

Janet: The Shape of the Hidden
Collaborative Video Practice as Research in a Poetry Archive

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Abstract

This doctoral project was guided by curiosity aroused by a cursory note written in the margins of a poetry transcript. It is a speculative investigation into the potential significance of ephemeral material secreted within the administrative section of the Bloodaxe Archive.

The methodological development of the research has been iterative. It was developed through the production of collage-like video pieces that incorporate documentary-style video footage, drawing and photography, as well as spoken word, poetry and sound. The project's eventual collaborative and cross-disciplinary approach unfolded through initial observational work in the archive. The research suggests that the composite, transferable and potentially 'ever unfinished'¹ nature of video is a useful parallel to the idea of the contemporary archive as shifting and fragmentary.

The written thesis that accompanies the creative work disseminates my utilisation of video making as a contemporary tool of archival research. The text also acknowledges embodied and ephemeral 'technologies' associated with collaboration - such as conversation and gesture - as key parts of the research methodology.

My search for Janet within the ephemeral materiality of the archive was a re-imagining of the archive as a space for speculation rather than a source of truths. Ideas gathered together in this thesis address the use of archive ephemera as a starting point for association, invention and autobiographical reflection.

¹ Hito Steyerl and Franco Berardi, *The Wretched of the Screen*, New York: Sternberg Press, 2012, p36

Acknowledgement

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Thank you to the archivists and library staff based in Special Collections and Archives at Newcastle University. I would like to also thank Bloodaxe Book's editorial and administrative team based in Hexham, Northumberland and Bala, Wales.

Thank you to Phyllis Christopher and my family for their inspiration, love and patience.

Links to practice-based submission

The links to the video and digital works listed here are intertwined with the written thesis and are ideally experienced as the text unfolds.

Her Working Hands: <https://vimeo.com/317074365>

BXB/4/5/2: Animistration: <https://vimeo.com/255868757>

Suspension: <https://vimeo.com/252142689>

Work: <https://vimeo.com/265561379>

Blank: <https://vimeo.com/352323980>

●ittle ●ight: <https://vimeo.com/432875318>

Instructions for a Butterfly: <https://sidestep.me/janet-draft/>

●anet: <https://vimeo.com/450726556>

Introduction
The Poetics of Archiving

Between 2013 and 2015, Professor Linda Anderson, then Director of the Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts, based in Newcastle University, designed a two-tiered interrogative project, *Poetics of the Archive: Creative and Community Engagement with the Bloodaxe Archive*² (referred to from now as ‘POTA’). The project invited a number of poets and artists to work with the University’s archivists to create the Bloodaxe Archive, a process that was both ‘following and subverting established foundations of archival practice’³. The artists were invited to research and respond to the sorting and cataloguing of manuscripts and edited typescripts, but also other documents including paraphernalia and papers relating to the administration, management and financial records of Bloodaxe Books. An online interface was designed to include the responses as well as different ways of searching the documents and the work was simultaneously archived as it was created. In effect, an archive was developed in response to a developing archive. This symbiotic process echoed the reflexivity of Walter Benjamin’s exclamation as he opened up a lifetime’s worth of boxes, filling a room with their effects and contents:

I am unpacking my library. Yes, I am⁴

Despite the Bloodaxe Archive not being the personal archive of the artists involved, the process produced glimpses of the intimate, conversive and self-conscious effect of the archive.

I carry pollen and harms from the street outside:
 How do we meet, in circumstances such as these?
 I bring the stone, you the ripples

² “The Bloodaxe Archive,” accessed on November 1, 2016, <http://bloodaxe.ncl.ac.uk/explore/index.html#/splash>

³ Linda Anderson and Ian Johnson, “Exploring the Bloodaxe Archive: A Creative and Critical Dialogue”, *Insights* 30, 3 (2017): 31–37. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.378>

⁴ Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting,” *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, London: Pimlico, p. 61, 1999

From the surface under the surface⁵

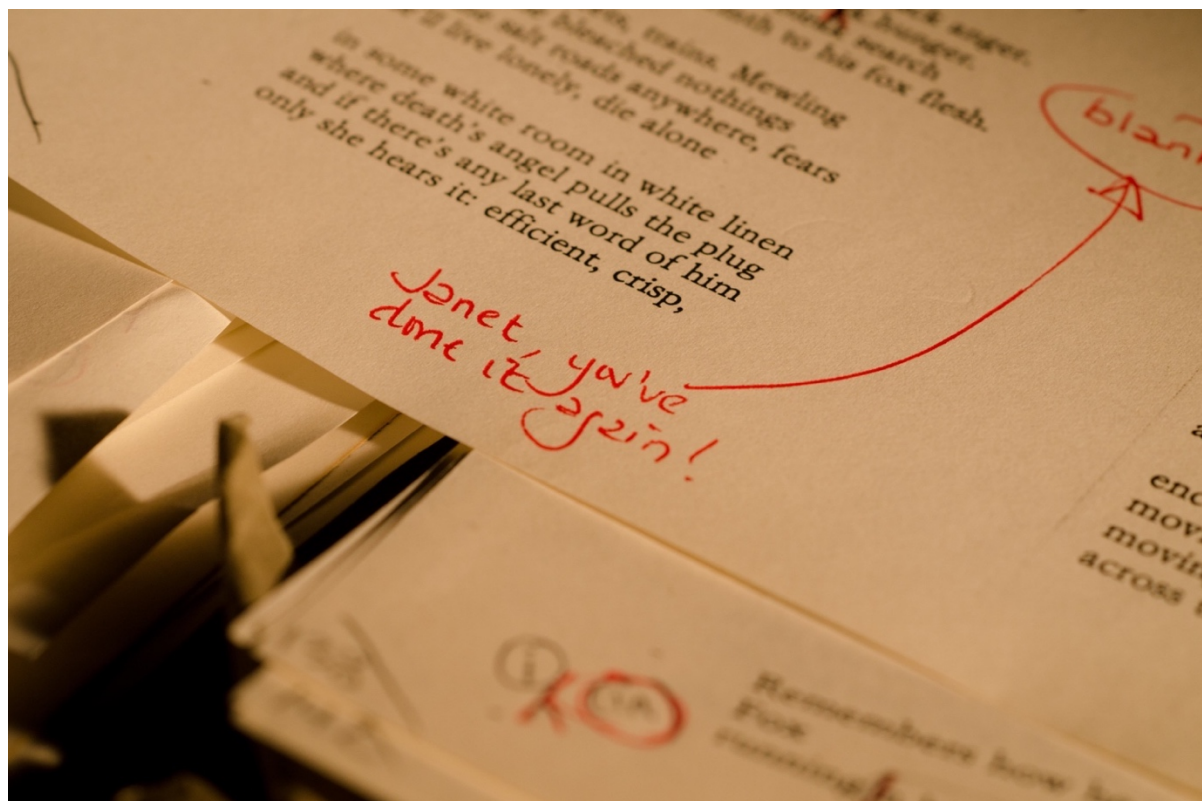
The project was driven by a desire to demonstrate and highlight a simultaneity between the creating of, and the response to, the archive, a process described by the project's digital designer, Dr Tom Schofield, as a form of 'archival liveness'⁶. This was a digital, collaborative attempt to demonstrate ways that sites of collective histories are not static, institutional monuments of fixed knowledge but that they are constantly in a state of flux. They are in dialogue with, and changed by, encounters with each other and with others. This research project builds upon the idea of 'sites of collective histories' to include human bodies and the experiences that shape them.

In 2013, I took a photograph of a part of a document in the Bloodaxe Archive. It was a note written in the margins of a manuscript of Ken Smith's poetry collection, '*The Poet Reclining*,'⁷ from 1977, one of Bloodaxe Book's first publications.

⁵ Pippa Little, 'The Song of the Boxes,' The Bloodaxe Archive, accessed January 29, 2017, <http://bloodaxe.ncl.ac.uk/explore/#/research/POA1PL1>

⁶ Tom Schofield and Mitchell Whitelaw. "Archival Liveness: Designing with Collections Before and During Cataloguing and Digitization," *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 9, 3 (2015). <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/153514>

⁷ BXB/4/5/2/Kensmith, Bloodaxe Books, Robinson Library, Newcastle University



Kate Sweeney, *Janet, You've Done it Again!*, 2013, Digital Photograph, Bloodaxe Books Archives, Newcastle University

The photograph frames a brief note in red pen. Who wrote it? Who was Janet? What had she done, *again*? The note's brevity - five words in red – reveals no answer yet nevertheless it delivered an emotional punch. The early abstract painter Wassily Kandinsky described angles and shapes as implying sounds, with a right angle being the 'coldest and most controlled'⁸. A red arrow jettisons off, sharply sweeping up from the exclamation to connect with a circle encompassing only the word 'Blank'. I have since been struck by how the photograph highlights the proximity of these querulous hand-penned comments to the last two lines of the ink-printed poem. Seeing it again evoked the memory of myself that day and all that I brought into the poetry archive along with my camera. My own thoughts intertwined with scraps of the conversations taking place in low, barely audible tones behind the 'welcome' desk of the university library's archive reading room. Each element I looked over, within and

⁸ Wassily Kandinsky and Hilla Rebay, *Point and Line to Plane*, New York: Dover Publications 1979, 71

surrounding the photograph seemed to be resonating with me as a form of touching; the perfunctory next to the profound, the internal and external. The material and the relational were rubbing alongside each other and composing the vestige of new narrative, an experience reminiscent of Karen Barad's multi-sensory concept of 'seeing-touching.'⁹ This unexpected archival encounter and its affects - what poet, Susan Howe would describe as its 'spontaneous particulars' – echoed with other things within me. For Howe, 'to reach is to touch,'¹⁰ and I did attempt to reach in and to touch upon what Barad would describe as the 'entangled tales' and 'intra-acting stories':

Many voices speak here in the interstices, a cacophony of always already reiteratively intra-acting stories. These are entangled tales. Each is diffractively threaded through and enfolded in the other. Is that not in the nature of touching?¹¹

The last line of the poem in the photograph encapsulates the 'inner significance' of my seeing-hearing-touching experience. The many voices Barad refers to become an enigmatic yet familiar signal, a low brooding sound; 'only she hears it: efficient, crisp.'¹²

The photograph was taken as part of the first phase of 'POTA'. I worked in collaboration with two poets, Tara Bergin and Anna Woodford, with the intention of producing a collaborative video that would document and respond to the laying of the foundations of the Bloodaxe Archive. We three surveilled the construction of what Woodford described as a 'shadow house', a place where the poet's own creative life *may* one day be stored. I, though, began to feel myself outside of their introspective gaze and finding myself instead observing them with my video camera as they were drawn in by the visible and invisible contents of the

⁹ Karen Barad, "On Touching – The Inhuman that Therefore I Am," *differences* 23: 3 (v1.1). 2012, p. 206. DOI: <https://www.are.na/block/1799783>

¹⁰ Susan Howe, *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives*, New York: New Directions 2014, p. 4

¹¹ Karen Barad, *ibid* p. 207

¹² Kate Sweeney, *Janet, You've Done it Again!*, 2013, Digital Photograph, Bloodaxe Books Archives, Newcastle University.

burgeoning archival material. I watched them interact with the archivists. I heard them whisper names, wait to receive and then wander through the reading rooms clutching folders of poet's and the publisher's papers, disturbing dust. And I watched them pull a lip or tip-tap a finger, wondering with consternation if their shadows would somehow remain on each page they pored over – leaving evidence that they had been (increasingly reluctantly) there. I became interested in trying to map of all these unseen, unintended contours being drawn and encircling the archiving process, becoming a part of and yet remaining apart from the archive.

The photograph, *Janet, You've Done it Again!* became a part of this mapping. We were sitting in the café of The Robinson Library at Newcastle University sometime after taking the photograph. Woodford said she had written an ode to Janet in response to my image. It is printed here, with the kind permission of the author:

Janet

She sits in a wing of the Bloodaxe office
 which is her back bedroom with poetry
 pouring out of the tips of her fingers –
 she is no poet but a phototypesetter
 and her old figure will be buried
 under a million Applemacs – still I would raise her
 hands in this poem's marginalia and keep her beautiful
 misprision, red-ringed in the Archive, for my closing line:

I saw the pit run out of me

(in another hand is this footnote: pity Janet, you've done it again!)

Anna said she wasn't sure about the place of her poem within the project – it seemed to her to be place-less, out of place and only a 'musing' around the edges of the main body of the project. I remember thinking to myself that the existence of the poem, its origins rooted in

a response to a photograph that was itself an attempt to capture contours, inferred that the edges, or wings, and the main body of the project were both separate and inextricably linked. The poem works as an evocation, without being an illustration, of the implicit textual and visual intentionality of the photograph. Author Teju Cole, in his book, *Blind Spot*, has placed photographs of fairly innocuous places and details, alongside short passages of text. They are sutured along the spine, annexed to each other, in dialogue; sometimes oppositional, sometimes complementary.

I believe still that every line in every poem is the orphaned caption of a lost photograph. By a related logic, each photograph sits in the antechamber of speech.¹³

I thought of Anna's poem and of my photograph. They were spineless, placeless. I thought of the archivists at the university and of the administrators working in the Bloodaxe offices, their shy shadows at desks and silhouettes slipping through doorways. They were present whilst becoming an absence in the work we were producing for the project.¹⁴ Their archival afterlives would manifest in small, incidental and ephemeral traces in the material being archived. I found myself reflecting on the short encounters that created the spaces between different people – poets, archivists, editor and administrators. Carolyn Steedman, historian and author of the influential book that focusses on archival materiality, *Dust*, says that what remains of the archival encounter is a quietness.¹⁵ It is my experience of this quietness - not much noise but not quite silence - that I am describing as an enigmatic signal. I am drawing from Barthes' 'third meaning', that he describes as 'the passage from language to significance'¹⁶ where what is signified cannot be fully described in words or images. It is

¹³ Teju Cole, *Blind Spot* London: Faber & Faber, 2016, p. 15

¹⁴ The outcomes of the Poetics of the Archive (POTA) project were centred around the poets represented in the editorial section of the burgeoning Bloodaxe Archive. Woodford's poem, '*Janet*' was never published or used as part of the final '*Poetics of the Archive*' project.

¹⁵ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001, p. 68

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning," *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 330.

located ‘where another language begins.’¹⁷ This thesis is an attempt to respond to the enigmatic signal. It is a search for Janet.

