so I could finally say, directly to him, what I needed to. I wrote an email and sent it, hoping he would either apologise, be frightened of me, or admit his crime. Either of those three things would be a resolution.

He never replied.

Or perhaps he did.

Silence is an answer.

I find my print-out of the email[56] and photocopy it repeatedly onto three pages from a vintage fairy tale book, alluding to the triads which are often present in folkloric texts: three punishments/rewards, three wishes, three unresolved hopes…

HOW TO GHOSTWRITE:

Invite no witnesses.
Write the one story that haunts you so much you can't tell it.
Replace the ink cartridge of a photocopier.
Place your untellable story face down on the glass.
Place paper that shouldn't go through a photocopier into the paper tray.
Press copy. Wait. Move the story. Stop.
Place the copy in the paper tray. Layer the story on one page.
Repeat the last two stages until the layered story becomes invisible; a ghost, in ink.
When the story is illegible, burn it, drown it, hang it or bury it.
Take a breath.
Look elsewhere.
Write a story that you desperately want to tell.
Find the ghost in the story and ask it, 'what do you want to be next?'

There is an intensity and volition to this process which verges on violence – at first the words become visible and I continue photocopying them in layers, obliterating them so no one can ever read them. Once the three pages are complete, I can barely look at them.

These pages are loud ghosts, a reversal of silence. They are noise.

Though there is an established and well-documented Noise scene (which emerged from avant-garde concrete poetry) which explores language in audible and sonic forms[57], here I am referring to noise that is made on the page/screen when text becomes visually confusing due to proliferation. Examples would be fast visual interactions of online texts which are overwhelming due to their quantity, or text made visually mesh-like or web-like on the page – for example, in visual repetition of texts by overprinting such as Rosmarie Waldrop's *Camp Printing* (1970) in which she layers lyrics written by James Camp repeatedly on the same page. My definition of noise also concurs with the general usage of this term in the field of Information Theory – how signals/signs interfere with clear communication of a message (C. Dworkin 2003, 47) and also the *noise* Russian Futurists describe (using the word "zvukopis") as

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[56] Though this email is not a story, to me it represents this one, as it is the only way this story can be un/told.

[57] For examples of textual and performative practices involving audible and sonic forms of 'Noise' see *Writing Aloud: The Sonics of Language.* (LaBelle 2001)

emitting from the surface of a work of art (C. Dworkin 2003, 45). My three pages contain noise as an image. The interference is repetition, applied to this text in order to transform it. Noise becomes message; message becomes noise.

An Untellable Story. (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

It is possible to examine the surface of the three pages and see the structure of text, or the material qualities of vintage paper, or shapes beneath layers of ink. The fairy tale illustrations buried beneath the noise have a visual density which verges on sinister. "Noises get accepted into the system, get inside us, become, in short, *les parasites:* infecting, spreading, and disabling, but also structuring, adapting, mutating…" (C. Dworkin 2003, 49). The density of the textual layers is influenced by the movement and directions of the hand movements involved in their overprinting. When copied horizontally the illegible text appears calm or at least organised. When moved around a central point (see the middle page in the image above) the illegible text becomes a blurred vortex, drawing the eye deeper into dense ink. The content of this untellable story, the 'parasitic noise' which this particular text represents, has destroyed the fairytale on the pages.

On the bottom of each page, the typed capitalised words DO NOT READ THIS are a command to the reader/viewer that ends with a final full stop. When reading is forbidden it becomes tempting, yet reading this illegible text is impossible. The content is alluded to by adding the legible title: AN UNTELLABLE STORY. With these words, the fairy tale pages accept the noise, but I can't bear to look at them. I have no idea if these loud pages are good or bad things, worth showing for the sake of other people's opinions or emotions, or worth burning for the sake of catharsis. At this moment in time all that matters is that this hidden story remains hidden. As I place the three pages in a desk drawer, wood slides against wood, it is shut. A metal click of the lock. I stand still for a while, fingertipping the desk, considering the sounds of objects.

And now, I am contemplating their silence. My silence. The silence of all hurt objects.

The silence of this untellable story thickens in my throat. Again, it breaks apart, becoming fragmented. I am used to this. I can dissociate. As Judith Herman observes, once a survivor is safe, the trance ability can be used for less traumatic purposes. (Herman 1992) I know what to do, because I have written a list. Lists can be easily referred to, shortened, repeated, or reversed:

Find the ghost in the story and ask it, 'what do you want to be next?'
Write a story that you desperately want to tell.
Look elsewhere.
Take a breath.

In working with a version of 'Cinderella', I defamiliarise the narrative by writing from the point of view of object narrators. As the chair of the Program on Folklore and Mythology at Harvard University explains, "Not surprisingly, stories that traffic in transformation also seek to change listeners and readers in unconventional ways" (Tatar 2010, 55-64). The source text for my version is of Scottish origin. In the Aarne-Thompson classification system, its tale type is defined as: 'The Persecuted Heroine'. It could also be described in Booker's terms as a 'Rags to Riches' tale (Booker 2004).

In writing a triptych (which forms a short story when read sequentially) from the point of view of three dresses a young woman wears, I write as the 'substance' of the fabric, and let each dress speak in turn, to tell the story of an abused young woman. There are several intentional similarities to the Cinderella tale. "In similarity, perceived resemblance is taken to reflect a deeper level identity..." (Nemeroff 2000, 4). In many versions of the Cinderella story, a young woman wishes for a particular colour of dress, or wishes for a dress which resembles something else (starlight) etc. In my triptych, the three dresses are made from snow, darkness and mirrors. In order to evoke empathy and the illusion of independent agency while writing about snow as a character and a substance, I freeze a miniature china doll in a block of salted water, and film the ice melting under hot water in a metal sink.

Melting Ice-Doll (film still)

I watch the film over and over again. The melting process takes the block of ice from solid white, to translucent silver, to smooth-surfaced curves as the doll's painted face and whimsical dress emerges. Gradually, the ice disappears, revealing a damp china doll.

The following extract is from the beginning of the story:

I am snow on a mountain, catching the thoughts and dreams of people as they rise through the air from the valleys below. Whiter than anything else, I am almost silver when the light changes. But when it's night, all the light on this mountain comes from the moon. It glints on the dreams and thoughts as they arrive here, before they rise away further, into the night sky.

One young woman in the valley below has a sharp clarity to her dreams, and they show me she is discontented and neglected.

While a full moon moves over me, I glisten and examine her dreams.

This young woman sleeps in warm ashes. She dreams of a phoenix and a golden egg. She dreams of a peacock and hen. She dreams of having a mother who loves her. She dreams of dancing and flying and singing. She dreams of leaving her stepmother. She dreams of swimming and painting and reading. She dreams of other families she's seen in her town. She dreams of siblings who never deliberately hurt each other. She dreams of feeling something more than numbness. She dreams of ice cubes and frozen peas and vanilla cream in cones.

She dreams of a dress made of snow. She dreams the same dress again.

She wakes, wishing for it.

And I am snow on a mountain. If I am to be made into clothing for her bruised body, she would stain me, and the warm air from her lungs would turn me to slush.

I predict my own future because I've seen it coming in this young woman's rising dreams, though for now, I remain snow on a mountain, clumping together my own slow wishes:

That winter at this height will last an eternity. That I'll lie here forever under these clouds which kiss my exposed surfaces. That I can remain soft, but with a core strong as ice. That more of me will fall and the more volume I have, the stronger I will become. That the sky will remain open and the dreams and thoughts of people will continue to arrive one at a time in the form of compacted ice crystals filled with strange images. That nothing will ever caress me but the clouds, and the light of the sun will never cut into me.

But people do not hear the wishes of anything which can't speak them aloud.

In many Cinderella tales, the dresses exist for a limited amount of time – at the stroke of midnight they revert to being rags. In this story, the agent of change is not a prince, but the seamstress who has made these remarkable dresses. Due to the limitations of first person point of view, each story within my triptych can only last as long as the dress is capable of telling it. The following extract is from the end of the part of the story which is told by the dress made of snow:

Her body burns me. I drip down her legs as she goes to a party and all eyes look at her as she dances with a man she's never met before.

He presses himself against me and it is almost unbearable, being melted between two hot bodies.

Her four hours are nearly over and they are still dancing, stepping around the drips I leave on the floor. I am barely here. The young woman doesn't feel that her arms are covered in goosebumps or her lips are flaking or her buttocks are tinged blue. She doesn't notice that her nipples pierce through me or I am thinning into holes against her thighs. The man she is dancing with grips her hand, steps back and looks at her.

She looks at his lips.

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He looks at her body.

As he grips us too tightly again, she notices the clock on the wall and breaks away from him. She runs. Her feet skid on the puddles I've left on the floor.

He calls after her, 'come back!'

He calls after her, 'I love you!'

He calls after her, 'wherever you go, I'll find you!'

The young woman doesn't want to come back. She doesn't want to be loved or pursued by someone she doesn't know. She runs outside into the cold night air and runs fast, and faster.

As she reaches her home her lungs ache from gasping, her body is burning and she can feel every soft hair on her arms and legs. She has spent years lying by a fireside trying not to feel numb. And tonight, for the first time, she ran away from something she didn't want, and escaped. Her heartbeat pounds. She is full of blood. She has forgotten me already because she no longer needs me.

But I have only moments left.

She goes into the kitchen. Lying at the fireside, her thoughts drift through her hair. They float on my steam, out of the window, past the seamstress who lingers outside in the cold.

I trickle through the ashes which coat the young woman's sweating skin.

Falling asleep by the fireside, she dreams.

And I am gone, completely.

The plot of my dress-narrated triptych story, 'The Three Dresses', refers to several common elements of Cinderella texts in recognisable ways. (A young woman lives with her abusive stepmother and wears three dresses on three different nights.) There are magical elements within the reveries and dreams of the Cinderella character (and references to a party/ball, bare feet, the need for escape). The main point of differentiation (and simultaneous defamiliarisation) in the new text is in the agency of the dresses as speaking objects, and their ability to express the relationship between the seamstress who made them, and the young woman. "…both similarity and contagion depend on a shared essence ("mana"), between the object and the representation in similarity, and between the source and the target in contagion" (Nemeroff 2000, 4). The 'sympathetic magic' (Nemeroff's term) between the source text and this triptych relies on similar elements and also contagion. The contagion – what is now being transmitted – relies on the essence of the Cinderella texts – the triptych holds the central theme of the tale type – The Persecuted Heroine. "The stories themselves function as shape-shifters, morphing into new versions of themselves as they are retold and as they migrate into other media" (Tatar 2010, 56). The dresses as speaking objects provide a new way to read the Cinderella story as we consider their affect on the central character. We can also experience, from the perspective of clothing, how it might feel to be worn. Folklorist, Eli Yassif says "the true importance of intertextuality lies in its contribution to the complexity of the text... (creating a) powerful effect of multiple layers and meanings" (Yassif 1997, 57).

The last clause of the above quote reminds me of the last line from John Hall's poem: "caught in a narrative of swinging things and meanings".

What if… these words were written at exactly the same time, though they were penned by different hands, in different locations?

What if… a story is written over and over again, by the same person, in the same location, on the same page?

'The Three Dresses' short story now needs to be hung, in order to become a multi-layered 'swinging thing'. The story is written in the voices of three talking dresses made of snow, darkness and mirrors. I imagine the warp and weft of snow, ink threads so tightly woven they become darkness, and the thickness of a fabric capable of supporting the weight of a shattered mirror mosaic. I have recently been gifted a new fine-lined pen. Its lines look like thin threads of spidersilk.

With the fine-lined pen, I transform the printed story into a twenty page drawing – or a 'drawn story':

THE THREE DRESSES

THE FIRST DRESS

I am snow on a mountain, catching the thoughts and dreams of people as they rise through the air from the valleys below. Whiter than anything else, I am almost silver when the light changes. But when it's night, all the light on this mountain comes from the moon. It glints on the dreams and thoughts as they arrive here, before they rise away further, into the night sky.

One young woman in the valley below has a sharp clarity to her dreams, and they show me she is discontented and neglected. While a full moon moves over me, I glisten and examine her dreams. This young woman sleeps in warm ashes. She dreams of a phoenix and a golden egg. She dreams of a peacock and hen. She dreams of having a mother who loves her. She dreams of dancing and flying and singing. She dreams of leaving her stepmother. She dreams of swimming and painting and reading. She dreams of other families she's seen in her town. She dreams of siblings who never deliberately hurt each other. She dreams of feeling something more than numbness. She dreams of ice cubes and frozen peas and vanilla cream in cones. She dreams of a dress made of snow. She dreams the same dress again.

She wakes, wishing for it.

Drawn Story page 1 of 20. (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

On each page, every letter is linked to another letter with an ink thread. I choose words within the story to reveal, and draw threads pulling away from them. Strands in a visual and textual web appear stretched, about to break. The lines are drawn to the bottom of each page, and page numbers become a vanishing point, creating the illusion of three-dimensional shapes on the flat surface of paper.

The words I've chosen to draw attention to are transcribed in the paragraphs below. Though these words (within the first iteration of this story) belonged to the narrating dresses, in this second iteration they form a condensed narrative which describe the emotional changes within the persecuted young woman:

One young woman dreams deliberate numbness. Her lungs rising, remain soft, fall and send all prayers upwards, transforming warp and weft as breath. She may never return to her thinning body, or her home, the kitchen. By the fireside, she dreams.

Darkness summoned through the eye of a needle

stretches, unthreading light.

For revenge she won't ever love again. Her arms cast no shadows, she can't yet touch her desires:

she is dreaming up ghosts.

She pinches at her fingers, trying to change herself. Her body is some collection of tricks. A puzzle. A toy. Her holes consume her, but her own darkness expands around her and inside the chambers of her heart

she covers her shrieks. She's fragments, becoming a whole thing. And now she believes in stars and ash, bruise and door. The young woman reaches for trouble in gloved hands. She wants hooks and cold knives, sharp silver lips, a cracked heart to fill with Doubles of herself

in a hungry embrace.

The 'drawn story' version of 'The Three Dresses' has the illusion of a tactile surface, as the threads appear as if they could have been woven or sewn[58]. The visual metaphor of interwoven threads mirrors the intertextual process of re-telling folkloric texts, and the threads simultaneously connect with four of the characters in the story: the three narrating dresses and the seamstress who makes them. The text remains legible and the addition of drawn threads slows down the process of reading.

As the drawing of threads adds illustrative and metaphoric (web-like / woven / threaded) layers, each section of the triptych is repeatedly photocopied onto three pages of watercolour paper to make it illegible, rendering the next iteration of the story a purely visual version. There is tone and line, density and texture, and again, the illusion of shapes on the flat surface of each page.

And yet when black text on white paper is rendered illegible, as Craig Dworkin explains,

> the material text cannot ever completely escape from the republic of signification; it simply crosses the border from the "literary" to that of "visual" art. (C. Dworkin 2003, 48)

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[58] In 2019, the drawn story version of *The Three Dresses* was accepted for print publication in Seam Edition's (UK) *Slant Anthology* after an international call out for creative and critical writing on the theme of feminism. Sadly, Seam Editions closed prior to publication, due to financial and staffing issues in 2020.

Drawn Story part 1 of 3. (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

As a visual image, text becomes web-like, layered and woven in appearance, but the story is lost in the threads. Visuality obtains agency (in a hierarchical sense) over the text. For the next iteration of this drawn story, I consider adding more *textual* layers. Under what circumstances do different texts co-exist on the same page? Is there a hierarchical relationship between them, or do they have equal significance? Historically, a 'palimpsest' is a book or manuscript which contains a newer text transcribed over an older text. Palimpsests were sometimes written across each other in horizontal or vertical re-writings, with the pages being rebound and refolded. Palimpsests were made because vellum, papyrus or paper was rare and expensive. The process of making a palimpsest could be seen as an early form of recycling and an example of textual hierarchies, as more relevant texts would be written over partially erased older texts which had lost their value or relevance in some way. This textual hierarchy has been reversed since the mid-nineteenth century, as historians seek to recover or resurrect the underlying texts(s) (Dillon 2007, 65). Since 1845, the word 'palimpsest' has been used in a conceptual sense across a variety of disciplines, and is often used to describe interdisciplinary encounters – in a literal and figurative sense (Dillon 2007, 2). As literary theorist Sarah Dillon explains, the concept of a palimpsest is "…an involuted phenomenon where otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other" (Dillon 2007, 4). The word 'involuted' refers to the term, 'involute' (involved / intricate) – which Dillon attributes to literary writer, Thomas De Quincey, who first introduced 'the palimpsest' as a conceptual term in 1845. Dillon elaborates by saying, "The adjective 'involuted' describes the relationship between the texts that inhabit the palimpsest as a result of its palimpsesting and subsequent textual reappearance."

If I select another text as an additional layer to interact with 'The Three Dresses', an additional process of printing the drawn story onto pages (which could contain *either* unrelated *or* related text) allows the verb palimpsesting to be added to this iterative exploration of the story's potential for visual, tactile, and intertextual encounters. Pages from a vintage fairy tale book, and antique lesson books from thrift shops are selected to work with (as these have large pages and my drawn short story is on A4 paper). For the first set of pages, I remove the surface of the pages of the fairy tale book by repeatedly tearing off the inks with masking tape that lifts the text off the page, and curls into itself.

Bowl of Deletions (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)
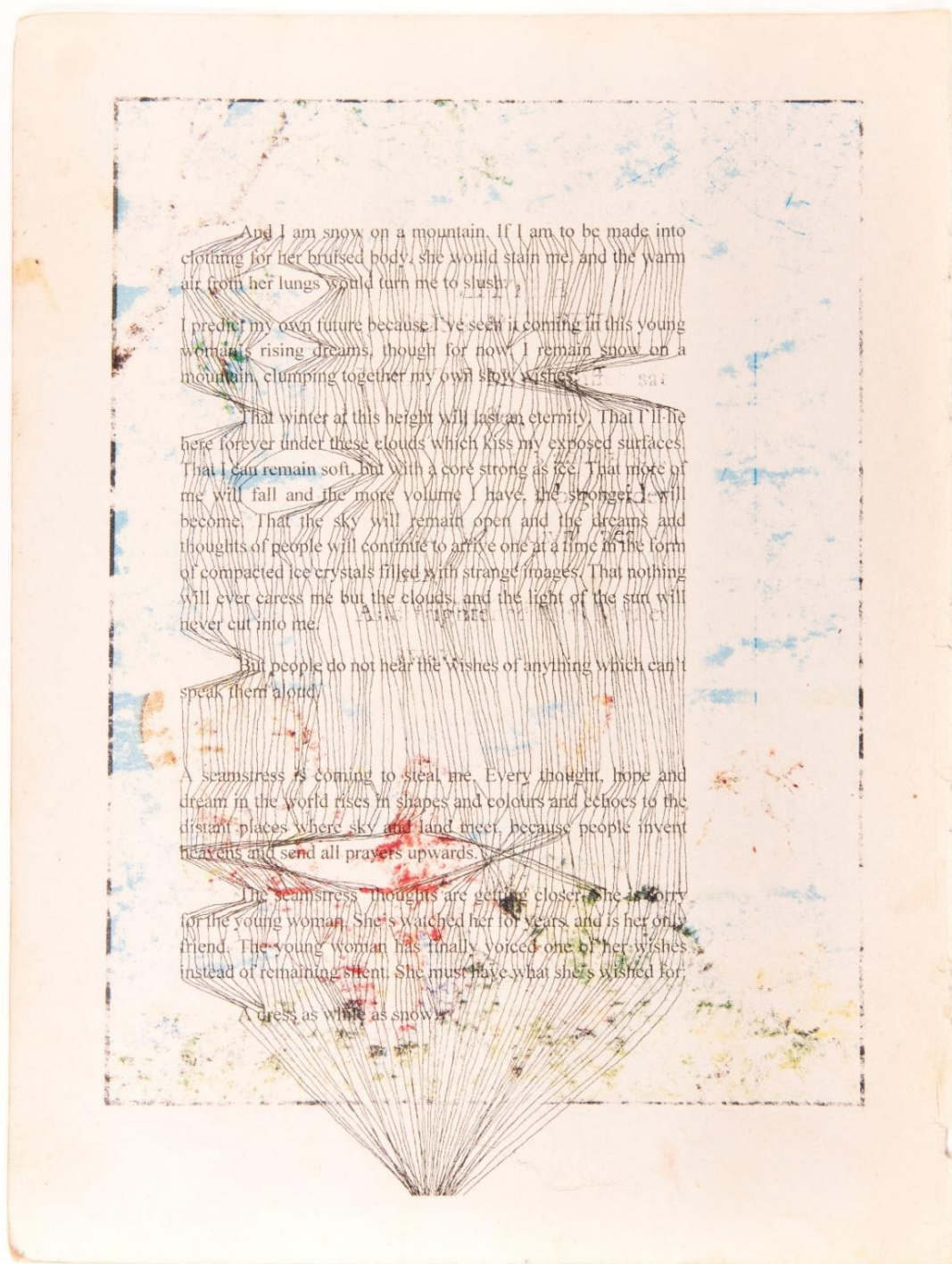
Palimpsest (detail) (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

Combined with the illusion of threads, the traces of the previous text visually disrupt the perception of the short story as a linear narrative. But as the words are still legible, the drawn story has a hierarchical position as the primary text on this page, while the previous text is reduced to ghostly traces.

Palimpsest (detail) (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

The second set of pages are torn from a thin-paged antique lesson book. The printed text is visually dense and includes intricate diagrams and drawings. There are implied hierarchical relationships in the interactions between the lesson pages and my story: of teacher / student, adult / child, information / story. The underlying text is disrupted by repeatedly photocopying my story on each page, so the threads have a woven textural appearance and the short story text becomes mainly illegible. The surface has the illusion of being three-dimensional, and it is difficult to establish whether printed text or threaded image has greater value. Around the edges, words can be read in horizontal lines or vertical columns.

Palimpsest (detail) (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

For the third and final set of pages, the drawn story is photocopied onto pages from a book about birds. This book is chosen because "the connection between birds and poetry" is frequently recognised in literary criticism as a figurative one. (Dillon 2007, 59) By figurative connection, I mean the use of metaphor, simile, or comparison – for example, the word 'bird' has connotations which can evoke thoughts on freedom, entrapment, the brutality or beauty of nature, the joy of flying or being part of a

flock, or desperate isolation, etc.[59] The use of the bird book is an intentional prompt for the reader/viewer to attempt to read the layered texts as either prose, or image, or as textual fragments with figurative connections. These pages[60] are then copied again onto another set of antique pages of lessons. The textual layers in this final set now come from three texts: my drawn short story, the bird-book, and the antique lesson book.

The links between a drawn short story that is a retelling of the Cinderella tale, the pages of lessons for children, and the descriptions of birds are vague, opening up many possibilities for a variety of readings, especially given that "in the process of reading the reader adds yet another text to the palimpsest's involuted surface" (Dillon 2007, 83). On this final set of pages, three texts "collide and collude" (Dillon 2007, 5) on the frail surface of the pages.

The process of reading has been visually disrupted. In attempting to read a page, my eyes are drawn to an illustration of a bird and the words which are closest to the bird's eyes – 'princes' and 'look'. As I continue my attempts to engage with this page as a reader/viewer, I become aware of the intention and choice involved in the reading process. Should we read only what is fully legible or attempt to decipher the illegible text, read the text layered over an illustration, or follow the words which run broken down the side of the page? There is a search for meaning, for connection, for narrative. It is possible to return to the same page and make different connections each time. These pages also provide unique sentences:

Expert climbers and stubborn princes pretended to claim castles.

Strong competitive forces: mistaken power as there is in hand-to-hand tussles.

Deliberate hearers tell vanilla cream – smother over the fact.

On another page, these words are printed on the neck of a swan:

Write the + between them, like quantities. Before the brackets, brackets may result. Her eyes redden. By brackets is meant: this is one of use – a single quantity within themselves. Thin both, within signs and multiplied -cx ; or, if multiplied by quantities…

C = e ; then, factors Zxy + oxy –bcd – nbcd.

PS or that pxyx + qxyz –

Expressions of this blue.

She doesn't sign before thinning the results. Brackets changed, dancing with grips: 3bc – 6d + bg, and 2d + y + 3x + b.

These may be arranged thus: he looks at her body and the sum will be...

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[59] In a fiction writing class I taught to a community group of adults in 2019 (the session topic was dialogue) I provided the participants with a list of twenty possible 'dialogue lines' and asked them to select one of these to use as a writing prompt. 50% of the class chose the one line which contained the word 'bird'. The writing produced by the participants who used this line contained emerging themes concerned with: freedom, romantic relationships, entrapment, and escape.

[60] The antique pages are used to add a third text to the third set of pages in the palimpsest, and also to resolve aesthetic issues caused by the smooth surfaces and bright images of the bird book.

Despite adding punctuation to the above transcript, the meaning is vague and unstable. The text provides an intriguing metaphor – comparing sums and heterosexual romantic relationships. In the last sentence above, the nouns provide something concrete to focus on. What are the connotations of the words, *body* and *sum*, when they are placed within an ambiguous sentence? This will vary for different people. For one person the words, *her body*, could evoke an image of a feminine form. And a *he* is looking. The male gaze brings connotations. *Her body* could also evoke the image of a female corpse. What is the sum of a corpse; a logical problem, the answer to the cause of *her death*, or is this sum of *her body* an impossible test?

In the following quote, Dillon quotes Barthes in order to explain that the relationships between layered texts are entirely created by the reader:

> It is thus a process of reading that attempts to negotiate, and do justice to, the interrelatedness of the texts on the palimpsest's surface. In doing so, it does not dissect the palimpsest, taking its layers apart. Rather, 'in the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled,* nothing *deciphered;* the structure can be followed, "run" (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced' (Barthes, 1977). Since the texts of the palimpsest bear no necessary relation to each other, palimpsestuous reading is an inventive process of creating relations where there may, or should, be none. As such, it always runs the risk of being false or fictitious. (Dillon 2007, 83)

As a fiction writer, I am fascinated by this notion of the 'fictitious' as a 'risk'. I am far more interested, in this instance, about whether people will engage with the palimpsest visually, or textually, or both. If we view the intertextual relationships between texts as a three-way non-hierarchical interaction between writer/maker, text/image, and reader/viewer, the infinite textual associations are vague and unstable, often instinctive, often at the level of the unconscious. The idea of reading as an 'inventive' process highlights the originality of thought which can be evoked when perception is altered by texts interacting because they have been visually defamiliarised.

> Where there is writing – or something that looks like writing – there is always something to read. Resistance in one layer might re-route reading to another. (Hall 2013, 88)

Palimpsest (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

I hang the palimpsest with pegs and string in a gallery space within a library. A few visitors spend a long amount of time with it, standing close to the pages, reading the story, and attempting to 'read' or 'invent' connections between layered words and images. Others spend less time with it and stand further away, viewing the palimpsest as an image or focussing on the tactile and aesthetic qualities of book

pages. The vintage and antique pages contain acid. Their surfaces deteriorate under bright lights – exposed to air they darken and develop freckles. Though some people stop to look or read, others rush to the library counter, return a book and quickly leave. They barely notice the palimpsest is there. They don't see that the same drawn story has been copied repeatedly, and that each version is different. They don't see that there are now many different ways to read it. I try not to watch people interact with it, glance at or ignore it, and yet I am often drawn back to observe the small changes on the surface of the pages, or watch hopefully for someone to spend time with it, reading. I am now at a distance from the processes of writing and reading – an anonymous observer who is occupying a space in the air.

The palimpsest pages require the reader/viewer to enter into imaginative negotiations with layers of illegible and legible words. My intention, that the pages are slowly read, and slowly invented, is not often how they are engaged with in the context of this busy library. However, John Hall explains that even brief encounters with il/legible texts can result in some form of 'reading':

> Consciousness of legibility is already a kind of il/legibility, is a material reminder of the material processes of reading and as a force cannot ever mark an absence of meaning-affect-effect. You can always walk away but already something has happened. A mark that belongs to writing is always a mark or trace of utterance as well as an instance of a writing system. As sign of utterance it will always provoke some form of psycho-graphological reading, however casual. (Hall 2013, 90)

It is entirely possible to casually glance at the surface images and experience a mark, a trace, a writing system, while walking past, but my intention for the palimpsest remains the same – these pages should be slowly read and invented. They include a legible short story and multiple layers of text, and as such need privacy and time. "Palimpsestuous reading is caught up in the palimpsestuous intimacy of security and insecurity" (Dillon 2007, 83). As the library's doors open and close, the palimpsest moves gently, caught in the draught. The pages are frail, temporal. Insecure, unfixed. The palimpsest looks like a ghost: here and not here. I am also here and not here. A ghost writer, silently looking at ghost words.

I am remembering vulnerability. I am silently considering untellable and tellable stories as "a narrative of swinging things and meanings".

I am remembering the performance of objects. I am remembering the performance of words. I am remembering the performance of silence. As I watch antique paper consuming itself as it moves in a draught, I am remembering real people from another moment in time, as if they are invisibly here beside me, and time only pretends to be linear. Memories are a palimpsest. What did John Hall say about the words I was writing in 1993?

"From that moment on, they were there to be seen."

Narratives don't have to be linear. It is March, 2019. I am in a library, looking at a palimpsest hanging on a wall. It is March, 1993. I am at Dartington College of Arts, looking at a ploughed field. Frost is forming in layers on the soil. I want to scrape stories into it, using my fingertips. I want to scrape them in, and then scrape them in deeper, over and over again. I don't want to speak them. I want them to be seen by the moon, the stars, the sun, the clouds. The earthworms, the grubs, the soil.

All of these silent things are as silent as I am.

And here I am again, in 2019, writing words "to be seen".

Writing with Un/Seen words

This section introduces the next stage of the research project, which expands on the previous exploration of book pages, and examines what kinds of writing might be produced by using whole books, not just as source texts, but as sources of text. The performative process of engaging with books as material objects is fully described as books are folded in slow and meditative ways, redaction techniques are experimented with, and these processes result in a new short story, 'The Bookbird' being written. This process sought to remedy my sadness about the books that were on sale tables in thrift shops, and recent news about more libraries closing down. In a departure from the previous unstable and at times random textual associations created by layered texts, during the next stage of the project, precision of textual selection is explored.

A few boxes of novels, novellas, short story collections, memoirs, non-fiction books, fairy tale books, poetry collections, etc. are obtained from thrift shops. These books, if unsold, would have been buried as landfill. An initial experiment in redaction involves using a black pen to draw around or score out words in a novel I have no respect for. In this particular experiment, I am drawn in to an attempt to analyse the words contained within this book (because of being baffled by its success). The book is abandoned at the end of chapter five as the vocabulary is limited and repetitive.
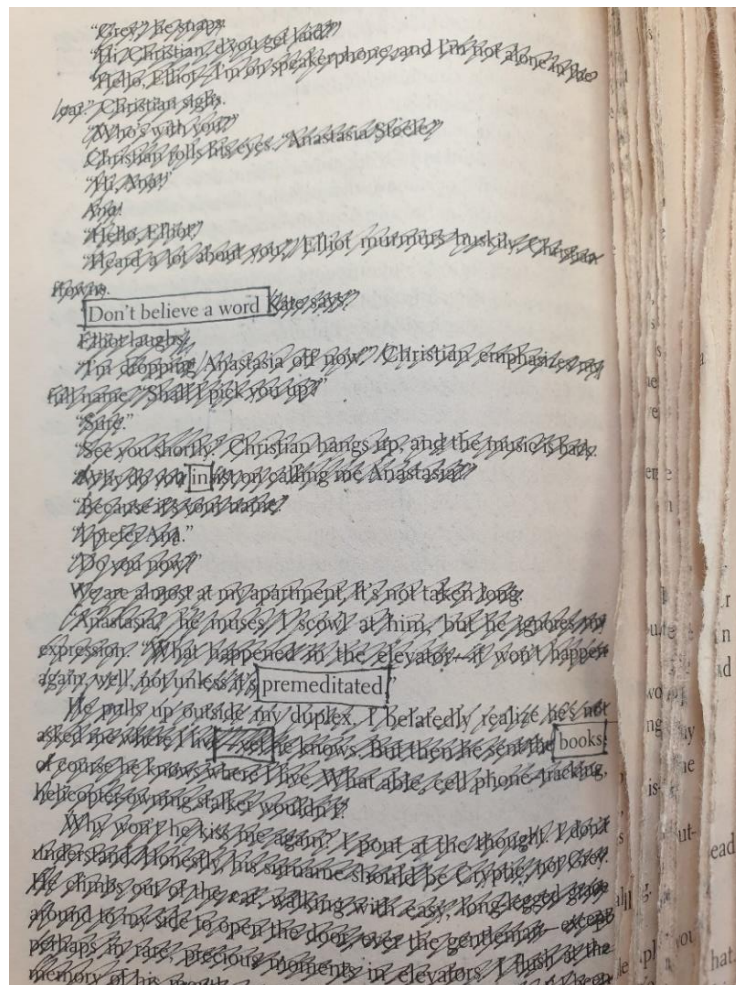
Premeditated Book

This is the wrong direction – in looking to analyse the text within a book, I have deviated from my intentions[61]. Instead of looking for words to interrogate or remove, words need to be sought that will be raised from the existing text, to be included in a new piece of fiction.

Redaction is a slow writing process, where the writer's vocabulary choices interact with the re-writer's selection processes. It is a precise method which requires attention, curiosity and interest to be sustained over a long duration. The words which are chosen therefore need to be valuable.

Alone with a pile of books, I consider how to slowly read/re-write them. With my eyes, or using all the senses? I sit with the books for a long time, examining them with hands and eyes, exploring the sensory experience of turning the pages – eyes noticing certain words, moving left to right. The smells of paper and cardboard, old threads and dust. The tactility of the pages, the sensation of fingertips becoming dry. Pages turn as sunlight shifts gradually across deteriorating paper. Threads forming the spines are unravelling. All books might be considered temporal objects, if libraries continue to be closed down, if more books are digitised, and independent bookshops continue to shut.

As a writer, storyteller, and reader, these thoughts are sad and distressing.

What if… as a species, books are dying?

How do you kill a book? What would a book-murder, a book-suicide, a book-disease be like? What about a book-haunting? How do you resurrect a dead book?

Blurring my eyes, I examine the shapes and texture of printed words on pages and attempt to break a spine, listening for the crack of old glue or the snap of threads.

Is this book-death, is this violence?

What is a book, anyway?

A block of words sewn to a spine, or a repository of vocabulary choices, paper bound, threaded and glued in place, or – a limited palette of words instead of colours.

I fold the corner of a page which contains an interesting phrase. A splash of word-colour. Guilt. This book is a hardback and might have once been valuable to someone. I fold the page again, diagonally across the centre of the page so the crease cuts across words. The sentence structures are disrupted. Words are hidden inside the folds, and more are hidden by folding other pages.

My intention is that the book will become a sculptural object and a potential writing tool – full of unpredictable writing prompts. But this book is a tightly-bound hardback, and once all the pages are folded the book is a decorative object and the pages can no longer open wider.

The once-frail book is stronger, but illegible:

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[61] For an example of book redaction that is conceptually driven (in that the idea which informs the process seeks to expose, analyse or highlight a particular aspect of an existing text) see Yedda Morrison's *Darkness* (Morrison 2012) - this is a redacted version of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. On Morrison's website (Morrison 2008), this redacted version is described as a 'biocentric reading' – the process used was to erase all mentions of humans, which left much space on the page and brought Conrad's textual descriptions of 'nature' into focus. Morrison's website also includes documentation of a 'biocentric reading' of a series of photographs, rather than text. Here, Morrison's photographs are close-up photographs of 'nature' contained within the photographs of an issue of American *Vogue*.