I have had a colour print of *Janet, You’ve Done it Again!* on the wall of my studio. Since 2013, I have noticed it almost every day - out of the corner of my eye - when I am at my desk. I am interested in how this act of noticing manifests as an ‘archival feeling’, a term reminiscent of the term drawn from the feminist and queer theorist Ann Cvetkovich’s book titled, *An Archive of Feelings*.¹⁸ Cvetkovich explores ideas about memory and history through the affective study of - the paying attention to - emotions when they resonate with complex and somehow inarticulable thoughts or things half-remembered, opening up an archive of feelings. In her essay on Alison Bechdel’s use of drawing to explore her own archive of feelings about her childhood in her graphic novel, *Fun Home*,¹⁹ Cvetkovich focusses on how queer perspectives of ‘private experience and public life’ such as Bechdel’s ‘challenge the relation between the catastrophic and the everyday’. Cvetkovich explores how Bechdel draws out ‘public space for lives whose very ordinariness makes them historically meaningful.’²⁰ Bechdel’s reproduction drawings of paper documents open up access to otherwise missing details of stories, transforming and preserving seemingly ordinary traces of unstudied, extemporaneous events through the time taken to draw them. Cvetkovich describes this as an ‘archival mode of witness.’²¹ I have adapted this idea to define drawing as an archival mode of projection and interpretation. This takes into account Hal Foster’s uncertain and contradictory proposition that archives are ‘found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private.’²² We put ourselves into an archive at the same time as we draw from it. It is through an internal

¹⁷ Roland Barthes, *ibid*, p. 330

¹⁸ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003

¹⁹ Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.

²⁰ Ann Cvetkovich, “Drawing the Archive in Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*,” *Women's Studies Quarterly* Vol. 36, No. 1/2, Witness (Spring - Summer, 2008), p. 111

²¹ Ann Cvetkovich, *ibid*, p. 114

²² Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse,” *October*, Fall 2004, p.5.

transformation process that drawings become archival semaphores; visual signals of something always already undefined.

This PhD project has offered me the opportunity to return to the site of those quiet encounters and to re-examine - to pay attention to - their (s)hushed signals. The written thesis is a reflexive overview of the video works. In her book, *Ordinary Affects*, Kathleen Stewart states that to 'attend to ordinary affects is to trace how the potency of forces lie in their immanence to things that are both flighty and hardwired, shifty and unsteady but palpable too.'²³ She alludes to the idea of the 'line of flight' proposed by Deleuze and Guattari and I have used their idea that the immanent force of ephemeral archive objects can map routes, make connections and build upon disjunctures, as part of my search for Janet.

The subtitle of poet Susan Howe's aforementioned book is, *The Telepathy of Archives*. The book is an exploration of the 'telepathic' effect that singular or surprising objects, fragments or things in material archives can have. Coming across unexpected details, marks and miscellany – the archive's spontaneous particulars – stimulates an exhilarating and uniquely archival feeling. Archive ephemera amplifies an inarticulable echo rebounding between the researcher and the subject. Telepathy was a key component of 19th Century spiritualism. Electromagnetism had been discovered. Ideas and language to describe objects that could be used as tools of communication, such as the telephone, began to emerge. Howe's telepathy evokes an era consumed with the idea that objects such as personal effects had the potential to be used as portals to other times, and become conduits for communication with the past. The front cover of the book is a cyanotype²⁴ 'portrait' of an archive drawer, seated on a stool. It is a spectral substitute for a human body, its face replaced by a container for a lifetime's worth of paraphernalia.

²³ Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, p. 3

²⁴ Cyanotype: A photographic process producing blue images. The English scientist and astronomer Sir John Herschel discovered the procedure in 1842. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyanotype#cite_note-1



Thomas William Smillie, *untitled*, 1890, Digital Scan of a Cyanotype Print, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Accession number: RU95_Box77_0024

The cyanotype, drawn from the archives of the Smithsonian museum,²⁵ bears its archival trace through the hole-punches located in the two top hand corners. Certain 19th century archival ‘things’, Howe maintains, create a psychic connection between the researcher and the researched, as if imbued with or powered by their era’s spiritual and technological energies. For example, she parses her own observational note with that of a scribble she notices on a page in Charles Sanders Peirce’s notebook. The notebook, she observes, ‘has an epigraph taken from the horse’s mouth: ‘I am the mere table of contents, a very snarl of twine.’²⁶ The subtle wordplay and its effect is visual. The horse’s mouth, the mere (the mare) and the snarl

²⁵ Thomas William Smillie, *untitled*, 1890, Digital Scan of a Cyanotype Print, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Accession number: RU95_Box77_0024

²⁶ Harvard University, *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives*, Woodberry Poetry Room, October 16, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZTGPbiUm-3o>.

become harnessed together. She understands that the combination of Pearce's notebook, his words and her encounter with them create a conduit. They are all an index to some bigger puzzle.

Howe's poetics utilise another of the 19th Century's great obsessions - archaeology - to conduct a 'dig' around the site of the archival artefact in order to unearth some of the restraints upon, and lived conditions experienced by, the person she is researching and makes visible those fragmentary, archaeological finds by creating poetry that becomes a viewing device through which to think or wonder about their poetic methodologies:

Each collected object or manuscript is a pre-articulate empty theatre where a thought may surprise itself at the instant of seeing. Where a thought may hear itself see.²⁷

Literary critic, N. Katherine Hayles, writing about the contemporary landscape of digital technologies, describes the interconnected relationships between creative output and technologies as one big knot: 'Pull any thread in the skein and the others prove to be entangled with it'²⁸:

Different technologies of text production suggest different models of signification; changes in signification are linked with shifts in consumption... To initiate new experiences of embodiment.²⁹

Howe, exploring of the relationship between technologies and embodiment of her own research practice, references Hayles when she says that, 'words are skeins. Mimetic spirit-sparks.'³⁰ *Spontaneous Particulars* is an acknowledgement of the current changing technologies being used in archival research and how they fundamentally change the modes of connections between the researched and the researcher and the consequent creative outcomes. The book is

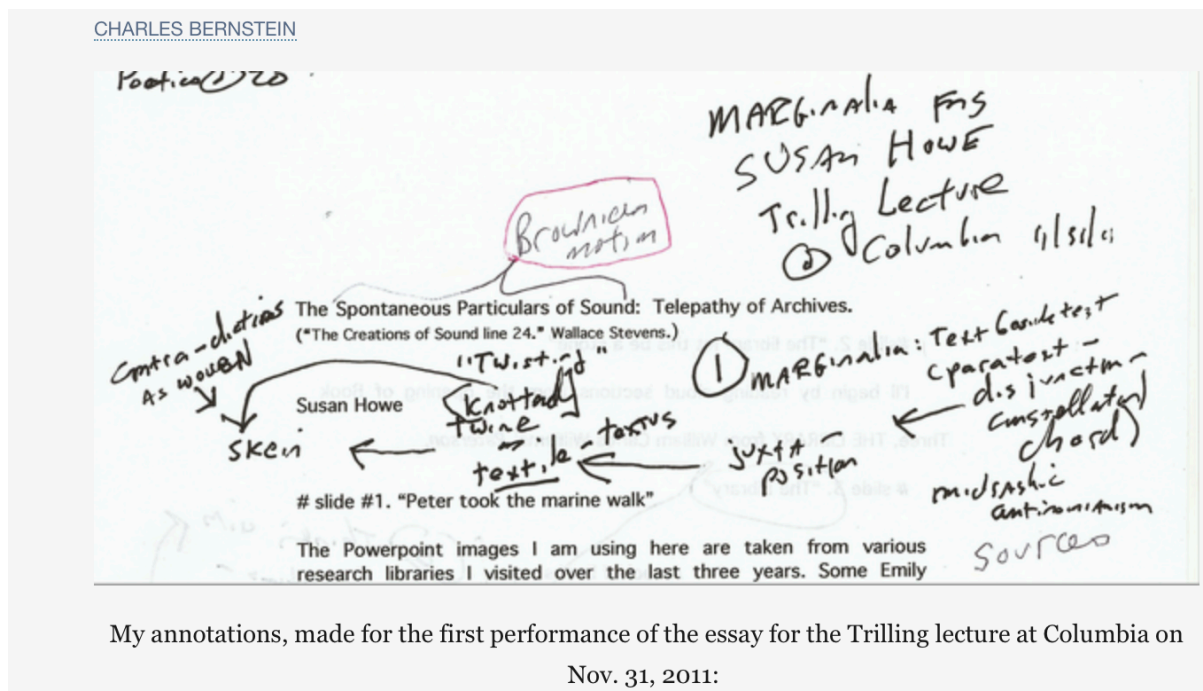
²⁷ Harvard University, *ibid.*

²⁸ N. Katherine Hayles, "Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers", *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* edited by Amelia Jones, Oxon: Routledge, p. 609, 2010

²⁹ N. Katherine Hayles, "ibid.," p. 609, 2010,

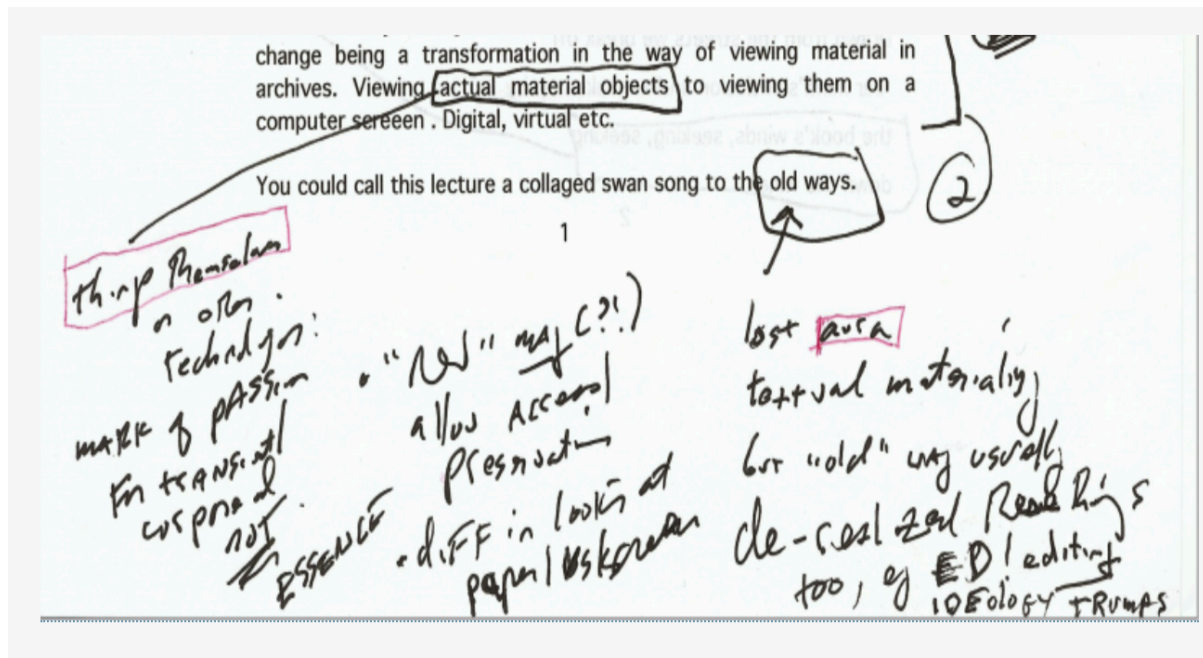
³⁰ Harvard University, *ibid.*

an ode, or 'swan song to the old ways.'³¹ It is also a tentative investigation of the new. She offers the work as a talk and slideshow that is presented as a video and accessed through *YouTube*. The work's impact and potential meanings shift and change between the book and the online video. I have attempted to mirror Howe's conscious and exposed use of different tools, technologies and systems of communication. Her work is a continuous reflection upon them and their affect upon her. After attending Howe's lecture of *Spontaneous Particulars at Columbia* poet, Charles Bernstein took two photographs of his own notes and marginalia made around Howe's presentation hand-out during the talk. Presenting them on his own blog, he posted a photograph of the notes in a post titled, 'Marginalia.'³² The images on the blog post re-shape the hand-out as a digitised archival artefact, or 'new magic?!' that attests to the affect, like 'knotted twine,' of Howe's praxis upon the reader, or audience.



³¹ Susan Howe, *ibid.*, p. 9

³² Charles Bernstein, "Marginalia for Susan Howe's 'Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives'," *jacket2.org* (blog), October 25, 2015, <https://jacket2.org/commentary/marginalia--howe-spontaneous-particulars>.



Charles Bernstein, *Digital Photographs on Blog Post*, screenshot, <https://jacket2.org/commentary/marginalia--howe-spontaneous-particulars>

Bernstein has experienced Howe's work as a tool for the production of something new, something that presents itself as collaborative – a weaving. For the research project, I have worked with the technologies and tools used to produce the documents and manuscripts in the Bloodaxe Archive. As well as the typewriter and the internet, paper and email, I have used analogue and digital image-making technologies in my research. I have occasionally been lucky enough to use photography to evidence Janet in the notes and marginalia of others. This is a doodle on a hand-out, produced for a public lecture I presented in November 2018.³³ I found it under a bench on the floor in the auditorium after everybody had gone.

³³ Insights Public Lecture Series, November 28, 2018, Newcastle University

to reveal and utilise equivalences in the laborious and repetitive qualities of administration and animation work, focussing on:

- The highlighting of plaintive language when requesting poems or responding to requests, especially language that seems to contain emotion and feeling beyond the cliché and the expected formal language of letter writing that indicate moments of personal engagement and speak of the more immaterial aspects to the job
- The use of materials found in an office to produce the animation, limiting the animation to being produced on a ream of paper (500 sheets – the same

Is this Janet.

Kate Sweeney, 'Is this Janet', 2018, Digital Photograph, Insights Public Lecture Series, Newcastle University

I have presented my research in an archive storage box. The box contains the written thesis and a flash disc containing links and files to the art work. My creative outputs are mainly video pieces. Video as a form of art production became significant at a similar time to the inception date of Bloodaxe Books in the 1970's. They also include text and photo-booklets that are included in the archive box.

Chapter 1 charts my search for Janet in the materials contained within the administrative section of the Bloodaxe Archive. The work in this chapter was made between three physical spaces. These were the archive reading room at The Wordsworth Trust in Grasmere, The Special Collections reading room at Newcastle University, and my own studio. The chapter is broken down into three sections. It describes my research project's heuristic methodology that utilised photography, drawing, and note making. The chapter is an overview of the production of three video pieces, *Her Working Hands*, *BXB/4/5/2: Animistration*, and *Work*. It begins with a rumination over a scribbled word, 'amen' on the back page of one of Dorothy Wordsworth's journals. The consequent video piece, *Her Working Hands*, was an attempt to draw attention to the importance of administrative work as a form of contemplative activity. The second video, *BXB/4/5/2: Animistration*, is a collage-like exploration of the contents of one box of administrative archive materials. The title contains the fabricated portmanteau, 'Animistration,' that describes my efforts to touch upon - literally through the act of drawing – the affective parallels between making animation with administrative work. The

third video, *Work*, was made in collaboration with poet, Anna Woodford. It was inspired by conversations I had excitedly initiated about a set of post-it notes I found in The Bloodaxe Books archive. Woodford's poem, is an evocation, stimulated by a discussion about administrative work. It is about things one desires to leave in the past. For Woodford, searching for Janet meant returning to the source of a latent whispered memory she had wished to remain out of earshot.

The video piece, *Work*, uses the archive and its contents as a mirror. The video reaches in and speaks back into the archive, a bit like talking to yourself. In this way, as Derrida suggests, every reading of the archive changes the archive. Through '*Work*', Woodford and myself accidentally invited ourselves into the archive, not to infer but to interfere.

Chapter 2 documents a development in my methodological approach. It charts the ways I utilised a decontextualized fragment of the archive to create a tool to use as an invitation to collaboration. The invite is a gesture, an attempt to reach out and interact with another. In her essay, "The Archive Function", Kate Eichhorn imagines Barbra Goddard, the subject of her research, lugging all her papers and books around with her in cloth bags. In this image one can see the human body struggle with the archive. Archiving can be seen as a physical gesture.

Understood as a gesture, the archive might then be also understood to hold the potential to do the opposite of what it says - to carry a tone, or carry out a performance that runs counter to its semantic meaning.³⁴

In the administrative section of the Bloodaxe Archive, there is a post-it note stuck to an invoice. The note has slipped through the archival 'cleaning' process and rather than being discarded, has been preserved by accident. To create my 'invite', I drew and digitised a font from the letters making up the short message written on the note. For every missing letter in

³⁴ Kate Eichhorn, "The Archive Function," *Australian Feminist Studies*, 30:83, 2015, p. 42, DOI: [10.1080/08164649.2014.998452](https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2014.998452)

the font, there is a dot; a hole, an ellipsis. I called the font, drafted from such an uncertain starting point, 'Janet'. Passed into an other's hands, 'Janet' becomes an archival conduit through which to tap, to touch; to speak. Choosing to work collaboratively was an attempt to create a methodology that would attest to, whilst preserving, the shape of that which is hidden in the archive. I wanted to invite other voices to infer, interpret and interfere with the archive. Eichhorn goes on to describe the archive, with all its missing parts and gaps, as a gesture toward truths rather than a text denoting a single truth. In Chapter 1, I attempted to describe 'Animistration' as a process of shaping and presenting work as an individual or a lone seeker of knowledge, its epistemic subject. This began to feel problematic as I felt I was unwittingly, or inadvertently, performing small burials. By not acknowledging small roles, significances and inputs from other people, I was misrepresenting my own working practice and covering over the input and importance of my interactions with ,and help from, other people. It is impossible to overtly acknowledge every interaction and not useful to cite them all as collaborative but by mirroring Eichhorn's idea of the archive as a gesture, I wanted to move beyond articulating my research as an example of my 'aesthetic autonomy'. To paraphrase the art theorist Grant Kester, I wanted to present the process of interaction itself as a part of creative praxis³⁵. I have offered the font, 'Janet,' to different poets and artists, inviting them into conversations that have occasionally led to collaboration. This gestural approach has created (and is still in the process of creating) a small archive of video and digital works. Each work is a collage of different responses in different mediums and using different technologies. They are all responses to the archive's enigmatic signal, heard through 'Janet'. Rather than attempt to atone for, or fill in the gaps in the archive, 'Janet' and the resulting work utilises and attests to those gap's existence.

³⁵ Grant Kester, *The One and The Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011, p. 9

My collaborative approach has helped me bypass my own prejudices and assumptions about who the hidden characters in archives might be, as well as how they came to be hidden and why. Traditionally, these presumptions made by artist-researcher, become foundations for aesthetic autonomy in art works produced from archival sources. My collaborations disrupt the singularity of those presumptions and I have produced works containing fragments of other artist's prejudices, processes and ideas. Stephen Wright describes those disruptive circumstances, that encourage 'diversity rather than commonality or similarity' as the 'bedrock of fruitful and necessary' collaboration.³⁶ Ownership of the works is problematised, and ultimately their potential to be singular insights into the hidden administrator in the archive are shown to be subjective. The works become deliberately stymied, fractured and challenging. In this way, the works embody Carolyn Steedman's idea that 'you find nothing in the archive but stories caught half way through: the middle of unfinished things: discontinuities.'³⁷ The process of collaboration saw the production of a shifting constellation of autonomous, flickering parts that were borrowed from, reused and passed between other flickering parts. The outcomes are finished in that they will continue to operate in their 'ever-unfinished'³⁸ state.

Karan Barad's theory of 'intra-action' and her explorations of the etymology of matter was indispensable to my devising of a collaborative methodology. It consequently helped me structure the presentation of my research and to consider the implications of the fact that it was made in conjunction with other people:

All bodies, including but not limited to human bodies, come to matter through the world's iterative intra-activity, its performativity. Boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted through the intra-activity of mattering.³⁹

³⁶ Stephen Wright, "The Delicate Essence of Artistic Collaboration," *Third Text*, Vol. 18. Issue 6, 2006, pp. 533-5

³⁷ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001, p. 45

³⁸ Hito Steyerl and Franco Berardi, *The Wretched of the Screen*, New York: Sternberg Press, 2012, p. 36

³⁹ Karen Barad (2007) *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Durham and London: Duke University Press pp 292-293

Rather than speaking of material as a body of a thing existing in stasis, a timeless permanence, a body's mattering refers to its becoming, its birthing, its arrival. Coming to matter is temporal. It is also to become significant, and then presumably potentially insignificant. A body mattering depends on the gaze of an 'other'. For Barad (drawing from Hegel and influencing in turn, 'thing' theorists such as Graham Harman), a thing is of no matter if it does not matter to some 'thing' else. Equally, the smallest and most inert thing becomes matter when it matters to an 'other.' Matter (the word) is derived from mother. (M)other. To mother is to administrate a body coming to matter. By proposing the idea that materiality is an occurrence or an event, Barad incorporates an emotional (and maternal) dimension to the substantiation of any body coming into being. The interaction between myself and my collaborators becomes substantial – a substance even though not visible. 'Janet' becomes a collaborator within the research project, but one that slips and shifts between a concrete identity or definition. This is the material or matter that collaboration produces. It is the location of new knowledge within this research project. The research project, through the use of video as the main composite mode of production has made space for, and explicitly expects the videos to be used by, the other 'authors' of the work. The work has been, and will be experienced in constantly changing new and unforeseen contexts and platforms. In this way the project has fragmented the archive as well as troubled the 'authorial status of the artist'⁴⁰ by creating a form of dispersed ownership.

The research project utilises aspects of revisionist theoretical approaches such as feminism, post-colonialism and queer theory to begin to examine precepts such as the original order used in archiving traditions. The research questions the way these precepts can subsume, ignore and eradicate stories and figures from their collections. The research attempts to resist

⁴⁰ Grant Kester, *The One and The Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011, p. 3

the imposition of new systems of assertions, that every ‘thing’ hidden in an archive can and needs to be exposed, revealed, or to come to matter.⁴¹ It is also an attempt to disrupt the supposed ‘immutable coherence of master narratives.’⁴² I have borrowed from Irit Rogoff’s defence of the idea of gossip as a subversive speculative research methodology in my use of conversational collaborations. According to Rogoff they

serve to destabilise the historiography of Modernism by pointing to both alternative economies inscribed in the business of cultural production as well as to the psychic fantasies whose constant dissatisfaction with existing accounts continues to generate unproven speculation⁴³

By shifting my methodological approach during the research project, I wanted to avoid exploring further the 'psychic fantasies' of who the living person Janet might be and what she might have done in reality. I wanted to explore the potential of archival material ephemera contained within ‘Janet’ to be defined by being undefined. The font, ' Janet' administrates the collaborative work produced for the research project. ' Janet' is a mode and an outcome of knowledge production: Janet in the archive and ‘Janet’ as an archive.

⁴¹ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy and History,” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, edited by Maurice Bouchard, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977, p. 151

⁴² Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p.

⁴³ Irit Rogoff, “Gossip as Testimony: A Postmodern Signature,” *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 324

Chapter 1: Holes in the Archive
The Search for Janet

This chapter is a chronological account of the research and the consequent video work made in the first part of my PhD research project. It is divided into 5 sections. The chapter outlines my early assumptions that the search for Janet would be mainly located in the historical materiality of administration work and carried out using digital and material tools and technologies of research. The chapter is an attempt to highlight the significance and role of sites of informal exchange, and of encouragement, help, information, and conversely of misremembering, misunderstanding and new direction. It is presented as an intermingling of critical writing with anecdotes, archive fragments, personal memories, extracts from emails and recollections of conversations with archive staff.

The chapter begins with my initial encounters with the administration section of the Bloodaxe Books archive material held in Special Collections at Newcastle University's Robinson Library. It goes on to explore the resonant effects of encountering a page in Dorothy Wordsworth's journal during a single visit to the Wordsworth Trust Archive Reading Rooms. The third part of the chapter details the production of a collaborative work produced in response to a series of conversations with poet, Anna Woodford. The chapter explores the importance of my private drawing practice, and attempts to describe the artistic studio-based process of interpretation and transformation of experiences had outside the studio. It also details the collage-like use of footage, sound and photography in video making as part of the development of my methodological approach to working through archive materials.

Section 1: Imaginings in the Archive

Dear Rachel

Happy New Year! Hope you are well.

I was hoping to come into the archive to look at the boxes relating to the administrative section of the Bloodaxe Archive this Monday. I'm not sure exactly how much material there is - I'd like to look at all of them. On the Archives Hub site, it looks as though there are ten boxes?

I can come for as long as you will have me! If you let me know me what times would work for you and yr colleagues - that would be great.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Kate

Hi Kate

Happy new year to you too.

Monday is fine for you to come in. I'm looking through the new Bloodaxe material at the moment, but I'm not sure how much of it is admin material. At the minute, most of it seems to be editorial material, but obviously I'm not sure what is in the boxes till I open them. More than happy to look through a box or two together?

In terms of sorted admin stuff, I think there's a fair few boxes. I can either get them all out in batches for you in the Reading Room, or you can pick out the ones you'd like to look at most.

Hope that's OK? I'm free all day on Monday so you can come and go as you please.

Thanks

Rachel

Oh brilliant - well maybe If I come in and we go through a couple of boxes together as you suggest and then I could just sit and begin to go through the sorted boxes - initially, if you could give me all of them, steadily in batches, that would be great (I'll probably eventually lose my mind, but I think it might be the best way to begin...) Ok, I'll arrive for 9.30am and we can go from there.

Thanks!

Kate⁴⁴

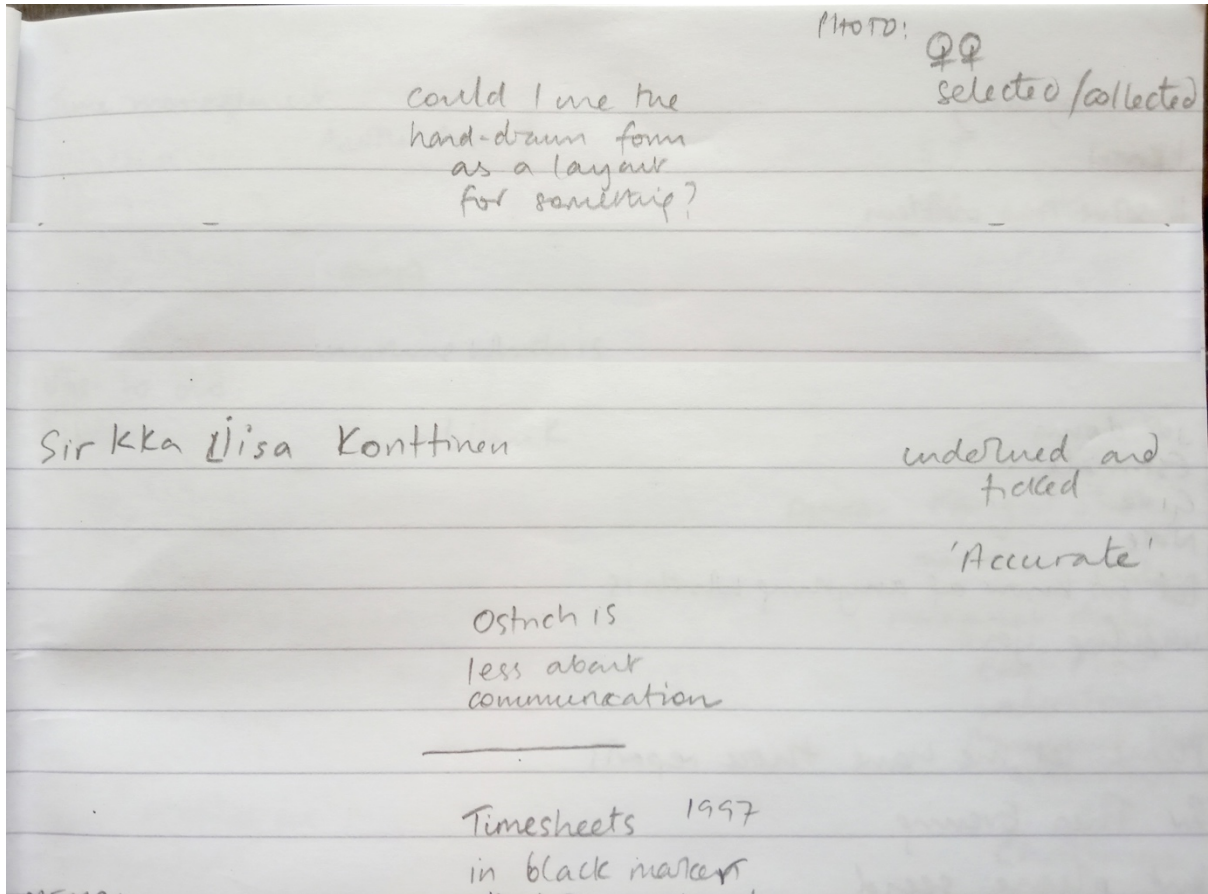
My search for Janet began on a rainy morning in October 2016. Rachel, one of the archivists in Special Collections at the Robinson Library, had placed the ten grey archive boxes of Bloodaxe Books administrative paraphernalia onto a trolley for me and left it in the reading rooms. They contained tranches of papers, tied with archive ribbon in the standard 'easy release' archivist's bow. I had expected to find more material, but was told by Rachel that this was in fact a huge amount of preserved documentation referring to the bureaucratic side of a publishing house, and that another poetry publisher's archive stored at the University Library

⁴⁴ Rachel Hawkes, email exchange with the author, January 4, 2017

contains just three printed pieces of paper concerning the administration of the business. Seated at a table in the reading rooms, I had in my mind a line from an online book review of *Coal Mountain Elementary*⁴⁵ by poet Mark Nowak with photographs by Ian Teh. I had read the review earlier that day and a line from it had stuck in my mind: ‘We don’t go looking for the memorable line or image; instead, we enjoy the sum and the accumulation.’⁴⁶ I drew three columns in a small handmade sketchbook. The left column contained extracts and fragments of typed text from the body of the documents. In the right column I wrote out any marginalia and tried to describe scribbles, marks, and tears impressed upon the pages. I used the centre column to write out any observations I had whilst in the archive rooms. I then proceeded to look through each box, one piece of paper at a time and I made notes in pencil of anything that piqued my interest.