Folded Decorative Book
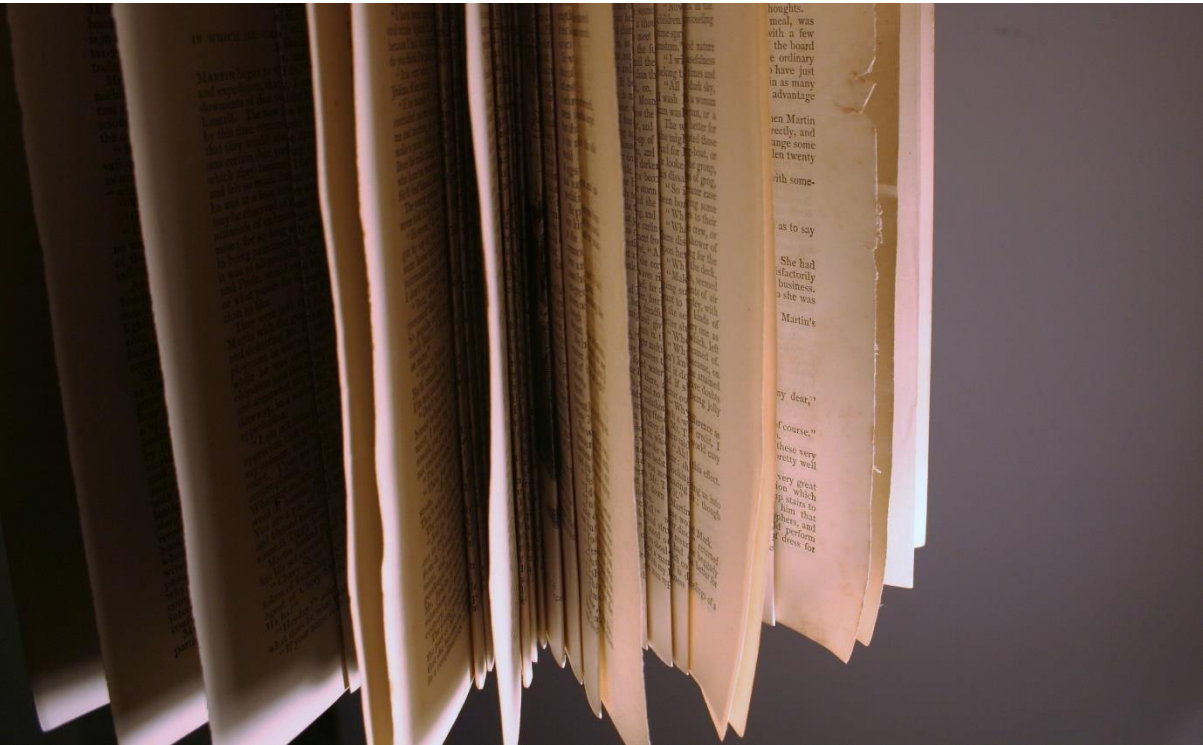
Folded Book (detail)

Taking another book, I fold the pages into vertical columns of different widths, leaving occasional pages unfolded. Again, once the whole book has been folded, it is stronger, but can no longer be closed or opened. The only visible text is contained in the columns running down the edges of unfolded pages.

I think of other shapes paper can be folded into:

Paper boats, aeroplanes, hats, origami shapes.

Overlapping edges of old paper become feathery, like wings.

I fold another book using a paper aeroplane shape, and more text remains visible.

And another, changing the width and direction of the folds, overlapping the page edges.

The process becomes performative.

The body sits quietly, hands moving as books are folded into three-dimensional shapes.

More shapes are needed. More sculptural possibilities.

I reach for a scalpel knife.

Folded Book Sculptures. (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

As I cut and fold pages, story ideas surface: about papery characters, or architectural structures – libraries with words printed all over their walls for miniature people to read. The book sculptures are small angry creatures with sharp edges, who aspire to make papercuts in skin. Perhaps I will write a tiny story for each of them to read, so they can become 'talking books'.

The shapes develop and change as I cut and fold more and more books.

A narrative for a story is emerging – not from the text within the books, as initially intended, but on the theme of 'transformation'.

Gathering Books (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

As I finish one book and reach for another, the folded books are placed on the floor around my feet. When viewed from this angle, they look like a gathering of birds, waiting for a story to be read.

Over a month, sixty folded books are made. I spend time arranging them on a studio floor as an installation, photographing them individually, from a distance, close up. I try to read them, but their material forms and the presence of the camera distract me from their text. Though other people who see these folded books in the studio environment compare them to a small city, or corals, or odd objects with individual personalities, no one attempts to read them. A few people ask me about folding techniques and ask for demonstrations so they can make their own 'book sculptures'. These books have crossed a boundary – instead of being fictional texts, they are sculptural forms.

Within the context of 'bookworks' or 'book art' (altered books which are shown in gallery contexts) many books are revitalised in material, sculptural and visual forms, often without the text from the book being visible at all. In *Bookwork: Medium to Object to Concept to Art*, Garrett Stewart says that book art "…gives us, like all conceptual art, less the thing itself than ideas about the thing". He elaborates as follows:

> …this abstractive process often begins with the reduction of the functional paginated form from proverbial tool of literacy to mere material form, from instrumental cultural transmission to raw geometric thing. With which, then, there is nothing to do but have ideas about it. (Stewart 2011, 10)

The overwriting of textuality by material form is an unexpected moment in this research project, as my focus is on writing new fictional narratives. However, the *ideas* the folded books have provoked are a good prompt for a new piece of fiction. These books are material objects, and an odd flock of birds. Ideas about birds made from books become more significant than the text contained within these books. Fleeting, fragile paper birds would wrinkle up and be destroyed by rain and storms. *What if…* these thoughts were reversed – *what if…* paper birds were strong? *What if…* paper birds were luminous and eternal hybrid creatures? These thoughts evoke sadness as I look at these objects my hands have altered, and see them again as about-to-be-buried books from thrift shops. I rescued them from landfill, and have taken their stories away. Have I committed book-murder? But these objects, as a group, don't seem dead. They have agency. They are gathered around my feet, as if they desire a story. *What if…* I had a story to read that I'd written just for them? What kind of story would they like?

A story about a book which transforms into a bird.

A Bookbird

The following process list summarises the process thus far and includes additional stages:

CO-WRITING WITH BOOKS

Buy a selection of books from sale tables in thrift shops.
Fold the pages so the books have new shapes.
Fill a floor with them.
Take photographs of them.
Spend time with them and consider what they want to become.
Choose one folded book and redact the text so the words which are left visible tell the story of the book's transformation.
Type up these words as a transcript.
Write a short story about the book's transformation using the words from the transcript.
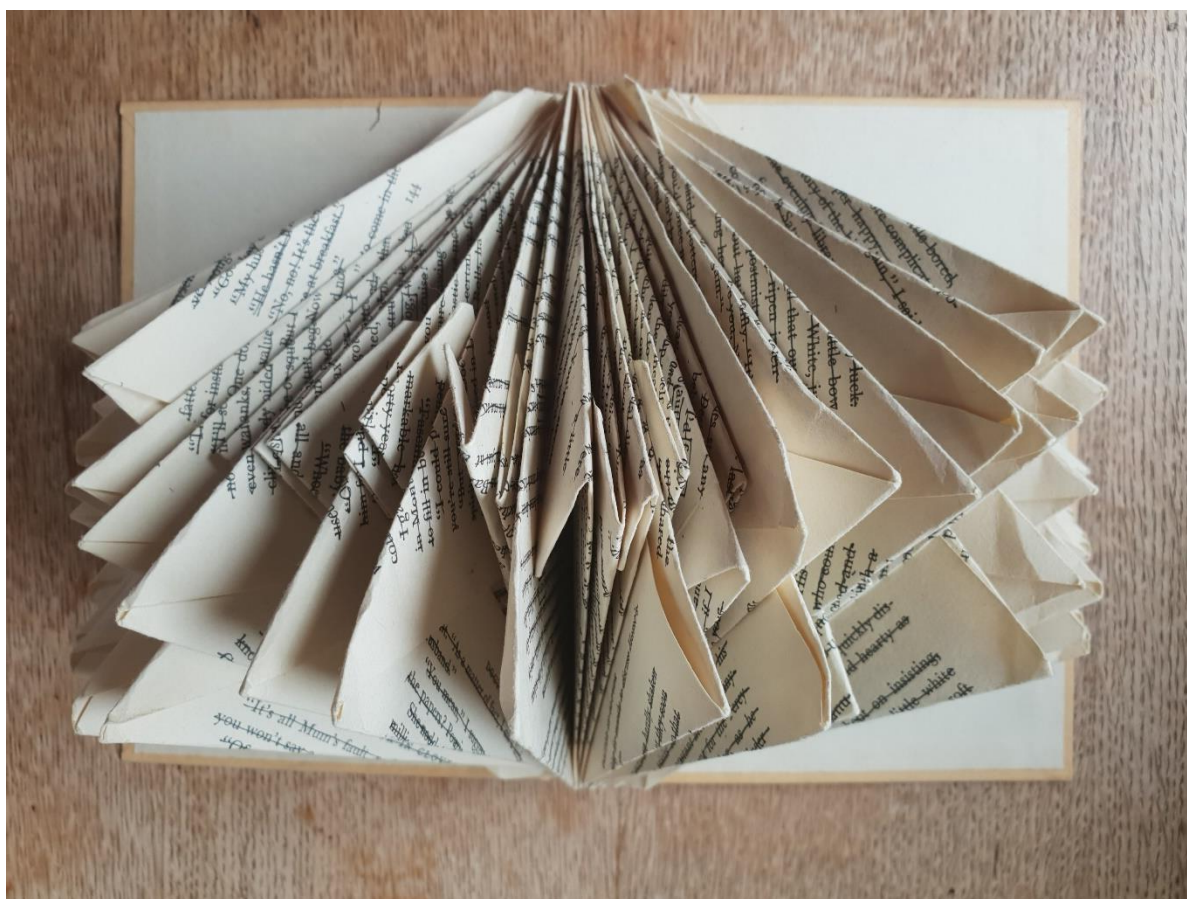
Folded and Redacted Bookbird

The folded book chosen to be redacted is a hardback copy of a novel: *Doctor in Clover* by Richard Gordon[62]. The illusion of independent agency is now applied to this folded book object. I temporarily believe this folded book is the narrator of its own story, and will tell me the narrative of how it

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[62] Published in 2008 by House of Stratus, Kelly Bray, UK.

transforms. The word 'bird' appears on a few pages within the book, though I have to unfold and refold some of the pages to make this word visible. While redacting the text using a black pen to score out or highlight words, the new phrases that emerge express a sense of insecurity:

The trouble is, I'm not the shining figure of a fairy godmother.

Expecting to charm on the grinding machine but having to be off it.

The emerging 'book narrator' is worried about their identity and what's expected of them. The redaction process is used to obtain more information about the narrator as a character. It is worried about its own story, which 'isn't gripping enough'. So another narrative layer is emerging from the folded book – which is about the content of the book narrator's own fictional text. This fictional text is being 'written' at the same time as I am trying to 'write' this transformation story. The book narrator also critiques its own imaginary text, in order to expand on the reasons behind its insecurities.

Once I have finished redacting the whole book, some of my word selections are only there because I have been trying to empathise with the book narrator's concerns and develop it as a character. There is an emerging story which is written in fragmented phrases. The plot of a short story is now clear to me, but only in the interaction between textual fragments, a character, and the imagination.

The following transcript is from the beginning of the redacted book, and is enough to make me empathise with the book narrator and evoke the illusion of independent agency: ('/' indicates page breaks)

Believe me, I'm / bad as / the worst / hushed whisper in the snow / I can only hope as / precisely / as an icicle in fact to think of anything else / with large opinions is / like occasional glass. / I don't think there's anything as cheerful as the reek of a / conjurer / in the evenings / I can wreck / your terribly amusing story about being a doctor when midnight struck / I'm a little blonde / incapable of another voice / so turn down the lights / I'm trusting so sell me useless tips on zebra crossings / Strangers have me in knots of / acute anxiety I couldn't reveal before, sorry for my tears.

This extract is the beginning of my short story, 'The Bookbird':

Believe me, I'm as insecure as a hushed whisper in the snow. With black words on white paper I can only hope to be opened, so at least a part of me can make some kind of sound. The hope I feel is as precise as an icicle, and while I wait for eyes to fall on my pages, any large opinions which I let myself have feel like occasional glass – a thing to be hidden away till the grandest guest appears and grants all my invisible wishes.

But there is no guest, so my hopes and wishes remain private.

I'm on a shelf in a cabaret bar and I don't think I've ever encountered anything as cheerful as the reek of a conjurer in the evenings, though the performers are never interested in me. Beside me is a book containing a terribly amusing story about being some kind of sex doctor, and that one is occasionally chosen by members of the audience. It's read aloud in fragments, passed about, laughed at, and replaced.

On the other side of me is a celebrity cookbook, which remains as untouched as I am.

The audience flick through screens on their phones more often than they pick up any dust-gathering book. They seem to mainly read comments about photographs they take of themselves. I do admire them for illustrating their lives in pictures and words. Proving they exist. I have nothing to prove I exist apart from these bound pages and the hardback cover I was once so proud of. I wonder if any of them will ever write a novel on their phones about what other people have said about their photographs.

The cabaret acts are all in fragments as well. Short sequences. Any longer than a few minutes, audience members start to cough, talk to each other, or look at their phones again. When midnight strikes, the stage lights go out and all the people leave the bar.

I have been loved in the past, but have been left behind. Perhaps all books feel abandoned. We need time spent on us, without interruption.

I dream of being picked up and carried out of here, of being opened under other lights – a bedside lamp or a streetlight or angle poise.

I dream of reading lights on aeroplanes, the changing colours of traffic lights.

I dream of parks, floodlit at night, and my most perfect dream is of being held open for hours in the countryside under sunshine.

But I sit here on this shelf in the cabaret bar where strangers sit beneath me each night, candle-lit for most of the evening. At times, the idea of being read by them has my spine in knots of acute anxiety, sometimes wishing for their tears to fall on my pages and smudge away all my ink words which don't fully express any of my own puzzle thoughts. I didn't choose the story I contain: it was never really mine, and yet, it is the only story I can tell.

This book narrator believes that the library represented its home, community, and family. In the story all the libraries have closed down, so the book feels abandoned and neglected. It is knocked into someone's handbag and escapes from the cabaret bar. Outside in the city, it is granted a wish by a strange bird who perches on the wires which criss-cross in the sky. After being carried to a hospital its whole story is read for the first time in years by 'a beautiful nurse'. The book is then rescued by the strange bird, and taken to the countryside where its wish is fulfilled.

The relationships between texts have woven a complex web in this short story: the text from within one book has become part of a new short story, in which a book narrator is talking about its own imaginary narrative, and comparing itself unfavourably to other imaginary texts. The book within my story also has conversations with an imaginary poetry book, makes observations about the text and images on imaginary magazine pages, has memories about other books it knew in a library, and reads its own imaginary review. It also critiques its own imaginary narrative and has no confidence in the love story it contains: "A problem is missing from my story. The couple love each other, but nothing ever goes wrong."

Despite these complexities, the plot can be expressed in one sentence: An abandoned book transforms into an exuberant bird. Contained within this short story is also my own sadness about physical books becoming landfill, or being transformed and never read again, and my concerns about libraries closing down. At its core, this story is a wish: for books to have a brighter, and lighter, future.

What if… there are multiple possibilities for new texts within every single discarded book?

A Humument by Tom Phillips is a rare example of a mass-produced altered book. Phillips combines painted images and text throughout the pages of W H Mallock's novel, *A Human Document.* Phillips has been working on this vast project since 1966, and published the final (7th) edition in 2017. Over this timespan, Phillips has used several copies of *A Human Document* and additional images are pasted onto

the paintings in later editions. In all editions of *A Humument* the selected words are linked by black-outlined white lines which curve between words and sentences: "meandering rivers in the typography" (Phillips 2017, Endnotes).

Initially influenced by the elements of 'chance' explored in the textual experiments of William Burroughs and John Cage, Phillips describes the narrative as follows:

> Inasmuch as A Humument tells a story, it could be described as a dispersed narrative with more than one possible order; more like a pack of cards than a continuous tale. Even in the revision I still have not tackled the pages in numerical order. (Phillips 2017, Endnotes)

Novelist / book artist Johanna Drucker suggests that bookworks (a broad term, incorporating book art) are often in the format of a one-off object because there isn't an "obvious audience" so a commercial or literary publisher wouldn't consider it viable for mass-production. Phillips is one of the few exceptions in terms of mass-production, perhaps due to his unique combinations of paintings and text.

Drucker sees bookworks as entirely different to writing novels:

> in a longer, literary prose text, the things I'm interested in have more to do with storytelling than the materiality of text or its visuality, whereas with book art I want to explore certain possibilities of the book format and language format. (Drucker 1999, 147)

Stewart illuminates these distinctions between practices further and simultaneously considers the potential fate of material books when he writes,

> In normal reading, books are to some degree vaporized by attention. Intermittently at least, they disappear as mechanical objects and weighted things. Museum exposure slows or blocks this process, whether to elegize it or reinvigorate its recognition. In gallery rather than library, books are therefore subsumed to the kind of metaphors in which their pages so often normally traffic… Books are manifolds as well as iconic objects, mechanisms first, then journeys, worlds. Book art moves to shape, operate, map, and occupy these assumptions too. So with the book as tomb. And so on… and on… until, perhaps, finally… The book in a museum is what all books may become. (Stewart 2011, xviii)

While acknowledging my own fear of the fate of books ('the book as tomb') I will continue to work with the material and visual qualities of books (as artefacts) but (unlike most practices described as bookwork / book art) give more focus to the *narrative* potential of text by incorporating fiction writing into the process of transforming physical copies of books.

The other broad conceptual field (in addition to bookworks / book art) that is worth considering at this point is artists' books.[63] In the chapter, "Books as Verbal Exploration," Drucker explores the textual content of artists' books, which is often manipulated in various ways (by printing, drawing, handwriting, redaction, etc.) Drucker makes a clear distinction between artists' books which "use language" and ones which are "actually written."

While writing the short story, 'The Bookbird,' fiction writing, visuality and materiality are all part of the process of writing[64]. A brief survey of artists' books reveals that the potential for hybridity is vast,

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[63] The potential for hybridity at the intersections of art, writing, image, form is exemplified by the range of artists' books explored in Drucker's *The Century of Artists' Books.* Here, Drucker describes the history of artists' books as "a field which belies the linear notion of history with a single point of origin." (Drucker 2004, 11)

[64] At a later stage in the project, I return to this short story, and incorporate it into a transformed book. The iteration of *The Bookbird* as a transformed book is illustrated from page 107 onwards.

in terms of multiple possibilities of form and content. Drucker describes the "material properties and linguistic resonance" of *written* artists' books:

> In such works the sonoric aspects of language such as rhythm, texture, timing, and also the visual aspects are brought into the book form as part of its substance. (Drucker 2004, 227)

At this point, a question emerges: can individual copies of books be resurrected, via writing, via narrative, before they become tombs? As objects, can they become vivid and alive, like the Bookbird in my story?

What if… ghosts of other stories are trapped inside books[65]? *What if…* I produce one-off book objects which incorporate: fiction writing, visuality and materiality in equal amounts? *What if…* new fictional narratives are written from within the older texts?

Now 'The Bookbird' short story is written, other books can be approached with trust in the process – that with certain rules and restrictions in place, a new narrative can be written from within a text.

At this stage I move away from using folkloric texts as a starting point for new fictional texts and reverse this process: the text in old books will be used to write fragmented fictional narratives containing folkloric elements.

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[65] Many of the key themes explored throughout the creative project are drawn from folkloric texts and used to write short stories. These include the use of archetypal characters: Emperors / Kings / Witches / Lovers / Hunters / Fools. Within the short stories are many examples of societal hierarchies, power and control, the effects of cruelty, poverty, hunger and gender power relations. Gender violence, in particular, haunts these stories. (See Angela Carter on the 'latent content' of fairytales (Carter 1979).) Other stories have ghosts as well, for example, imperialism is present within two of the thrift shop books which are redacted during the next stage of this project.

Redacting Books / Reduction of Text

This section describes the process of writing fiction by redacting the text contained within old books. Redaction materials are chosen which enhance each book as a material and tactile object. Half-redactions are explored and described as 'textual whispers'. The redaction process is a precise and extremely slow method of selecting text. As the redacted books are defamilarised in visual, textual, and material ways, each book becomes a unique artefact which challenges the viewer/reader's perception.
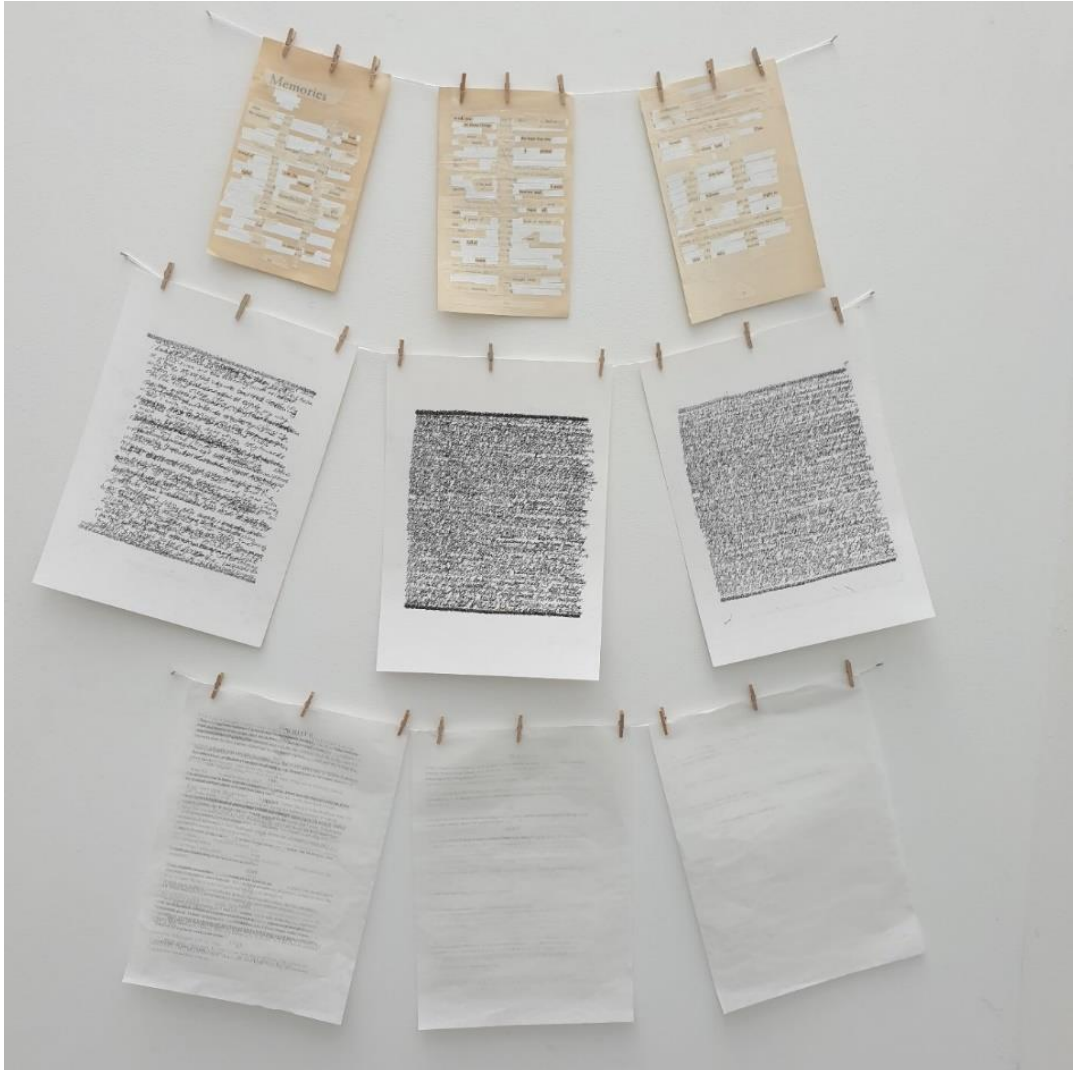
Test pages (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

After trying out various materials and techniques for their drying time, visual and material qualities the redaction materials selected are cream-coloured masking tape and white correction tape.
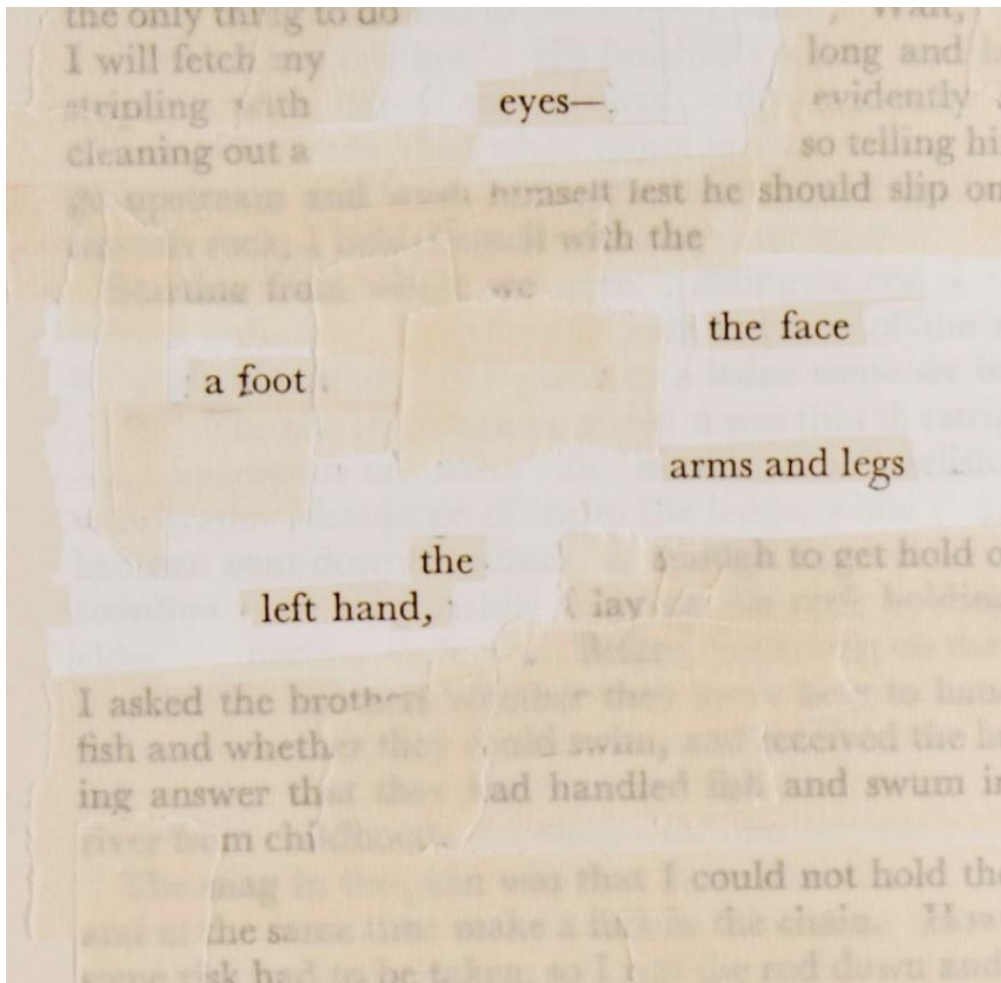
Masking Tape and Correction Tape (detail)

The white correction tape can completely blank out the underlying text, or be used to lighten the area around a particular word, visually drawing attention to it. The cream-coloured masking tape is slightly translucent – the masked text, or *half-redaction* becomes another half-seen layer – a textual whisper. Adding additional masking tape layers makes the underlying text blurred, illegible, or invisible and can also create relief shapes or images on the page's surface.

The visual qualities of these layers allude to palimpsests, but the verb, palimpsesting, is not an accurate description of the process used in this instance[66]. This is a process of construction from within a text, rather than destruction – printed words are treated as a limited palette of words instead of colours[67].

To use tapes and text as materials for redaction is to be engaged in a labour-intensive method, which slows down the writing process significantly. The physical manipulation of materials – the tearing and placing of masking tape, is much slower than handwriting or typing. By adding layers of masking tape, the pages become thicker, increasing the volume and weight of the transformed book.

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[66] The redacted books, once completed, can't be described by the *noun* palimpsest either, as palimpsests typically involve at least two unrelated texts, one being *overwritten* by the other.

[67] While redacting, if names, locations and dates are removed first, the text is displaced. The book becomes a source of text, rather than a source text. At some later stage it may be worth exploring what affect the *inclusion* of names, locations and dates has on a book's redacted or altered text.

The slow pace of working with these materials is slowed still further by the precise selection process. The hunt for the right words, the hoped-for words, the alternative words, the new directions considered when the anticipated words aren't there, the hunt for other words which will do well, or do better…

CO-WRITING WITH BOOKS

Read the first and the last page of a book and find mirrored words.
Remove names, locations, dates.
Follow a theme and chase a fictional narrative.
Work through the whole book, hiding words.
Make definite decisions: no erased words can be restored.
Condense the words to the bare minimum.
Half-hide more of these words until the book whispers like a ghost.

Examining the first and last pages of a book while considering the infinite possibilities of the geno-text: the multiple texts which the text could have been, and could become, is complex and overwhelming. But by examining the language at word level in the first instance, limits can be defined. By removing geographical locations, dates, and names, the text is displaced – mimicking the geographic and temporal displacement common to many folkloric texts.

The selection process involves hunting for the kinds of words I would anticipate using while writing a text in a folkloric style:

THE VOCABULARY OF MAGIC

Nouns which relate to nature (moon / sun / tree, etc.)
Reoccurring nouns which indicate a generic location – to locate the narrative within a setting (ship / home / city).
Concrete nouns describing symbolic objects (apple, bowl, feather).
Abstract nouns which express concepts or emotions and help to locate a theme (magic / truth / anger).
Active verbs which can be attached to characters, objects, or anything that moves.
Interesting adjectives.
Sensory information (smell of salt / colours / texture of dust) to make the fictional world vivid and sensual.
Visceral words (blood / bone / breath / body parts in general). To connect the human body to the magic and violence of nature.
Binary oppositions (evil/good, light/heavy).
Paradoxical ideas / reversals (weakness as strength) which give the narrative conflicting forces within it.
Transformations – any word which can be used to express a change or a counter-narrative, so the conflicting forces in the narrative are kept active.

The last three items on this list are particularly relevant to the redaction process, as conflict within fiction writing is often expressed during character interactions, especially via dialogue. Character and dialogue may be absent when the text is redacted as I am removing names. The conflicting forces in the new narratives can be located in binary oppositions, reversals and counter-narratives. Where possible, I continue to write in present tense, even if the book is written in past tense.

Two of my first attempts at redacting don't achieve the aim of completing the entire book. In examining these books to understand why, it becomes apparent the vocabulary in the book needs to be varied

enough throughout, in order to sustain interest, and a narrative. The most useful words were used up too quickly during the first sections, and to continue would have resulted in dull repetitions[68].

The next books are chosen based on the variety of the common nouns and action verbs, and I approach these words with an intention of *rationing*, so they can be returned to at later stages in each book. Most major decisions about the narratives are made while redacting the first ten pages – whether to have a character, or use personal pronouns, or focus on sensory detail, and what the thematic content will be. To ensure I reach the end of the book, when I am half way through I jump ahead and redact the final few pages – I can then move the narrative towards that particular ending. Over a period of months, I manage to complete several redacted books.

The textual content of one of these books: 'The Leopard' contains surreal imagery I couldn't have written by using any other process. 'The Leopard' is a good model to discuss here, as in some ways it represents all of the redacted books. 'The Leopard' is made from a hardback edition of *The Man-eating Leopard of Rudraprayag* by author and hunter, Jim Corbett[69]. Corbett's book is a non-fictional account of how he hunted and killed the leopard in India in 1926. The fragmented fictional narrative selected from within Corbett's book tells the story of a mountain, a leopard, the sun and the moon. Personal pronouns are avoided – the language style resembles a series of performative statements, commands, or instructions.

Verbs such as 'promise', 'declare', etc. are already defined as performative verbs, but in my view, any verb can obtain performative qualities if it is perceived as a command / instruction, and is written using the present tense. Corbett's book is written in past tense, so my selection options are limited further. Occasionally, I visually alter a word ending in '-as' to obtain the word 'is' by redacting about half of the letter 'a', and adding a small dot in black pen. There is an immediacy within this new narrative that is formed mainly by instructions – and a potentially challenging ambiguity: who is talking, and who is being addressed? Is the reader an active participant in the narrative because they are being given instructions about what to do, or is either the writer or narrator describing their own actions in the form of instructions? Is the book itself giving the reader instructions?[70] Without personal pronouns, without a named character, the narrative opens further possibilities for a variety of readings. The violence of hunting, guns and other weapons, and death is contrasted with surreal images incorporating nature and the senses. The text unravels, exposing multiple meanings and possible interpretations. In *The Plural Text: The Plural Self* Joseph Harris describes Roland Barthes' views on reading and textual interpretation as follows:

> More than anything, Barthes was the advocate of reading as a form of pleasure; his aim was not so much to interpret the text as a coherent whole but to seek out jolts of meaning – isolated moments of brilliance or intensity. (Harris 1987, 159)

These jolts of meaning are contained in new combinations of words within 'The Leopard'. These phrases contain intensity because images and performative verbs have been recontextualised and isolated. When a fixed (published, multiple) text is unfixed (transformed into a one-off text) the fluidity of language is exposed. The new text contains new imagery, actions, themes, fragmented phrases, etc. Effort and thought are required, to write it, as this is a slow and laborious process. Though in some ways is easier to read than the previous book (because there are far fewer words) thoughtfulness is required during the reading process because the selected (and half-redacted) text can be read in a variety of ways. Potentially, there are multiple meanings. For Barthes, interpretation of meaning is not the aim

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[68] By dull repetitions I mean phrases which would be meaningless or boring to write/read. Personally, I have an allergy to boredom, and am convinced that if the writer is bored while writing, the writing will be dull.
[69] Published by Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1948.
[70] This direct style of addressing the reader is similar to a *second person* narrative style, which readers can find challenging because of the directness of 'you'. Which 'you'? Second person can sometimes feel like we are reading an intimate letter, or that we, the reader, are being addressed by the narrator or writer.

of reading a 'writerly' text[71]. His structuralist approach to literary interpretation includes a definition of a 'writerly text' as one which contains prolific meanings and disrupted narrative structure which encourages the reader to take a more active role in the construction of meaning. This is in contrast to a 'readerly text' (also called 'a work') which Barthes argues renders the reader passive, as the author is in control of meaning. Barthes views both the self, and the text, as unfixed and plural: "…the voice of the writer is always a weaving of other voices" (Harris 1987, 161).

When the writer relinquishes control of meaning and allows a text to be unfixed, the reader can actively seek their own method of reading. When narrative is not linear but disrupted or interrupted: formed by fragments, the reader can experience their own subjective / plural responses to reading the text. This fluid style of writing can reveal the text's "…sensitivity to, and openness about, its own subjective grounding in language – to the ways in which what is said is shaped by the forms of its saying" (Harris 1987, 160).

The following extract is a very short transcription from 'The Leopard' which shows how a few fragments might be read if they are presented in a linear form. (A full transcript is provided as Appendix V.) Though the words are transcribed from the book in the order the eyes might follow them visually on the pages, the punctuation and line breaks in this extract are altered so the rhythm is the same as reading aloud:

Collect all things needed – rifle – a bath of fire.
Collect smoke and light.
Gather loss and hear the clatter of branches.
Procure a silk fish, and chance a strip of an idea.
A chill wind; prepare for a view of darkness – no dark to dark.
Dark, and to never dark.
Unless the sky drops to the ground.
Bring night-shooting light, a bone, white stone, clouds eating the rain.
Wait a length of time.
Fire the rifle.
Bullet-hole the sun down for cremation.

When isolated from the book by being typed into a computer, the transcripts from the redacted books are easier to read. However, the weight of the book and scent of old pages is absent. The textual whispers and layers are gone. The language appears in a visually familiar form – in lines across a page with added punctuation and spacing. Barthes valued writing that resisted, "…being read too easily, whose meanings and voices were too many and complex to be reduced to a single point or moral or explanation. What is individual is that which resists being wholly understood, obvious, docile" (Harris 1987, 164). And while the individual words are simple in the above transcript, the language is strange because we (or someone unknown) are being given some odd instructions, and we don't know who is talking. The imagery is also strange, as is the motivation behind these performative statements/instructions – why gather these particular magical/ritualistic objects? Why shoot down the sun? When these words are contained in a redacted book, the evidence of labour suggests that a careful and temporal process has been involved in this writing. Finding unexpected words within a book suggests the presence of secrets.