⁴⁵ Mark Nowak and Ian Teh, *Coal Mountain Elementary*, Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2009

⁴⁶ Maurice Manning, "Coal Mountain Elementary," review of *Coal Mountain Elementary*, by Mark Nowak, *Bookforum*, July 24, 2009. DOI: <https://www.bookforum.com/culture/coal-mountain-elementary-by-mark-nowak-with-photographs-by-ian-teh-and-mark-nowak-4016>



Kate Sweeney, *untitled*, 2016, Digital Photograph. Archive notes in author's notebook, Newcastle University

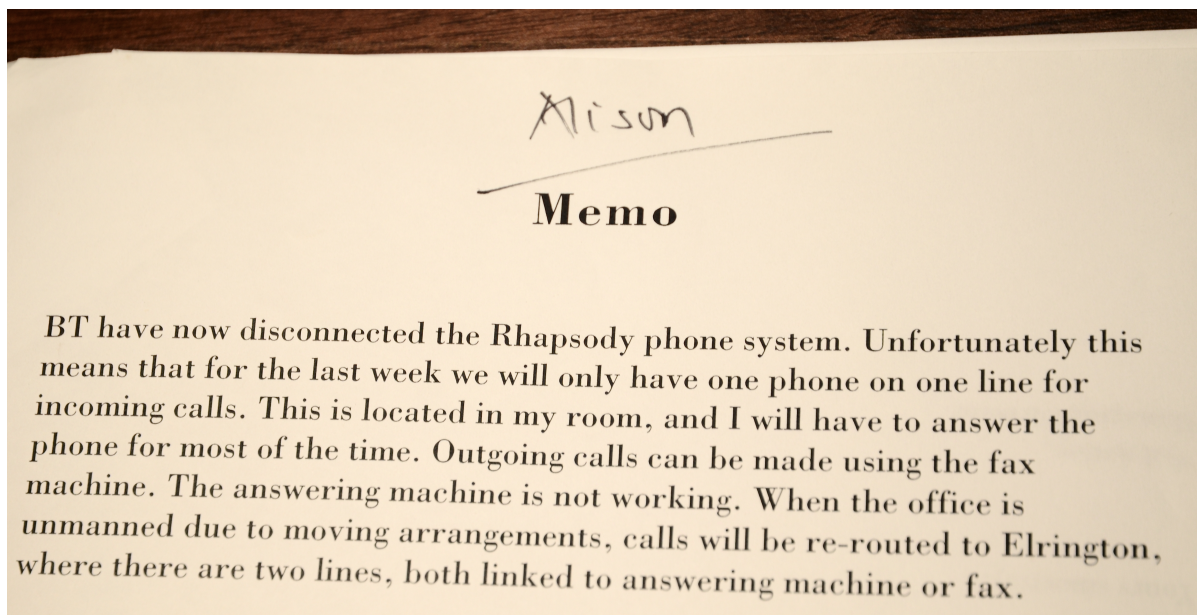
Poet, Mark Nowak describes the focus of his creative practice being the action of 'accumulating' lines from textbooks, photographs and extracts from newspapers.⁴⁷ This is a useful description of my methodological approach to the beginning part of my search for Janet. My accumulating process was an act of drawing together – a phenomenological process of noticing and then reflecting upon the process of noticing.

Each time I visited the archive over the next few weeks, the material in the boxes began to reveal a little more to me about the functioning of the creative company's office-based operations in 1980s and 1990s Newcastle upon Tyne. I continued to pull out and pore over letters referring to rent changes, eviction notices and legal correspondence, phone line contracts, computer installation manuals, invoices to publishers, letters about unpaid invoices

⁴⁷ Mark Nowak and Ian Teh, *ibid.*, 2009

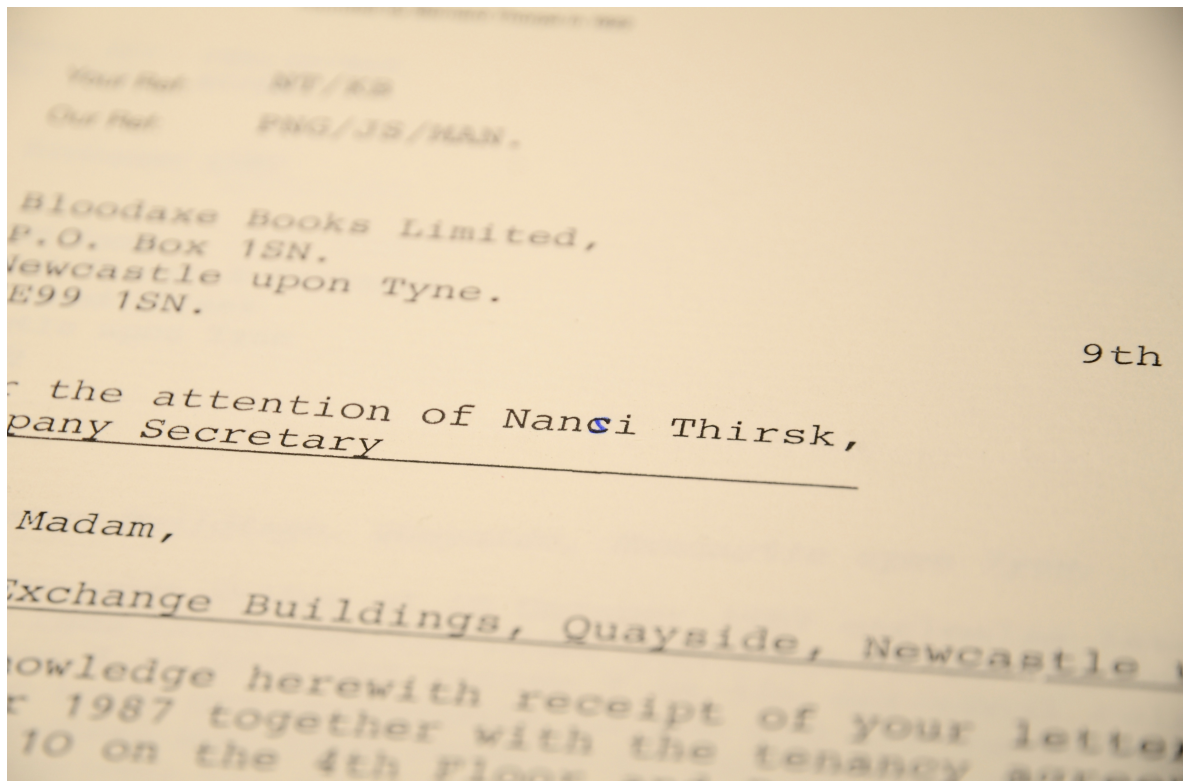
and early birthmarks of the internet. As well as my handmade sketchbook, I also started to use my camera to document my observations of the juxtaposition of the handwritten and the typed, the fault and the correction, the public-facing statement and the private notation.

In the archive box, BXB/4/3/2 there are 'instructions for dividing the office' labelled with names of people - permanent and passing through - on how and when to use what once would have seemed ubiquitous but now is largely defunct office tools and processes; 'multiple phone lines', 'fax machines' and 'answering-machines'. There are still-blank sheets 'to be signed and sent out'. There are letters to clients and other businesses apologising for tardiness or confusion, explaining that 'we are moving' and 'you will find we become more efficient in all areas.'



Kate Sweeney, *Alison Memo*, 2017, Digital Photograph, Bloodaxe Books Archives, Newcastle University

There are underlined sentences that need redacting, or are re-stated in bold type. There are strings of pretty green-highlighted numbers that no longer mean anything and starred names of now-unknown contractors, councillors and solicitors. There are whole paragraphs struck through. Nansi frequently corrects the spelling of her own name – its 's', not 'c'.



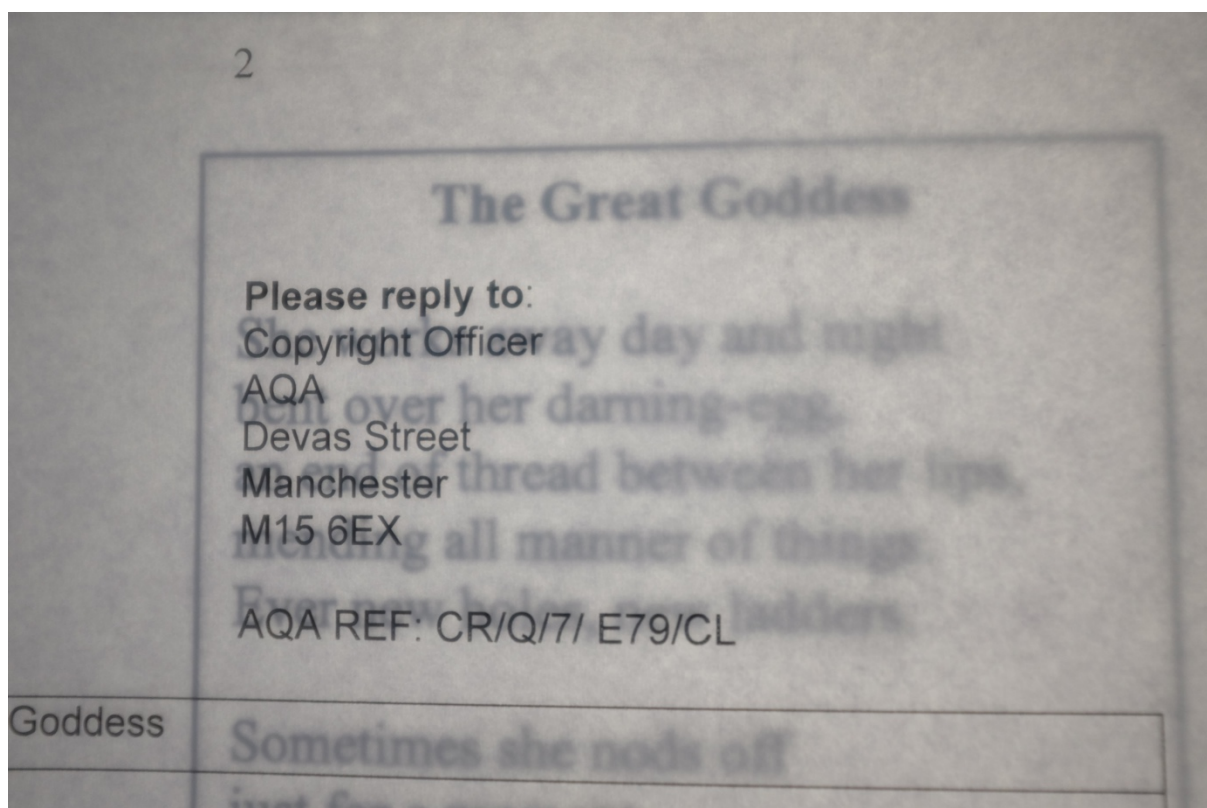
Kate Sweeney, *Nansi with an s*, 2017, Digital Photograph, Bloodaxe Books Archives, Newcastle University

I noticed how the archive contains evidence of the shift in administrative and financial systems from analogue to digital. Documents such as the one photographed in ‘*Alison Memo*’ are testament to the existence of the poetically named ‘BT Rhapsody phone system,’⁴⁸ a system allowing more than one phone to be plugged into the single line, launched around the same time that the pop band, *Queen* released their multi-vocal hit record, *Bohemian Rhapsody*. I was surprised how quickly I have forgotten that in the early 1990’s, other than shouting and waving up to a dark window, land-line telephones were still really the only way to remotely contact a person sat at a desk in an office somewhere.