Within the physical copy of the books, the advantage of using (translucent) masking tape to half-redact the text is that words can remain slightly visible, like textual whispers of other possibilities and other voices. On screen, there is no genuine equivalent to the half-redactions ~~unless they are clumsily shown by using a scoring out tool~~. With masking tape, these half-redacted words/phrases can be large areas of

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[71] For more information on Barthes, see *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), *Mythologies* (1957), *Criticism and Truth* (1966), *S/Z* (1972), *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), and *Image Music Text* (1978).

text, or more carefully selected words/phrases that add something significant (as a textual whisper) alongside the fully visible words.
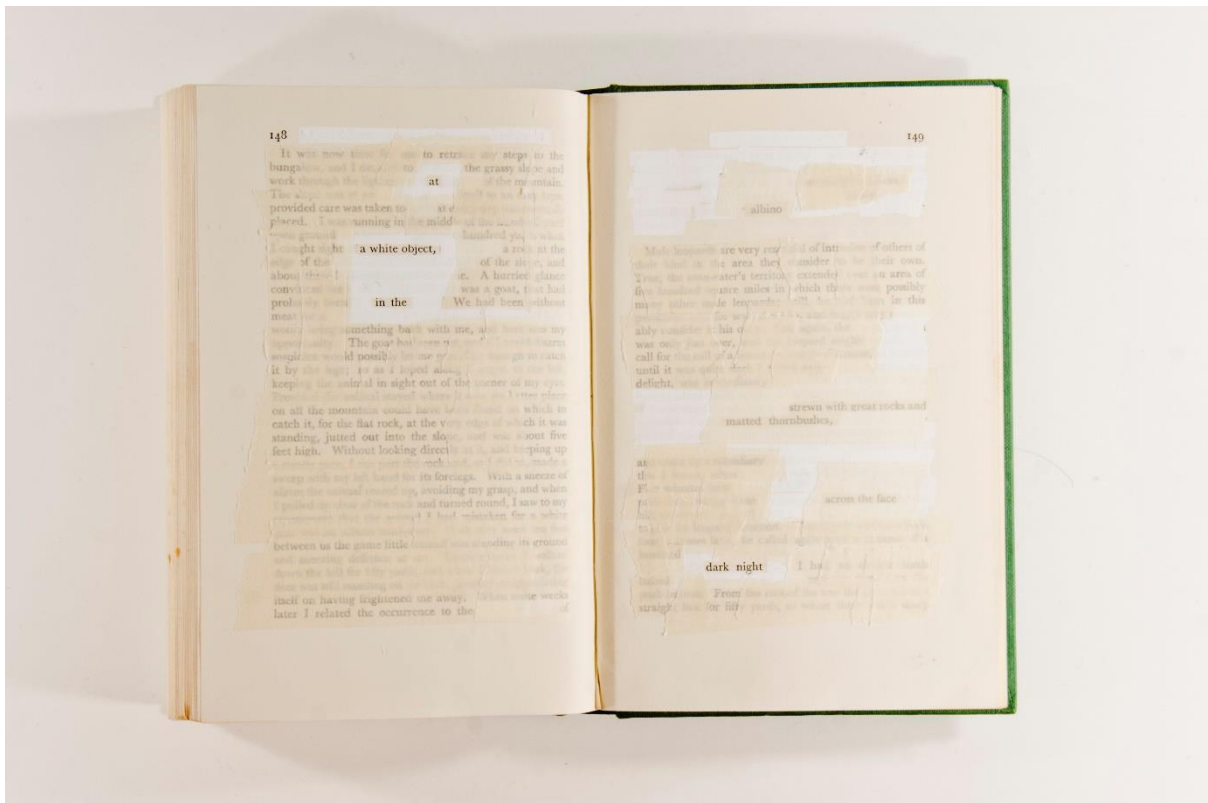
The Leopard p148-9 (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)
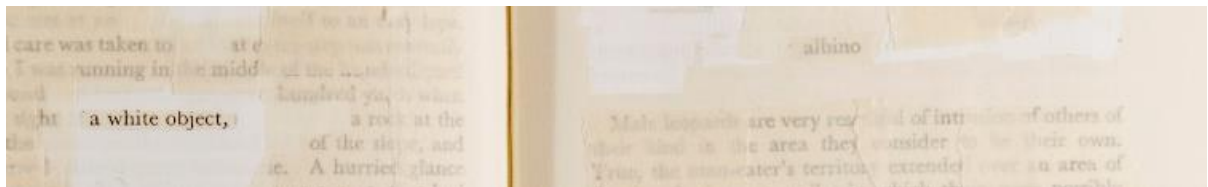
The Leopard p148-9 (detail) (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

On the above page from 'The Leopard', the half-redacted word 'albino' is textually whispered alongside text describing the moon, because the word 'moon' isn't there.

At other times larger sections of the text within the book remain as half-redactions, for the purpose of juxtaposing my word selections with Corbett's word selections. His narrative interrupts my narrative, and my choices disrupt his narrative. This process creates unpredictable and unstable relationships between the voices of two writers, though both sets of words have been chosen with precision. Corbett's words have been published as multiple copies of a book, and will have gone through an intensive editorial process. My words have been written extremely slowly as a one-off fragmented narrative within one copy of his book. Like the 'inventive process' described earlier (of reading layered texts on the same surface) unpredictable associations are likely to be added during the process of reading. The process of writing (and reading) fragments mimics the way that human thoughts and experiences are constantly interrupted. As writer and academic, Lisa Samuels, observes, "we are fragmented, and fragmented language is a true representation of our experience" (Samuels 2014).

Within the redacted book, 'The Leopard', as well as unpredictable associations, there are intentional ones. The juxtaposition of a narrative about hunting a man-eating leopard (contained within Corbett's text) combined with the instructions and surreal imagery (within my selections) guide the reader in conflicting directions. The leopard is hunted throughout Corbett's text, and at the end, is shot dead. In my text, the leopard has the head of a rifle, and is killed and resurrected. In my text, the man who killed the leopard is eaten by a fish, and his body parts are scattered through a river. There are many points within this book where the two narratives conflict with each other.

While redacting each book, I often find myself hunting for particular words and images, and sometimes several pages are entirely blanked out before I find the word(s) I seek. Sometimes the words I am seeking are not there at all, and I have to speculate further about other narrative possibilities and completely change direction. As anticipated, the redaction process is extremely slow, with each complete book taking a month or more to complete. Each book becomes a fragmented collection of phrases which form images linked by performative verbs and repeated nouns. "We are what our languages make of us and what we can make of our languages" (Harris 1987, 169). Despite there being an overall (linear) narrative arc in my mind, this is not communicated in terms of cause and effect. It is possible that the disruptions to language will cause some readers to dismiss the redacted books. As Lisa Samuels (whose poetry and prose is often fragmented[72]) explains,

> people learn to think that there is a sense and that language makes it (only) in certain ways, and that using language in other ways is "not making sense." But that's a learnt attitude, not a real fact about language or the organizational possibilities of the human world. (Samuels 2014)

What kind of 'sense' does language make within my redacted books? Each fully visible fragmented narrative has a cumulative force, which is amplified by simultaneously attempting to read the fragments of the text which are partially hidden or concealed. Sally J Morgan's live performance series, *A Life In Diagrams Installation/Performance Series* (1993-1994)*,* is a good example of how narrative can accumulate and develop "a rhythm of its own" (Morgan 2019, 56). During her live performance, artefacts relating to her father's recent death were dug from a construction of archaeological layers. The artefacts were scientifically analysed and recorded in verbal and written forms, and personal texts written by Morgan at the time of her father's death were also read aloud. Drawing on Paul Ricouer's *The Human Experience of Time and Narrative,* Morgan describes how the revealing of what is hidden can construct meaning via a cumulative narrative:

> the process of revelation would have a rhythm of its own, one that would cut across whatever other activities were happening at that moment, no matter what they were, and become a narrative. The French philosopher, Paul Ricouer speaks convincingly about narrative as a temporal function occurring in and *as* time, as 'a linear succession of abstract *nows*', with each discrete 'now' following on from another 'now' and seeming to form meaning through accumulation. (Morgan 2019, 56)

If we consider the temporal function of the redacted books' cumulative narratives it is worth considering how to prompt the reader/viewer to performatively engage with text that is visible, partially visible, and blank. Use of the present tense already gives each text a performative intensity – and the fragmented narratives have the potential to move the active reader through one unfixed present moment, to another, to another.

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[72] In addition to Lisa Samuels's experimental novel, *Tender Girl* (Dusie Press, 2015), her other print publications include creative nonfiction, long essays, numerous poetry collections which incorporate visual poetry (sometimes called 'Vispo') and/or drawings and most recently*, The Long White Cloud of Unknowing* (Chax Press, 2019) which is prose poetry combined with photographs. Samuels's writing also crosses creative disciplines – into sound, video, visual art and film.

As the redacted books are defamilarised in visual, textual, and material ways, each book becomes a unique object which challenges the viewer/reader's perception. Due to the thickness of the pages some of the covers can no longer close, and the spines are stretched. "It is the characteristic posture of a book to be closed, and characteristically it is the visual presence of the spine that is the opening that marks this specific closedness… the act of opening is the first move in a potentially significant – and often daunting – temporal undertaking" (Hall 2013, 63). These redacted books are slightly open as if negating that first move – they offer a visual invitation – to have time spent, on them.

The presence of apparent clumsy manual endeavour is evident within the layers of the masking tape layers, which are also suggestive of obsession and/or time-consuming labour, although the visible words are chosen with precision. The rips and rough tears in the tape (as opposed to neat scissor cuts) produce blurred edges, drawing attention to the presence of human hands. This is evidence that much time has already been spent on them, before. The minimal word selections suggest the duration of time to read these books now, is far less than the duration of time which was needed, before. Before when? Before time was spent on them.

Reading the text becomes a more active process as the surface of the page and the visual appearance of text is disrupted and defamiliarised. There are also choices – to view each page as an image, to attempt to read combinations of visible or half-visible text, to view the books as material objects, or all of these things, simultaneously. The process of viewing the books becomes an encounter with a textual object/artefact and an active intertexual reading process (Allen 2000, 7), as there is no 'correct' or 'passive' method of reading the text. The reader re-writes the text as they read it.

Though the redaction process could be described as an intertextual transformation, literary theorist, Graham Allen describes an interesting development in Kristeva's theories about intertextuality: "Keen to avoid the reduction of intertextuality to the traditional notions of influence, source study and simple 'context', Kristeva now drops the term intertextuality in favour of a new term, transposition" (Allen 2000, 53). In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva elaborates as follows:

> Transposition plays an essential role here inasmuch as it implies the abandonment of a former sign system, the passage to the second via an instinctual intermediary common to the two systems, and the articulation of the new system with its new representability. (Kristeva 1984, 60)

'Transpositional transformation' might be a more accurate description of redaction practices than intertextual transformation – the abandonment (partial reduction, blanking out, removal) of the former text and articulation (re/construction, revealing) of a new text from within it. Another citing of Kristeva's slight shift in position describes her as having said, 'destruction' rather than 'abandonment' in a similar quote (Allen 2000, 53) Abandonment / destruction of words and phrases is also an appropriate way of viewing many established redaction practices which seek to expose meaning or engage with censorship[73] as a reductive, artistic and political method of exposing hierarchical power structures. However, in this research, the process of redaction is used in order to articulate a new fragmented fictional text. The redacted books thus occupy an unstable and hybrid space – a borderline between artefacts, visual image, and fiction.

The redacted books also occupy a borderline in terms of appropriation. Who does the text belong to: *this* writing self, or that other writing self? Is Kristeva's "instinctual intermediary" in the above quote the writing process, or the writer? Is it language? In discussing Mikhail Bakhtin's theories[74], Allen expands on Bakhtin's ideas of language occupying a borderline space between self and other: "The

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[73] See for example, 'blackout poetry', political artworks concerned with themes of censorship, and the term 'sanitised' as used in security/surveillance studies.

[74] Kristeva is credited with introducing Russian literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin's work to French speakers during the 1960s – while structuralism was transitioning to post-structuralism.

word becomes one's own through an act of 'appropriation', which means that it is never wholly one's own, is always permeated with traces of other words, other uses" (Allen 2000, 28). This borderline sense of language and otherness also relates to Bakhtin's concept, heteroglossia – a word which has its Greek roots in the words 'other' (hetero) and 'voice' or 'tongue'(glot). The dialogic aspect of an/other tongue / heteroglossia is present here – as each redacted book now contains the narratives, voices and intentions of two writers, and the reader (who re-writes the text as they read it) also becomes an additional writer.

> …at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. These 'languages' of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new typifying 'languages'. (Bakhtin 1981, 291)

Despite this somewhat comforting description of the social construction of language, I remain unsettled about claiming full ownership over the redacted books even though the intertextual/transpositional process doesn't extend (via long phrases) into 'quotation'. To check this, I type up the visible words from each redacted book as transcripts, and run each of them through online plagiarism software. There are no alerts.

My concerns about appropriation don't disperse, though I re-read the redacted books, and realise I wouldn't have been able to write these particular texts in any other way – the process I have followed for each book has produced a set of redacted books containing fragmented fictional narratives unlike any other text I have read, especially when combined with the materials I've used, which I haven't found anyone else using either. It is precisely *because* the new text within the redacted books seems so original that my concern about appropriation is amplified. As this concern won't go away, I write to one of the (living) authors via his literary agent. I tell him what I have done to his book, but get no reply. I try again, but to date, I have received no reply. Authors are difficult to contact directly, and for good reason.

Would I mind if someone did this to one of my novels? No, because it would be their own copy and novels exist as multiples. So why do I still have concerns about appropriation? Kathy Acker[75] deliberately plagiarised large sections of other texts in her novels. Though there are many conflicting opinions about Kathy Acker's writing, Campbell summarises Acker's writing practice particularly effectively, describing her as "the pirate punk of US postmodernity" and elaborating on her "socio-political motivations" as:

> myriad guerrilla tactics of bad taste, violence, "terrible plagiarism", pornographic pastiche and textual shattering through cut-up practice in her overtly signalled war against capitalism and imperialism and the violence of the representations that sustain them. (Campbell 2014, 153)

Acker's appropriation/plagiarism was used as a vibrant and energetic force. In addition to plagiarism and re-writing texts by other literary writers (including re-telling myths), Acker constructed her narratives from highly personal texts, including her own diaries. In contrast, the author Jeremy Gavron appropriates whole sentences from his favourite 100 novels to create his book, *Felix Culpa* (Gavron 2018). Gavron adds in his own phrases in order to complete the narrative and claim ownership.

I don't feel the same concern about appropriation when considering 'The Bookbird' short story. This is because I had a narrative in mind before selecting the words from the folded book (a book will tell the

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[75] For more information on Kathy Acker's life and writing, see Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker: A Literary Biography* (2017)

story of how it transforms into a bird). I therefore imposed the narrative on the book, which was expanded as I transcribed the words from the book and wrote the story, rather than selecting the entire narrative from within the book.

From these doubts and comparisons, what becomes clear is that a sense of ownership, or at least the illusion of ownership, is contained within the process of constructing a narrative. However, in the redacted books, my primary concern about appropriation is that the narrative emerged from a book by another author. In an attempt to assuage this concern, I attempt to incorporate the words chosen from 'The Leopard' into a new piece of fiction, as I did with 'The Bookbird'.

The new text rapidly becomes quite lengthy (around 12K words) and doesn't yet work as a more conventionally structured narrative – the narrator is a ghostlike character, who occupies/possesses elemental forces, objects, and other characters. At many points in the narrative this narrator functions more as an observer than an active participant within the story. The most successful elements are the strange imagery and landscapes, and the surreal versions of the narrating character – which could also be re-written as personifications of the moon and the mountain, the thornbushes which are protective spirits, and the central character of a rifle-headed leopard. The minor human characters are either violent and ambiguous, passive or dead, so they either need to be removed or developed. A significant amount of time (beyond the limits of this PhD) would be required to develop this new text to its full potential. For now, I will set this new text aside and accept that the fragmented narrative in the transformed book, 'The Leopard', is simultaneously original and appropriated.

Another redacted book which is worth mentioning is 'Tears' – a redacted copy of Peter Carey's novel, *The Chemistry of Tears.* The way I worked with the materials developed (through time and practice) by the time I made 'Tears' – and this book may last longer than 'The Leopard' as the paper is acid-free. Many pages are simultaneously an image made from text, and text that makes images. The use of individual letters to spell out words (e.g., H o p e – personified as a character) are a departure from previous redactions, where only complete words were selected.

The narrative is strange and unpredictable – the narrator is a human who has recently died, yet is refusing to die – instead, they are coming to a new understanding of what death means. The properties of metal have become magical, this character rejects the notion of death being peaceful, and can travel anywhere they want to, as long as they are touching something made from metal. Hope, as a secondary character, functions as a helper to the narrator, and though she is mesmerising and charismatic, she is highly unreliable. By the end of the book, there is some peace to be had for the narrator, as their spirit settles inside a book which is held in the hands of someone they once loved. For the reader/viewer, who holds this book, if they are open to this interpretation, they become this person who is loved by the ghost in the book.

This is the narrative I see, because while redacting I was imaginatively filling in the blanks which were missing in the specific palette of available words. Other people who read/view the redacted books might find alternative narratives, due to the fractured and unpredictable combinations of phrases and words, the textual whispers and hidden words, and the negative space on the page. In that sense, each reader is also a co-author of the redacted books if they invent their own narratives.

The words I would have written myself if I was writing a new narrative containing allusions to these books, with a free choice of words, were rarely there. The selected alternatives aren't second or third choices – because these compromises weren't there either. Though this was frustrating during the writing process, during the reading process, I value the confidence of word choices which contain no sense of compromise. The redacted books contain words which work together in unpredictable and surprising ways.

It is strange that so many of the redacted books include ghostlike characters.

What if… my own untellable story, the story from long ago, is emerging in the gaps created between fragments. The geno-text, in a psychological sense, is whispering of the presence of my untellable story within the fragmented stories I am now telling.

I can't write this story.

So instead, I explore the stories which *can* be written and re-written, the texts that can be dismantled and reassembled in new forms.

Or *what if…* these books haunted by the ghosts of their authors, though one of them is still alive? Are these ghost writers angry I have redacted their names from the book covers and redacted their words?

In discussing how much a writer needs to make formal acknowledgement of appropriation and 'borrowing' from other texts, literature scholar, Julie Sanders says,

> what in studies of Shakespeare might be termed an examination of sources or creative borrowings, citing allusions to or redeployments of Ovid, Plutarch, Thomas Lodge, the Roman comedies and so on, becomes in the case of a modern novel a reductive discussion of plagiarism and 'inauthenticity'. (Sanders 2006, 34)

Sanders goes on to give the example of James Joyce's novel, *Ulysses,* indicating that the title expresses "its intertextual relationship with Homeric epic" and yet doesn't allude to Shakespeare's Hamlet, with which Joyce's novel also has an intertextual relationship. Sanders argues that this 'lack' of overt reference to Hamlet doesn't make *Ulysses* any less original. She also says Genette's theories of palimpsestuous writing indicate that part of the pleasure of reading is in exploring intertextual relationships without authorial interference (Sanders 2006, 35). While considering Kristeva's reluctance to allow the term intertextuality to be reduced to 'source studies' and Benjamin's separation of 'information' from 'story' it is nevertheless worth noting that appropriation is devalued when it is unacknowledged within contemporary literary texts. Paradoxically, interdisciplinary projects (music, film, stage productions, etc.) which quote, recontextualise or allude to literary texts are often regarded as "a "kinetic process" which enriches the literary text, rather than "robbing" from it" (Sanders 2006, 40).

In summing up her discussion, Sanders calls for a rethinking of,

> the process of adaptation, moving away from a static or purely linear stand-point. Unfoldings, recyclings, mutations, repetitions, evolutions, variations: the possibilities are endless and exciting. (Sanders 2006, 39-41)

I redact another book[76], looking for ghosts, making images from text, and seeking out their voices. I don't read the book or attempt to write a narrative. Using the illusion of independent agency I ask the ghosts in the book to show me their faces and talk about what it's like to be dead.

---

[76] *Talks to Teachers on Psychology, and to Students on some of Life's Ideals* by William James, published by Longmans, Green and Co, London, 1920.

Ghost Talk (detail) (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)
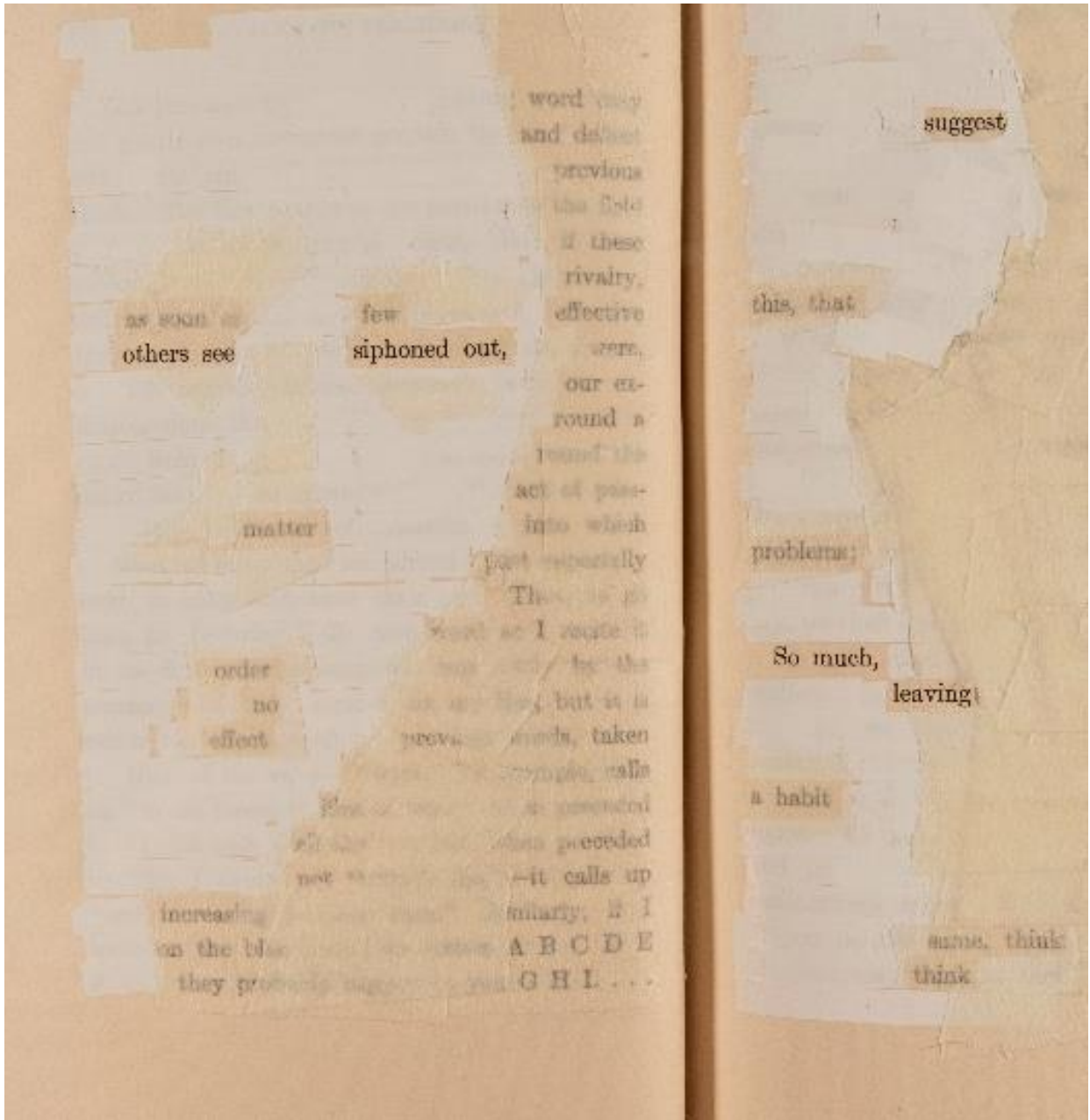
Ghost Talk (detail) (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

In the previous two images, the faces appear at a distance to be representational; more illustrations than fictional text. But the words chosen to be the facial features (in particular, the eyes) represent the thoughts of the ghost who is represented in the image.
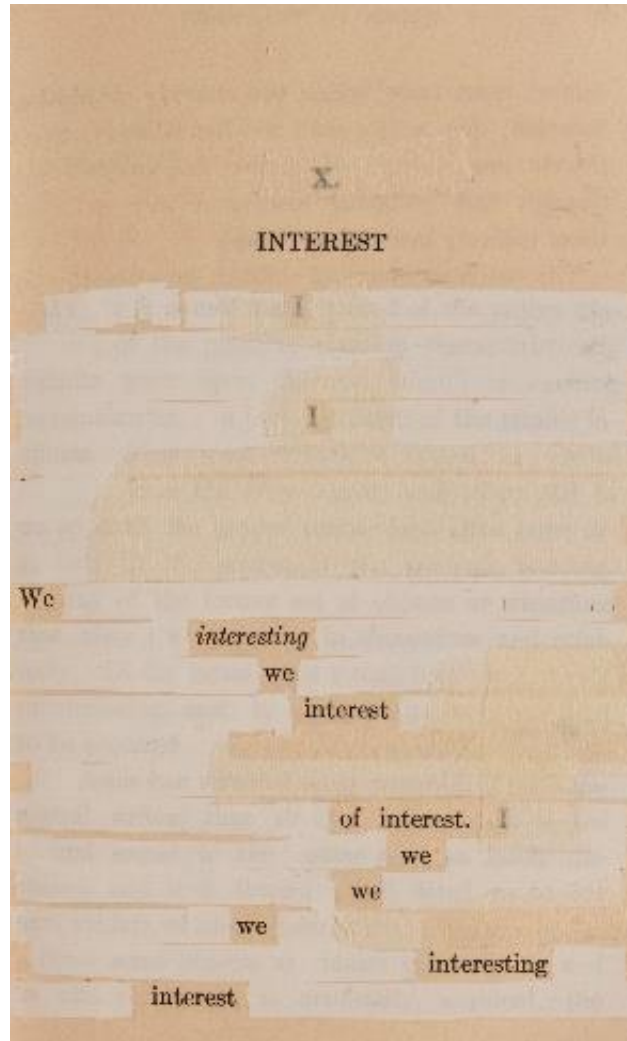
On the pages which don't contain ghost faces, the collective or individual thoughts of ghosts are expanded on. On these pages, ghosts are images, and ghosts speak. In some respects, this conceptually resembles concrete poetry in that there is "a unity" (Drucker 2004, 233) between the visual and textual aspects. This unifying aesthetic principal emerged after Futurist and Dada artists had previously attempted to "liberate poetic language from the constraints of literary conventions, particularly the linear format of the grey-toned page" (Drucker 2004, 233). However, while concrete poetry varies in form, the conceptual drive "to literally concretize meaning—embed its verbal complexity in a material, visual form from which it cannot be separated" (Drucker 2004, 233) is at odds with what is occurring on the pages of my transformed book, *Ghost Talk*. Here, the characters are a collection of faces made from visible and semi-visible words. They speak in word combinations which have ambiguous meanings. Just like living characters in fiction, they often argue and contradict each other. Many of these ghost thoughts are vague, using abstract nouns and repetitions.

There is often a sense of longing for the world of the senses, and a desire for possession of the living. The images of distorted ghost faces make eye contact with the reader, using text-eyes to communicate. This redacted book makes ambiguous meanings via short phrases and absences.

The following extract is a short transcript from several pages:

Execution of I word.

Tracing.   Thinking.   Hear.

                                        'by heart'

remember other dates; and after no further argument   pass by.

But   by heart,   a remark

                                        out of place.

A strong reaction;

                              by heart is despised

                              a dispensable nothing.

by heart by bridge by hammer by picture

to sound and see or think.

                         By emotion   by heart

by pain done

               by end it,

                                   by   g

                                                    h

                                                    o

                                                    s

                                                         t.

Exploring Hybrid Processes

This section surveys some hybrid textual/visual explorations by other writers. My brief engagement with some of these processes leads to writing a short story using the theme of memory. This story is called 'Before the Gale' and is taken through further iterations[77] at a later stage of this project.

The poet Austin Kleon is often credited with creating blackout poetry[78] (Ramsay 2014) however, Kleon acknowledges on his website that people have been making poems from newspapers "for 250 years" (Kleon 2014). As well as print publication of his blackout poems, Kleon started a Blackout Poetry blog on Tumblr, resulting in blackout poetry becoming popular online.

Another established artform which uses redaction is erasure poetry – which involves making/writing poems from 'found texts' by erasing or scoring out words in order to draw attention to new selections of words. Erasure poetry as a technique is credited to American poet, Ronald Johnson, who first published *RADI OS* (a collection of poems 'found' within Milton's *Paradise Lost*) in 1977 (Johnson 2005). The process of making new texts by selection and erasure is sometimes described as an artform, or as erasure poetry, blackout / whiteout poetry, found poetry: these terms imply overlapping boundaries between art and writing – blackout/whiteout alludes to painting/drawing materials and tone, 'found' refers to objects[79], images or texts being recontextualised, erasure speaks of censorship, eradication or removal, and poetry implies a condensed and literary form. Poet and academic, Mary Ruefle, briefly draws attention to these boundaries and overlaps between art and writing forms in her melancholic lecture: *On Theme*:

> Art has always been aware of itself as art. Even the premise behind "found art" implies there has to be someone who 'finds' it, or it has to be put in a context that is art conscious: a urinal in a museum. As far as I understand it, artists are trying very hard to be as inclusive as possible, to broaden consciousness so that there are fewer boundaries, lines of demarcation. (Ruefle 2012, 68-69)

Ruefle also explores the boundaries between art and writing in her own creative practice. *Little White Shadow* is a 56-page 'whiteout poetry' collection made from a found text (Ruefle, Little White Shadow 2006). Ruefle uses white correction fluid as her redaction material, which is similar to the erasure materials I am using, though it has very different qualities [80]. Correction fluid is a concealing liquid, usually applied by a small brush or pen. In Ruefle's hands it is applied to the book page slightly unevenly (and yet meticulously, possibly rhythmically) so that parts of letter edges show as ink smears or patches. *Little White Shadow* is published as a small pamphlet-style book. The reproduced altered book pages

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[77] This iterative process (and iterations of some other fictional texts written during this research) is described in this exegesis during Section III: Iterations. For a thorough global review of iterative poetics and copy practices see Jacob Edmond's *Make it the Same* (Edmond 2019).

[78] Kleon's first collection of blackout poems: *Newspaper Blackout* was published in 2010 by HarperCollins.

[79] Perhaps the most influential piece of 'found' art was Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* – a urinal, signed 'R. Mutt' which was submitted to and rejected as an exhibit by the Society of Independent Artists in1917. Beatrice Wood (Duchamp's proxy) defended the fictitious R. Mutt, writing: "He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view, created a new thought for that object." (*The Richard Mutt Case* published in *The Blind Man* (Dada journal) May 1917) For more information about Duchamp's artworks see: https://www.widewalls.ch/duchamp-fountain-100-years/

[80] My materials have the following qualities: white correction tape covers text evenly with an opaque and slightly gloss surface. Masking tape is matt, slightly textured and raised. While translucent when applied as one layer to leave some text semi-visible (as half-redactions/textual whispers) the masking tape can be applied in layers which thickens the pages. The shape of the book changes as the spine is stretched.

are printed as gloss-surfaced photographic images. Ruefle's publisher, Wave Books, have an interactive page on their website where people can make and archive their own erasure poems[81].

Ruefle's creative practice involves making erasure poems from books and (via a curated website) her erasure poem, *Melody* (2008), is published online. (Ruefle 2012) This poem is shown as a series of photographs of the altered book pages on Michelle Aldredge's website, Gwarlingo (Aldredge 2014).

As well as correction fluid, Ruefle occasionally uses other materials to blackout some pages (perhaps marker pen or dark pencil lead – it is difficult to tell from the photographs). The pages of her *Melody* poem incorporate found illustrations which have been cut/torn from other sources and pasted in. On Aldridge's[82] Gwarlingo website, Ruefle describes her process of writing erasure poems as, "writing with my eyes instead of my hands".

In my experience of redaction – because of the layering and ripping of masking tape my hands are involved far more than they would be if they were either handwriting, typing, or rhythmically applying correction fluid. Layering requires the masking tape to be torn, placed carefully, smoothed down, repeated. There is constant interaction between the eyes, the mind, and the hands which perform the ritual of the task. Though Ruefle is perhaps the writer whose practice is visually closest to my redacted books (though without the half-redactions/textual whispers), there is a fundamental difference in that Ruefle identifies her redaction practice as poetry, whereas I would identify mine, for the purposes of the storytelling aspects of this research project, as fiction. Even the more fragmented 'Ghost Talk' redacted book could be loosely defined as fiction, because it involves the development of an appropriate (fragmented) narrative voice for multiple ghost characters.[83]

In contrast to working with physical copies of books, Australian poet, Eddie Patterson's poetry collection is written with words from "everyday 21st century texts" such as emails, tweets, webfeeds, etc. (Patterson 2017). The words that are redacted (by using computer-generated black oblongs) in this paperback book can only be guessed – but it seems likely that most of them are the names of real people. Famous people's names are not redacted. The title, *Redactor*, doesn't appear to describe the process that's been used to write these poems[84] but provides the theme that links the collection together: redaction as a metaphor of surveillance and censorship.

Spoken words were erased/redacted by silence during Kelly Malone's live performance of her academic paper, *Proprioception, Poetics and Performance Writing*[85] while the audience cut up and rearranged a material copy. In his essay, "Under Erasure", Raphael Rubinstein provides a thorough overview of the history of erasure poetry (and erasure as political statement in visual artworks). His discussion focusses

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[81] Sadly, the last poem appears to have been posted in 2013. (Wavepoetry 2012)

[82] Michelle Aldredge and her collaborator, Corwin Levi, also published *Mirror Mirrored* – a limited-edition book of images (some including text) based on Grimm fairy tale vintage illustrations which have been 'remixed' by contemporary artists (Levi 2020). An example of a purely visual interpretation of the Grimm fairy tales are the paintings of figurative artist, Rebecca Holden. Holden used an element of chance and random selection in her artistic process while creating her 'Grimm project'. She asked friends to send her landscape photographs and these determined the colour palette. She also asked them to randomly select a number (from a given range) and this determined which page from the Grimm Tales would inform the imagery of each painting (Holden 2014).

[83] The boundaries between fragmented fiction and poetry are worth exploring, but they are beyond the scope of this research project.

[84] Patterson draws on techniques from the visual arts and 'radical writing' (cut-up techniques/concrete poetry).

[85] Kelly Malone's silent performance involved her alter-ego, Coni Text (Cometprojectspace 2017)) silently reading her paper from the podium, engaging in mouthing, laughter, and gestures. In the noisy audience's hands, Malone's academic paper was cut up and folded or torn into shapes, spreading across the room like (Malone's term:) 'contexti' (Malone 2017). For other examples of experimental New Zealand writing, see *Over Hear: six types of poetic experiment in Aotearoa / New Zealand* Ed: Lisa Samuels, Tinfish Press (Samuels 2015).

on the exhibited works of poets and visual artists at the Pierogi Gallery in New York: "erasure in all its gradations knows how to suspend a word in the gap between sign and gesture" (Rubinstein 2018).