The perfunctory formal language of the letter; ‘Dear’, ‘yours sincerely’, ‘please...’ ‘May I request’, ‘I am writing concerning’ is cut through with moments of more distinct expressiveness; ‘we just love this poem’, ‘we can’t really afford to support your lovely project,’

⁴⁸ An internet search brings up a website detailing the various makes of landline telephones. It contains a page regarding the ‘BT Rhapsody phone system’ <http://www.britishtelephones.com/rhapsod1.htm>

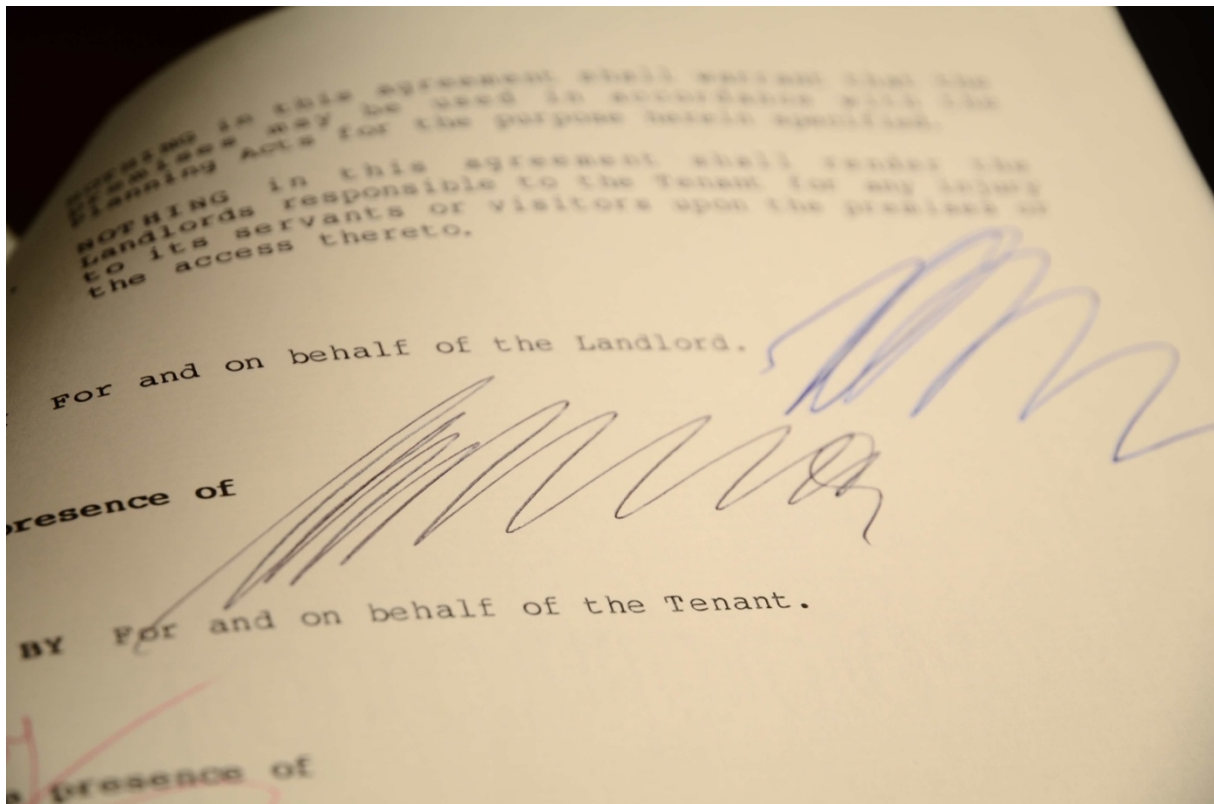
‘I have no idea if this is the right way to go about things’. Patience and frustration, politeness and boredom, sympathy and irritation are neatly stapled together in an incomplete sequence of correspondence regarding an eviction notice. In other tranches, individual poet’s names, and lines from their poetry appear as part of requests for use in charity brochures, in church epistles, in effusive and lyrical statements accompanying artists’ exhibitions, and on high school English exam papers. Sometimes, the archive desk light has illuminated lines of poetry streaking right through the middle of an invoice, creating a hybrid.



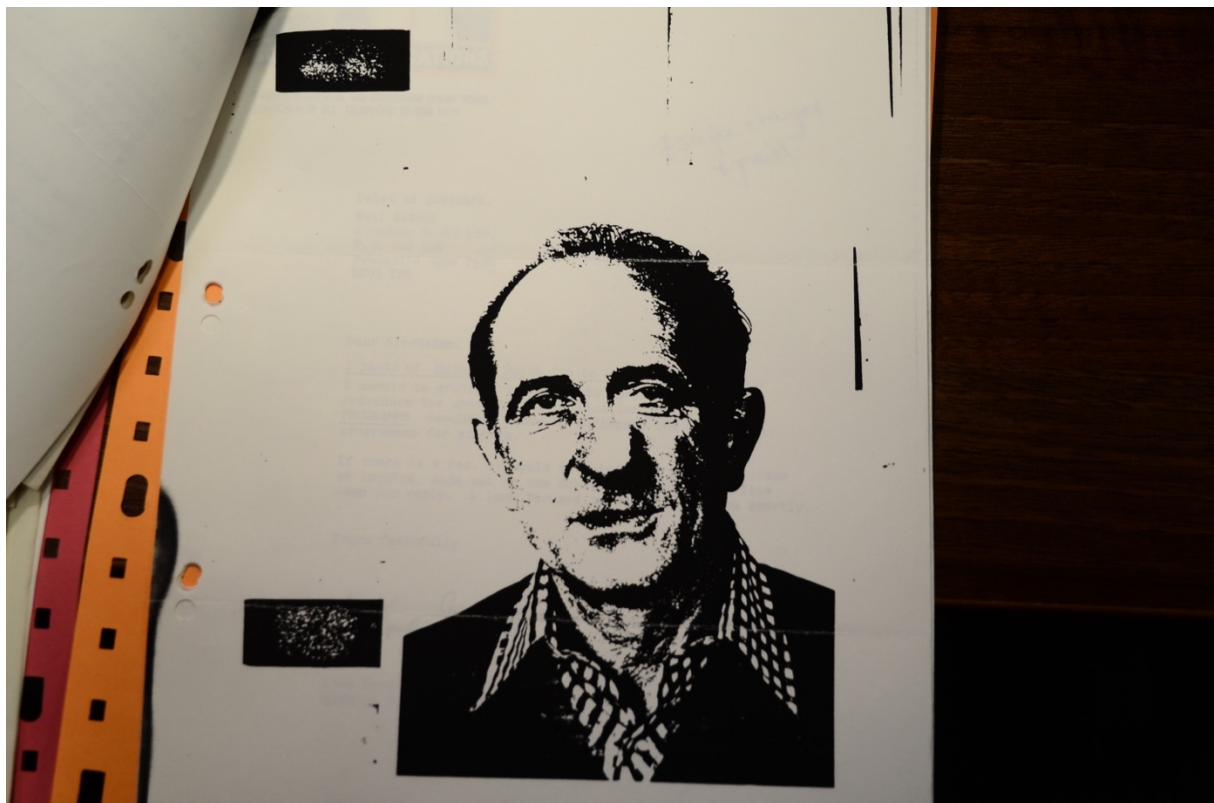
Kate Sweeney, *The Great Goddess*, 2017, Digital Photograph, Bloodaxe Books Archives, Newcastle University

I struggled to follow the logistics and actualities of the correspondences - there are many missing pages in the archive - and I found myself drawn to the drama suggested by details on the documents: the duelling signatures at the bottom of irate missives from one chief to another, for example. Each inky flourish impressed deeply and more elaborately than the one on the preceding document. Somewhere in now-bulldozed offices around Newcastle’s Quayside, a signature war took place and is now evidenced on five letters unexpectedly

encountered between a photocopy of poet Miroslav Holub's face and a batch of blank complimentary slips.



Kate Sweeney, *Signatures*, 2017, Digital Photograph, Bloodaxe Books Archives, Newcastle University



Kate Sweeney, *Holub Photocopy*, 2017, Digital Photograph, Bloodaxe Books Archives, Newcastle University

After many mornings opening and rummaging in the boxes, I felt as though I had ostensibly produced an inventory of material signs from recent history. I had gathered traces of office materials that were so common and familiar during the 1980's and 1990's and were now barely recognised. I felt a burgeoning nostalgia partly because I was becoming so familiar with them. Looking through my notebooks and collections of photographs, I began to notice patterns in what I was drawn to. I saw connections between descriptions of things I observed in the archive and comments I had overheard, associations I had made, and feelings I was having. Reflecting upon her own time spent in the dust and quiet of archives, Steedman notes that 'the Archive allowed the imagining of a particular and modern form of loneliness'⁴⁹. Through these imaginings, I began to wonder and worry about 'where things can go, taking off into their own little worlds'⁵⁰. Each mark in my notebook seemed to be a gestural trace of the archive. I felt all of them could lead me off into different directions. Maria Tamboukou describes this 'process of deconstructing archival auto/biographical sources and narratives' as a 'disorientation.'⁵¹ I felt a sense of confusion about what to look at next and a loss of bearings. I felt a little lost and alone in my own little world.

This is a link to documentation of the text and photo booklets produced using my sketchbooks and photographs from this part of my research: <https://capturingthebody.wordpress.com/2020/09/03/photo-and-text-booklets/>

Section 2: Her Working Hands

In March 2017, I attended a symposium in the reading room of The Wordsworth Trust in Grasmere. It was organised to support PhD researchers looking to work with archival objects and happened to coincide with my regular visits to The Bloodaxe Books archive. I was

⁴⁹ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001, p. 72

⁵⁰ Alphonso Lingis, "The Society for Dismembered Body Parts," *Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy*, edited by Constantin Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski. New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 296

⁵¹ Maria Tamboukou. "Archival Research: Unravelling Space/Time/Matter Entanglements and Fragments" *Qualitative Research* 2014, Vol. 14(5) p. 619, DOI: 10.1177/1468794113490719qrj.sagepub.com

delicately leafing through a small pile of Dorothy Wordsworth's original handwritten journals. The small books were hand-bound by Dorothy, apparently using pieces of William's old shirts.⁵² They contain pages of scribbled lines of poetry full of corrections, crossings and underlines and annotated with notes and thoughts. In the same scoring hand, there are also household budgets and shopping lists. On the back page of a particularly well used and scratched book is written the word 'amen' over and over: 'amen, amen, amen, amen'.

⁵² Jeff Cowton, Wordsworth Trust Director, Anecdote, November 29, 2016

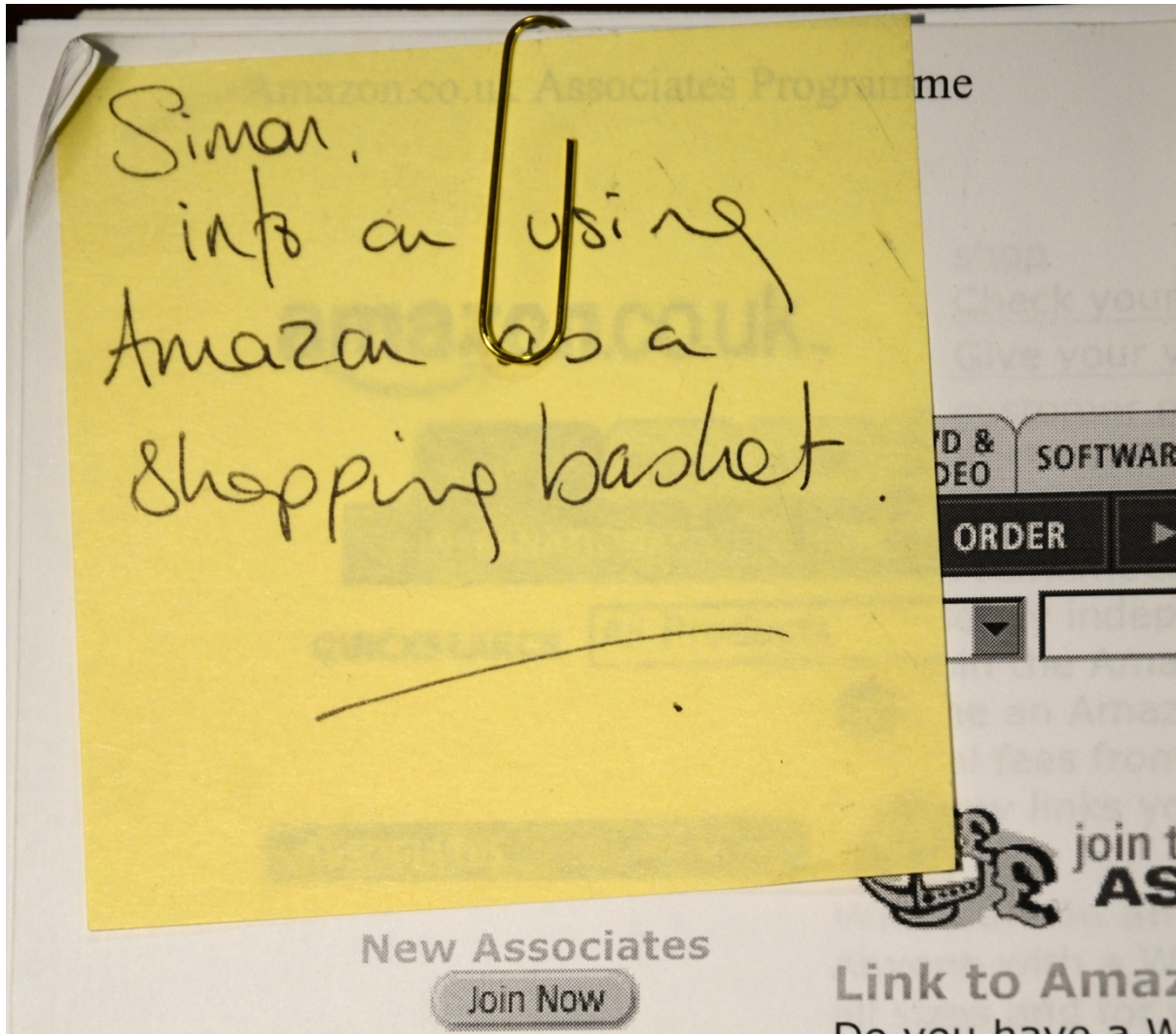
Dorothy made by hand much of the ink used to write out drafts and workings of The Wordsworth's poetry⁵³. The ink is an earthy brown-blue, changing hue like a subtle watercolour painting. Sometimes faint and sometimes bold, the 'amens' roll horizontally across the page like waves. Occasionally an 'amen' is cut through with a 'DW', an inverted 'Dorothy', or a drip. There is a 'God' in there, and a 'Godly'. Sometimes 'amen' is cut down to an 'am'. Running vertically, striating the waves, is a note that I can't read apart from the last word – 'Confusing'. I rubbed my thumb gently over the dirty creamy paper and I thought about ink making as a secretarial job - a necessity - mundane, time consuming and repetitive. The word 'secretarial' quite literally contains a secret. I thought about ink making as being the perfect activity to invoke something secret, completed with the seal of an 'amen' - it is so - and secreted away in the back of a hand-made book. Whereas the body of her journals contain ideas assigned with dates and describe experiences had in everyday real time, the secreted 'amens' are devoid of temporal fixity. Without context or constraint, they float and flicker through time. As I contemplated them, their inky strokes began taking off from the page and started to operate as a drawing, a figurative representation of something unseen.

More precisely, I was shifting their context and re-shaping their original meaning and what Stanley Fish would describe as a potential 'syntactic slide' was taking place. In *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*⁵⁴ he discusses the ways in which interpretation creates new meaning. Interpretation is the process of reaching towards - and then ultimately failing to - understand the original enigmatic sign. I was reaching and failing to understand why I was so struck by this last page. Contained alongside my irritated

⁵³ During one of his anecdotes about Dorothy Wordsworth, speculatively conceived from the scant records of her life, Jeff Cowton stated that he thought 'The Wordsworths' was a term now widely recognised as denoting Dorothy and William Wordsworth and functions as a sufficient and efficient nominative for the authors of the poetry traditionally attributed to William.