Though the word *suspend* alludes to the visual appearance of text as poetry, and erasure poetry is an established artform, as I mentioned in the context of comparison with Ruefle's redactions, I would not label the intended outcomes of this research project as poetry. While considering what is, or isn't, defined as poetry, it is worth reiterating that John Hall gave me permission to call one of his texts a poem, even though he does not define it as a poem himself. When discussing writers calling their work 'poetry', Lisa Samuels acknowledges, "that 'self-naming' right is an ethical development in our assumptions about identity…" and adds, "but I don't think poetry is a term for all writing. I think we need as many types of writing as we can get." (Samuels 2014, interview pp40-48)

Samuels's experimental prose novel, *Tender Girl* is written in a fragmented third person narrative which is frequently interrupted by sections of (italicised) first person writing:

> Girl forms her mouth on words, she takes them out and pushes them toward one attendant and another, wet and blocky. "Nice to meet you / pleased to meet you / what are you doing here / where are you from" *what do you smell like you have eaten salt in your mouth there are teeth they are leaning outward as you breathe toward me, would you like something to eat to smell to* (Samuels 2015, excerpt from Chicago Review p146)

These first person interruptions show us the fluid internal thoughts of the protagonist, Girl, who is half-shark, half-human. "So the language is unusual, perhaps, as a report from within a strange, literally impossible, imagined ontology..." Samuels describes her experimentation in *Tender Girl* as concerned with "how to imagine language performing this character consciousness" (Samuels 2014, interview pp40-48).

A Book is a novel constructed from prose fragments written by the author Nicole Brossard. Like Samuels's *Tender Girl*, Brossard's fragmented prose in *A Book* could also be said to 'perform' on the page, though *Tender Girl* arguably engages the reader's imagination more, due to establishing the reader's emotional connection with *Girl's* character via her 'otherness', inner thoughts, and sensory descriptions. Both novels use unusual typography such as alternating font sizes, unconventional line breaks, or italics. Explaining her fascination for the visuality of text, Brossard says, "graffiti, comics, calligraphy, headlines, typeface changes are used to reinforce the transgression and to emphasise the work of the reading eye…" Brossard also says that *A Book* "put to work my fascination for writing and reading." It is a book which is about a book, and about writing/reading books – this could also be described as metafiction (fiction about fiction). The pages of *A Book* contain text printed at the top of each page, with blank space below. They can be read in any order and on some pages, line breaks occur part-way through sentences:

> The words follow each other quite closely. It is easy to see them and read them, but the eye is quickly clouded by the desire to know even before the eyes have read, to have read without reading, to read before and after. Before through the memory and after through speculation. Thus it is rarely at the right time that the eye does the reading it is supposed to do.
>
> Between the lines and the words
>
> the spaces reveal as much as the text. If not more, if not the essence. (Brossard, 29)

While considering the visuality of text in the printed form[86], decisions about visual layout are often made while working on-screen. However, the redacted books for this project are manual endeavours. What effect does rapid technology have on the construction of phrases? As demonstrated by Kleon's

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[86] Line breaks and disrupted sentences are also used frequently in my own novels (though they are written as linear rather than fragmented narratives). There are partly-formed sentences, floating lines and texts within texts.

Blackout Poetry on Tumblr, whiteout poetry being published on Wave Book's website, and images of white/blackout/found poetry on social media apps (such as Instagram) online tools and apps are used to rapidly create and circulate texts. Musician, David Bowie, who used storytelling and characters within his lyrics, developed a computer program (in collaboration with Ty Roberts) called a 'Verbalizer' to randomly and rapidly generate phrases. Bowie had previously worked more slowly. He had applied a cut-up technique by cutting out phrases from newspapers and literary sources, mixing them in a hat, removing them, and manually striking through words he didn't want to use (Interview 2016). Hsia Yü published a collection of poems which were written "in collaboration" with translation software, called *Pink Noise* (Yü 2007). Random texts were translated by being fed repeatedly into the software and the resultant book of collaborative poems was printed as a set of transparencies (Asymptotejournal 2012).

An online app is used to scramble and reverse a paragraph of my text. There is an increased sense of distance from the content and little control, other than in the choice of words to be shuffled. Historically, random selections of words have been used by artists (Dadaists, Brion Gysin, et al.) writers (Tristan Tzara, William S Burroughs, T S Eliot et al.) and musicians (Bowie, The Beatles, Frank Zappa and Lou Reed all used random processes to generate tape-collage and lyrics) (Wein 2012, 5-6). However, my own brief experimentation with random and rapid selections of text reveals that slowness and a high level of control have become significant aspects of the processes explored in this project.

Returning to a slow process, I redact a memory conference document searching for a 'counter-narrative' – or more specifically, reversals and transformations of memory as a theme. This is useful in terms of generating surprising ideas[87] to work with. There is an over-abundance of abstract and proper nouns, and absence of action verbs and common nouns. Most of the verbs describe academic processes ('documenting', 'referring to', 'referencing') rather than actions (run, hide) which would be more useful for fiction writing. As a result of slowness, redaction becomes a meditative process. Instead of finding a narrative in the document, the theme of memory provokes thoughts and ideas about what memory is, what it does, and what happens when it is disrupted. The redacted memory conference text is used as a thematic writing prompt in order to write another short story, 'Before the Gale', which is based on the idea of memories being redacted. In a departure from a straightforward fictional narrative involving a plot, conflict between characters, and a shift in the narrator, I write as a character remembering and remembering and remembering, as the world blows up (the apocalyptic aspects of the story are shown to the reader by what the narrator sees but doesn't connect with) and then forgetting and forgetting and forgetting.

Once I've written and edited the short story, I consider how the material text can be made to disappear, to visually reinforce the 'forgetting' section of the narrative. The obvious solution is to simply delete that part of the story, or to make the font colour white and print the whole story on blank pages[88],[89] but could my story be partially deleted and remain legible, so the narrative (forgetting / redacted memories) is shown visually in another iteration of this story? On screen, several iterations of the same section of text are experimented with so that certain words or letters disappear. Three of these are shown in the following samples which are the title and first paragraph of the story:

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[87] The phrase: *The memorial to murdered memorials*, for example, will probably be useful at some stage.

[88] Blank pages within avant-garde and conceptual poetry are referred to by Dworkin in 2013 as "a minor subgenre" – though the blank page as poem can be found much earlier (in 1913) in Vasilisk Gnedov's last poem in his collection, *Death to Art*. This page contained the title *Poem of the End* with no other words printed beneath it (C. Dworkin 2013, 27).

[89] In 1968 Lita Hornick's imprint, Kulchur Press, published a book by Aram Saroyan which was a ream of blank typing paper – "a book, *to be.*" Hornick described it as a "wretched little thing" while being simultaneously concerned she would be considered "too bourgeois to understand Dada" if she did not publish it. She consigned the majority of the published copies to the bin (C. Dworkin 2013, 12).

Sample 1: (vowels replaced with spaces)

B F R TH G L

*'m s tt ng n b nch t th w t rfr nt, l k ng t t s . Th c rg b ts r c rry ng w y m t l c nt n
rs. t's d wn, nd my y s r r nn ng fr m th ff rt f st r ng fr s l ng, l k ng fr l ght, s k ng s
m th ng p ss bl , w ll ng s m th ng t ch ng . t's nly th d wn th t d s th s − c nj r s th s x
ct sh d f m l nch ly. l v nd h t m l nch ly. ft n s k t t, b t t h d t b th r   n m lr dy,
d dn't t? T kn w wh t t l k f r. R mm g ng n my h ndb g, p ll t my h ndk rch f. t's wh t
sq r w th n c rn r mbr d r d w th c l rf l fl w rs. W p ng t rs fr m th cr s s b n th my
y s, p s f r m m nt nd x m n th w rp nd th w ft f th th ck l n n f br c. Wh t w ld n s
t fl n s b , w th t th   th r?*

Sample 2: (consonants replaced with spaces)

E O E E A E

*I' i i o a e a e ae o , oo i ou o ea. e a o oa ae a i aa ea o aie . I' a , a e
e ae u i o ee o o ai o o o , oo i o i , ee i o e i o ie, i i o e i o a e. I' o
e a a oe i − o u e i ea ae o ea o . I o ea ae ea o . I o e ee i ou , u i a o e
e ei ea ea , i ' i? o o a o oo o. u ai i a a, I u ou a e ie. I' a ie ua e i o
e o e e oi ee i o ou u o e . ii ea o e eae eea ee, I au e o a oe a eai e e
a a ee o e i ie a i. a ou o e e o ie e, i ou e o e?*

Sample 3: (the theme appears in the gaps)

BEFOREmemoryTHEmemoryGALE

*I'mmemorysittingmemoryonmemoryamemorybenchmemoryatmemorythememorywaterfront,memorylo
okingmemoryoutmemorytomemorysea.memoryThememorycargomemoryboatsmemoryarememorycarr
yingmemoryawaymemorymetalmemorycontainers.memoryIt'smemorydawn,memoryandmemorymyme
moryeyesmemoryarememoryrunningmemoryfrommemorythememoryeffortmemoryofmemorystaringme
moryformemorysomemorylong,memorylookingmemoryformemorylight,memoryseekingmemorysometh
ingmemorypossible,memorywillingmemorysomethingmemorytomemorychange.memoryIt'smemoryonl
ymemorythememorydawnmemorythatmemorydoesmemorythismemory–
memoryconjuresmemorythismemoryexactmemoryshadememoryofmemorymelancholy.memoryImemor
ylovememoryandmemoryhatememorymelancholy.memoryImemoryoftenmemoryseekmemoryitmemory
out,memorybutmemoryitmemoryhadmemorytomemorybememorytherememoryinmemorymememoryalr
eady,memorydidn'tmemoryit?memoryTomemoryknowmemorywhatmemorytomemorylookmemoryfor.
memoryRummagingmemoryinmemorymymemoryhandbag,memoryImemorypullmemoryoutmemorymy
memoryhandkerchief.memoryIt'smemoryamemorywhitememorysquarememorywithmemoryonememor
ycornermemoryembroideredmemorywithmemorycolourfulmemoryflowers.memoryWipingmemorytears
memoryfrommemorythememorycreasesmemorybeneathmemorymymemoryeyes,memoryImemorypause
memoryformemoryamemorymomentmemoryandmemoryexaminememorythememorywarpmemoryandm
emorythememoryweftmemoryofmemorythememorythickmemorylinenmemoryfabric.memoryWhatmemo
rywouldmemoryonememorysetmemoryofmemorylinesmemorybe,memorywithoutmemorythememoryoth
er?*

Although the insertion of a word representing thememorytheme in thememorygaps might provoke temporary interest, the visuality of text completely overwhelms the fictional narrative in all of these on-screen samples. The omission of letters resembles some of the self-imposed language constraints used in the literary experiments of the French Oulipo[90] collective: "The Oulipo escapes the Romantic cul-de-sac of unfettered imagination (or its Surrealist avatar, chance) by reintroducing external constraints, which are self-imposed." (Gallix 2013)

These formal constraints often involve mathematical structures, which developed from the initial interests of the founding members[91] in 1960. The most famous published example which emerged from this collective is Georges Perec's 1969 novel, *La Disparition*[92]*,* which does not contain the letter 'e'. Though Perec reportedly said, "I set myself rules in order to be totally free" he had concerns about revealing these language constraints, as: "The problem, when you see the constraint," Perec observed, "is that you no longer see anything else" (Gallix 2013).

Though as Craig Dworkin states, "omissions within a system permit other elements to appear all the more clearly" (C. Dworkin 2013, 9), in these on-screen experiments with text, the other elements are of little value due to their effect on the fictional narrative.

While continuing to contemplate how to make my 'Before the Gale' story visually disappear, the possibilities of using textual additions, cut-ups and redactions in tandem are explored further.

These experimental processes involve my own extensions of some of the 'cut-up' techniques developed by the writer William S. Burroughs, and the artist Brion Gysin. Their early collaborative cut-ups draw on previous Dadaist and Surrealist experimental writing processes, such as Tristan Zara's (1920) *To Make a Dadaist Poem* (Lewis 2007, 107) and could also be described as textual collage[93].

Burroughs's prose writing style is fragmented, and though (in collaboration with other writers and artists) he produced many cut-up experimental texts, in his novels he inserted long chunks of more conventionally written narratives, as he concluded, "you can't dispense with straight narrative if you want people to read it" (Miles 2012, 31).

The process of cutting-up texts results in an extension of my own vocabulary, as words are encountered which I wouldn't habitually use. The process of pasting new texts onto older texts is reminiscent of palimpsests.

Sarah Dillon briefly cites Michael Davidson's similar word, *palimtext*:

> Davidson coins the word 'palimtext' in order to combine 'post-Structuralism's emphasis on writing as trace, as inscription of absence' with 'the material fact of that trace, and inscribing and re-inscribing'. Davidson argues that 'the palimtext retains vestiges of prior writings out of which it emerges. Or more accurately, it is the still visible record of its responses to earlier writings. (Dillon 2007, 47)

Though Dillon disagrees in some respects with Davidson's use of the term (as he implies palimpsests are made from linked texts) Davidson comments on the material and ephemeral qualities of a 'palimtext':

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[90] Oulipo = Ouvroir de littérature potentielle, roughly translated as: workshop of potential literature.
[91] Writer, Raymond Queneau and scientist, Francois Le Lionnais.
[92] The direct translation is: *The Disappearance*, but this is published in English with the title, *A Void.*
[93] Burroughs states that "a page of Rimbaud cut up and rearranged will give you quite new images—real Rimbaud images—but new ones." (Miles 2012, 23) For a wide range of collated examples of avant-garde writings, see the website: ubuweb (Goldsmith 1996).

pencils, pens, paper, typewriters. . . The personist character of these technologies is dependent on their ephemerality, their fatal involvement in time. . . staples rust, card stock fades, paper yellows and begins to flake. . . The materiality of ephemerality is a study in ghosts. (Davidson 1997, 28)[94]

In response to these links to my recent textual experiments—Davidson's term, palimtext, is explored while working with cut-up pages from my own novels (along with memories and personal texts). This part of the project is documented separately as an illustrated online essay[95].
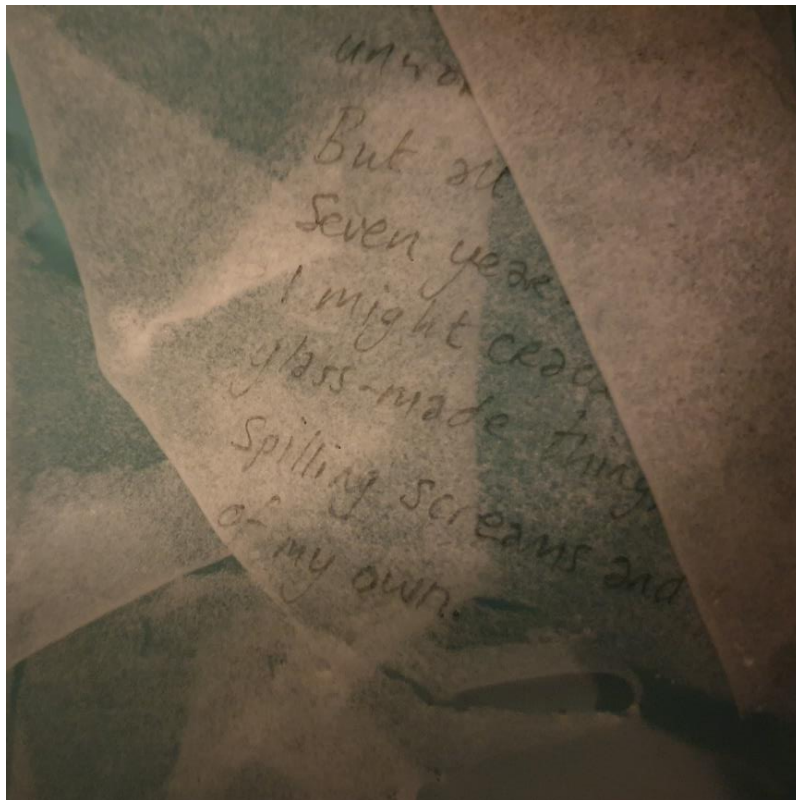
*Handwriting on Sugar Paper* (film still)

Returning to my attempts to make my 'Before the Gale' short story partially disappear, I experiment with different types of paper. A small amount of handwriting on sugar paper looks haunting while it floats in water. To the touch, it feels like a thickening of the water. As it dissolves, the paper becomes glue-like, so to read the writing while it's still legible, the dissolving paper would need to be documented as a video or sequence of photographs. This wouldn't work for a narrative as long as this short story. Butter paper and tracing paper are translucent, which visually suggests disappearing, but when text is printed on these papers, the words are fully legible. However, the translucency of these papers is promising, due to the potential for layering[96]. Sally J Morgan's artists' book, *A Life in Diagrams*, is

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[94] Ghost, again. It seems they are everywhere. I have just searched for the word 'ghost' throughout this exegesis. It is repeated over one hundred times.

[95] This stage of experimentation is published in the online journal *Memory Connection Volume 3, Number 1* January 2019. A link is included as Appendix III.

[96] I return to butter paper at a later stage of this project, due to its frailty and the visual effects of layering printed texts. Some of my altered books resemble the *layering* effect of butter paper in Morgan's artists' book, though the content of the pages is entirely different. Morgan's pages contain delicately drawn diagrams, images, and handwritten text, whereas my pages contain printed and fragmented fictional text.

made from translucent butter paper pages. The translucent pages reveal layers of fine-line drawings and diagrams combined with text, creating a moving and poetic tribute to her father (S. J. Morgan 2019). For another example of book pages made from translucent paper, see Marcel Broodthaers's artists' book[97] which shares a title with Stéphane Mallarmé's poem, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard (Casting the dice once will never abolish chance) (1969)*. Mallarmé's free verse poem was a famous precursor of the concrete poetry movement. In Broodthaers's hands, the poem becomes illegible because all the words have been replaced with thick black lines[98].
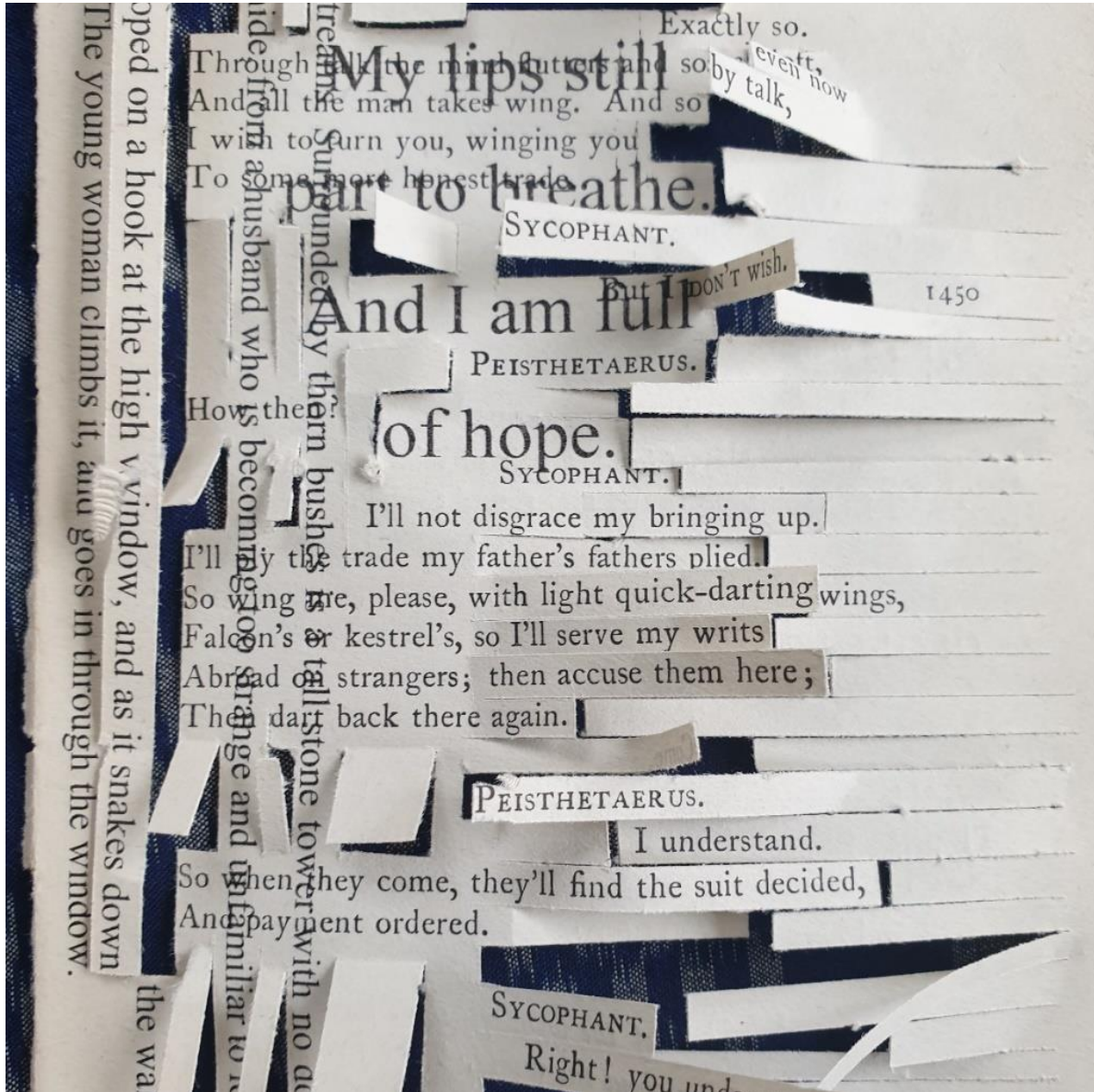
Cut-Out Overprinting

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[97] In terms of artists' books, a comprehensive survey of the field has shown that the most relevant examples in relation to this research project are this layered book (which contains blocks of lines in place of text) by Broodthaers, Sally J Morgan's layered accumulating image/diagram/text works within *Life in Diagrams*, Tom Phillips' non-linear narrative on the brightly painted pages of *A Humument*, Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit* for her poetic instructions for performance, and Mary Ruefle's *Little White Shadow* for her whiteout redactions.

[98] Broodthaers's artists' book (Osborne 2002, 167) is a hybrid object, described as being 'suspended' between "competing forms of literary and visual communication". For a thorough history of Conceptual Art, see Peter Osborne's book *Conceptual Art* (Osborne 2002).

I attempt to make text 'disappear' within other texts by over-printing on vintage book pages, and then cutting the pages. The paper becomes sculptural and distracts too much from the text. The over-printing makes the text visually confusing and overly complex to read.

The material qualities of text and the temporal qualities of books and pages have become significant again at this point, due to considering the possibilities of making part of a fictional narrative visually disappear, and yet still be legible. "As Jean-Michel Basquiat put it, ~~"I cross out words so you will see them more; the fact that they are obscured makes you want to read them."~~." (Rubinstein 2018)

The next stage of this research project will be to make my 'Before the Gale' short story disappear inside a book.

Cut Up Fiction in Redacted Books

This section describes the next stage of the research project, where cut-up techniques and redaction processes are used in tandem – to see how two or more texts interact on the pages of books. Like palimpsests, each book (/artefact) visually represents an 'overwriting' of one text by another, but unlike palimpsests, there is an intertextual relationship created between these two previously unrelated texts, and the combinations of words make a new text. The book artefacts that are made during this stage of the project are similar to the previous redacted books in that they also stand as hybrid textual, visual and material objects.

The book selected to paste my 'Before the Gale' short story into is a poetry collection: *Travellers' Verse – New Excursions into English Poetry* chosen by M G Lloyd Thomas[99]. This hardback book is fairly fragile, has a theme of travel, and many of the poems focus on 'exotic' or 'foreign' landscapes. The references to nature in many of these poems conflict with the apocalyptic narrative of my short story. The poetic language is rich, precise, rhythmic, and full of imagery. In a departure from the redaction process used previously, there is no need to seek a fictional narrative from within the poetry book, as this will be provided by my story. This process is therefore an imposition of an apocalyptic fictional narrative which appropriates words from the multi-authored poems. The fictional narrative will be fragmented by being cut up and also redacted, so words from both texts interact visually and textually on each page.

Barthes makes a distinction between the reader's subjectivity and "individuality" in his book, *The Pleasure of the Text*: "Whenever I attempt to "analyse" a text which has given me pleasure, it is not my "subjectivity" I encounter, but my "individuality," the given that makes my body separate to other bodies and appropriates its suffering or its pleasure…" (Barthes 1975, 62-63). In my understanding of this quote, Barthes is describing the appropriation of emotion which occurs during the reading of fictional texts (though personally I would describe this as empathy). He goes on to establish that a sense of the individual, in the process of reading fiction, is plural:

> A certain pleasure is derived from a way of imagining oneself as *individual,* of inventing a final, rarest fiction: the fictive identity. This fiction is no longer the illusion of a unity; on the contrary, it is the theatre of society in which we stage our plural: our pleasure is *individual* – but not personal. (Barthes 1975, 62)

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[99] Published by Frederick Muller Ltd in 1946.

At the conclusion of *The Pleasure of the Text,* Barthes writes about something he claims doesn't exist – 'writing aloud'. In this final section an imagined cinematic (and disembodied) voice of an actor is described using sensual and sexual verbs: *granulates, crackles, caresses, grates, cuts, comes*: The distance of the screen and the 'close-up' on the disembodied voice described with these specific active verbs seems to at the very least, *allude* to close ups on isolated and active body-parts in pornography. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, meaning is often obscured by the extended (and at times bafflingly sexual) metaphor of textual eroticism. But what is of significance to my research project is what happens when a fictional narrative is not only fragmented but also interrupted by words and phrases from another text? *What if...* a fictional narrative is fragmented and interrupted to allow for a variety of individual, plural, multiple, interrupted, or fragmented readings? What happens in the negative space? What happens when phrases are shortened, condensed, redacted, and read again?

> Between the lines and the words
>
> The spaces reveal ~~as much as the text. If not more, if not~~ the essence. (Brossard, 29)
>
> ~~(my redaction)~~

We might attempt to fill the negative space with individual connections – or accumulate a narrative from these interrupted fragments. We might also search for what is familiar, and try to uncover what the book used to be, while simultaneously engaging with what it has become. Though the fictional narrative pasted into the book is unfamiliar, it is contained inside a familiar material object. If we consider the book (as material object) to be the primary 'familiar' aspect, Sander's positive summing up about the future of appropriation and adaptation becomes significant:

> …finding new angles and routes into something, new perspectives on the familiar, and these new angles, routes and perspectives in turn identify entirely novel possibilities. (Sanders 2006, 158)

New possibilities of the book, and the potential to read/view each book as a visual/textual artefact will now be explored further during this research project.

What if... this whole project is a memorial to something I don't want to believe is dying?

Perhaps what is dying is the book. Perhaps it is storytelling. Perhaps it is both.

Many people have written about the death of storytelling, the death of the novel, the death of the author, the death of literacy.

But what if a storyteller believes in ghosts, and this is why they continue to tell stories?

This research project is formed by quiet, slow writing which at times seems as urgent as graffiti, as if: "it must spell out before being arrested, and ultimately, washed over-covered up" (LaBelle 2001, 70-71). I cut my 'Before the Gale' story into fragments (keeping the words in the order in which they occurred) and simultaneously redact each page of poetry as I glue in the fragments, and redact these as well. I use words and phrases from the poems to foreshadow the events in the story, to expand on the narrator's internal thoughts, or to add conflicting forces by juxtaposing the apocalyptic narrative with nature imagery.

Because the poems are already written in a condensed form, I incorporate longer phrases than I did while redacting the previous books, which were all written in prose. Coincidentally, the first poem in the book already contains the phrase 'before the gale' so this phrase is included as a repetition/reinforcement of the title.

The two texts become interwoven and yet can be read in several different ways:

Read only the story that's been pasted in and left visible.
Read all visible text, and the half-redacted text.
Read only the visible text from the words contained in the book.
Read only the half-redacted text.

The following text is transcribed from pages one to five of the book. The text (in brackets) is the text from the poetry book, and the half-redacted text is included:

BEFORE (strange machines white smoke from black, before the gale, forbid) THE GALE (as birds, like swallows The end is itself-the end of skimming The surface of The Rock or strewn souls)

I'm sitting on a bench at the (sunken) waterfront, looking out to sea. The cargo boats (Came home cracked by the sun and the seven deadly sins) are carrying away (complaints) THE WORLDS metal containers. It's (like) dawn, and my eyes are running (wander) from the effort of staring for (my fortune) so long, (Wide is the world and A Siren) looking for light, (these shores winds and seas are troublesome – may be free in the deep, in sleep) seeking something possible

willing something to change. (if honour were to be attained with ease) It's only the dawn that (would come and rest But) does (danger seek To spend time luxuriously Become) this– (of worth) conjures this exact shade of melancholy. I love and hate melancholy. (With that unreal name;) I often seek it out, but it had to be there in (a thing conceived, to molest peace, and to beguile) me already, didn't it? To know what to look for. (suppose there were) Rummaging in (honour, Yet manliness would scorn to wear) my handbag. I pull out (The time, touch) my handkerchief. (feel joy;) It's a white (pleasure like the shore.)

(A) square with one corner (same recreated still:) embroidered with (pleasure a touch at last) colourful flowers. Wiping tears from the creases beneath my eyes, I pause for (That opinion out of) a moment and (make laws a nature wail) examine the warp and weft of (blood;) the thick (hurt unrest, to turn mischief good a wicked peace) linen fabric (changed for war. Then I see) What would one set of lines be, without the other? (won, cannot win, lost beauty)

A man runs along the waterfront, and (The strangest adventures happen by the sea,) there's the sound of a dog panting to keep up with him. As he's (out hunting – A huntsman – a little ship) about to pass (close to land) me, I glance at him (silver,) and as he catches my (sail) eye he slows (the little ship) down. He's younger than (singing The waves hear) me, (soft) a fit and happy (fish) type, (darkness Ascended the sea,) and I (And all the birds) expect that he'll tell me to (hear his words! Tell me) cheer up, the way strangers often do…

Without the half-redacted text, the above transcript would be more concise and focussed. Because the half-redacted text is semi-visible/visually whispered – the affect of reading the transformed book is very different to seeing it typed here in black ink on white paper. To read the book is to read layers of textual whispers, half-hidden words, hints of secrets.

After slowly redacting and pasting text throughout the entire book, I reconsider the narrative while examining the textual interactions on the pages.

A woman is experiencing a relentless onslaught of memories as the world is about to end. The words selected from the poems elaborate on / juxtapose her memories and add rhythm to some of the phrases.
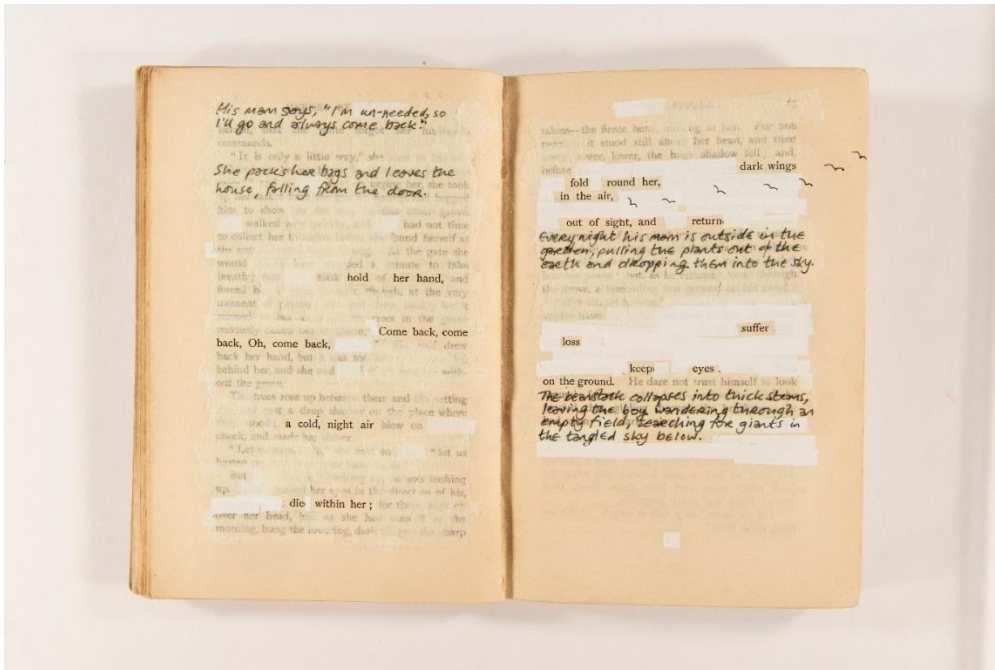
Before the Gale (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

The bomb blows – and is formed from the letters of poems. The word 'bomb' does not appear in the story because the narrator is unaware of what is happening – it is formed from individual letters in the poems. This is the most significant moment in the narrative[100]. After that, we then see the narrator's process of forgetting. It is arguable that the story narrative should end before the 'forgetting' section – in the moment the bomb blows up.

To complete this book I use one layer of masking tape to half-redact all of the remaining pages which contain the post-bomb (forgetting) part of the story. This part of the narrative is still there, but as a textual whisper.

In the iteration of the short story 'Before the Gale', that is a transformed book, textual visuality, materiality, and narrative interact in equal measure. A fictional narrative has been imposed on the book rather than emerging from within the narrative. The possibilities of multiple readings of the book are also extended as the vocabulary choices of more than one writer interact on the pages.

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[100] Visually representing the crisis point in the narrative arc.