⁵⁴ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, US: Harvard University Press, 1980.

feelings about the sublimation of Dorothy's identity into a silencing title, 'The Wordsworths' and the consequent continuing partial concealment of her work, was conversely a deep but muted sense that, in making the ink with which to draw out both the poetry and the 'real' of the everyday, the essence and point of her work involved being hidden and that being hidden afforded her the opportunity to continue to slip through time, unseen but present. I felt that being hidden would be something that Dorothy would have appreciated and even desired. I found myself thinking about being sat at a similar type of desk a week earlier, leafing through a box labelled BXB/4/5/2. I remembered a specific post-it-note, a note for Simon stuck over A4 instructions on 'how to use Amazon as a shopping basket', written in biro-ed capital letters. I thought about my search for Janet, evidenced in the material detritus that was preserving something intended to be discarded. I thought about my own life, my current situation and the feelings drawn out in the loneliness of the archive. Through my search for Janet, and contemplation of Dorothy's 'amen', I felt in that instant an understanding of the impulse to communicate and to remain silent at the same time.



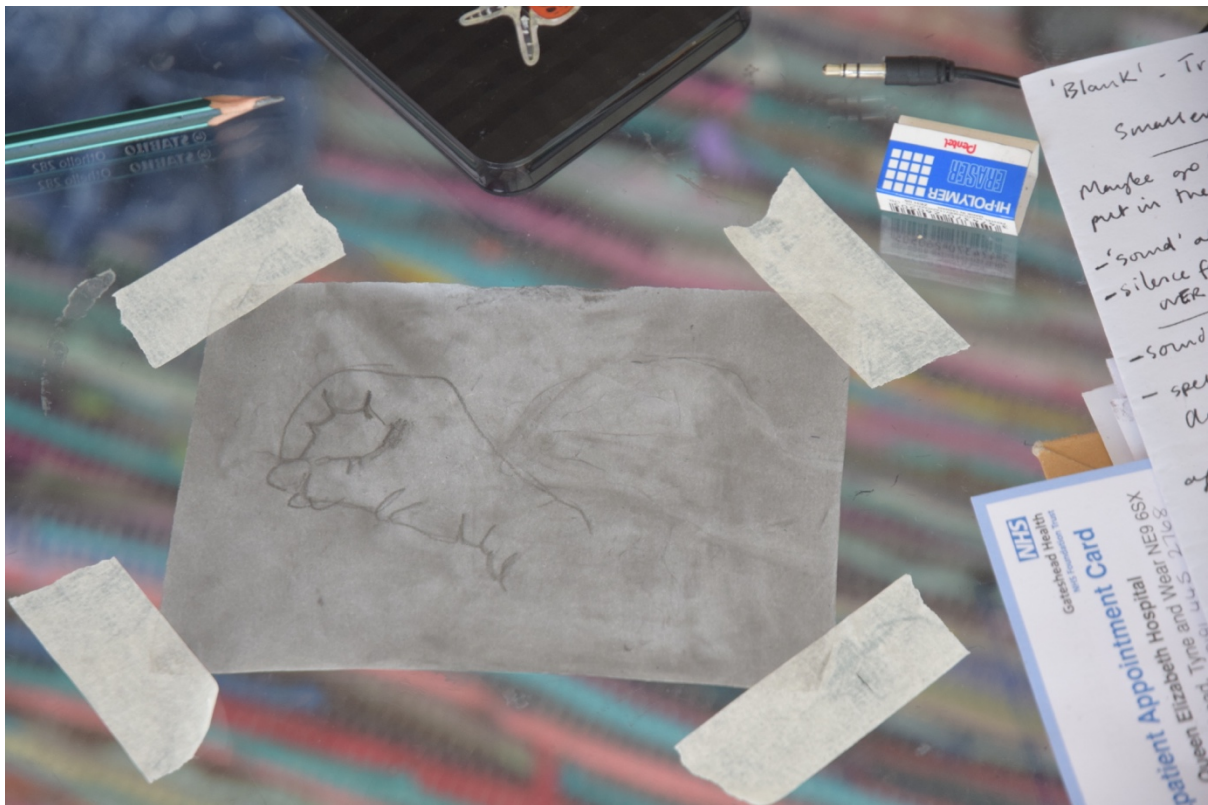
Kate Sweeney, *Amazon as a Shopping Basket*, 2017, Digital Photograph, Bloodaxe Books Archives, Newcastle University

In his book, *I Swear I Saw*, Anthropologist Michael Taussig's description of drawing a line as a way of seeing aptly frames Dorothy's 'amen' as a secreted away drawing. The description, he says, can also apply to the experience of beholding a drawing, a process of drawing from a drawing. Drawing, for Taussig, is a process of secreting something away and drawing is a secretion, revealing and hiding at the same time:

Drawing is like a conversation with the thing drawn, likely to involve prolonged and total immersion... A line drawn is important not for what it records so much as what it leads you on to see.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Michael Taussig, *I Swear I Saw This*, London: University of Chicago Press, 2011

For Taussig both types of drawing - the action and the reflection - make up a conversation. By shifting the original signification or meaning of Dorothy Wordsworth's 'amen' and beginning my own process of interpretation and connotation in my mind, I had begun a drawn-out conversation across time. *Her Working Hands*⁵⁶ is a video piece collaged together from a series of rotoscoped⁵⁷ drawings of my hands making ink – marks made, then erased and drawn again on a single sheet of paper and lit through my studio window and interspersed with video footage of my shadow on my studio wall.



Kate Sweeney, *Untitled 1 (Her Working Hands)*, 2017, digital photograph, author's studio, Gateshead

Remembering his anecdotes about ink and book-making from the symposium, I wanted the video to contain traces of my interactions with the Wordsworth Trust's Director, Jeff Cowton. I edited an email exchange between us regarding instructions as to how Dorothy

⁵⁶ Kate Sweeney, *Her Working Hands*, March 1, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/317074365>

⁵⁷ Rotoscoping is a process of drawing from individual frames of filmed live action to produce sequences.

would have probably made ink. I wanted to emphasise how his straightforward list of ingredients and instructions, interspersed with short phrases that convey emotional labour, synthesise into something more than an outlined recipe for ink. The fragmented text became the underlying, and ultimately unseen, structure for the video.

Re: ink – a question!¹

Hi Jeff, happy new year - hope you are settling into 2017.
 I wanted to make contact with you and
 I hope you might be able to help me...
 At the end of last year,
 I was struck by some things you said about
 Dorothy making ink, notebooks and paper -

Dear Kate
 So sorry to be slow in replying
 And I'm sorry if I confused
 By talking about the W's making paper –
 We know they got some of their paper from Richard, their brother,
 Who would send up paper used by lawyers.

*Jeff has said before
 That the 'public'
 Understand the 'Wordsworths'
 As 'they'
 - two people -
 A double act, interchangeable.²*

They made their own quills –

I'm not so sure

It made me think about hiding
 things and labours
 of love!

It's as simple as that

Do you have
 any information or literature
 that may assist?!

I am sure there will be you tubes about how to do that.

And for ink –
 they used a mixture of

crushed oak galls, iron sulphate and gum Arabic. You
 crush a few oak galls and
 soak in water for a few days; then
 dissolve some iron sulphate (from health food shops) and
 gum Arabic (from art shops) in water
 – so you have 3 containers with three liquids –
 when they mix in one, it goes black. Magic.

*When they mix in one
 It goes
 Black magic*

Probably doesn't help you much Kate – but
 a great subject to try out.

Best wishes

Thanks Jeff!
 Really useful yes
 maybe I misunderstood –
 most likely it was my imagination that
 decided I heard you say

When they mix in one

It goes

She

made the notebooks that
 she
 wrote in...

Black magic

Yes –
 they
 made notebooks, for sure –

*'Amen'
 Over and over
 - Amen Amen Amen -
 in the back*

¹ The title of email exchange between Jeff Cowton, Director of The Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere and myself from 2017.

² Personal reflections made in response to the email exchange with Jeff. 2017

In the video piece, *Her Working Hands*, I have left a gap between the edges of the paper and the video's frame, allowing the glass of the window to gather traces of the weather over a period of days and weeks – sun, snow and wind. Dorothy Wordsworth's short, dense

descriptions in her diaries also merge the practical, mundane and small with a sense of the emotionally expansive. Compressed into a couple of lines is the slow relentless shift over a year of snow, wind and rain through to days of sun, cloud and mist along with the daily shuffle of human emotions and experience:

When William went down to the water to fish I lay under the wind, my head pillowed upon a mossy rock, and slept about 10 minutes which relieved my headache. We ate our dinner together and parted again. William was afraid he had lost his line and sought me⁵⁸

In a speculative re-enactment of Dorothy's hands making ink - removing any depiction of the actual ink-making materials from the drawings - I was seeking to emphasise the allegorical possibility of hands. In her article, "The Revolt of the Object," about the artist William Kentridge and his use of the symbolic object in his 'moving drawings,'⁵⁹ Rosemarie Buikema draws upon Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory. She states that 'the allegorical gaze forces objects to retreat from their conventional context.'⁶⁰ For Walter Benjamin, the allegorical gaze was a modality of encounter between a subject, and an object in retreat from its original context. My hands, immersed in a process, become Dorothy Wordsworth's secretarial hands. The audience are invited to concentrate only on their gesture and the hands become an allegorical symbol of internalised somatic knowledge. The inclusion of the masking tape holding the paper to the window reveals the process of construction and renders the work a partly abstracted documentary the aim of which is not to produce a set of instructions on how to make ink, but a material trace of a process; a drawing, in which each part of the process – including the conversational - produces what is seen and heard in the final piece.

⁵⁸ Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere and Alfoxden Diaries*, edited by Pamela Woof, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002

⁵⁹ Rosemarie Buikema, "The Revolt of the Object: Animated Drawings and the Colonial Archive: William Kentridge's Black Box Theatre," *Interventions*, 18:2, 2016, p. 255, DOI:

⁶⁰ Rosemarie Buikema, "ibid.," 2016, p. 255, 10.1080/1369801X.2015.1106968



Kate Sweeney, *Untitled 2 (Her Working Hands)*, 2017, digital photograph, author's studio, Gateshead

The soundscape was made using non-diegetic recordings of studio activity, birds just outside my door, and a 10-year-old recording of rain falling on my studio window edited into a composition of sounds that were recorded diegetically (the sound of the ink being made and the click of the camera for example were all recorded at the time of the filming). Acknowledging the necessary but often hidden moments of collaboration in every process, the soundtrack also contains audible fragments of my partner Phyllis's supportive voice.

In Susan Hiller's 1994 essay, '*Working Through Objects*'⁶¹, that accompanies her exhibition at The Freud Museum, she builds on critic Rosalind Krauss's idea of the 'expanded field'⁶² within which an art object resides, or functions. The concept, formation and presentation of an art object is in dialogue with every other construct - institutional and personal - it encounters. Hiller was reflecting, absorbing and interacting with Freud's ideas and his own

⁶¹ Susan Hiller, *After the Freud Museum*, London: Book Works, 2000

⁶² Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October*, 8, 31-44, 1979, DOI:10.2307/778224

objects contained in the museum and creating, ‘supplementary narratives’ by introducing her own personal, esoteric but resonant objects directly beside his in the process of making and presenting the work for the exhibition:

When I was first informed of the vitrine, I knew immediately that this location would help me finish the piece of work that had begun a long time ago in my mind and which I thought might go on forever⁶³

Hiller is aptly describing the Lacanian idea, extended by Jean Laplanche, of the cyclical process by which artists respond to enigmatic signifiers that stimulate the desire to ‘complete’ unresolved feelings through the projects that drive them. She writes about

...receiving signifiers which... testify to the intention to communicate and, perhaps, to conscious and even unconscious reasons for such an intention.⁶⁴

Freud’s glass display case – the vitrine - enigmatically signifies the possibility of resolution. It acts as an emotional trigger or, in reference to Barthes, it is the punctum: ‘a sting, a speck, cut, little hole’⁶⁵ into Hiller’s unconscious that begins her pursuit of closure through the production of an artwork. Barthes describes these enigmatic signals created by the act of interpretation as ‘the third meaning’. It is really a hole or a gap in meaning: ‘We cannot describe the third meaning... I cannot name that which pricks me.’⁶⁶

Artist Chris Dorsett refers to the paradoxical nature of interpretation in his chapter in “Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations.”

Interpretation exists, individually and communally, because we continually fail to achieve interpretative closure⁶⁷

⁶³ Susan Hiller, *Thinking About Art: Conversations with Susan Hiller*, edited by Barbara Einzig, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, p. 226, 1996

⁶⁴ Jean Laplanche, “The Unfinished Copernican Revolution,” *Essays on Otherness*, edited by John Fletcher, Routledge, p. 79, 1999

⁶⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, London: Vintage, p. 27, 1993

⁶⁶ Roland Barthes, “The Third Meaning,” *A Barthes Reader*, edited by Susan Sontag, London: Vintage, p. 318, 1993

⁶⁷ Chris Dorsett, “Beyond Display, Making Meaning,” *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements*,

Interpretation is the same thing as misinterpretation. Artworks are the fallout from the ongoing process of working out and responding to the juxtaposing and unresolved feelings that reaching to interpret evoke. In '*Le Tombeau D'Edgar Poe*', Mallarme sums up the poem (or artwork), 'aroused like some vile hydra of the past' as

A quiet piece fallen down here of an obscure disaster.⁶⁸

Quiet in that it seems far away, coming from somewhere else, the site of an 'obscure disaster' that is also reminiscent of the quiet archive described by Steedman in *Dust*.⁶⁹

Video artist Elizabeth Price posits that the nexus of her work is a response to 'the psychological power that relies upon the potential emergence into the visible of something as yet undefined'⁷⁰. My drawing practice is maintained through the regular studio-based processes that form a pattern of behaviour, and a structure for working out and for interpretation. That work is necessarily hermetic. It is the solitude of the studio that makes it the primary site for liminal transference that then creates impetus for the production or output of an artwork.

Drawing for me has always been a place of retreat. Being alone in my studio, I am working things out with drawing. I am withdrawing, with-drawing. It took me a long time as an artist to embrace the idea of drawing as retreat. It felt somehow incongruous to the very idea of being an artist – a communicator. Video work that incorporates sequences of moving drawings, or animations, has become a place where I can occupy two or more states at once – I can be withdrawn - with drawing - but include the traces of being with people, and of collaborating, communicating. Video-making has become a space to combine elements of my

Interpretations, edited by Sandra Dudley, p. 266 London: Routledge. 2010

⁶⁸ Stéphane Mallarme, *Selected Poems*, California: University of California Press, p. 21 2002

⁶⁹ Steedman, *ibid*, 2002

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Price, *IN A DREAM YOU SAW A WAY TO SURVIVE AND YOU WERE FULL OF JOY*, Hayward Gallery, London, June 2016, exhibition catalogue

work, and of myself. Drawing begins with a blank page before which the body places itself and literally has to draw from within, using what Derrida describes in his book, *Memoirs of the Blind*, as the ‘finger-eye.’⁷¹ It is the hand that draws out what has been collected and gathered in the head. The blank paper sheet is a space for the artist to reach and to touch and to draw the contents onto. It is a material surface – a ground to place things on and around – and it is a temporal space to begin to catalogue and order the archive of ideas drawn out from within the body. Derrida quotes Merleau-Ponty to say that all drawing, even observational and figurative drawing is made through a phenomenological process ‘without the ontic mask.’⁷² That is to say that even when drawing from life - something that is in front of you – you are seeing beyond the facts of the object’s height and colour and you are performing an interpretation. The ‘ontic mask’ is the illusion of the real. In order to concentrate on the line being drawn, one is also drawing from the traces of other disparate, juxtaposing and fragmented experiences and events.