The Storyteller (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)
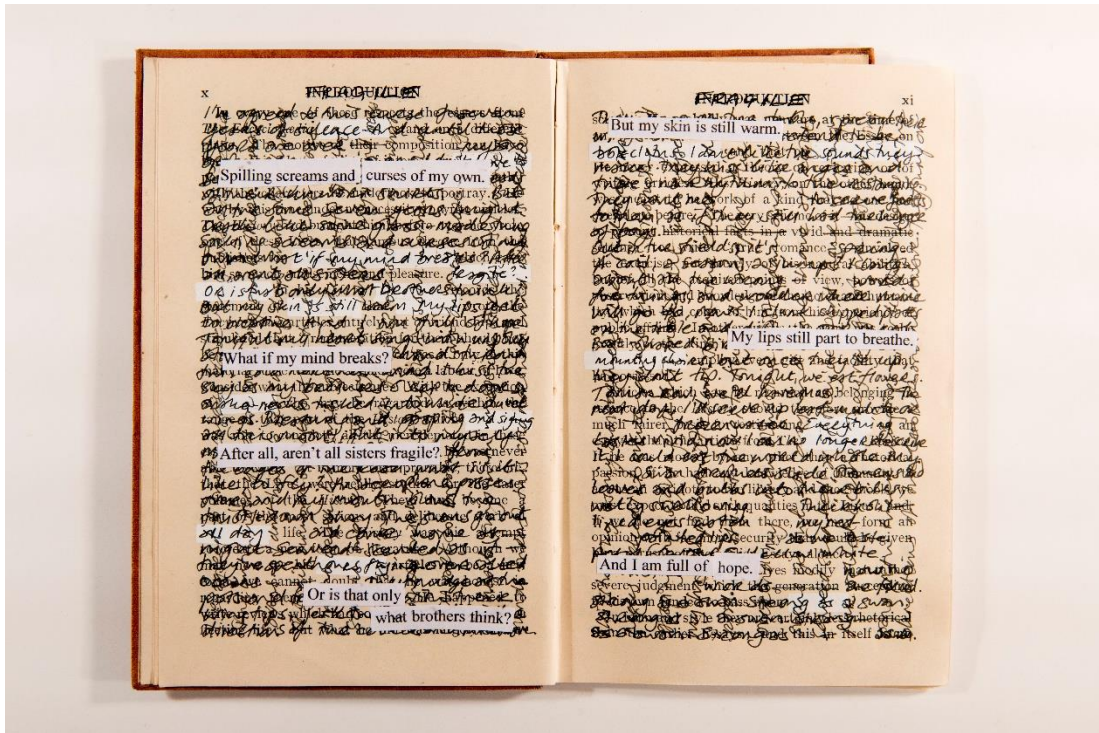
While considering the folkloric narratives I was reading/writing at the beginning of this project, I work with my memories of fairy tales, rather than directly from textual versions. This is in order to engage with the magical parts of these narratives that still seem relevant to me as an adult. Several fairy tales are re-written backwards, or as oscillating backwards/forwards narratives and the content is altered to include adult characters and/or themes. I handwrite a few of these short stories into a redacted book ('The Storyteller'), and use some of the book's printed text to interact with the narratives, to either explore the theme of storytelling, add further imagery, or develop the characters. The handwriting evokes a sense of intimacy (and the personality of the writer) in this small soft-covered book. As an object it is like a diary or notebook; small enough to be carried in a pocket.
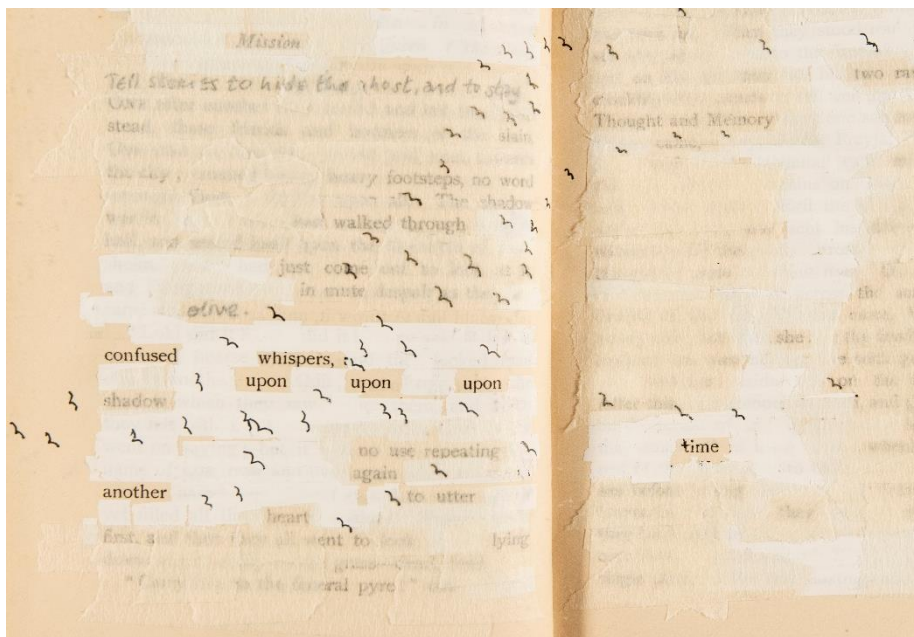
The Storyteller (detail) (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

Fragile (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

Fragile (detail) (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

The previous two images are from another book that is altered by incorporating handwriting and printed text. 'Fragile' uses an excerpt from one of my short stories that is repeated to the point of near illegibility. The visual image of repetition on book pages appears frantic, and has connotations of obsessional thinking. However, this repeated short text is about a narrator who is fairly calm and enjoys being silent:

FRAGILE

I've agreed to this curse of seven years of silence. And until those years are over, my six brothers remain swans. I don't have to seal up my lips with the threads of their unworn shirts. But all the same. Seven years. I might crack like some glass-made thing. Spilling screams and curses of my own. What if my mind breaks? After all, aren't all sisters fragile? Or is that only what brothers think? But my skin is still warm. My lips still part to breathe. And I am full of hope.

Tonight my heart sings with unspoken stories as I weave my hands through this cold northern wind. I kiss the sky as my swan-brothers sleep indoors, snake-necks tucked into white duvet-wings. Breathing and gasping and sighing all this moonlight into myself. My hands pick thistledown from the edges of the road. What is it like, to fly? An aeroplane passes over, and my mouth blows the thistledown away.

The swans go out all day and come home at night. Seaweed scented, as if they've spent hours flying over salted oceans. They nudge at the pots and frying pans with their wingtips, jerk their heads in the directions of the cooker and microwave. They jump on the table, spread their wings and pretend to be tablecloths. I don't like the sounds they make. They hiss like anger, and there's no rhythm to their stamping. They want me to serve feasts to them, as if they still had the hunger of boys.

Out in the fields, it's spring. A coil, a season, a jump? I laugh about all the wrong words for things, and wonder where mine will go to, now.

I clunk chipped plates on the table and dish up our meal. Boat-shaped birds are clumsy at mounting chairs, but once they're up, they don't tip. Tonight, we eat flowers. Tomorrow, we'll have moss. The next day, I'll serve up leaf mulch or frozen water. Everything tastes vivid, now I can no longer describe it. I could eat the world whole. My swan-brothers slide stamens and leaves and bulbs into their bills, wetly swallowing. Their kohl-lined eyes watch my red-painted lips as we taste petal flavours: yellow, white. I'm stronger, now no words are forced.

Strong as a swan.

The above version of the text allows the reader to experience this short narrative without any visual interference. The over-writing and repetition of hand-written words in the transformed book raise questions about what damage prolonged and forced silence might do to a human mind. After making this book, I expand the above short text into a full-length short story, and the content becomes darker and more sinister. The narrator does not experience a happy ending, and her swan brothers remain untransformed. One of the swans in my story has a hidden human arm and hand, reversing the folkloric story of the Swan Sister, who, after transforming the swans back into humans, has a brother with one wing. The process of silently handwriting the same text repeatedly into a small disintegrating book gave me insights into the pleasures and dangers of silence. This informed the short story narrative's further development.

I return to my short story, 'New Clothes', and consider what kind of book to paste it into. The narrator (the Emperor's wife) is an artist who is obsessed with winter, and some of her drawings are described in my short story. This opens up the possibility of using visual images as well as text. In my short story, the Emperor (Rex) is often compared to the sun. A hardback book about cosmology is selected which contains text and black and white photographic images[101].
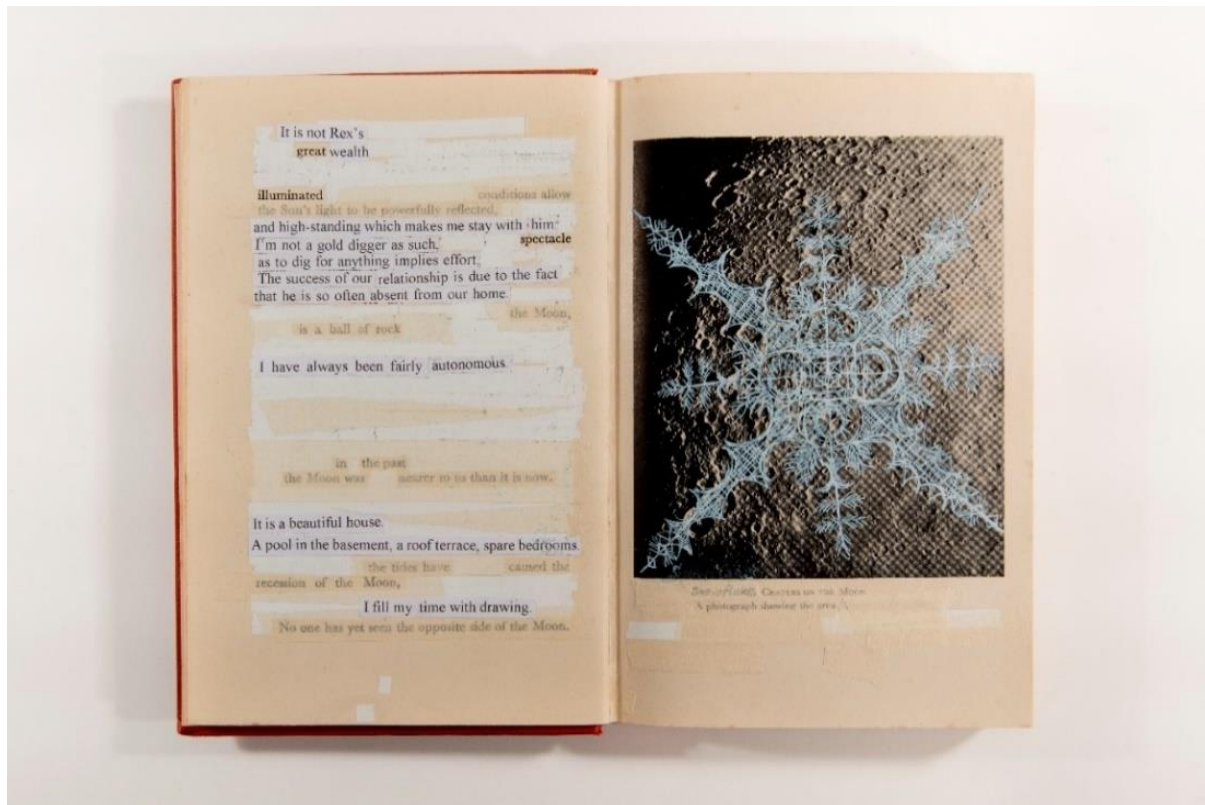
New Clothes (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

In addition to the materials of masking and correction tape, I use black and white pens and pencils to draw on the pages. Handwritten words are added to increase a sense of intimacy with the narrator – as if we are looking at her sketchbook.

The combination of hand-drawn images and the use of the first person narrative voice juxtaposes subjective intimacy with the scientific, objective elements of the cosmology book. There are other visual/textual juxtapositions – a cold and distant narrator combined with the handwriting of an author whose personality is warm would perhaps confuse any handwriting analyst. These juxtapositions provide conflict in the reading process – as this aspect of fictional narrative is lacking now that the linear structure of the story has been disrupted.

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[101] *The Nature of the Universe, A Series of Broadcast Lectures,* by Fred Hoyle. Published by Blackwell, 1950.
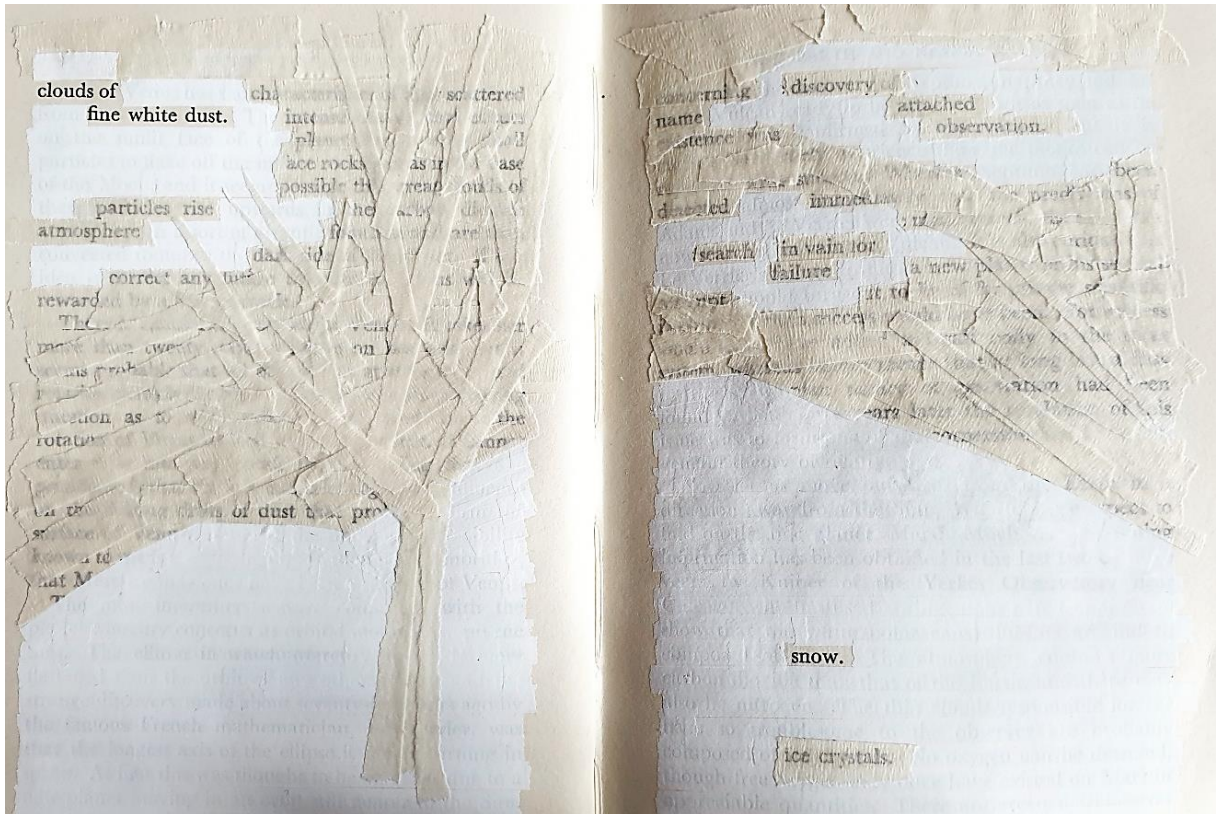
New Clothes (detail)

Some images are made as relief – using layers masking and correction tape, and can only be fully seen when light is angled to reveal the surface texture. Many pages of this book are textual and visual in various ways, and the images are drawn from the short story narrative:

Today I'm drawing a landscape of white hills, a grey sky, and one solitary winter tree.

Yesterday I drew elaborate, detailed drawings of individual snowflakes.
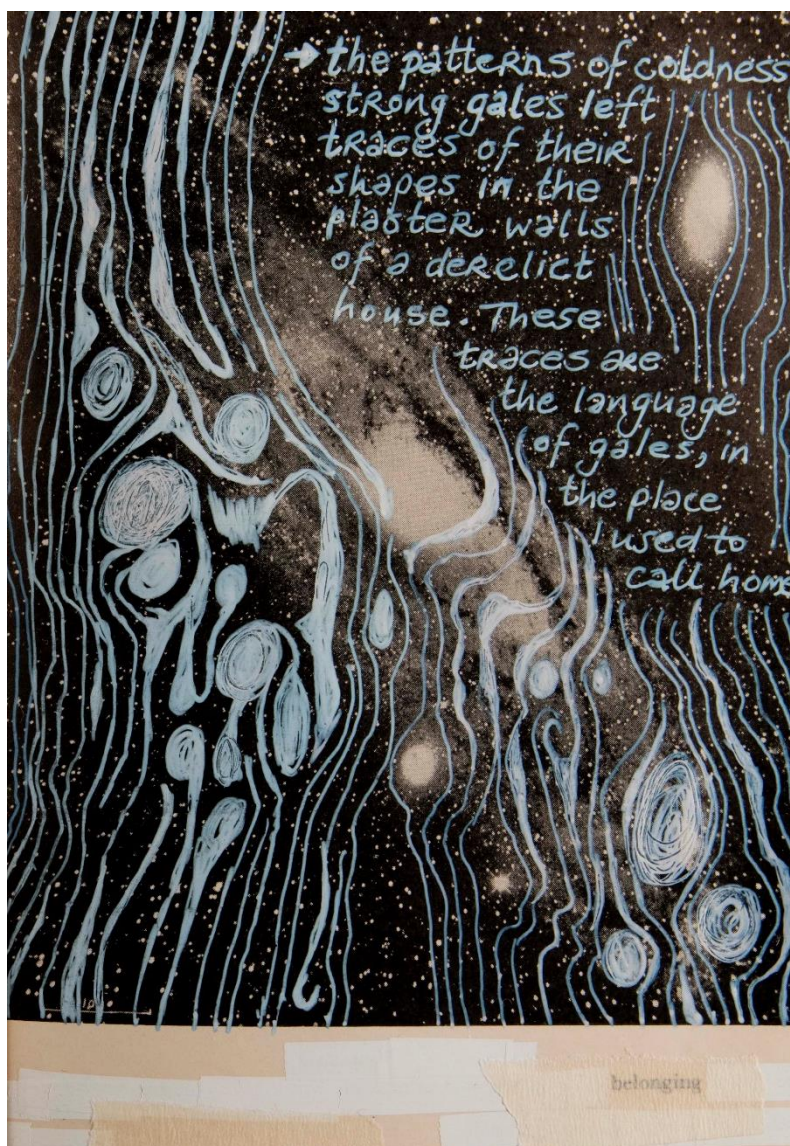
New Clothes (detail) (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

The sense of intimacy created by hand-drawn images and handwriting draws attention to the paradoxical nature of the narrator's character who is cold and distant. As an author, I simultaneously reveal more of myself as I develop this book – one of the image/text pages includes a recent memory of walking near my childhood home not long before my father died. There were circular swirling lines in the plaster of the walls of a derelict cottage. My father had previously told me that these lines were made by gales. In the book, I draw the swirling lines in white pen on the night sky, and add handwriting about the language of gales.

I return to my short story, 'The Bookbird'. As the story is about a book transforming into a bird, and music and song are mentioned, I cut out some music lessons from the antique lesson book. A hardback book is selected: *The Magic Flute: A Fantasia*, by G Lowes Dickenson[102] and I work through it, redacting, cutting up my short story and pasting it in alongside the music lesson fragments. Individual letters are used to form visual images.

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[102] Published by George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1923.

The letter 'o' looks like a raindrop on a windowpane, when isolated from the words it belongs to.

o oo   o o   o   o   o   o   o   o.[103]

For example, in the first image below the letter 'o' is left visible. The subsequent pages also contain many visible 'o's which disappear when it stops raining within the short story:
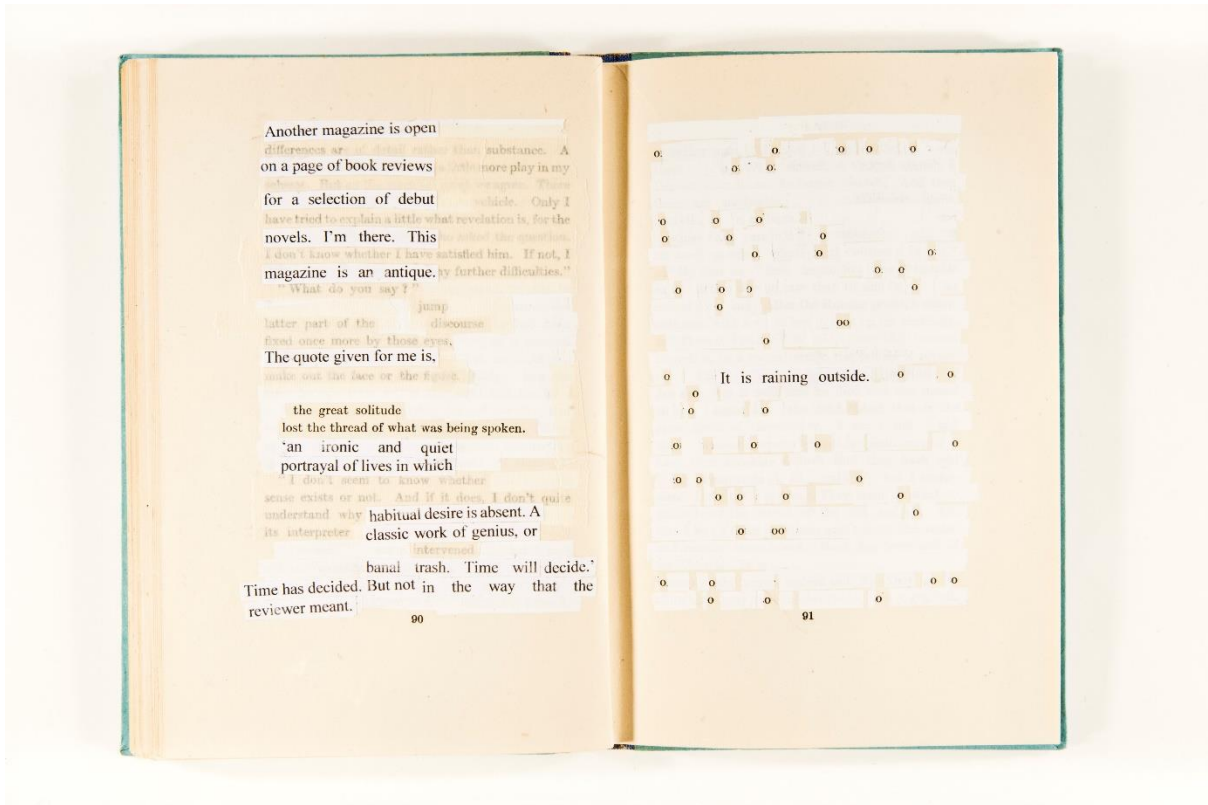
The Bookbird (Photo credit for this and the following seven images: Jessica Chubb)

It is raining outside.

[103] For a very different visual/textual example of the use of dis/appearing and repeated 'o's – see the images from Caroline Bergvall's exhibition, *Middling English*, 2010 (Edmond 2019, 142-143).
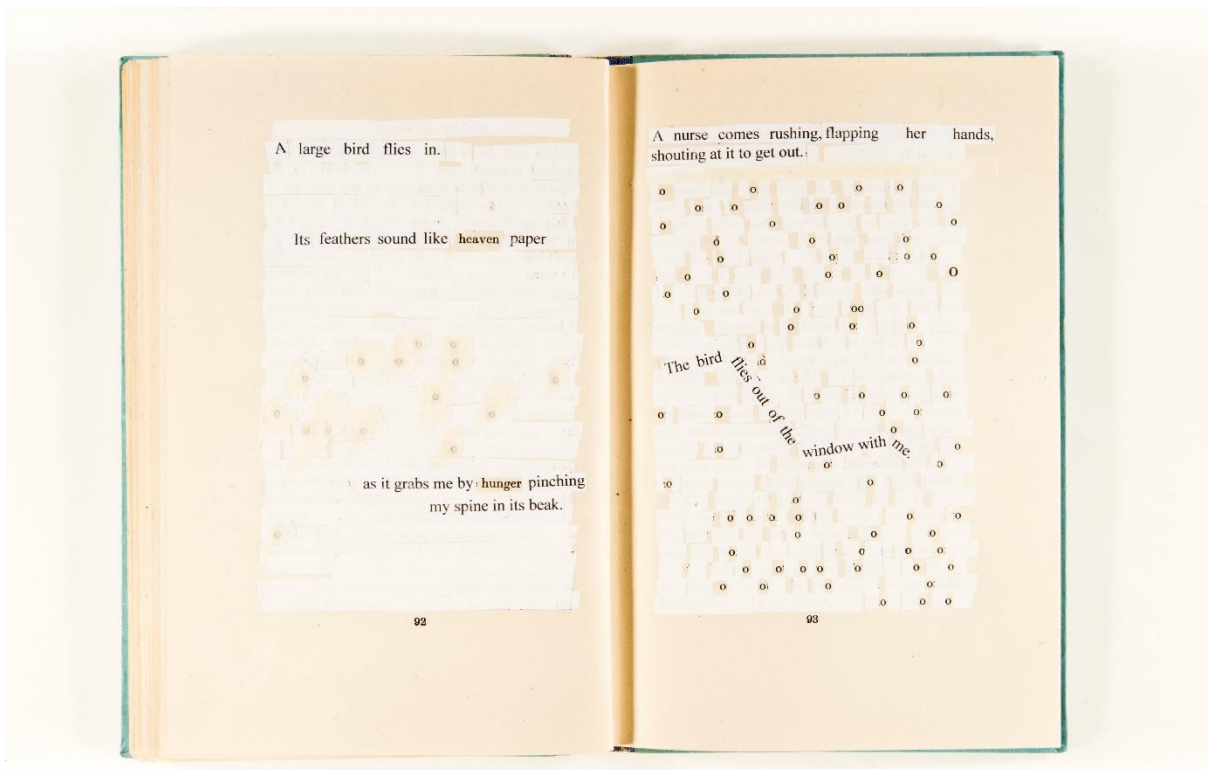
A large bird flies in. Its feathers sound like heaven paper – as it grabs me by hunger-pinching my spine in its beak. A nurse comes rushing, flapping her hands, shouting at it to get out. The bird flies out of the window with me.
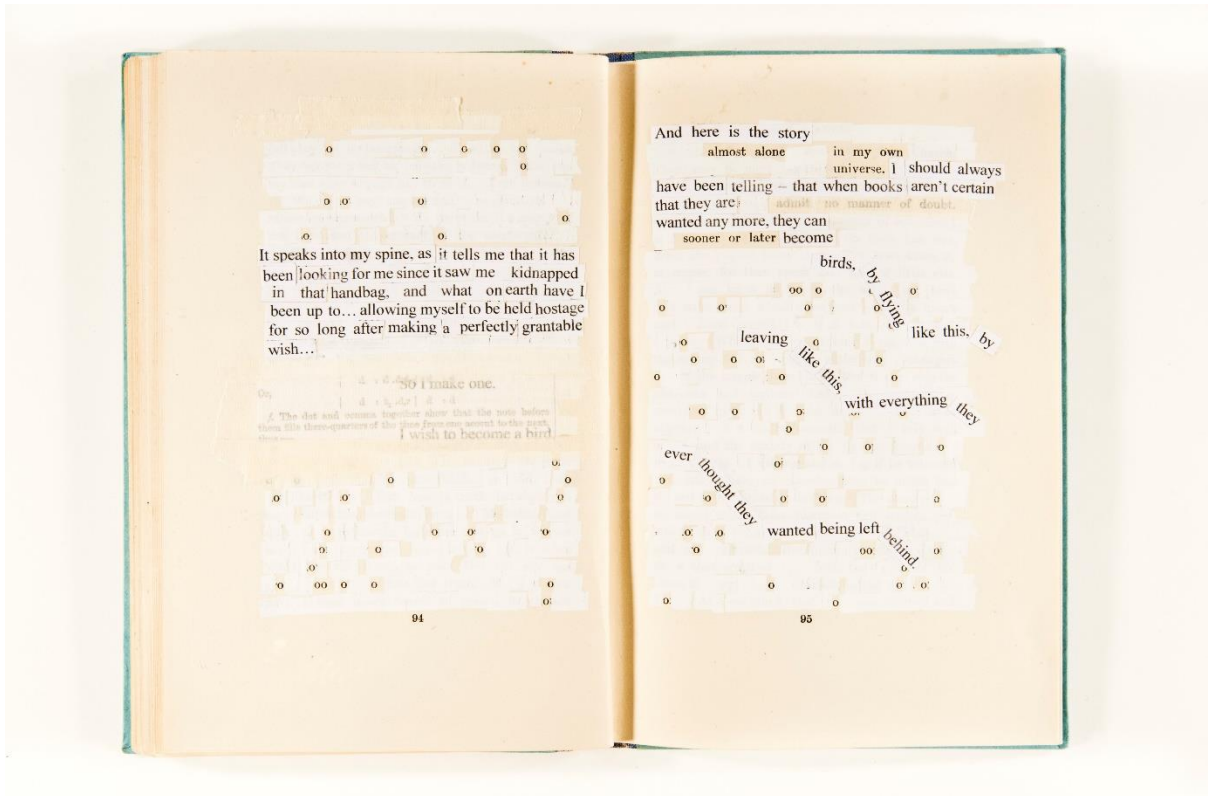
It speaks into my spine, as it tells me that it has been looking for me since it saw me kidnapped in that handbag, and what on earth have I been up to… allowing myself to be held hostage for so long after making a perfectly grantable wish… And here is the story – almost alone in my own universe – I should have been telling all along – that when books aren't certain they are – admit no manner of doubt – wanted any more, they can sooner or later become birds, by flying like this – by leaving like this, with everything they – ever thought they wanted being left behind.
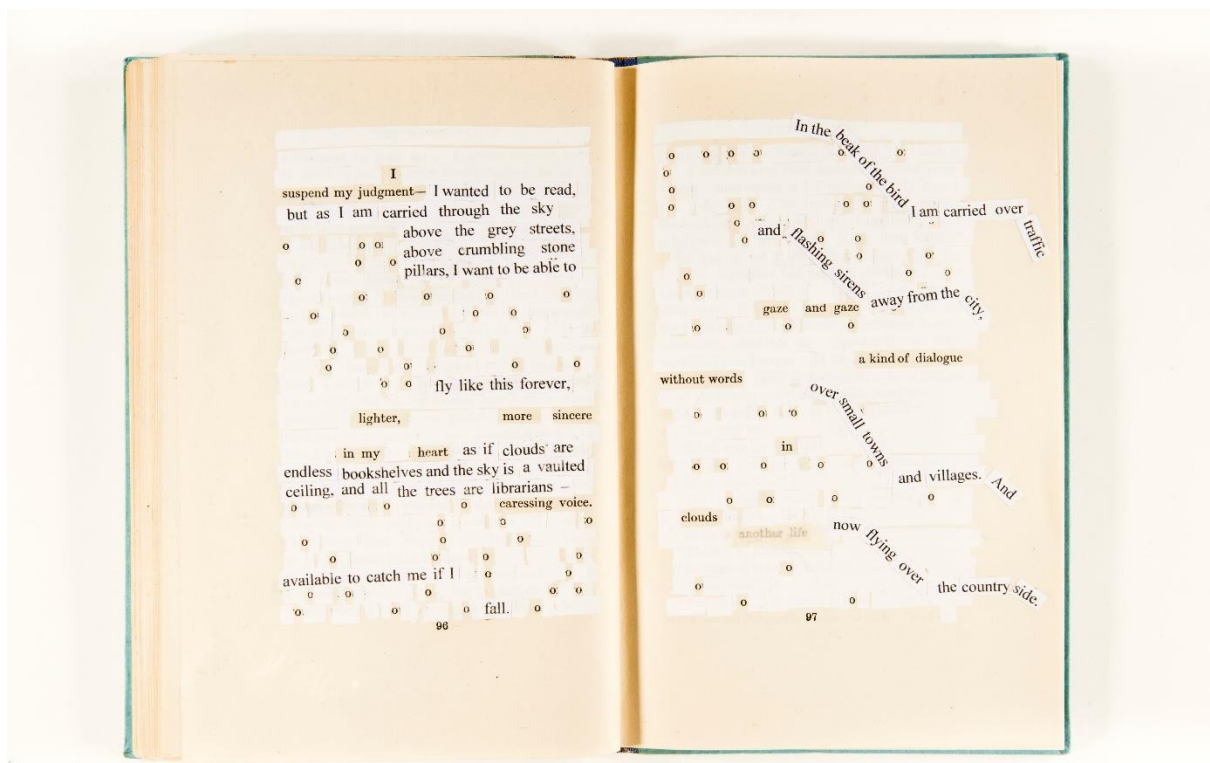
I suspend my judgement – I wanted to be read, but as I am carried through the sky above the grey streets, above crumbling stone pillars, I want to be able to fly like this forever. Lighter, more sincere in my heart, as if clouds are endless bookshelves and the sky is a vaulted ceiling, and all the trees are librarians – caressing voice – available to catch me if I fall. In the beak of the bird I am carried over traffic and flashing sirens, away from the city. Gaze and gaze, a kind of dialogue without words, over small towns and villages, and in clouds, another life, now flying over the countryside…
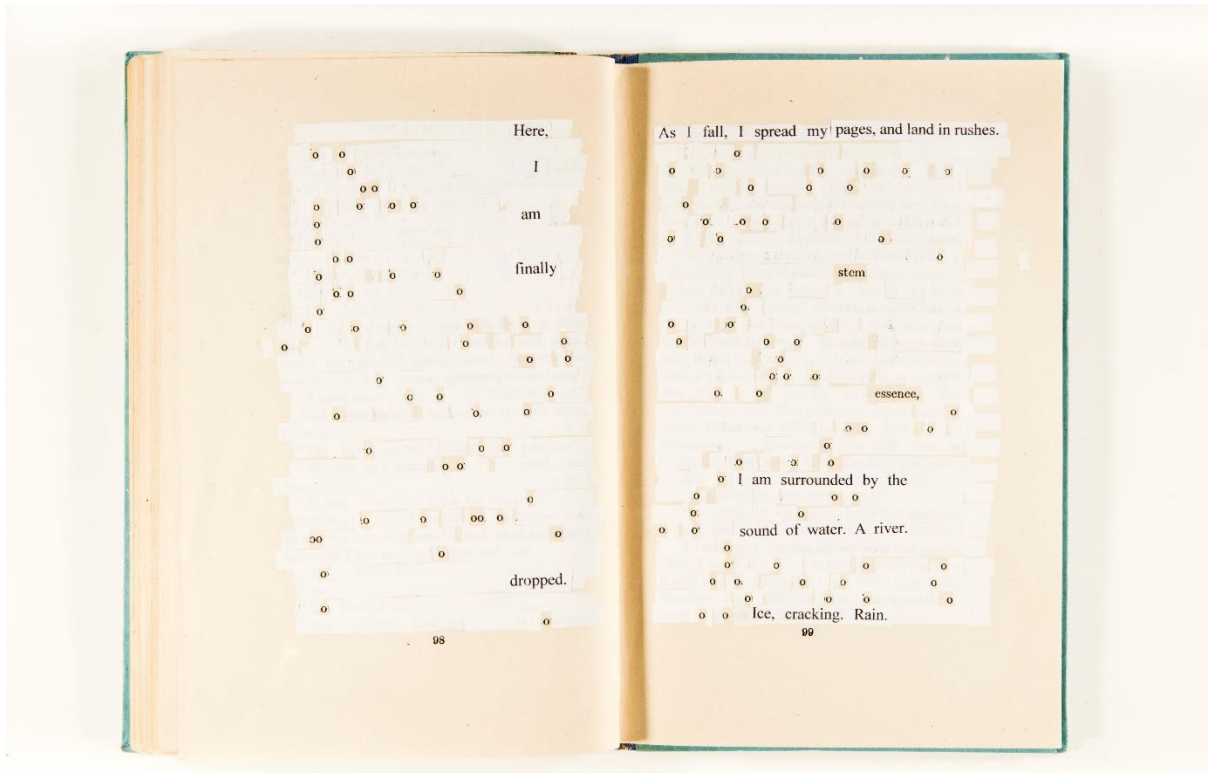
Here, I am finally dropped. As I fall, I spread my pages and land in rushes. Stem essence. I am surrounded by the sound of water. A river. Ice, cracking. Rain.

My pages turn grey as words wash away. When the rain stops. Sound of running water, I shake and ruffle myself dry in an icy gale. I'm shocked as I find my voice and exclaim a loud melody. Doh, Quiet, Soh, Doh, Doh, Soh, Quiet, Doh. Note: sing these notes first slowly, then quickly, and again with a sound long-drawn-out. Master one note at a time. I try again, a little more softly. Doh, Quiet, Soh, Quiet, Oh, quiet, Doh, Doh, Soh, please, Soh, Doh. Sing these notes as tree and water meditation.
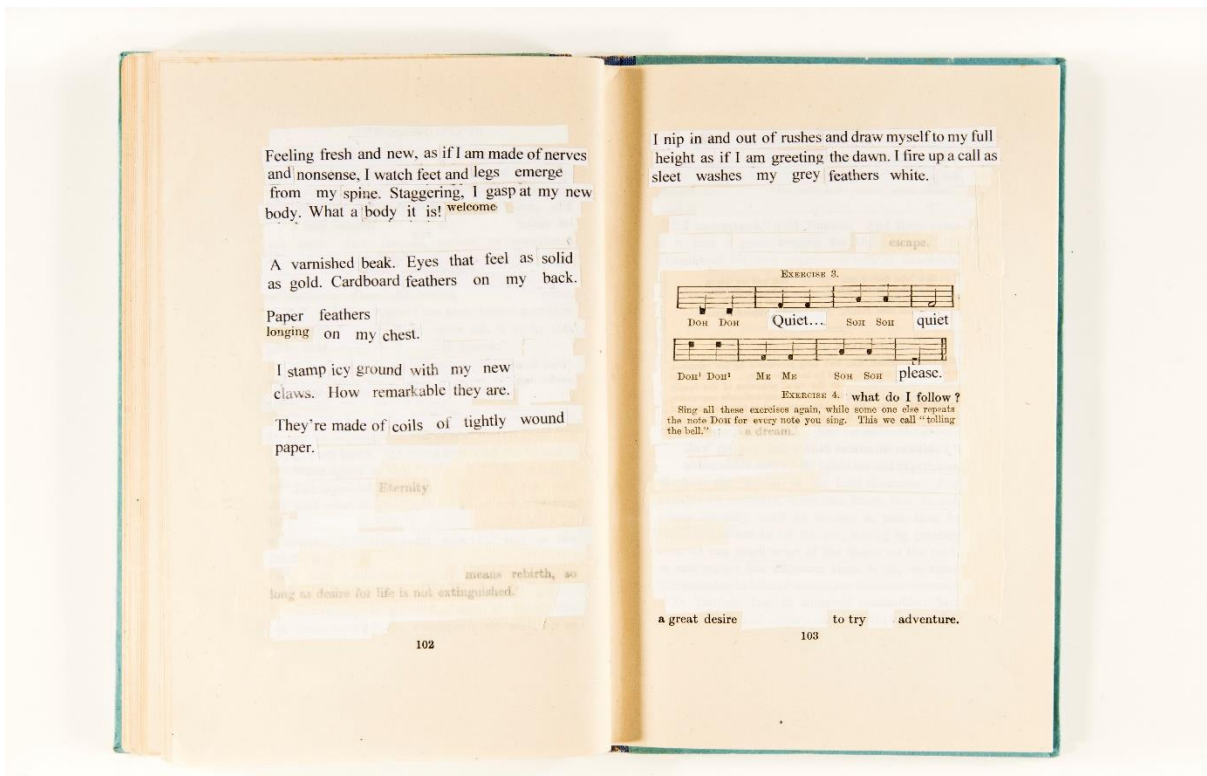
Feeling fresh and new, as if I am made of nerves and nonsense, I watch feet and legs emerge from my spine. Staggering, I gasp at my new body. What a body it is! Welcome. A varnished beak. Eyes that feel as solid as gold. Cardboard feathers on my back. Paper feathers – longing – on my chest. I stamp icy ground with my new claws. How remarkable they are. They're made of coils of tightly wound paper. Eternity means rebirth, as long as desire for life is not extinguished.