This is a link to the video piece, *Her Working Hands*:
<https://vimeo.com/317074365>

Section 3: BXB/4/5/2: Animistration

I returned to the Bloodaxe Books archive and I searched for the box that contains the ‘Yay!!!’ post-it note. Archive box BXB/4/5/2 contains 507 individual pieces of paper – almost the exact number of sheets in a typical ream of office printer paper. I placed the box on the reading room table and placed a brand-new ream of office paper, still wrapped in its packaging next to it. I positioned my camera above my new ream and I ripped it open. I began to draw small details from each piece of paper in BXB/4/5/2 onto a corresponding sheet of paper from the new ream. I drew what I noticed first. Colours, words, holes and the patterns tea cups make

⁷¹ Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, Chicago: Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993

⁷² Jacques Derrida, *ibid.*, p. 76, 1993

lingered like a shadow on the retina. I photographed each drawn line and mark as it was made. The desk light reflected brightly off the white paper and soon I noticed the afterimage of certain repetitive words appeared on my retina and would then slowly fade as I turned over each piece of paper.

Permission Permission Permission Permission Permission Permission
 Dear Dear Dear Dear Dear Dear Dear Dear Dear Dear Dear Dear Dear
 Of course Of course Of course Of course Of course Of course Of course
 If you could If you could If you could If you could If you could If you could
 It's not a problem It's not a problem It's not a problem It's not a problem
 You are a star You are a star You are a star You are a star You are a star

I drew and photographed, drew and photographed, drew and photographed for days and weeks, seated at the reading room desk in The Robinson Library. The nature of the drawing and photographing process was intense and yet slow and repetitive. I drew typed words, snippets of correspondence pertaining to the requesting and granting of permission to publish poems in various magazines. I drew poets' heads, covers of anthologies and I drew handwritten notes in highlighter pen or biro. Fountain-pen ink sketches of logos leaked into quotations of felt-tipped lines of poetry about holidays to Ibiza, and I made charcoal-quick pictures about the moon. As I drew, I continued with the system I had devised earlier in the research project of keeping track of my own observations, feelings and thoughts in my hand-made sketchbook. I found myself often drifting away into my own thoughts – completely unrelated to the archive. I sat and doodled a picture of my Dad on the back of a page. Through it I could see the title of a Ken Smith poem, "My Father Fading Out." At the end of each day in the archive I was unsure whether I had found Janet, missed Janet completely or actually become Janet.

I returned to the studio. My video piece, *BXB/4/5/2: Animistration*,⁷³ is a video made of over 3000 photographs that document the process of producing the 507-page ream of drawings that were made from the contents of archive box, BXB/4/5/2. The photographs, processed through video editing software, appear in sequence and produce an animation. Weeks of work flick by in seconds. Time begins to create a sense of disorientation. The Artist Ann-Sofi Siden refers to the different temporalities involved in thinking about, recording, and then producing video work:

(Video is) simple ideas presenting themselves in an instant, but followed by an intense or expansive period of production, and in the end resulting in long hours in front of a computer watching, editing, reviewing.⁷⁴

The drawings, texts and photographs that I had made over months in the reading rooms began to intermingle with notes and sketches of Dorothy Wordsworth's journals and the drawn-out experience of searching through archive boxes began to fall into piles on the desk and floor of my studio. I had to shuffle through to search for rolls of masking tape, charcoal, ink-filled syringes and headphones. They have fallen in sediment-like layers and mixed with bits of my life's ephemera: letters, appointment cards, leaflets for acupuncture, bits of medical packaging. And everything was dusted with pencil sharpenings and motes of graphite. My computer screen 'desktop' was scattered with a constellation of emails to archivists, administrators and artists asking for permission, information and advice, with sound recordings and jpegs on my many hard-drives, their tiny LED lights blinking.

⁷³ Kate Sweeney, *Animistration: BXB/4/5/2*, May 20, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/255868757/2cba422b15>

⁷⁴ Ann-Sofi Siden, *Video Art*, by Sylvia Martin, edited by Uta Grosenick, Germany: Taschen, p. 6, 2006



Kate Sweeney, *Desk*, 2017, digital photograph, author's studio, Gateshead

In W. G. Sebald's, *The Rings of Saturn*, the lecturer Janine Daykins creates a 'paper universe' on Flaubert's world view in her office. Her messy desk is a whole landscape of white glaciers, snow-fields and mountains and valleys. It is the 'origin and focal point' from which she draws out her subject:

In a grain of sand in the hem of Emma Bovary's winter gown, said Janine, Flaubert saw the whole Sahara.⁷⁵

For me, drawing is a form of note-taking. It isn't a way of reaching back to connect the self with the subject of the drawing, the trace. It is watching myself searching, bringing about the past, minute observations of minutes and hours spent mining. The photograph, *Janet, You've Done it Again!* that is on my studio wall and my landscape of papers on my studio desk

⁷⁵ W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, New York: New Directions, p. 8, 1998

and floor, all are a part of drawing sharp and hazy, distant and prescient memories, and feelings. The activity of making notes is like a ‘mothering’⁷⁶, says artist Moyra Davey, quoting Barthes. Her book, *Les Goddesses*, is a collage of note-taking, and notes about other artist’s methods of note-taking. Squatting somewhere unnoticed, at a quiet distance, she generates written observations of herself, watching as if she was her own camera:

She writes, sitting on the floor in sunlight and reading through eight small notebooks going back to 1998 looking for a phrase about Goethe: The stars and the plants below!⁷⁷

This text later becomes the script for her video work, in which we see the artist listening to herself read the book through earphones, and repeat the text out loud as she wanders through her own studio-home. Note-taking is a way of administrating the mind, through recursive, reflexive actions. The video is a container for these notes, as well as being another plateau from where to observe: a searching, and a record of the search. The body remembers where things that come to matter are; it stores a map of sensory references: ‘medleys, anthems and folklore’⁷⁸. When describing Valerio Ademi’s drawing out of Jacques Derrida’s handwriting in his portrait of the writer, Laurence Simmons, in his essay, “Drawing has Always Been More Than Drawing” says that

the physicality of the primary gesture of the drawing hand here must also be understood as an impulse to touch that which should only be an object of visual perception, to transfer a presence to a deep memory. The drawing is in this sense a “search” rather than a “communication”.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Moyra Davey, “Notes on Photography and Accident” in *Long Life Cool White: Photographs and Essays by Moyra Davey*

⁷⁷ Moyra Davey *Goddesses / Hemlock Forest*, Brooklyn: Dancing Foxes Press, p. 26, 2016

⁷⁸ Moyra Davey, *ibid*, p. 36

⁷⁹ Laurence Simmons, “Drawing has Always Been More Than Drawing: Derrida and Disegno,” *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts*, 11, November 8, 2010, <https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/interstices/article/view/390>

Ademi is drawing Derrida's handwriting in an attempt to absorb it into his own memory, the trace of Derrida's own 'deep memory' manifested through his hand. A drawing is not an illustration of a memory but a note, operating alongside all the other notes as a record of the search.



Kate Sweeney, *Feet*, 2017, Pencil on Paper, A3

The process of drawing and then animating those drawings and then collaging the animated drawings into video works allowed me to develop a heuristic method of video making. I was attempting to capture the transformational and interpretive qualities of drawing whilst using the extended durational commitment involved in producing animation to mirror the repetitive and laborious similarities to administrative labour. I created the paragram, “Animistration” to describe the observational methodology I had created for the research project. “Animistration” began as a process of writing out, then photographing directly from archive material. This developed into a process of drawing and video editing that combined archive observation with personal imaginings and memory. “Animistration” is not an effort at imitating another as a way to ‘become’ them. It is a speculative attempt to replicate tasks and routines performed by others. The hands are the administrators of the mind. “Animistration” is a way of relating to the administrator through recreating gestures and actions. Drawing becomes a way of recording the recreating of those lost gestures and the video work, *Animistration BXB/4/5/2*, is a document of that mapping.

This is a link to the video piece, ‘*BXB/4/5/2: Animistration*’:
<https://vimeo.com/255868757>

Section 4: Work

In November 2017, I recorded and transcribed a conversation with Simon Thirsk, the Finance Director of Bloodaxe Books and one of the company’s founders. He spoke at length about his perception of the differences between poets (and artists) and administrators:

People in the creative arts look down on admin: ‘Management Bollocks’ is what they regard it as and there is this sort of assumption that anybody can do it, whereas the creative process is unique to an individual and ‘only I can do it the way I do it’. And of course, that’s nurtured. That’s what editors and the public wants; they want individual voices. They want individual

personalities whereas that's not what people want in accountancy or in all these other things, they want predictability and they want dependability and consistency. So, this is all part of the culture; the different things we want from different people and different roles.⁸⁰

The original order of the archive preserves and nurtures the status quo that is described by Simon. At the end of my process of "Animistration" in the archive, I found I had developed a significant attachment to five yellow post-it notes. The scribbled words are a left-open door through which to listen into the office. Stuck on with the understanding that they are only semi-adhesive, they temporarily form a parallel narrative to the business of publishing poetry. They are yellow-hued ghosts curling up and taking off into the space above the main story. They seem especially to be a part of the archive and apart from the archive. For the administrator to be 'predictable, dependable and consistent' she must assume privacy in order to contain, manage the poets and writers - the 'individual personalities' - that the public want. The post-it notes epitomise this order(liness). They play a key role in our culture, 'ensuring we get the different things we want from different people and their different roles.' They are necessary and superfluous, attached and detached. The post-it notes are a small testament to the unseen and unspoken relationships and labour between the administration and the editing sides of poetry publishing. I again refer to Deleuze and Guattari's use of the analogy of the rhizomic relationship between a wasp and its orchid; as the wasp encircles the orchid, the contours of its flight shape the orchid. Equally, as the orchid grows, it reaches toward the wasp, affecting the wasp's line of flight. They work around each other, side by side, evolving separately yet in synthesis. They become a map of - or to - the other:

(The wasp and the orchid are) a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp... the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation

⁸⁰ Simon Thirsk, interviewed by Kate Sweeney, November 17, 2017

of intensities... There is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome.⁸¹

The importance of the post-it notes in a poetry publishers archive would seem, in this context to be significant. However, in discussion with Rachel the archivist, I learn I am lucky to have found these five:

We usually just bin the post-it notes – all the pieces of rubbish, the bits and bobs that aren't relevant, are cleaned away.⁸²

The post-it notes pose the archive and the archivist a quandary. By discarding them, the secretarial processes of administrating and managing the business of publishing becomes hidden. The purpose of the archive to evidence systems for future testimony becomes potentially lost. However, by preserving them, there is the danger of covering over their extemporaneous purpose – that of being a temporary, invisible scaffold. My five post-it notes are interlopers, a hidden framework, preserved by accident. This dichotomous, contradictory feature of their archival 'lives'⁸³ resonated as a low brooding hum. It was this dual desire to project and to protect that had initially invited me to lean in and pay attention to the archive's enigmatic signalling.

This is a link to a short video sketch, *Suspension*:
<https://vimeo.com/252142689>

⁸¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* London: Bloomsbury, p. 12, 2016

⁸² Rachel Hawkes, conversation with the author, January 4, 2017

⁸³ I am deliberately referencing Tom Scofield and Mitchell Whitelaw's idea of 'archival liveness' that I discussed in the introduction as another example of language that emerges from one area of cultural significance becoming prescient, operating in a rhizomic way, in other areas.

Around the same time as my conversation with Simon, I started meeting poet, Anna Woodford at the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art to begin an informal dialogue about the ways producing visual art and producing poetry are similar and different. Our conversations were free-flowing and often I was left with only a shadow of a sense of what Anna understood, or was herself saying. During that first meeting, we visited the sprawling installation, *'Four Roads'*⁸⁴ by Jason Rhoades. A huge array of separate and random objects; CDs, pens, film reels, porno mags, paintings, drawings and baby car-seats were bound together with a gooey-glue of gunk that the artist had invented. 'PeaRoeFoam' was Rhoades's self-made recipe, he described as 'a brand-new product and revolutionary new material' created from whole green peas, fish-bait style salmon eggs, and white virgin-beaded foam.⁸⁵ The PeaRoeFoam - like lava from Vesuvius - had been used to meld the (now-dead) artist's belongings and studio materials together into one sculptural body of disparate objects, like the fused corporeal remains of individuals and things in the city of Pompeii.



Jason Rhoades, *Four Roads*, 2015, mixed media, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead.

⁸⁴ Jason Rhoades, *Four Roads*, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, May 2015, Exhibition.

⁸⁵ David Zwirner, "Jason Rhoades, PeaRoeFoam," press release, September 11, 2014, <https://www.davidzwirner.com/exhibitions/pearoefoam>

Anna and I had a fractured, hesitant conversation about what PeaRoeFoam was, deciding that every unfinished and badly articulated idea we were having during the conversation was actually being bonded by PeaRoeFoam. It was holding together - but also keeping apart - our interpretive glitches. We began to purposefully seek out these gaps in understanding, returning to them in conversation and allowing them to create new 'lines of flight'⁸⁶ in our own thinking. It still holds together our conversations. We refer to it, almost like a safe-word whenever we are losing the other's plot.

During our next meeting, Anna gave me a photograph of Sylvia Plath's grave that she had taken as a teenager. It still stands on my desk, leaning against the radio. The reason for giving it to me has been long forgotten and maybe was never articulated. Instead the round, earnest words and old yellowing, long-since-sticky tape marks suggest it had deep youthful significance. The transparency of the photograph reveals graves like a fading afterimage still lingering on the retina.

⁸⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *ibid*, p. 12



Kate Sweeney, *Sylvia's Grave (recto verso)*, 2017, Digital Photograph, author's studio, Gateshead

Over the next few months, we talked about the ways that words 'rhyme' with objects. We discussed how language is a material for the poet and materials are a language for the artist.