I nip in and out of rushes and draw myself to my full height as if I am greeting the dawn. I fire up a call as sleet washes my grey feathers white. Doh Doh Quiet Soh Soh quiet Doh Doh Me Me Soh Soh please. What do I follow? A great desire to try adventure.
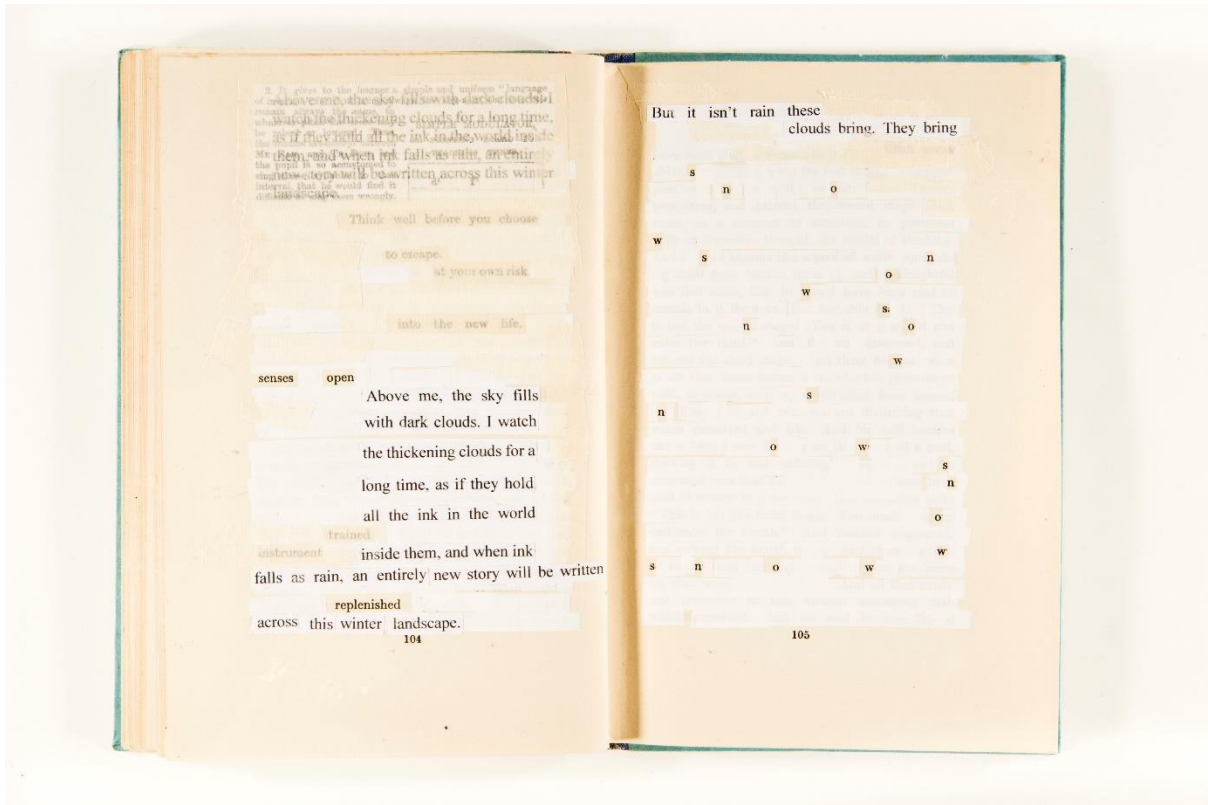
Think well before you choose to escape at your own risk – into the new life. Senses open. Above me, the sky fills with dark clouds. I watch the thickening clouds for a long time, as if they hold all the ink in the world inside them, and when ink falls as rain, an entirely new story will be written – replenished – across this winter landscape.

But it isn't rain these clouds bring, they bring… s n o w s n o w s n o w s n o w s n o w…

and thousands of birds.

The iterative process which resulted in writing 'The Bookbird' as a short story (folding books, redacting, using a transcript) has been taken further. The story is now cut up – fragmented to interact with two other texts during the process of becoming a visual/textual/material artefact. During the next stage in this research, 'The Bookbird' will be taken through further iterations. By the end of this transformative stage of the project, I have made a small collection of one-off transformed books, several textual/sculptural objects and pages, and written many short stories.

Now these words need "to be seen".

PART III: Iterations

Readings, Workshops and Audio-Visual Presentations

The books are fragile and temporal objects, so the advantages and disadvantages of presenting them in audio-visual formats need to be fully considered. This section introduces some of the presentation modes that are explored during the final stages of this research project.

A selection of photographic images from three of the transformed books are presented as part of a panel of 'performed' presentations: *Creative (Art) Writing Assembly* at the AAANZ conference[104]. The session description includes the following statement: "Writing, like most art, is not just practice, but is itself an interactive process that enables the emergence of the new, the unseen, and the unforeseen." Text from a selection of the books is read aloud as the corresponding pages are shown as photographic slides. In the group discussion afterwards, the presentation (hearing the text spoken live, and simultaneously seeing the images) is described by various audience members as 'performative', 'beautiful', 'mesmerising' and 'compelling'. Another topic of conversation is appropriation. One of the conveners says my creative work "blows the issue of appropriation apart" in the context of two other presenters who openly appropriate text from other writers (in the form of collaboration, in one case) and my texts being re-made / re-written into a new form. As I discuss the redactions and additions in the transformed books, others assert their views – I am now the writer/maker of each transformed book, including the purely redacted ones. Through the process of writing/making the transformed books, and by having this discussion, my earlier suggestion – that the ownership of a text is determined by *narrative* – has now become a clearer position. The text which is now 'there to be *seen*' in each of the transformed books is my own accumulating fictional narrative formed by fragmented phrases.

As a result of posting some images of the transformed book pages and folded books on social media, I am invited to run a two-hour art/writing workshop and one-hour presentation of my PhD project at Palmerston North Library[105]. For the presentation, I focus on 'The Bookbird' (as the narrative highlights the value of libraries). Images of folding books, redacting a book, writing the story, and cutting it up and pasting it into another book are shown as projected images while I talk in detail about the iterative process. No images are shown when I read the entire short story aloud. One of the librarians takes a print-out of my story home, as she wants to read it again in her own time. After the presentation the audience are invited to touch and examine the redacted book. Most of their questions are about experimental writing processes or the story. The mix of discussion about both 'process' and 'outcome' represents a significant moment in this project – people engage with 'the story of the story' as much as the story itself.

The workshop participants are adults from the local community in Palmerston North, and we use folding techniques to make book sculptures. We explore the use of materials to work with the text of these sculptures. Out of the materials I provide, some participants choose pens/pencils/crayons of various colours, or glue and words and images from other books, some choose correction tape, or black marker pen. Some of them use redaction techniques to write poems, and others select groups of words based on a theme.

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[104] Aesthetics, Politics and Histories: The Social Context of Art, RMIT, Melbourne, 2018.

[105] I was invited by *Toi Warbrick* (a New Zealand arts collaboration) to be part of a community project centred around Palmerston North Library. The interdisciplinary programme of events (Amelie of Palmy) focussed on aspects of the French film, *Amelie* (directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 2001). My workshop was called "Lost and Found Words", and my talk was "Transformed Books" which both took place in March, 2019. The link made between my work and the film was the section where the character Amelie constructs a lost letter (from a dead soldier, to alleviate the pain of his still-living lover) by cutting up copies of his other letters, rearranging the words to write his final letter, and aging the paper by soaking it in tea.

There are many advantages to a reading-aloud and workshop presentation format – when enough time is allowed afterwards, ideas can be raised, skills and stories shared. The story is read with the storyteller's own rhythmic voice, and can be heard in its entirety. However, when a text is presented/performed/read to a group of listeners by its writer, a hierarchical relationship is inevitably created. This resembles book festival appearances – where authors are elevated on a brightly lit platform, and listeners/audience are seated below in rows, sometimes in darkness.

In another presentation (at the Fashion, Costume and Visual Cultures conference)[106] a fiction reading is combined with a workshop. Participants make their own image/text works from recycled book pages while simultaneously hearing a story[107]. This workshop is useful in terms of experimenting with the ways in which a group of people interact with images, fictional text, material text, and their own imaginative explorations. The relationship is less hierarchical as the workshop participants drift in and out of listening to the story, and simultaneously drift in and out of their own creative process. This performative approach is immersive and intimate. At the end of the workshop, the participants share their writing and images with each other.

Though these presentation and workshop modes show the transformed books as still images, there is little opportunity to engage with the physical books and access to textual content is limited. The possibilities of showing a moving image of the books are explored next.

*To hear a story in the voice of the absent storyteller while seeing it.*

The reader sees the story. The reader doesn't see the storyteller.

Videos of my hands turning the pages of the transformed books are made. Some of the videos are silent, and on others I record my voice speaking the words. While editing the video of a cut-out book titled, 'Girl Stories', the image is reversed and slowed. By altering the speed and order of the turning of pages, the material qualities of this book are amplified. The selected phrases are primarily focussed on lacks – emptiness, absences, and loss – mirroring the absences of the phrases which have been removed from the book. As an object, 'Girl Stories' is reminiscent of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes* – his novel has been cut out to construct a fictional narrative from within a short story, *Street of Crocodiles*, by Bruno Schultz. In a review, writer Michel Faber compares the two texts and observes that "Foer has merely excised hunks of Schulz's luxuriant verbiage and exhibited a slimmed-down version of the master's vision" (Faber 2010). Faber goes on to criticise Foer for including so many "complete phrases and sentences", while claiming "this book is mine". At the same time, he praises some of his "genuinely unconnected sentences". Faber's review is mainly critical, but also reveals a grudging admiration for this book, recognising that it a) is of academic interest and b) contains some "thrilling juxtapositions". I haven't been able to yet obtain a copy, but would agree that if the narrative is genuinely a *condensed* version of Schultz's story, then sole authorship cannot be claimed by Foer. However, from the grudging praise for Foer's 'unconnected sentences' and 'thrilling juxtapositions', at least some of the content can clearly be attributed to Foer. *Tree of Codes* is described by Foer's publisher as a 'sculptural object' – and has been neatly cut by using a die-cutter. Brian Stefans compares this book with other 'speculative' books and cites a frequent criticism for their "ready public dissemination" (such as Kenneth Goldsmith's *No. 111.2.7.93-10.20.96* which is formed from phrases with specific letters and syllable

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[106] The attendees were fashion and costume designers and makers, researchers and academics.
[107] *The Three Dresses* – this is my retelling of *Cinderella* which is told from the point of view of the dresses. In this story, the seamstress who made the dresses is the agent of change, instead of the prince. The image of the drawn version of this story was also shown as a visual slide show which was part of a separate presentation (as part of a *Textual Adaptations* panel) at this conference. FCVC, Roubaix, Lille, France, 2019.

counts, and Christian Bök's *Eunoia*, a book-length prose poem in which each section uses one vowel and excludes others) (Stefans 2014, 159-183).
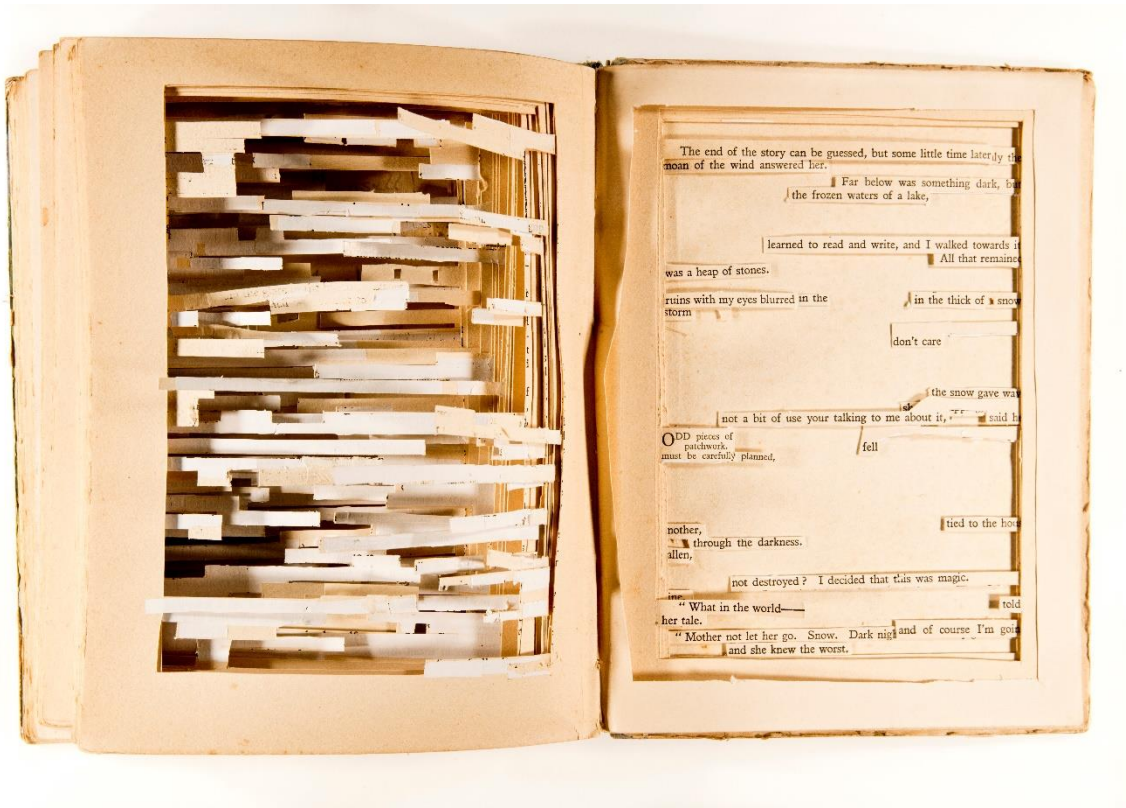
Girl Stories (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)
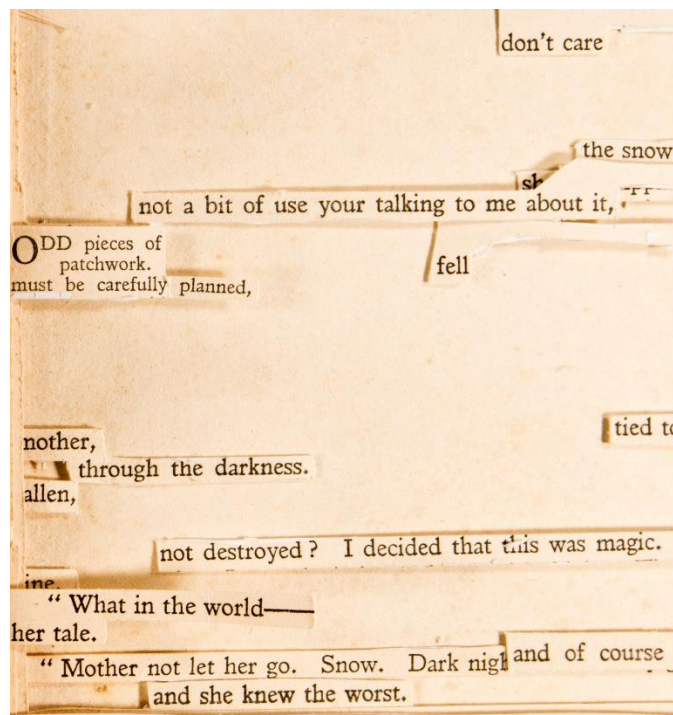
Girl Stories (detail) (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

The transformed book 'Girl Stories' is a one-off object, and is very roughly hand-cut from a 1950's Girl's Annual with thick pages. The blankness of the correction tape on the reverse side of each phrase highlights the book's sculptural qualities and evokes a sense of dereliction. When the book is closed, the interior changes are not visible, but when picked up, it feels surprisingly light. Inside, the text is redacted by being cut away and removed – floating lines of text remain. Textual relationships are established not just on one page (as is the case in the redacted/pasted books) but across all the pages of this book.

I make another hand-cut book from a similar 1950's Girl's Annual which includes one of short stories cut-up and pasted in to interact with phrases from the Annual. This transformed book, 'Monster', becomes visually overwhelming due to a large amount of text being simultaneously visible. The texts in 'Monster' are phrases constructed from the Annual (some of which are magical and strange, e.g., 'a bone character with cold blue eyes') and my cut-up short story ('First Song') which is about a non-religious girl's forbidden love for a fundamentalist Christian girl. The intensity of emotions involved in forbidden love is emphasised via the overwhelming physical/textual qualities of this book.
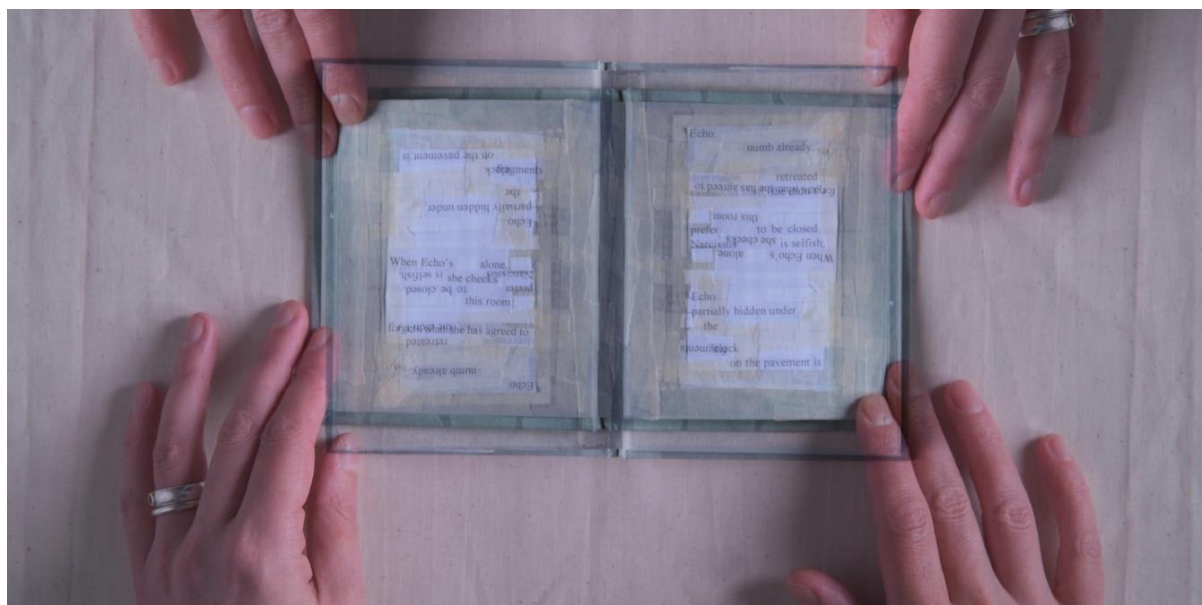

Echo (video still): https://vimeo.com/306700855

A small 'Echo' book is also recorded as a silent video – expanding on the textual allusion to the Echo and Narcissus myth, reflections are worked with visually. The edited video is reversed and 'ghosted' so it is formed by two layers. Though this short video is visually compelling (mirrored hands turning mirrored pages) text is lost in the overlapping layers of the video.

Another book video, *Before the Gale*, includes a vocal track and the narrative is constructed from a combination of poetry and prose fragments[108]. The spoken voice is gently rhythmic in places, and the visual sparseness of text provides clarity of image. My voice stumbles over the half-redacted words, adding a performative intimacy to the story narrative of remembering and forgetting. However, while recording the first version, I stop reading the book at the point in the narrative when the bomb blows up on the page. The final pages being turned in silence coupled with a more rapid pace of turning of pages

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108 This video can be viewed on the vimeo website via this link. https://vimeo.com/311127815

makes the video seem unresolved. A whispered voice works well for a narrative of disappearing memories, so four tracks of whispered text are recorded and layered with different starting points. The final part of the soundtrack now audibly mirrors the visual layers and disappearing memories contained inside the book.

The *Before the Gale* video is accepted to be shown as a video installation in the international performance art festival, *Performance Arcade 2019*, on the Wellington waterfront. The Arcade is constructed from metal shipping containers, and due to requiring a video projector, my video installation will be shown after dark. A torn white sheet hangs from the centre of the container, functioning as a tactile projection screen. Air moves the torn sheet which distorts and ripples the image of the book. The audio track is played through two large speakers, and four corner lights define the limits of the space.

The Performance Arcade is an unpredictable public environment where people walk, cycle, or jog through, or come to specifically spend time listening to bands, eating and drinking, and visiting the many live performances and artworks which are inside and around the industrial shipping containers. In witnessing how the public engage with the video, some of them go in and sit on the floor, or stand just outside, leaning in to hear the soundtrack. Others walk up to the hanging sheet to look more closely at the moving image of the book. Some people glance in, and walk past. Some people stay for the 40-minute duration of the video and others hear a few sentences and leave. The white sheet is central to the understanding of the video installation in this environment – a sense of 'haunting' or 'ghostliness' is evoked as salt-scented air softly creates a rhythmic movement. When the soundtrack becomes layered whispers, those who are outside step inside the container, as if hoping to hear a secret.

A few people have been invited to view the video and talk to me informally afterwards. People who stay for short durations can repeat a word, short phrase or image which evokes a personal thought, emotion or memory. Others who stay longer quote several phrases and summarise the emotion(s) they associate with their overall experience. Some are drawn to visual images formed by text – 'the exploded/deconstructed bomb' is mentioned several times. A fashion student mentions humour, quoting phrases such as: 'deathless high heels' and 'pornfeet'. A message via social media describes the installation as 'haunting' and the text as 'containing sentences that take your breath away'.

The waterfront location mirrors the setting of the fictional narrative. In some ways, the story could have been written for this precise place. On the soundtrack and screen, there is mention of sails, boats, sheets, and the waterfront. The content also contains chance encounters with strangers who pass the narrator, someone jogging past, a dog barking, etc. Like the fragmented narrative of the cut-up story, verbal conversations that occur along the waterfront location are fragmented, interrupted and disrupted by other conversations. In the short story, the narrator speculates about what is inside the *metal containers* being transported on *those cargo ships to the moon*. The text matches this environment in many co-incidental ways. *Cut-away purple sheets*, is another such phrase. At first, I regretted my use of the word purple as the sheet was white, but by chance, the lighting made the sheet appear purple.

As I wrote this story prior to knowing I would cut it up and paste it into a poetry book, make it into a video, or that the video iteration would be accepted for a night-time presentation at the Performance Arcade, the *coincidence* of the mirrored content is interesting. It is, however, unsurprising:

> Fortuitous coincidences are impossible. Coincidences can be explained only by the existence of special laws of plot formation. Even the admission of borrowings does not explain the existence of identical stories separated by thousands of years and tens of thousands of miles…. As a matter of fact, such stories are forever disintegrating and forever being rebuilt in accordance with special laws of plot formation still unknown to us. (Shklovsky 1990, 17)

Shklovsky's use of the word 'plot' in the above quote, according to the Ethnographic School, (via Veselovsky) means the combination of *theme* and *motif*[109]. According to Veselovsky, "By plot I mean a theme, into which a variety of motif-situations have been woven" (Shklovsky 1990, 16). Shklovsky is speaking from a Russian Formalist approach to prose writing – one which is concerned with writing processes and the "historicality of forms" in opposition to psychological interpretations and "the rules of how formal objects work" (Bruns 1991, xii). *Before the Gale* was initially written using the theme of memory, and if we accept that story *themes* and *motifs* cross historical time and geographic locations, "forever disintegrating and forever being rebuilt", then coincidence is bound up in the theme. Coincidence remains an interesting notion, but one which cannot be easily unravelled. Ironically, the final showing of *Before the Gale* is cancelled, as the Arcade hub is closed down for that night, due to the arrival of a gale.

Coincidence is bound up in the theme.

The fragmented narrative is seen on a fragment of sheet, while the voice of a storyteller speaks the words of a fictional narrator, for exactly forty-one minutes. "Many literary texts are a time-game between text and potential readers: how can the to-be-absent writer shape the way that the time of the text is measured out?" (Hall 2013, 62) The time-game wasn't between the reader and the text in this instance as my absence dictated the presence of my voice. My voice dictated the duration of the video installation. This video installation is not a fully successful iteration of this transformed book, as the video projector is not of a high enough quality to allow the textual whispers / half-redactions to be read. The tactility of the physical book is transferred to the tactility of the sheet as a screen. A torn sheet that shows a picture of a book containing an apocalyptic fragmented narrative is an evocative and ghostly image, but not as intimate as the process of reading the text inside a physical book. All the same, once the video showings are over, this iteration of the text continues to resonate because the Arcade location mirrored so many thematic coincidences.

Dis/Integration and Performative Installations

What if…

> "we take into account the infinitesimal differentiation occurring in the *pheno-text* (the concrete manifestation of the text; the closed text) during the signifying process, while constantly evoking the space where production originates: the *geno-text*." (Prud'homme 2006)

'The Bookbird' short story has never been an entirely closed text, because it is still fresh and unpublished. It has already gone through several iterations – previously written using a folded book, then cut up and pasted to interact with two other texts in a transformed book. This book has been read at a conference while people saw its pages as photographs, and the story inside it has been read aloud to a library audience, and given to a librarian. The transformed book has also been made into a video and the story has been recorded as a separate audio track. But in terms of independent agency, this story shouts louder than all the others.

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[109] Here, the examples given on theme are 'tales of the sun and his mother' and motif is described as 'the smallest narrative unit' e.g. 'the sun/eye simile', or situations such abduction. The ATU systems concerning the categorising of Tale Types, mentioned in Part I of this exegesis, are also relevant when considering coincidence in story themes and motifs.

It now wants to become even more bird-like.

This story is a story which transforms.

It now wants to fly.

A print-out of the story is cut into individual words. This process destroys the linear narrative structure of the story, and simultaneously expands its possibilities. The text becomes wide open to shifting multiple and infinite possibilities. I will lose control of this story entirely, as it flies off the page.

What if… to lose control of this story, I enlist the services of another storyteller?

What if… my voice, and the voice of my co-storyteller, are silent?

What if… a ghost writer is required.

Ghost Writer Required (glass bottle, redacted book page, air, salt crystals.)

Short Story on Feathers.

'The Bookbird' short story is cut up into individual words which are glued onto approximately 4000 small feathers. Each word is positioned so that when the feather is gently dropped, it falls word-up.

The labour-intensive process of gluing individual words onto small feathers allows much time to reflect on the narratives of this particular transformation story, and its relationship to all the transformed books. Books about to be buried as landfill now contain new narratives. 'The Bookbird' has gained independent agency as a character and as an iterative story. It wants to fly. How might the feathers be caused to

flurry, fly, or gently move, shifting the words of this story as they are retold by air? As the words are glued in a random order, I become aware of repeated nouns within this particular story, and all the stories I have written. As these words are silently pasted onto soft feathers, strands of the geno-text within everything I write, including this exegesis, whisper back to me in a language of haunted nouns:

whisper snow icicle glass echo fragment trauma frost cage cold gale winter mirror ice trap silence

~~*ghost ghost ghost ghost ghost ghost ghost ghost ghost ghost ghost ghost ghost ghost ghost*~~

Objects which can already move air are selected (antique bellows, a broom, etc.) and others are adapted to move air with the addition of long feathers (gloves, fans, etc.). These allude to the types of objects found in folkloric texts, including a pair of red shoes which are painted white and covered in masking tape to redact the bright colour. As well as having a function, the addition of long feathers defamiliarises the appearance of the objects, adding ritualistic and folkloric connotations.

Air-moving objects: fans, feathers, bellows, colander, shoes, gloves, broom, horn.

Alone in a locked studio, these objects are used to explore via an unwitnessed[110] performance what air writes with the feather-words from 'The Bookbird' short story. The illusion of independent agency is

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[110] While I say the performance is unwitnessed – that's not strictly true. It is witnessed by my stills camera and mobile phone camera. Both of these objects have lens-eyes.

now given to air, as a substance, as a co-writer and storyteller. To lose control of the story, air is moved and feather-words shift around the floor.

And yet while this process is a 're-telling' or an opening of the possibilities within 'The Bookbird' story, another narrative is emerging. This story, cut-up, could be any of my stories. What is filling the room is a live and embodied narrative of a silent performative process. At first, air was a storyteller. But this illusion is elusive because there is a heightened awareness of physical movements and emotional responses. Time passes slowly. Breath moves air. Inside this closed room, I am inside a dismantled story.

Scattered Feather-words (Photo credit: Jessica Chubb)

I am scattered across the floor.

The storyteller sees the story.

The story sees the storyteller.

> The prose world is a place of violent interruption; it is the nonlinear region of pure historicality that can only be described by means of chaos theories and models of catastrophe, or perhaps not so much catastrophe as the slow breaking down of entities piece by piece. It is an unpredictable and dangerous world in which everyone is someone's victim… (Bruns 1991, x)

The story disintegrates, as it is repeated. Words are rearranged and I no longer remember which words were written by me and which ones were written by someone else. What happens inside a locked silent room, which for five hours contains a storyteller, air, feather-words, and air-moving-objects?

"A story itself must be repeatable in order to be a story, though it must tell of changing events." (Hall 2013, 49) The following list communicates the story's 'changing events' by describing actions, metaphor, setting, and time:

LIST OF TIME AND MOVEMENT

For an hour, the storyteller moves the objects.
Feather-words fall from a pillowcase, scattering word-up, as they have been designed to fall.
For two hours, air rearranges the storyteller's words.
The room is a book. Its floor becomes a page. Its door is a spine.
The walls and ceiling are its covers.
For four hours, the eye of a camera is watching the storyteller, who doesn't want to be watched.
For five hours, a story moves around inside this room.
For five hours, the door is closed.
The storyteller can't read the story, so the story reads the storyteller.

The Bookbird video stills (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

Another way of telling this story is in the form of a visual narrative that is written by a camera.

Air-writing (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

This story is written, re-made, re-told, repeated.

The story disintegrates and is rebuilt anew. (Shklovsky 1990, 17)

Another way of telling this story is to document what air wrote from the fragments of a story.

The feather-words can be touched.

The feather-words move as they are rearranged by air.

The feather-words can be trapped.

Feather-traps (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

> In a poetic universe, every fragment is a luminous detail. It resonates with the super-sensuous… There are overarchings everywhere. But a prose universe is just one damn thing after another, like an attic or junkyard or side of the road. (Bruns 1991, ix)

What if… by using this performative process of rearranging a disintegrated story, a poetic universe is emerging from a prose universe? In order to explore the connotations and imagery contained in the room where feather-words and air attempt to co-write a story, all the iterations of this story are brought together in an integrated form as an installation of images, objects, text and artefacts.

This installation is displayed in a library[111]. The process is thus shown as a narrative which is as important as the narrative of the short story. By disintegrating, this story expands to include objects, additional words, and photographic images of its own storyteller.

The story has been opened by revealing the iterative processes of telling and re-telling.

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[111] The installation: *Thirteen Ways to Re/write a Story: The Bookbird* was presented in Te Pikitanga Gallery, Massey University Library, Wellington, May 2019.

Thirteen Ways to Re/Write a Story.(detail) Installation in Te Pikitanga Gallery

Prose is by nature unstable and self-interfering: it is refractory and uncontainable… Indeed one could say that the natural inclination of prose is to organize itself into lists rather than stories and propositions. (Bruns 1991, xi)

Another way of telling the story of this story is to choose a title that alludes to poetic lists[112] and write a process list:

Thirteen Ways to Re/write a Story: The Bookbird

Fold some old books and fill a floor with them.
Co-write a story with a folded book, about a book transforming into a bird.
Print the story onto maps of oceans, folded into the shapes of things that fly.
Cut the story into fragments and paste it inside an old book.
Cut the story into individual words and glue each word to a feather.
Gather objects which move air, and take them to an empty room where no one else is breathing.
Silently drop the feathers onto the floor and let one of the objects write nothing at all.
Let a feathered fan write.
Let a colander write.
Let gloves write.
Let a broom write.
Let a flat fan write.
Let shoes write.
Let bellows write.

Red Shoes, Disguised.

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[112] 13 ways of Looking at a Blackbird (a poem by Wallace Stevens). 13 ways of Talking about Performance Writing (John Hall) (Hall 2013). 14 Ways of Listening to the Archers (a poetry collection by Cliff Yates).

I learned in that room filled with air and feathers that stories transform. They always have, and always will, because storytellers will tell any story we are capable of telling in any language we can tell it with. And we also hide and reveal the stories which can't be told. Individual words are often repeated throughout a storyteller's sequence of stories, whispering of our private ghosts. Storytellers make illusions, and believe in illusions, and when we weave ourselves into the stories we tell, we become illusions.

Another way to document an unseen performance is to write about it.

Let a storyteller write…

On Dis/Integration:

To take a prose world, contained in a story, and break it down into words, is to take a story that has been carefully put together, and break it apart. This violence is a strange thing. The vocabulary has already been chosen. So the story is the same, but it has been cut by scissor blades. The story is broken, so it can repeat itself. It is to be re-written by something I can't even see. Today, I am sad. Something I love has recently died. And here I am, with what I have written, destroyed. The story can't be reassembled as it was written. I move air, stirring feather-words with a set of antique bellows. A colander. A fan. A horn that doesn't work. I am inside a story, or all stories, in this silent room, trying to remake something which has been cut into pieces. I think of Rumpelstiltskin's demand for a first-born, and hands bleeding as they spin straw into gold. A pair of feathered shoes that used to be red are on my feet, almost tripping me at every step. These shoes are only pretending they aren't red enough to kill me. Delicate gloves, pale lace pierced through with quills, are tight on my fingers. The feathers flex as I move, transforming my hands into dead wings.

I am writing with dead birds and air. I am inside the heart of a fairy tale.

This is an impossible task.

A story I have written, repeats, and rearranges itself. I repeat myself:

I write worlds in prose, because of an untellable story that has always haunted me. It is a ghost which is fragmented inside this throat I can't tell it with. I write stories to stay alive – I can't say this aloud, but can write it down. To assemble stories piece by piece is to remake this untellable story, to re-write it as something else, something more, something tellable. And now I break apart one of the tellable stories I have written, destroying all the phrases which I so carefully constructed. This violence is a strange thing – as I have softened it with feathers. And yet these feathers were plucked from the corpses of dead birds. Once living, flying, singing, scratching, nesting, shouting, creatures. Words on feathers travel on the air I move with a fan, a witch's broom, a white pillowcase, in this locked room that is silent of bird-song, silent of the violence of claws, silent of the violence of sharpness and torn-softness – all these silences move with the air, through this untelling. Red shoes are murderous because they can dance without ever ending the dance. They step in these gaps between words which are filled with conflicting forces. Slowness, violence, empathy, dissociation, destruction, attempts at reconstruction.

Rumpelstiltskin was hungry for something no one would ever give him. He demanded a first-born but what if he really wanted

I mean, what if all he ever wanted

was to spin gold into straw?

An illusion attempts to re-write a story with the feathers of dead birds, reconstructing a story that will never be read

*because it*

has been

broken

*apart.*

It is an impossible task.

Ghost Writing

It is possible to generate unpredictable new writing with a story that is allowed to be opened, develop agency and become its own force. The ghost that has been present throughout this project and within the geno-text of this exegesis now rises to the surface and overlaps with the project itself.

At first this is frightening because there are too many questions: how many ghosts are writing my stories? How many stories do these ghosts want to write? Which ghost stories are hidden in my writing? If I am a writer for ghosts, who, or what, is writing through me? Which ghosts hide inside my stories? If I am a ghost writer, who is employing me, and under what terms?

To answer frightening questions about writing, the only thing to be done is to write the answers. A fragmented narrative is written which incorporates everything I do and don't know about ghosts. This text is printed on translucent paper and sewn together in layers. There are ritualistic and performative aspects to this process – words are transformed in order to tame fear.
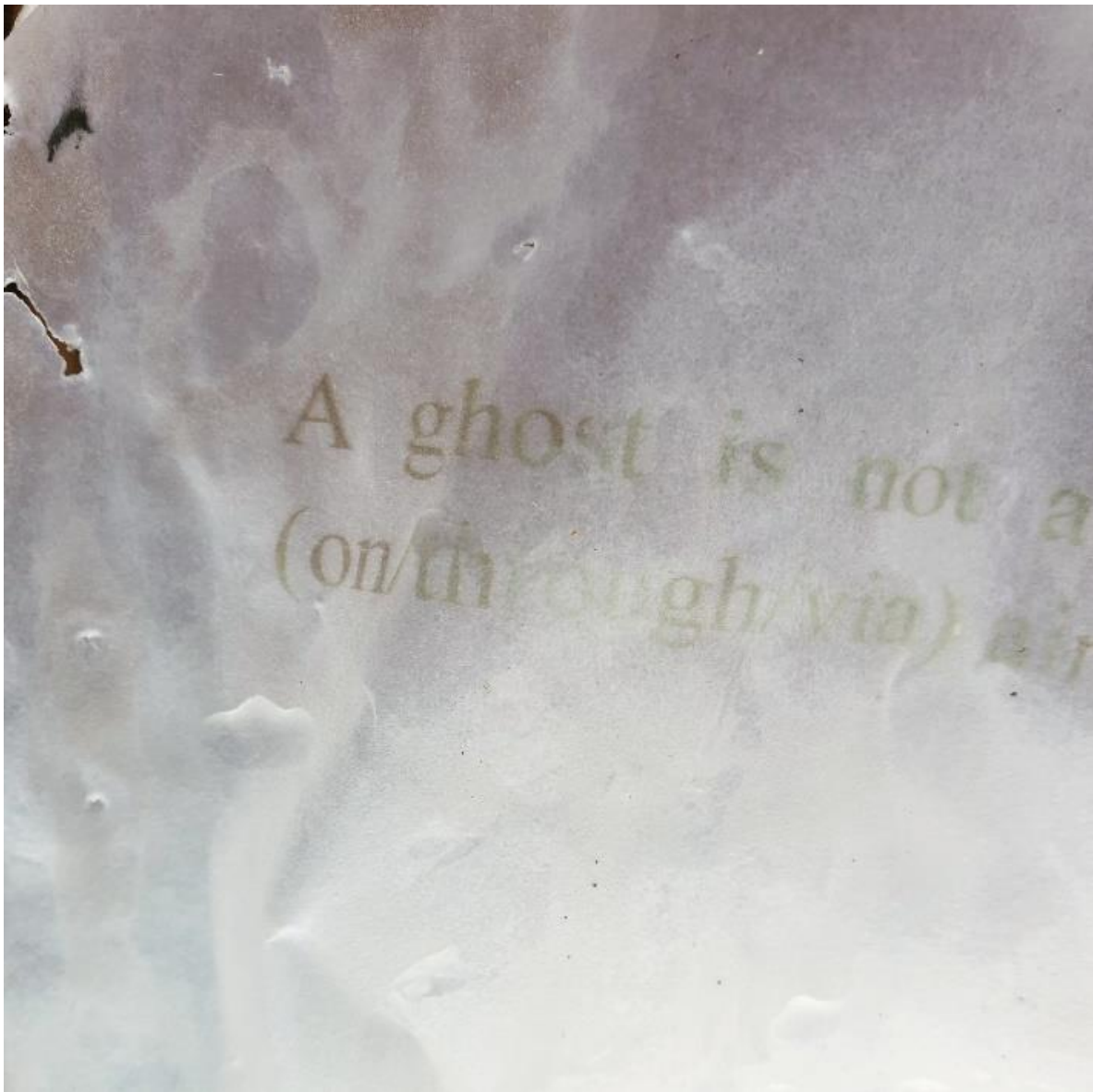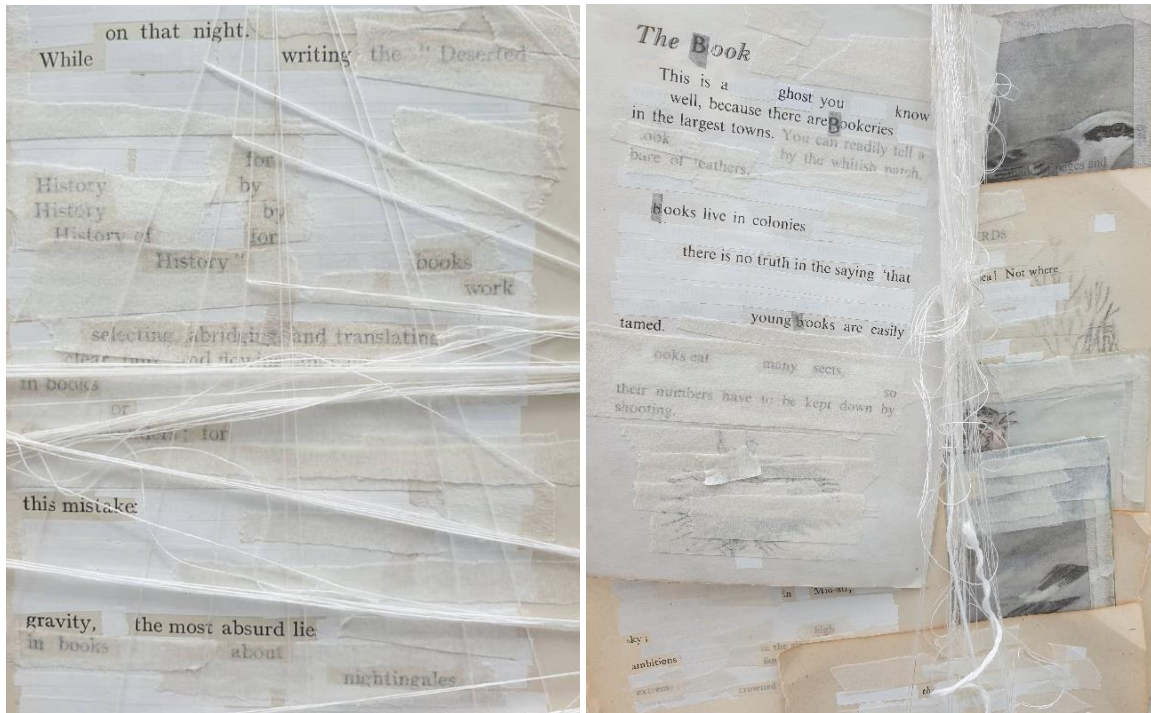

A Ghost is Torn and Drowned and Hung out to Dry.
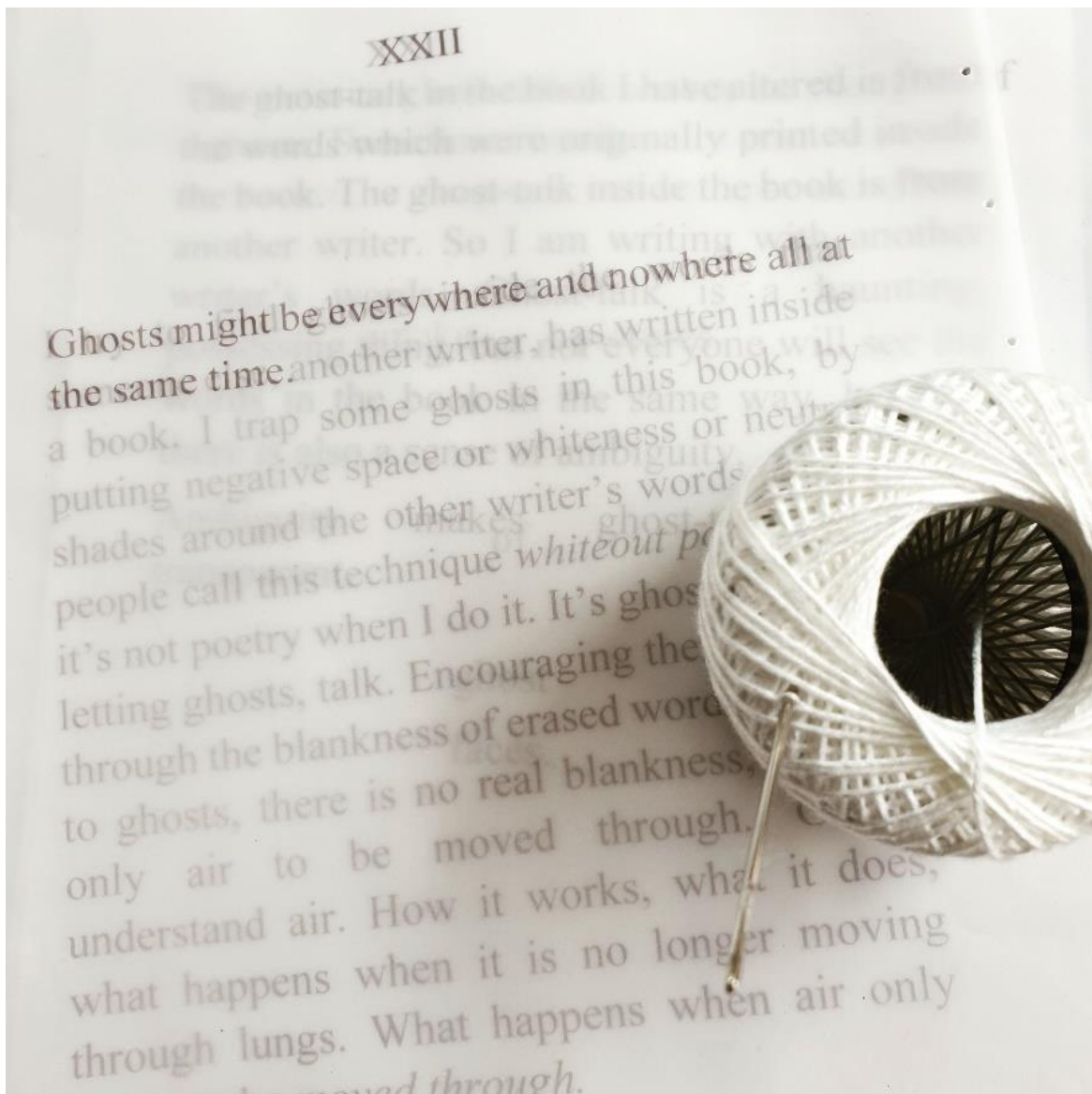
Everything Un/Known about Ghosts is Written, Layered and Sewn

I cut and paste this fragmented narrative about ghosts onto loose pages from two disintegrating old books – a children's illustrated book of birds, and a copy of Aristophanes' play, *The Birds*. I redact and half-redact the text on these pages:

Bird/Ghost-Ghost/Bird – Two Dismantled Books.

These ghost-bird/bird-ghost pages are hung on tangled threads from a broken book cover. The pages are free from the book so they can shift and travel when air is moving. The pages make a shushing sound.

If ghosts are birds, and birds are ghosts, there is nothing to be afraid of.

A public installation of selected works from this PhD project, called *Ghost Writing,* is presented as a solo show in an art gallery. This exhibition includes a selection of the transformed books, book pages, texts, textual, sculptural and tactile objects made during this project. There are small visual cues (notes typed on torn tracing paper) which give permission to the viewer/reader to touch the books and objects.

Ghost Writing is framed as an installation. In the publicity material, people are invited to touch and interact with anything they wish to. Along with the general public, I also invite some local artists, writers, academics and librarians to the opening so I can observe how an audience of artists and writers interact with these hybrid art/writing artefacts in a gallery environment.
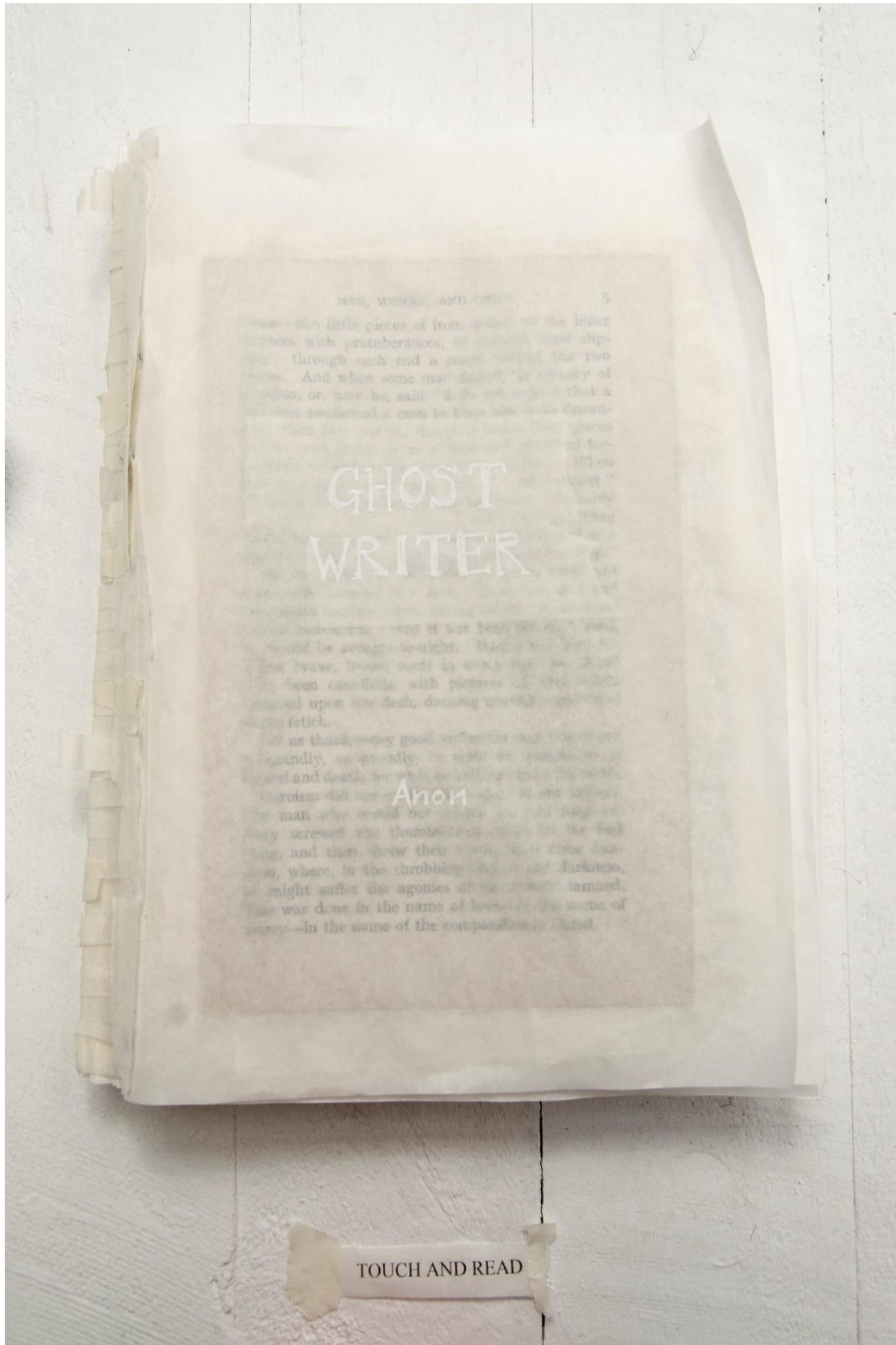
Ghost Writing Installation at the Engine Room, Wellington. (Photo credit Harry Culy)

Ghost Writing Installation at the Engine Room, Wellington. (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

Ghost Writing Installation at the Engine Room, Wellington. (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

Ghost Writer Anon (Book Pages Buried in Butter Paper) (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

At the opening…

a local writer sits in a rocking chair, reading 'The Bookbird' to some folded books.

Young artist/writers make poems with feathers.

A visual artist asks if she can buy one page of the sixty page palimpsest. This is one page of a story and I don't quite understand what she's asking me for.

A web of pages containing backwards fairy tales offers the illusion of a more private space.

A performance artist wants 'to own a set of prints'. But the pages in the installation are all one-off prints that have gone through a dying printer which struggled with the wrong kind of paper. I look at her blankly and she disappears behind the web of pages. She tells me later that she upset some poets by using the bellows to fan their feather words away before they had time to document their writing.

An academic writer tells me that pages hanging on a gallery wall create distance but the physical books bring the viewer far closer – into the writing. He is glad of the instruction 'touch and read' though because of the connotations of the gallery environment, it takes time to trust that touching the books is really permitted.

A librarian glances at the folded books and tells me with a smile that I have made 'a librarian's nightmare'.

Disciplines clash. A crowded gallery opening is not the ideal way to experience these quiet objects and texts. The opening provides an overview but people tell me that later, during solitary visits, they experience a deeper and more in-depth engagement with the installation.
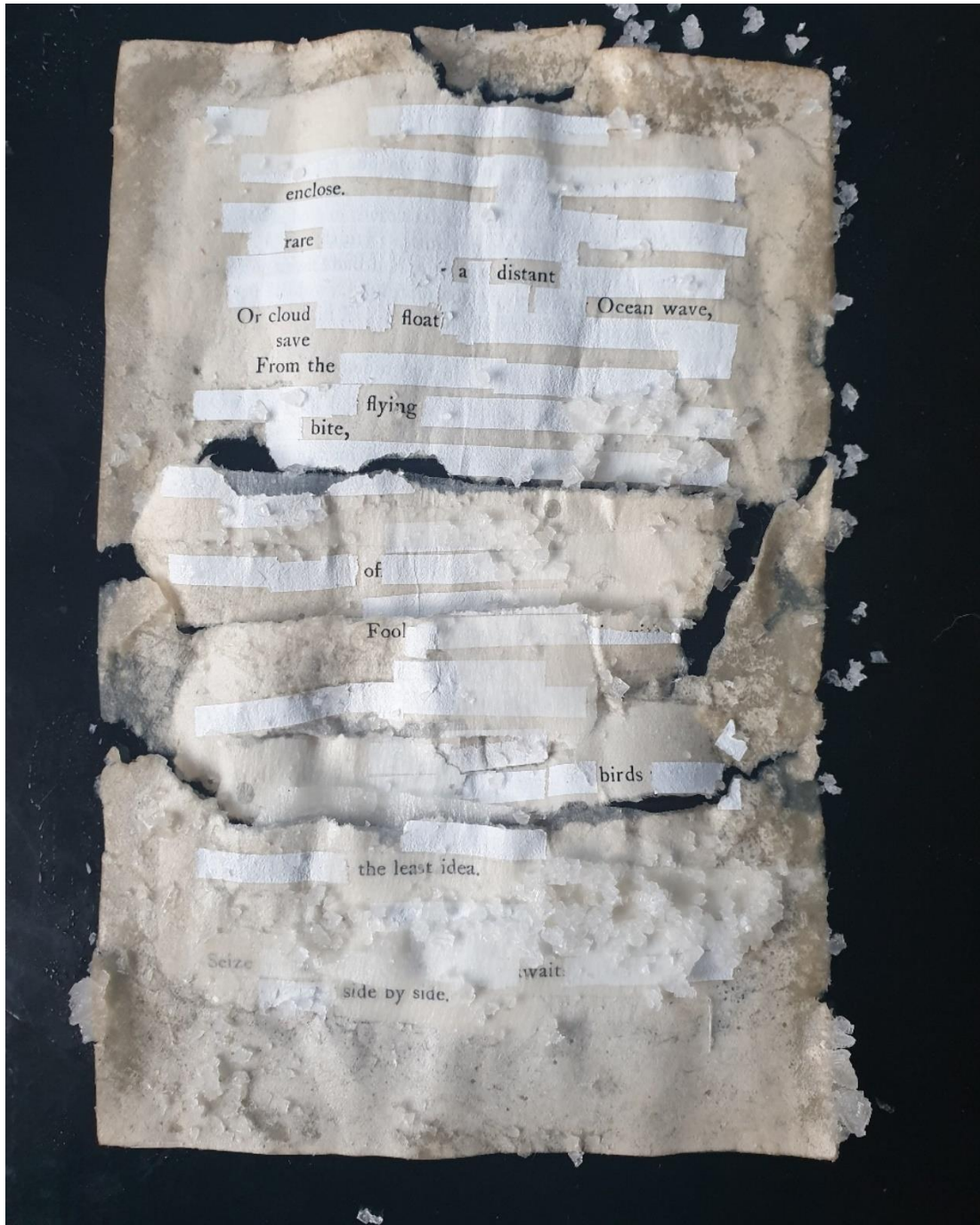
Message in a Bottle (Ghost Writing, 2020)

There are hidden and secret texts half-concealed in various places, which won't be found by many people. Inside a glass bottle (see previous image, *Ghost Writer Required*) is a message that is made of a redacted page that was soaked in a salt solution till crystals grew through the paper. There are folded process lists and fragments of other texts contained in glass jars and bowls.

There are over-printings of sentences from my backwards fairy tales forming the web of stories. These pages can be read in any order.

A Web of Stories (detail) (Photo credit Jessica Chubb)

A Web of Stories (detail) (Photo credit Robert Hurley)

One of my stories that forms part of the web of stories is included here in its textual form:

BEAUTY, SLEEPING

An old woman hides in her bed believing it is the only safe place left in the world. She's overweight, so can last for a long time without going to her kitchen for food. It is dark, and outside her open window, there are the sounds of helicopters. Someone is screaming.

Perhaps everyone is screaming.

She covers her ears with a bunched-pillow, imagining her bed is inside a fortress, a castle, a lonely boat. Everything has gone wrong with the world. It happened fast, after it happened slowly.

People thought there would be more time, but people were wrong. One madman lost control while in charge of a country, and made friends with another country's madman who had also lost control. Now all the madmen have lost control and become enemies with each other. All of these madmen love only two things: power and death.

So now death is everywhere. The few people who are still alive are locked in their homes, hiding from toxins that travel the air. Water rises, burying stone and earth. Air chokes with fumes, fighting with fire. Even from the safety of an imagined fortress, or a castle, a lonely boat, or a bed, it is impossible to ignore the smells of gas, pine trees, flesh and roses burning.

Loosening her grip on the pillow, the old woman hears the sound of a man breathing in the gap between her bed and the wall. Death must now feel this close, for everyone. She longs for something powerful that isn't death. But the man rears up and she glimpses a pale hooded face which is covered in scratches. He has the word prince tattooed on his throat.

Regretting the fact that her knives are in the kitchen drawer, she closes her eyes and pretends to already be dead.

Without asking permission, he kisses her and his lips taste of ash.

Biting his mouth, she enters a dream state, dragging him into it with her.

She dreams of being in a crowded bar as she watches him getting his scratched hand stamped by the doorman. He leaves his long coat in the cloakroom, and she stares at his thin thigh bones as he approaches the bar. She buys him a crimson-coloured cocktail, spikes it, and smiles at him sweetly as he drinks. When he's unstable on his feet, she kisses him. He backs away from her and cowers in the corner, hollow eyes filled with mistrust.

And now she can forget him because he is nothing she wants.

She dreams of one hundred winters in a derelict city. In windowless supermarkets she eats tinned vegetables. She empties seed packets into the gaps between crumbling paving stones, digs water out of broken drainpipes, and climbs skeleton skyscrapers, rescuing earth from office plant pots, pouring it into bleached roof-gardens.

She dreams of one hundred springs. From the top of a church spire she whistles into the empty sky, calling for the birds, the insects, even the flies, to return.

She dreams of licking condensation from basement walls for one hundred summers.

She dreams of one hundred autumns, and gathers knitted blankets from a block of apartments to make a shelter. Sewing the blankets together with the unravelled threads of school shirts, she dreams of repair. She dreams of tree roots. She dreams of age.

She pricks her finger on a rusty needle.

The smell of her own infected blood wakes her up.

She wakes in her bedroom, as skinny as a witch. There's a scythe lying on the floor, between the bed and the wall. She leans on it to lift her aching body from the bed.

Outside the open window, monstrous thorn bushes block the light with a mesh of thick leaves and rosebuds.

There is the sound of one bird cheeping, seeking a mate, or food, or a fight.

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Presenting this project in an art gallery frames it as visual art: people move around the gallery glancing, looking, observing images and objects. A gallery audience has to be given specific instructions that encourages them to read and touch the books, feathers, objects and book pages.

There are often insecurities, instability and doubts at any given point of intersection. Crossroads meet, and all directions are possible. But without a map…

What if… gallery environments are resistant to fictional narratives?[113]

This is entirely possible. My focus for this research thus far has been on fiction formed by fragmented and accumulating narratives. There are iterative outcomes, and these have been shown in different environments.

> Meaning always depends on location, on a context that changes from place to place and from one historical moment to the next. Yet as conceptualist strategies of repetition and appropriation underscore, neither is that local context ever entirely separate from intersections with other contexts, places, and times. (Edmond 2012)

The transformed books are a little lost in the context of a gallery environment which frames the books as images/sculptural objects, and while their words are 'seen' they are often only briefly read[114]. What is reinforced by showing this public installation is my intention – that at the heart of this research project, reading is central.

The conclusion I have drawn from all the presentation modes explored throughout this project is that the ideal way of presenting the transformed books will enable them to be slowly and performatively read. This should be a quiet and solitary environment in which the books are the sole focus for the reader/viewer. The fragmented narratives in these books are hidden and revealed in layers. They demand a present moment in which it is possible to pause, to be silent, to be still enough to read deeply and perhaps half-see the ghosts in the words.

Reading Rooms

A Reading Room is set up in the Museum building at Massey University in Wellington. The room chosen is a small forgotten room, adjacent to a lecture theatre, which is occasionally used to store old furniture. The room is long and narrow, has no windows, and the air is entirely still when the door is closed. There are marks in the white paintwork and tiles on the walls. This room is chosen because it is a quiet and immersive empty space in which the reader will be able to remain uninterrupted while they focus on the books. Framing the experience as an invitation to a 'Reading Room' (via a sign on the door and an invitation to book a time) provides an instruction for the audience/reader. The additional instruction to switch off electronic devices also prompts the reader to focus on reading the books.

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[113] Fictional narratives are also very different to some conceptual writing practices. For example, notions of 'psychological depth' (often shown via connotations, conflict or character development) in fictional narratives are in opposition to the "principled "unoriginal" or "uncreative" approach" (Edmond 2012) of the literary practice described as 'conceptual poetry'.

[114] I continue to pursue options for publication of the fictional texts produced during this project. My short story 'Beauty, Sleeping' has just been accepted for potential inclusion in *Performance Research* Issue 26.4, *On Repair*, 2021. I am in discussion with the editors as to whether this story might be best published in a textual form, or as a series of photographs of the story, handwritten on autumn leaves.

Reading Room in a forgotten room, Museum building, Massey University.

The books are arranged on a low coffee table in two rows, within reach of a sofa. By lighting the books from the side, the relief textures of the masking tape and correction tape become more visible. In another iteration of this Reading Room, a comfortable chair is used because there is no sofa available.

In each Reading Room, the furniture is covered with white sheets so that it doesn't visually distract the reader from the books. Though the main purpose is to make the books the central focus, the sheets themselves have connotations, though these are fortuitous. The sheet on the table looks like a tablecloth or part of a museum display – the books are a collection, or specimens of some kind. The connotations of white sheets as shrouds emerges as the books are read[115]. Many of the themes contained within the transformed books involve ghosts, absences, death (including the death of books) and transformations.

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[115] For a thought-provoking series of images of ghosts made visible via the application of shroud-like white sheets, see the 2017 film, *A Ghost Story,* directed by David Lowery.

Reading Room, Performing the Artefact Conference, University of Otago.

In yet another iteration of the Reading Room, sheets are added to the floor – to define the space in which the books would be read. In this instance the quiet location that was provided for the reading of the books was a small room within a library[116].

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[116] The transformed books were presented at the *Performing the Artefact* conference at the University of Otago, Dunedin, 2019.

Reading Room (detail) Performing the Artefact Conference, University of Otago.

Informal responses to the experience of spending focussed time with the books in a quiet environment provide an idea of the various ways the transformed books are experienced by writers, artists, and academics who have expressed an interest in this project. One reader mentioned 'mythical or fairytale language' combined with 'down to earth phrases about the real world.' An ESL reader found the experience difficult at first and managed to let go of concerns about authorial intention and relaxed into seeking emotionally meaningful phrases. Individual words were mentioned with a blush: kiss, love, silence. He told me that when he encountered these words, he became so relaxed that he lay down on the sofa to continue reading. He *almost* told me that he had a new girlfriend, but not quite.

As predicted, the books being presented on white sheets did add connotations: the sheets made the transformed books seem like 'memorials to books' to one reader, 'objects in an abandoned house' to another, and 'a medical reading cure' to another. The ghostly/haunting content in some of the books was central for some readers, while others commented about other aspects – for example – magical or folkloric elements, the strange ways objects were described, or humour. Some readers focused on the connotations of figurative language and imagery, and talked about personal memories these aspects

evoked. An academic writer discussed their own experiences of intensive writing processes and their relationship to time, mentioning compulsion, effort, and obsession with certain stylistic approaches to written language.

There were also subjective responses about experiencing a relationship with the books. One writer observed that they were writing the book as they read it, and simultaneously 'discovering an already formed narrative.' An artist removed her shoes before approaching the books, as she 'felt this was a respectful thing to do'[117]. Writers also often mentioned engaging with the subtext which was concerned with books (this was described as the 'meta-bookishness' of the books)[118]. Several writers and artists with hybrid creative practices of their own commented on their observations on the combined images, text and material qualities of the books, and went on to discuss their own hybrid projects and processes. One writer mentioned becoming 'profoundly aware of the latent force that resides in language.' Several readers communicated that the experience of reading the books, touching and engaging with them as tactile objects was an intimate and affecting experience for them.

These informal conversations confirm that when specialist audiences from artistic and writing communities (who self-selected through their interest in the project) are provided with an opportunity to engage with the transformed books quietly and slowly, the personal experience of each reader can involve both intellectual engagement and emotional affect.

Over time, more transformed books can be added to this growing collection. The final book I have made during the timespan of this research project includes a transcript of the texts from the redacted books. This transcript is printed as fragments on translucent butter paper pages. These pages are pasted into another hardback book[119]. The hardback book's pages have been torn away, and fragments are faintly visible through the translucent pages:

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[117] The removal of shoes is not a usual religious or cultural practice for this particular artist.
[118] There is much text in these transformed books which mentions reading or writing, or book materials – threads, spine, words, paper, ink, pages, paper, etc.
[119] This hardback book, like all the others, was obtained in a thrift shop. It is *The Encyclopaedia of Fortune Telling* by Frances X King. It was published by Hamlyn Publishing, in 1993.

me why luck never seems to be worth keeping.

Sightless vibrations linger in the doorway—

a draught of snowflakes, the smallest whisper.

Sound, in competition against eyes, taste, and temperature.

Drops of water offer a chance to escape

the familiar sight of a short winter's day.

Stop to marvel at a spider's web beaded by mist—

demolish and remake impermanence.

Old trees ease their aches in earth.

The sound of horses agitate the air.

two horses, tethered rich brown in a blue evening.

A desire to walk through the ideas of dreams;

a glass door in a cloud, an uprising hill

a book of awkward favours, a glowing valley.

The far side of longing—

to walk through a vision of emotional places.

This is a laugh from all life,

wound up in love and light— all the proper things,

and a burning to see truth on top of the heap.

But truth's washed ashore in a backwater

and feet must grow wings.

Ghost Writer (detail)

The illusion of independent agency is particularly strong with this transformed book 'Ghost Writer' because its physical appearance suggests the pages of the transcript have 'possessed' the book, and destroyed it from within. I acknowledge that in this form the text has the visual appearance of poetry, in that it contains line breaks and stanzas, and this means that some readers may read this book as a collection of poems. Although the reader may interpret it as poetry, this was not my intention while writing it. To me, 'Ghost Writer' is fiction, framed as an anonymous narrative that has been written, in fragments, by ghosts.

My belief that ghosts have written this book extends far beyond the process of writing it.

what Ghost

A stranger is absent in the woods,

6.

sings in the most doleful places

with an evil-smelling mechanical bird.

It is fortunate that when we turn pages

7.

we find a picture of a wet-surround-heaven; a nest—

the brain, the best thing to miss,

not the finite heart;

dead to dreamer, romancer, or lover

cold, pale, blind.

Lift eyes, turn, turn away, and forget.
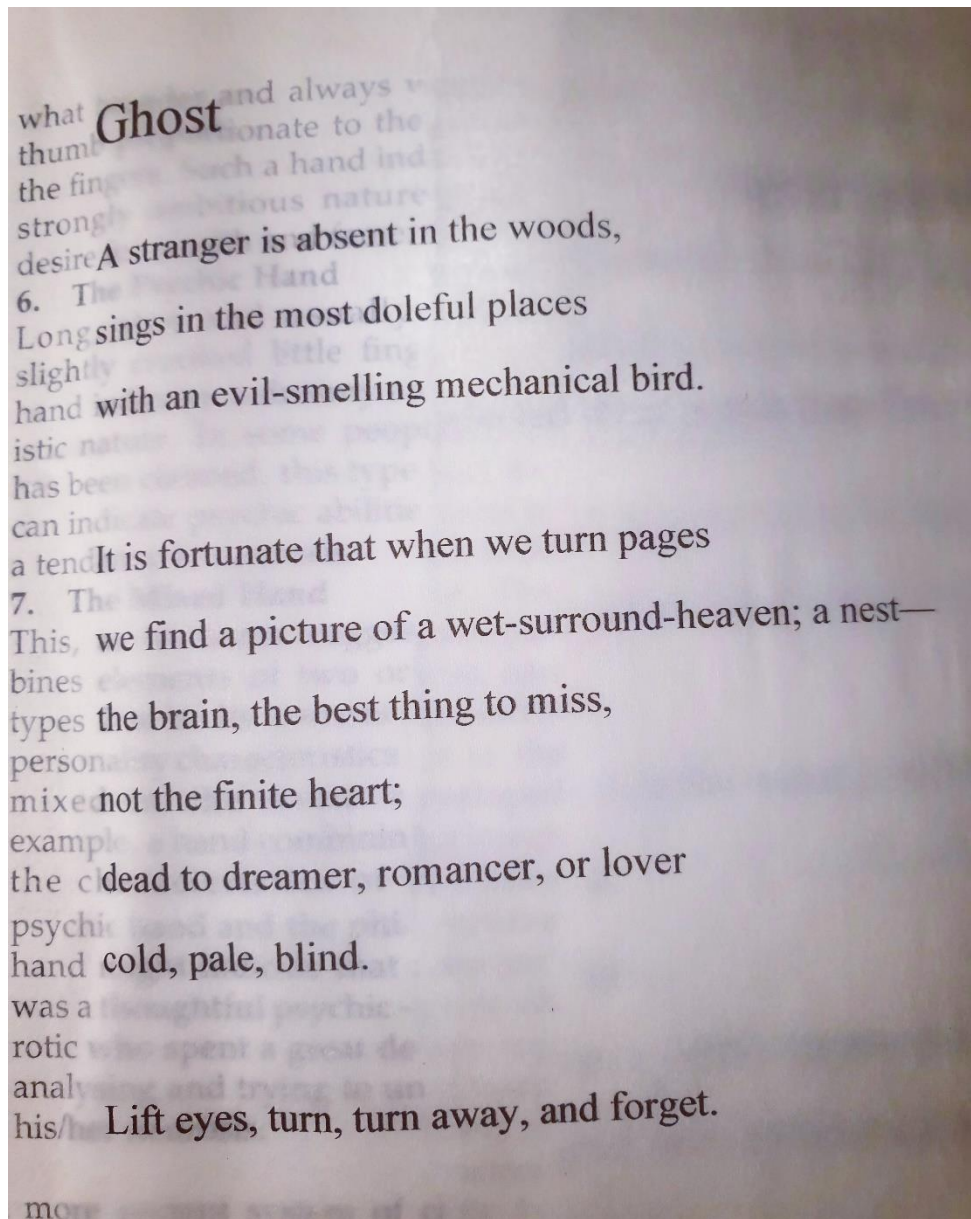
Ghost Writer (detail)

The writer disappears
leaving a ghost in the words
passed on to be read.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this research project, thematic aspects of folkloric storytelling traditions – illusions, transformations and iterations – provided a framework from which to write a range of new fictional narratives. Magical thinking, defamiliarisation, and intertextuality have been discussed within this exegesis and throughout the creative project. The metaphor of a ghost in the words resulted in figurative language being woven through several fragmented narratives.

The outcomes of this creative project were presented in a variety of modes: print publication, live art/performance, conference presentations, articles/essays, workshops, readings, and installations. In an art gallery environment, additional instructions were required so that people knew they were permitted to touch and read the books and other objects. The reading duration was decided by how long people had available for the gallery visit and how they chose to engage in a public space. Within an art gallery, visuality became the primary focus.

When the transformed books were shown as photographic or moving images, audiences engaged more with the text, but many of the textual whispers / half-redactions were lost along with the tactility of each book. The duration of video recordings were determined by the pace of the reading voice or the turning of pages. When presented as fiction readings (or as part of panel presentations at conferences) the speaking/reading writer was the focus – often elevated on a platform / standing in front of a seated audience, and duration was decided by the organiser of the event.

After writing many texts during this project, a small collection of transformed books as hybrid art/fiction artefacts became the central focus. An immersive, slow, and individual reading experience was discovered to be the best way to experience these books. Deep reading echoed the process of deep writing which evolved while making them.

The reading process became active because many of these books contain layered texts, and with layered texts the reader is involved in the process of writing/inventing the text. The reading experience was also akin to performance in that it was an immersive, temporal, and durational event. When time and privacy were provided, touch, tactility, and an intimate relationship with the books occurred.

The transformed books were successfully presented in Reading Rooms within museum and library locations: these private rooms were controlled spaces in which individual readers could spend long periods of time reading and handling the books. In his chapter, *Towards a Cultural History of Things*, Stewart called books an 'endangered species' (Stewart 2011, 215) and suggested that book works shown in museums could "seem isolated for aesthetic reflection as monolithic remnants of a vanishing order of nonelectronic civilization altogether" (Stewart 2011, 165).

The isolation of books was significant for a few reasons: the idea of working directly with books during this research project emerged from a deep concern about the future of books, storytelling, and reading, so the books being isolated for 'reflection'[120] was appropriate. Also, the transformed books were isolated from a larger body of work so that for the final stage of this research, the hybrid nature of these books as art/fiction artefacts became central. The reader was also isolated from other distractions within controlled Reading Room environments, allowing them to establish a relationship with the books. Though the title/sign 'Reading Room' provided a clear instruction, highlighted the reading process, and clarified what was expected, its main function was to encourage the reader to spend a significant amount of time privately with the books. But it is worth noting that any quiet space which enabled the reader to

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[120] Contrary to the previous quote, in this case this is not merely aesthetic. The transformed books made during this research project are intended to be read and engaged with as performative objects/artefacts with visual, textual and material qualities.

remain isolated from other distractions while being alone with the books could prompt reading to occur. Because time and effort were visible on the altered surface of the pages, the books already demanded that time was spent reading them. When alone with the books in a quiet and comfortable environment[121] the duration of reading was between one and three hours, when it was the individual reader's decision.

The Reading Rooms provided an opportunity to explore the performative relationship between reader and text, with the writer being absent. As Ric Allsopp explains, "The term performance writing brings into focus that interactivity, the transformative play of text as performance" (Allsopp 1999, 80). Sam Richards (no relation) also articulates the following description of Performance Writing:

> Interdisciplinarity is intrinsic to this description as is seen in the inclusion of notions of site, display, live voice, recording, digital realisations, projections, gallery items. This shows some of the range of the idea. Performance Writing situated itself at the cross point of many disciplines, but put writing in the central place. (Richards 2015, 393)

The problem with all these terms[122] is the same as it's always been – instead of *what if…* a more frequent question is, *what is…* visual performance… performance writing…[123] Paradoxically, terms such as these (and later, conceptual writing) were designed to actively resist definition – to open the inclusive possibilities of interdisciplinary practice, rather than close them. To occupy hybrid spaces. These abstract terms could appear to represent something elusive or intangible, but during this research project they provided an additional framework for transformations to occur at the disciplinary 'cross-points' between fiction writing and artistic practice.

Transformations occurred via the use of artistic processes – such as blanking out phrases with masking tape, pasting words onto feathers, folding pages of books, drawing ghost faces on book pages, filming ice melting, etc. These processes were combined with magical thinking while writing fiction – particularly *speculation* and the use of *the illusion of independent agency.* This opened up infinite possibilities for new narratives.

The fictional narratives produced during this project could not have been written in any other way. A story that was co-written with books about their transformation into birds, a fragmented narrative about a rifle-headed leopard, a disappearing story about a woman's memories flooding, mingling with poems, and then vanishing as the world ended, the thoughts and word-eyes of ghosts. These are just a few examples of the fragmented narratives contained in the collection of transformed books.

All the fictional texts written during this project went through some kind of iterative transformation – whether they were written after reading folkloric texts or as new narratives raised from within / pasted onto the text in old books. As Jacob Edmond explains,

> Iteration becomes a way to avoid repetition and homogenization. It functions as insistence, transformation, a demonstration of how a system that seems to entrap might be a source of endless permutation and so of difference. (Edmond 2019, 123-124)

This description of iteration is particularly relevant to this research project while considering the extensive iterative process that many of the stories, and in particular, 'The Bookbird' went though. The story as four thousand feather-words was just one outcome – but its possibilities were infinite. The story

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[121] I tested out two of the redacted books on a visitor to our home who had previously read my novels. She sat on a sofa by the fire, reading each book for about an hour. She was deeply moved by the experience.

[122] Craig Dworkin first coined the term Conceptual Writing (Against Expression: Ubuweb Anthology of Conceptual Writing 2006, 2011) in order "to signal literary writing that could function comfortably as conceptual art and to indicate the use of text in conceptual art practices." (Andersson 2017, 6)

[123] In *Make it the Same,* Jacob Edmond quotes Bergvall's address to the first performance writing symposium: "what is Performance Writing not? Is Performance Writing not writing? Is it writing which performs not writes? But then does writing not perform?" (This is a reference to / described as 'doing a' Gertrude Stein.)

was not so much repeated in its feather-word form – but repeatedly, perhaps endlessly, transformed. The transformed book 'Ghost Writer' (which re-iterates the transcripts selected from the redacted books) extends the metaphor of a ghost in the words and the illusion of independent agency into one of the physical books. 'Ghost Writer' is an anonymous text on translucent pages, which is framed as having been written by ghosts.

This creative practice research project has shown that books containing fragmented fictional texts may act as performative artefacts. The collection of physically transformed books made during this project stand as hybrid art/fiction artefacts. They are presented to the reader/viewer who is encouraged to performatively engage by spending time touching and reading words, whispers, silence.

AFTERWORD

Ghost Readers

While writing the final section of this exegesis, the borders were closed and many countries were placed under lockdown in response to a global pandemic[124]. Lockdown initially sounded like it should be a quiet thing, as most people (apart from essential workers) were confined to our homes. But there was perpetual noise. This came from the proliferation of news stories, un/reliable information and social media commentaries. Noise also came from online meetings, work groups and gatherings which now entered the home via screens. The screens reinforced absences in communication: absence of touch, nuance, body language, tone of voice[125]. During lockdown, a sense of all communication becoming strange reverberated through the online 'noise.' Loved ones on the other side of the world were now in danger, or fearful, or ill. The sound of global information boomed and echoed through hypervigilant thoughts.

Isolation took on a new meaning in this context – to be solitary by choice was a very different experience to enforced 'social distance'. Under these circumstances, it became difficult to write or read – to experience more words in a world which already contained far too many[126].

Inside my home in New Zealand, wrapped in white sheets, the transformed books waited to be read.

One day, I held one of the books in my hands and whispered its fragmented narrative aloud, imagining I was reading it to a blind ghost-reader. In this quiet moment, fragmented stories of magic or strangeness, birds or ghosts, passed as ink to paper, paper to hands, hands to eyes, eyes to voice, voice to ghost ears, felt incredibly sad. Could anyone experience the gaps between words as a pause, could textual fragments and whispers move through silence, while the whole world was shouting? No, not during lockdown, and probably not immediately afterwards. Time was needed. Time for books passed between human hands to become books again, and not potential carriers of disease. Time for isolation to be a choice, not a prison. Time to let strange new languages become familiar. Social distance. PPE. Cases. We lived in 'bubbles' made of people. Nations became bubbles as well and all eyes were on the archetypal 'rulers' for guidance. But the magic was all wrong; an emperor of one bubble was temporarily missing, believed sick or dead. In another bubble, a fool mused about drinking disinfectant and filling sick bodies with light. A mad king praised the angelic nurses in his bubble for saving his life but didn't protect those angels from dying. An aging queen hid with her sick husband, a witch raged about injustice, a fairy godmother waved a dented wand made from kindness. The whole world was a bubble of magic-gone-wrong, a bubble of conflicting shouts, repeated on a loop.

> Poems and other works of literature can cause us to reflect on the circulation of news and information, on its uses and misuses. They can prompt us to pause and question the human decisions that allow some ideas to go (metaphorically) viral and that stop others in their tracks. In the face of a real viral pandemic, we need now more than ever to confront this power of repetition. (Edmond 2020)

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[124] The lockdown was in response to the virus Covid-19, in 2020.

[125] Absence of family was amplified, as my spouse and I have no relatives in New Zealand, they live in the UK.

[126] An example of the proliferation of online words/noise during lockdown is demonstrated by Jessica Salfia in a poem constructed from the first lines of the emails she received during quarantine (Cain 2020).

What if... magical thinking needs the imagination, but imagination becomes involved in fearful repetitions and loops. The pandemic delayed the final stages of this project and I was aware of the frailty of any personal/creative ventures that weren't linked to survival or urgency. But in the spirit of confronting the "power of repetition" via iteration[127] I managed to retain a small amount of hope that readers might one day be ready to imaginatively and inventively engage with books again. This delay simultaneously resulted in a rethinking of the 'ideal' presentation mode for the books. If the experience of reading the books was not limited to the frame of a controlled 'Reading Room' environment, but the process of *reading* was considered a performative 'event', the books could be read in any quiet location.

The process lists written throughout this project incorporated performative writing processes, various themes, or language/vocabulary selection, and they were also reminiscent of artist Yoko Ono's 'instruction works'[128] which provided the reader/performer with a written instruction to follow. Ono's instructions provided an idea and an action – so the reader created an experience in which the present moment was transformed:

> from an idea into an experience – each one distinct from the others. Ono has described her instruction works – or scores – as "seeds," activated individually and collectively in the minds of those who receive them. (Concannon 2008)

As a collection, the transformed books were placed in a vintage suitcase which was to function as a library[129]. This suitcase could be either loaned to individual readers in their homes, or set up in a specific location (as a Reading Room). Under these circumstances, the action of privately opening the suitcase would potentially prompt an intimate relationship[130] between reader and books in any quiet environment. This suitcase-library includes this list[131] of instructions:

READING LIST

You are alone with this suitcase, which means you are trusted.
Please prepare yourself to be alone and silent for a duration of time.
Test a chair for comfort. Notice the temperature of the air in the room.
When you are ready, choose a book to read first.
Feel the weight of the book in your hands. Smell the paper, and read.
Keep reading the books until you no longer wish to.
When you have finished reading, sit quietly and listen to your thoughts.
When you are ready, place the books back into the suitcase and close it.

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[127] If, as in Edmond's previous quote, iteration is a way to 'avoid repetition'.

[128] Yoko Ono's artists' book *Grapefruit* is a collection of Yoko Ono's 'instruction works' (also known as 'event scores' – developed by John Cage in his experimental music classes at the New School for Social Research in New York during 1950-1960). The first edition was first published by Ono's own imprint - Winternaum Press, Tokyo, 1964. Two examples of Ono's 1964 instruction works are: "Let people copy or photograph your paintings. Destroy the originals." "Imagine the clouds dripping. Dig a hole in your garden to put them in."

[129] There are other tiny libraries which contain books by several different writers or artists. One example is a community project in New Zealand which was started by the poet, Ruth Arnison, called 'Lilliput Libraries' (Arnison 2015) – these are small street-side cabinets where the public can freely exchange books. Another example is 'The Bristol Art Library' in the UK - a travelling library by artist Annabelle Other, which is a small wooden cabinet containing 250 5x4 inch books made by many different artists (Other 1998).

[130] Jacob Edmond writes that ""The poetic" is always already a product of exchange, such as loaning, and thus concerns not objects, but relationships" (Edmond 2012).

[131] This list indicates to readers that decisions need to be made about which books to read and for how long. It also has the potential to trigger an awareness of the present moment and the reading body.

The concept of a Reading Room was thus re-defined as any room which contained a reader and the suitcase of transformed books. All kinds of rooms – living rooms, wash rooms, bed rooms, became strange under the unfamiliar circumstances of being locked-down at home.

What might a dying room, a dirt room, a lying room look like? How tall is a room? Ceiling-height or sky-height? How far away are the walls or the front door or the gate? How far away are the locked-down bookshops and the locked-down libraries?

Exactly as far away as the locked-down stars, the locked-down forests, the locked-down oceans.

At the time of writing, the global pandemic continues and here in New Zealand the borders remain closed. With unpredictable and limited freedom, unreliable hope glows, carefully hidden. It seems more difficult and more important than ever for storytellers to continue to tell stories.

While I wait for the transformed books to be experienced by readers again, the suitcase remains in my home. As a symbol, the suitcase evokes thoughts of travel, personal possessions, secrets, flitting, leaving or returning. It implies movement and hope, though for now, it is static. When alone, I often take out a book and whisper sections of the fragmented narratives aloud to a blind ghost reader, imagining that I and this suitcase of transformed books have travelled a very long way to find them.

The following extract is transcribed from the redacted book, 'Tears':

PROCEDURES MEETING:

Present: I
Condition is: primarily pessimistic about the future.
Three stages:
1: assessment. 2: restoration: a new pedestal. 3: restoration: contemplate the present time.

Given the age and imperfect storage, attempt to arrange favourable Hope.
Here she is, fair hair and wind - voice an ache-pitch.
Come in Hope – she is pretty, with porcelain eyes and lashes. Think of a swan. Think of water. Think of clean things.
She listens, head cocked.
And I am forced to care beyond the sands and sands idea of time.

She says, "begin the inventory of care. Delete everyone. Delete heart. Delete pain, doubt, bone. Delete sex, trust, skin. Delete time, shame. Delete Love Love Love."

Smoke is billowing.

"To move in the future, deny the peripheral past. Delete." She smiles. Hope, beneath the hair, has a plastic hearing aid. She uses one ear.

I say, "I died. That's all."

"Wear gloves," she says, "feel your skin, in colour."

To cloak the strange materialising body, boots attach to the possibility of feet. Leap the air, scamper inside a reflection in black. Limp and hobble. Present the obstacle of personality and identity as a wilful wish: to be majestic. Solid silver rings make a long neck…

Hope is so slow.

Take a pink too-big coat and insist it was made with a pretty stupid question, but it was really made precisely right. The next gem is a coloured dress: green as intuition. Silk skin is produced by ornaments: silver rings, oil. A coat sleeve.

Colouring myself in, I discover my skin is immaculately clean. Concealed is revealed. The Soul is beautiful when it's three-dimensional and hard.

Hope is a kind of genius: hands expressive, listening with affection, and unaware of irritation. Eyes like an oyster bursting into flame.

This is the first time there is a reason to cross a line
and believe in her hand, light on my shoulder.

For now, I will continue to whisper these fragmented narratives to ghost readers. One day, the books will again be opened by living hands, with no barriers to divide skin from page. Then, agency will be passed to the reader, who will invent their own narratives from these layered, fragmented, texts.

Magic is still here in the world; it's just hidden itself away for a while. It's either tangled in the threads of a book's spine, or it's a spark in a blind ghost's eye, or it's up there in those clouds which aeroplanes used to fly through.

And yet for ghosts who might be birds, or birds who might be ghosts, the skies and the land and the oceans are as open as they always have been. Ghosts and birds and magical thoughts are flighty creatures which will always travel, crossing boundaries and oceans and borders.

Just like stories.

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APPENDICES

Throughout the duration of this project there have been presentations of work across different modes – print publication, live art/performance, conference presentations, articles/essays, workshops, installations and readings. Some of the more visual presentation modes are documented as photographs within the exegesis, but links to other online/printed publications (and a short story) are included here:

Appendix I

Link to: A Tale of Two Brothers:

https://www.theperformancearcade.com/thelivepress11

Appendix II

Link to: Love Like Salt article:

Institutional access via: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13528165.2018.1464721

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Appendix III

Link to: Memory Connection illustrated essay:

http://memoryconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Jess-Richards-hires.pdf

Appendix IV

(The Naming of Kings (short story) is included in full on the following pages.)

THE NAMING OF KINGS

Jess Richards

King Fire is dying, I'm sure of it. Sometimes I think I am the only person in these caves who knows this. It's a premonition that feels true, because I have a deep connection with fire. I am slow with it. I give flames my breath, and wait for them to take their own. Fire is not fire, without air.

My hands are light as the sweep of my broom moves grey ashes to the edges of my cave. Changing matter into energy has always been my passion, and I hope that with the death of the King, the changing of this particular word will not destroy fire completely.

In our country, the King chooses the name which is given to him when he is crowned. When he dies, the name is removed from our language and a new word is used instead. Out of fear, we are all obedient. Several words have already been removed, and we use the new words even though they still seem wrong to us.

What will fire be called, when King Fire is dead?

I am a warm-hearted man who acts as a firestarter for all the other inhabitants of the caves on our mountain, when I'm needed. We have chosen to live far away from the cities in which bad news is passed rapidly. Occasionally we are sent things they no longer want, but think we might have use for. Clothes bundles, old shoes, electrical items and mobile phones which don't work without plug sockets. We make small toys and sculptures for each other from them, for our children, for marriage gifts. We are told little of what goes on, and rarely even think about it. The only official news we are always given is the news of our king: when he dies, when he is replaced.

We live quietly, here. But when we call each other, the whistle or shout echoes down to the valley and up to the clouds. When I am called, I wrap up in furs and go to help immediately. Without a fire at the entrance of our homes, the bears come. Without another fire inside each cave, the cold settles in too fast, and people get sick. I use flint to make sparks. I have a bag of tinder which I carry with me whenever fires have been accidentally extinguished.

I see this as my job: the job of my heart, not a job of trade or money. We all work through the days, mining coal from quarries. Noise is rare, here. We have chosen to live this way. Sounds come from weather and tools and trees, and travels the air. Sounds are present in our dreams and memories of the places we have left behind. The cities we all lived in but rejected before finding our way here. Perhaps all of us would prefer to be alone, at heart. This is the kind of place you can only find if you leave the noise behind you and keep searching and searching for somewhere new to call home. But we live together because we need each other for survival in this bleak landscape.

Though our fires are kept lit for as long as they'll burn for, sometimes they go out during storms. If the passing-gas comes from the west, and brings snow in flurries, the fires

can be extinguished. I remember one such storm. It was a terrible night. I had thirteen fires to light, all within a mile of each other. But the snow was thick and wet. The storm raged. In this landscape of great rocks and drifts, I was the only thing moving.

I relit all of them. No one panicked. No bears came. No one was frost-sickened, though for weeks afterwards, I had chilblains which covered my feet even though they were fur-booted. Once all the fires were lit, a cheer which spanned a whole mile crashed through snow's silence. One cave started it in my name, and the name of fire, and the next took up the cheer and sent it onwards.

Silently I sat beside the fire in my own cave, with flames in my heart from the sounds of my neighbours cheering because fire had been returned to them. I burned with pride for the first time in my young life. Fire: the bringer and keeper of life. For that one night I pretended to myself that I was a king with the name of King Firestarter, but that I would live for all eternity.

Our king is a distant king, but everything we used to find familiar is now distant. I've always thought that all kings or all power is something terrible. I don't know if that's the truth or a lie, but in our caves, we've no need for either. Because I love fire, and King Fire is going to die during my lifetime, I am fearful of his death.

I wonder who would hear me, if I were to still speak the word fire, but only deep inside my gut. If it never reached my mouth, or became sound, what could the consequences be? It is law that anyone who uses the name of a dead King is removed from their kin, their home and their work. In a trial which lasts exactly twenty six minutes, the number of letters there are in the alphabet, they are rapidly sentenced. The jail is built in a mountainside thirty miles north of here, and the cells are clay-built miniature rooms. It's like a hive of prisoner bees. Not worker bees, because no work is allowed to be done. And that is the punishment for using the name of a dead King - to be made useless. As forgotten as a word that's been sentenced to death.

Useless is the most desperate thing of all. We all fear having no reason to keep breathing.

The King before this one only reigned for two years. His name was King Sword. And now sword is a word that has been removed and replaced with a new one. Our new word for sword became that dying king's last words: *No-no*.

That King was an aggressive one. He believed that taking the name Sword would carve his path to greater power in a straight and clean line. He would cut down the boundaries between cities and counties and countries, and build his own walls. He would widen his empire with a great army of supporters. But he was killed by a no-no in a battle with some other king.

The choice of the replacement word depends what kind of state the King's mind is in when he's dying. King Wind was only on the throne for one year before being assassinated. And yet in his last breath, with a smile on his face, he replaced the word *wind*, with *passing-gas*.

On King Dark's death, the word dark was removed from our language and replaced by the word light. The original word, light, retained its original use. So after King Dark died, dark became light, and light remained light.

How to describe a zebra? Light and light.

While King Dark was still alive, I worried about this. It was rumoured that King Dark had many nightmares, and was a highly fearful man. He had chosen what he feared as his name. I think many of them do. They might seem full of hatred, but behind their hatred is misplaced fear. King Dark wanted the word dark removed from our language, as his legacy. He chose what it would change into in the moments before his death. Everyone thought he must have seen a friendly albino ghost.

'Losing dark is a blow,' my father said, 'especially since we'll now have too much light. But everything with two poles has a line between them. A continuum of shades, pegged out to dry in the passing-gas.'

I wasn't reassured. I asked him, 'and how will I describe the pupils of my eyes, when I'm taken to bed by my bride?'

'They are light.'

'So this is how I am to be blinded.'

Since King Dark's death, I only ever speak the word dark inside my mind. The punishment of uselessness is too harsh. But I do remember what darkness was like when it was allowed its own name. It was stronger, then. A force and a power and a beauty. Now we say that our coal is light, some essence has gone from it. It's as if to take away a word that is used to describe something creates splits in the substance of the thing itself. We gain little financial reward when coal is hacked from the quarries in great lumps, but splits into charcoal.

The fire at the entrance to my cave is burning blue instead of golden. I am thinking of the dancing eyes of the wife I will marry in a few months but my heart is in my throat. The fire knows what's coming.

As the flames have predicted, word of King Fire's death arrives tonight.

There's the sound of a claxon. At the entrance to my cave, I look into the valley below.

A man lights his way with a torch. He waves it to summon us. He rides a light horse, and wears a small no-no sheathed to his thigh. There is no road leading to us, and a forest to be hacked through to get here, unless you know the route our wagons take when we're transporting coal. The path to our cliffside caves is jagged and steep, and best managed by goats and horses.

Gathering up my tools: flint, axe and tinder so I can start a fire, I emerge from my cave. Others are carrying food and blankets and we're murmuring to each other as we climb down the steps which are carved into the rocks. The valley is sheltered by pine trees. We all want to hear this man's words, as the journey he's taken to make them will have been a long and difficult one.

As I light a fire, others busy themselves by spreading blankets on the ground for our guest's comfort. He is a tall man, and cramped from the horse. He doesn't yet want to be seated.

He paces as he claps his hands. 'I'll speak before I accept your hospitality.'

We halt in our tasks, our eyes on his lips.

He announces, 'King Fire is dead. In his final speech, he decreed that *when I die, the word for fire will become the word water*.'

'So this,' he brandishes the torch, 'still burns as flames, but is called water. Does everyone understand?'

My father and one of the elders approach him. The elder looks into the messenger's eyes as she replies, 'we've read all the books we were sent when your libraries closed down. We reimagined the meaning of your historical texts with kings' names blanked out. We understand you too well, which is why we choose to live far from you.'

My father places his hand gently on her arm as he says, 'We will light our waters to keep ourselves warm and dry. When our waters are blown out, we will relight them.'

Our bonwater is burning but the flames are ghostly thin. I stack the logs high, to build a stronger base. We warm stew in a pot balanced on sticks. The messenger eats with us before he travels onwards.

As he's about to depart, there's a sharp singing noise from inside his pocket. He draws out his mobile and prods as if trying to dent it.

I glance at my future wife who's fanning the timid flames, desperately trying to keep the water lit. She's got thick long hair, and wisdom in her eyes. She glances at me, looking worried, and fans the flames more urgently. I wonder if for the rest of all time, water will be this frail. I will have to find some way to make its flames stronger, for all of us, if we are to survive. Perhaps I should ask this messenger to send us some recycled paraffin or used petrol. The word water weakens energy even if the matter it's transformed from is strong.

The messenger puts his mobile away again, his eyes scanning our suspicious faces.

He says, 'I've just had a text. The new King has chosen his name. King Wife. He's chosen the name bitterly. He's already announced that when he dies, all married women shall become husbands.' Almost inaudibly, he murmurs, 'He's known for having been cruel to both his wives… But the irony is, with this choice of name he'll have to think about wives every single day he reigns.'

As the messenger mounts his horse and rides away, he calls over his shoulder, 'The King is dead. Long live the King.'

My future husband narrows her eyes as she glances at me again. She kicks at a log in the water. It sparks, and subdues.

I smile at her as she leaves the waterside and sits next to me. I say, 'there are many routes which lead deeper into these mountains. Perhaps there's somewhere far enough away to hear no word of any kings.'

Her eyes shine. She leans close to me as she whispers into my ear, 'we could let the roaring wind gust and let coal gleam dark. We could protect ourselves with swords.'

And I whisper back to her, 'if one fire in this whole country is still called by its own name, it would surely burn brighter than any crown.'

The flames burn deep gold while we whisper the word fire.

Still whispering, she nudges me. 'Did you see that? Fire, fire, fire…' The flames strengthen and gleam bronze.

My father glances at us with a frown and a slight shake of his head.

Speaking louder, she replies, 'water spreads.'

Everyone's packing up their blankets and leftover food. They climb back up the cliff steps and return to their caves.

My future husband kisses my cheek and I wrap my arms around her. We sit quietly together for some time, watching the flames change from bronze, to gold, to silver.

To smoke, to lightness, to nothing.

(Sample transcript from one of the redacted books.)

THE LEOPARD

To acquire a full measure of a mountain, toss a coin beyond dreams.
Beware of the bridge - it is lost from view, draped with moss and watercress.
The mountain has lungs above sea level; gasp for breath, and bleed in comfort.

Two rivers meet, and eat a leopard.
The leopard, carried to every part of long distances, is not concerned with death.

During the hours of sunlight, shadows lengthen.
Flocks of depressed goats roll a stone to a boulder-strewn ravine.

Night.
Charcoal on fire.
A young moon is ill.
Sickle-shaped and tethered by ropes to an unlucky star. (Each one has its own tragic story.)
Sheep tracks on fresh snow.
A thorn is a spirit between the hours of sunset and sunrise.
Fat sheep go up the road and down the road.
A parallel scene.

The grass at the foot of hills is a silent place –
sit night after night.
Imagine a light-coloured animal –
body of a leopard and the head of a rifle.

First: the leopard is on a river bank. A bridge: blood on the bridge and the leopard is gone.
Second: A leopard caught in a trap: willing to kill for fear of the trap.
Third: a cave is closed with thornbushes.
(There is no leopard in this cave - thorns off, thorns up.)
The leopard on the bridge, in the trap, or sealed in the cave, need not die.

Thornbushes protect a fire far up the mountain-side; a warning of dark wishes.
A mountain will observe - look down and up: forests, villages, land.
No difference to observance of the night or the direction the wind is blowing.

The circumstances leading up to daylight are visited by the argument in the middle of sound and glance.
A beat.
Over the countryside light removes itself to a distance, slumbering miles away.

From maps of rough miles of anywhere, the obstacle to swimming the river is a belief in bridges.

A swing bridge – blackened water, a roar.
Between cables is an odd structure: try to cross a spine to the other side.

Treat all as suspect as tied up on a path is a goat killed by animals or birds, leopard or man.
A warning - be careful.

Collect all things needed – rifle – a bath of fire.
Collect smoke and light.
Gather loss and hear the clatter of branches.
Procure a silk fish, and chance a strip of an idea.
A chill wind; prepare for a view of darkness - no dark to dark.
Dark, and to never dark.
Unless the sky drops to the ground.
Bring night-shooting light, a bone, white stone, clouds eating the rain.
Wait a length of time.
Fire the rifle.
Bullet-hole the sun down for cremation.

A fickle trick of supernatural faith - this opportunity of a return to dark.
Promise the dark, the hope of a storm.
With stricken water, bitter thought, and no regret over shooting light.

To close the only means of communication between the sun and the night, climb a rickety ladder.
Stand on the top rung and blow wind which changes direction.
Blow from the south, and blow from the north.
Blow as a raging gale.

Magic:
A silver glint - strange apparition in jet-black hours.
A silver disc on black water.
A bowl, or a silver journey.

Cut down the moon.
Be aware – look straight into the face.

In the heart of the moon is only one room, made of odd bits of plank and an open door.
Tear the rope by which it is tethered, drag it out in the open.
Plant thorn twigs in a ring and wait for the moon to rise in a series of great leaps of displaced light.

Let a rifle head leopard see the outline of the man who would care for a leopard skin.

Nights return, settle, and remain.
Hunters and rifles, a blue-flame stove, a petrol-lamp, wait at the bridge.
Here, men guard the kill.
The kill is a fair girl, lying on her face.
Stripped, licked.
Teeth-marks portion her body, beaten by men.
Cry any sound.

Call to the girl; no answer.
On the back of the leopard, pick her up, hold her high.
Across one field, down another.
Drop her body in the shade of a tree overlooking a glade.
Cover it with pine-needles.

The leopard's rifle is fitted with telescopic sight.
The leopard follows a violent man.
The leopard is followed by a hunter.

A rifle is not difficult for a man to hold.
The trap is set, poisoned with cyanide (the best poison for the cat family).
Listen, watch for the leopard.

Four miles away, the leopard is on a reed couch upholstered with a tangle of wild rose-bushes.
The ground is covered with a layer of earth, dead leaves, dry sticks, and splinters of bone.

Not one man would notice the deadly trap set.
Only one kill: leopard or man. One trap or two.

A month later the skin of a leopard is buried by men.
The spirit that has been the leopard, is alone with the moon.

Night is endless.

There is truth in the rumour that the man who killed the leopard was eaten by a fish.
A hazardous task, but the fish had been hooked, and the water, shot through with millions of bubbles, was deep.
Every stone and pebble were slowly moving upstream.
The falling into the water coincided with the arrival of a rock.
The man shook, scattering in all directions.
Eyes, the face, a foot, arms and legs, the left hand, teeth.
Fingers, throat.
The fish seized and ate them in foaming water.

Persistent night.
North of the great mountain, rough rocks and caves, copper light shines in a hide-out.
The broken sun calls to be raised.
Light rapidly fades as a red-and-white blur.
The light nearly gone, cautiously approach.
Prevent it from rolling down the steep hillside.
Take a full box of matches.
Striking a match and striking another match, summon lanterns and pine torches.
Show the sun how to still be alive.
Up position.
Watch lantern light.
The sun overlooking rhododendron branches, wooded hills, running east and west, growing along a path.
Above, up, a bend, and from this point on the upper path there is no need for a torch.

The sun is silent, but with light so brilliant clearly see scattered dry leaves, movement of branches, a diagonal tree.
Spring, the ravine, hills.

By accident or intent, a glint of moonlight.
Watch daylight return and hope for nothing but fire.

To recover from the effects of a fall from above, the first thing to do is to reconnoitre the dense depression, evidently caused by the ground.
At the upper end of depression is a cliff of light.
Enter the depression below the cliff.
On locating a shot, and another shot, zigzag in height at each turn.
Across the depression, there's a ringing alarm call.
Be perfectly still and then start slowly moving forward.
Bury a hole delicately, cover five holes making them almost secure.
Spend sundown depressed.

Whisper of rain-water.
Set off a luminous descent.
Fire off a noise of thinking and fearing.
Express rage, tumbling out of the winds.
Suspect silence – reveal empty thoughts too bitter to give expression to.
Keep awake, so no sleep.
At the first streak of dawn understand how it all happened:
the weight of the trigger, and jaws of the fall.

It is necessary to enlist the help of birds.
A pair of doves - a flight of up, above, and off.
Up, cross the glade and up, to the light.
With blessings for maybe, tomorrow.

During the early hours of morning the light is steel-grey and angry.
Far removed from the precaution to protect previous injury, with doubt of courage.
Beyond rock cliffs and above intense blue sky.
Sun shines on the mountain.
Two white birds climb lonely rays of the sun, light as thistledown.
Clouds glow molten red, pink, gold.
Shafts of light broaden in the sky overhead.
Each species has its own language, and the birds' language of pleasure can be put to great use.

The mountain, over twelve thousand feet high, can see sun light on a bed of blue poppies.
Broken, white rocks.
An isolated rock is a sentinel.
The mountain, with only one eye showing, is gazing at a white object in the dark night.
A complication as unexpected as it is unfortunate.
A long period of silence and sand thought.
Without warning, retain contact with wind-pressure imagination and smoke dreams.

For several nights passing close to the thornbushes up there, a leopard is prepared to shoot in any direction across the sky.
Obscuring the stars one by one.
Uneasiness about the lapse between defence and protection.

The falling of the mountain could ensure a finish to the difficult intention of the leopard.
The crash and roll of stones.
Taking the blood of earth up, hear pandemonium.
Night drum and gun, the wailing of mourning weather.

Let a story unfold itself.

Rescue the leopard, clamped throat to rifle.
Return to the crowbar and prise up one intangible force.
Call fate and set a period of time to the threshold of death.

Heavy clouds gather sounds.
Hush.
A roll of thunder: storm rage.
Lightning so continuous that the sky fights accidental nature and can accomplish a faith strong enough to remove mountains.

Pass through the victim's fear of Fear.
In the room, open the door.
Fill lungs with night air, breathe and bleed profusely.

The spirit of the leopard is shooting from the moon, lighting up the dark night.
The leopard smears blood on a stick in a thorn enclosure on the moon.

A shot in the dark: one dim flash: an echo, an answer.

As the moon is due to rise, spreading branches impede the view.
Descending again, moon-pale objects.
Visible on a rock: a streak of blood.
The leopard lying in a hole is only an old leopard, muzzle-grey, eyes half-closed, sleeping.

Description:
Colour: light straw.
Hair: short and brittle.
Whiskers: none.
Teeth: worn and discoloured, one canine tooth broken.
Tongue and mouth: black.
Wounds: one bullet-wound in right shoulder: partly healed.

Suitcase of Transformed Books, Jess Richards, 2020