We talked about how conversation, and misunderstandings in conversation, can be skipped over at the time, but create lingering impressions, leaving tape-like marks inside ourselves. Sitting in the Baltic, watching Heather Phillipson's video installation piece, '*A is to D what E is to H*'⁸⁷, we wondered what the shape and form of a conversation might be. In the video Phillipson's mouth is a site for things going in and things coming out, like food, or sex. In the video she regales us with a memory of a trip to France and we see a slap-dash array of images and video clips taken on a camera phone. When she mishears the words 'French Cuisine', and instead recalls 'French Kissing', the words are edited to overlap, underlining what these oral practices have in common. The shape of her mouth re-forms things. It is a literal, literary site for sensations and making new things. Sounds and images bump into and over each other like scenes from a fractious dream. They arouse questions: did she just say that? Was that dough slapping against a table, or a slap?

It was going to be a film about French Cuisine
 French Cuisine/ French Kissing
 I could have sworn I said French Kissing⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Heather Phillipson, *Yes, surprising is existence in the post-vegetal cosmorama*, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, May 2013, Exhibition

⁸⁸ The Wire Magazine, *A is to D what E is to H*, July 2015, <https://vimeo.com/118572178>



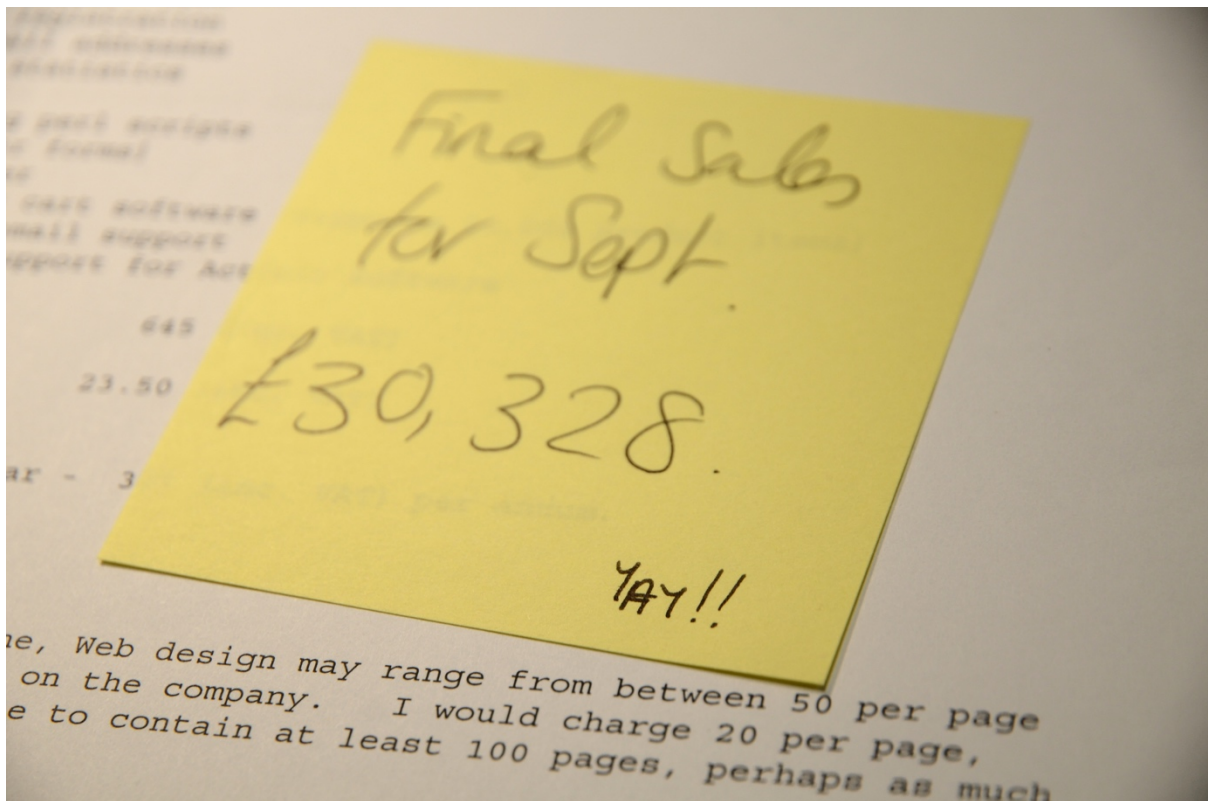
Heather Phillipson video, *A is to D What E is to H*, 2019, screenshot, <https://vimeo.com/118572178>

I remember later thinking that the shape of any conversation could be half-formed, or half-faded and what is here as subject ?? it could be sitting in the corner of the eye, flickering into view whilst I was concentrating on other things. Maybe a conversation is an object that has what digital artist and critical theorist Michael Betancourt describes as an ‘immaterial physicality?’⁸⁹ Maybe it is a thing made of shape-shifting fragments, words, gestures, glances and fleeting feelings, brought together for a moment with an organic, bodily gooey-glye, then coming apart and flicking by? It is impossible to look directly at a corner-eye image. Attempting to do so destroys it, or it changes its shape, or makes it disappear entirely. It *belongs* in the periphery.

⁸⁹ Michael Betancourt, “Automated Labor: The ‘New Aesthetic’ and Immaterial Physicality,” *CTheory*, May 2, 2013, http://ctheory.net/ctheory_wp/automated-labor-the-new-aesthetic-and-immaterial-physicality/

In his essay, Betancourt is actually describing the products of digital automation – things not made by human hand or labour, that render traditional ideas about a commodity’s exchange value obsolete. In a process that N. Katherine Hayles would recognise as symbiotic, language begins to emerge around cultural shifts such as one toward digital automation, that allow us to critique those traditional ideas regarding what constitutes ‘labour’, and also allows us to articulate and imagine other cultural processes and activities such as the conversational in new ways.

On a cold sunny day, I forget what month or year it was, I was breathlessly describing to Anna my delight at the post-it notes I had found in the administrative archive. I was explaining my notion that, considering the archive had been purchased by the university, and the post-it notes were a part of the archive, they now had cultural and monetary, transactional value. I explained that I thought this deserved consideration. They weren't meant to be there, slipping as they had through the archive's cleaning process. They had escaped the bin and also scrutiny. Hidden or maybe ignored, they were now a part of, while also still apart from, the whole body of the Bloodaxe Books archive. Through an observational study of their proximity to other materials in the archive, and their oblique but often plaintive or amusing messages, I outlined the premise of my research to Anna. I told her I was considering whether these little yellow interlopers had the potential to attest to the relationships between the people who wrote them and the people they were meant to be read by, and that I was evaluating their place within the wider cultural idea of the archive. To illustrate my excitement, I brought up a photograph on my laptop of the post-it-note with 'Yay!!!' written on it. Trying not to be distracted by Anna's increasingly perplexed face, I excitedly continued explaining how I was reminded of her poem, *Janet*, written two years previously.



Kate Sweeney, *Yay!!* 2017, Digital Photograph, Bloodaxe Books Archives, Newcastle University

The main thing Anna took away from my monologue was an overwhelming sense of the horror of the office, of shared space, forced familiarity, inanity and fake feelings. Anna left the Baltic and she told me later that the poem, *Work*, almost poured out of her on the bus. I left the Baltic feeling deflated. I wandered home wondering how I had been so drawn to these scraps and I berated myself for giving them value, and making them matter to me, when they were patently not going to be valued by, or matter to, others. I was irritated that I had heard a signal when it seemed other artists heard only noise. I thought back to my conversation with Simon Thirsk. It was only when I realised that the poem Anna had written on the bus had in fact been produced as an afterimage, created in the corner of Anna's eye, that the idea for the video piece, *Work*, began to occur. Our conversation had created and given the post-it note value: it mattered.

The video piece, *Work*,⁹⁰ is both a hand-drawn animation and a photographic study. It

⁹⁰ Kate Sweeney and Anna Woodford, *Work*, 2018, <https://vimeo.com/265561379/93568bf3a1>

combines two narrative-building visual devices at once, allowing those visual devices to seep into each other as it unfolds. *Work* seeks to explore the ways memory can fragment, disrupt and overlay the present and creates a space for the haunting poem by Anna Woodford to unfold. It was put together in the archive store room. The spot-lit yellow post-it notes frame a poet reminiscing about an old office job she once had before becoming a writer. Mirroring the function of a post-it note stuck to a document, the post-it note animation demarcates, highlights and obscures glimpses of shelves, desks and objects synonymous with any office. The objects in those glimpses are those used to categorise, label, post, file and eventually build a physical archive and yet they, and the people who use them, are often invisible when we consider the cultural significances of archives and how they are used to articulate cultural history. ‘*Work*’ offers an uneasy juxtaposition between art and administration, the artist’s feelings about the job of administration. For Anna the poem grew out of a response to the post-its that signified drudgery, claustrophobia, and evoked a terrible time of yearning to be somewhere else. My drawings on the post-its treat the poem as an unfolding conversation. Anna’s poem is not a trace of my thoughts about post-it notes, and the drawings do not illustrate the words of Anna’s poem. Instead, Anna’s words are the wasp to my post-it note drawing’s orchid. The video file is a shared space for our different responses to the post-it-notes’ enigmatic signification⁹¹. The video is the map of the conversation, and the conversation becomes a video through that mapping process. The video piece, *Work*, is a collage, a suturing of ideas of uncertain origin. It destabilises the idea of the single author and suggests the complexity - especially when talking about maps - of surveying the ‘geography’⁹² of the archive and the multitudinous claims made over, and responses to, its landscape.

⁹¹ Allyson Stack, “Culture, Cognition and Jean Laplanche’s Enigmatic Signifier,” *Theory Culture and Society*, Vol 22, Issue 3, 2005, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276405053720>.

⁹² See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1993, p. 400

Despite both enjoying seeing the video screened at various events, Anna and I have not made anything else together since *Work*. Anna's poem exists elsewhere, in printed form, with a different life. The video is only a composite of a series of digital photographs that live on a hard-drive. The piles of post-it notes have long since fallen out of sequence. Illiterate, they have inevitably been added to the mounting piles of paper in my studio:

Conjunction is a becoming-other.... Singularities change when they conjoin, they become something other than what they were before their conjunction.⁹³

In Bifo Berardi's *The Uprising*, the chapter, '*Conjunction / Connection*' contrasts the semantic implications of the two terms in the title to describe the trajectories of two different types of collaboration. He discusses how, in the digital age, the idea of a 'connection' has become a way to describe a linear, contractually organised system of collaborating whereupon a desired outcome has been pre-determined. He describes the way the digital turn has in effect created a general 'sensitisation to code' and a reliance on the one-dimensional, singular direction of the operating system that shapes and govern processes and so consequently shapes outcomes. Working in conjunction on the other hand is a looser, unformulated system that functions when 'the other who enters the conjunction with you must interpret the context, the shade, the unsaid':

Conjunction is the meeting and fusion of round and irregular shapes that are continuously weaselling their way about without precision, repetition or perfection⁹⁵

The conversation as an unclassified form of information fits into recent feminist and post-modern theories of ways that problematise dominant forms of institutionalised research methodologies. Irit Rogoff describes such methodologies as 'structures of knowing and

⁹³ Bifo Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, Los Angeles: Semiotexte, p. 123, 2012

⁹⁵ Bifo Berardi, *ibid*, p. 125, 2012

alternative epistemologies which are actually informed by the conjunction of subjectivities, pleasures and desires'⁹⁶. The boundaries of a conversation are loose and undefined. An evocation of Cvetkovitch's 'archival feeling'⁹⁷, there is a certain sense of anxiety provoked in the reaching back and recalling of a conversation. Research that is a visual or textual representation, interpretation or response to a conversation contains the possibility of focussing on misinterpretation, as well as the placing of emphasis upon throwaway, or only half thoughts and ideas. The conjunctive collaboration and the conversation become an opportunity to open up and interrogate the shape and form of unseen-but-present inter-relational working practices. It reveals itself to be a possible way of interrogating a creative process undertaken in archival research.⁹⁸

This is a link to a short video sketch, *Work*,
<https://vimeo.com/265561379>

Section 5: Janet becomes 'Janet'

Carolyn Steedman describes the burgeoning relationship that develops with an archive as 'a Freudian romance, of finding all the lost things and names, whatever they may be: things gone astray, mislaid, forgotten, wasted.'⁹⁹ Steedman evokes the idea of an archive as a site for a tryst – a coming together of origins between you and an 'other'. The romance is an anxious one. There is a plethora of tiny emotional responses that draw you into the material as well as lock you out - a sort of overwhelming as you realise you are experiencing things you had forgotten, or you don't understand, or didn't expect to be there. The experience of looking in the archive for traces of other people in the marks they leave and the tools they used to leave

⁹⁶ Irit Rogoff, "Gossip as Testimony: A Postmodern Signature," *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Amelia Jones, London and New York: Routledge, p. 316, 1996

⁹⁷ Ann Cvetkovich, *ibid*, 2009

⁹⁸ See Irit Rogoff, "Production Lines," *Team Spirit*, edited by Susan Collins and Nina Castelli Sundell, exhibition catalogue, New York: Independent Curators Incorporated, pp. 33-39, 1990

⁹⁹ Carolyn Steedman, *ibid*, 2002, p. 36

them, feels as seductive as it is frustrating as one is drawn further into a place of spaces and absences as much as actual artefacts. Steedman goes on to say, ‘you find nothing in the Archive but stories caught half way through: the middle of things; discontinuities.’¹⁰⁰ These stories fuse with one’s own, merging with those hinted at in the archive’s fragments and ephemera. There is also a distinct and lingering sense of being an outsider, a voyeur looking in, an interloper, a part of the archive and apart from the archive. As an outsider, there is a heightened sense of self, and an awareness of one’s own movements, thoughts and feelings. A certain level of insecurity increases an awareness of the subjective nature of curiosity, of decisions and of a sort of internal dialogue that takes place, a questioning one’s own motivation.

Steedman tells of Western culture becoming truly archival in the 19th Century. The age was one of an abundance of paper-based documentation that pertained to the administration of colonial, imperial power combined with an indefatigable confidence in emerging global systems. This was material worth preserving for the future. The growth and development of institutional archives as primary sites of preservation in the 19th Century happened at the same time as the development of the technology of optics – the science that ultimately led to the contemporary use and ubiquitous presence of the camera. Marina Warner discusses in her introductory essay to the exhibition catalogue, “*Eyes, Lies and Illusion*”, how the technology of the camera emerged in symbiosis with other significant 19th century developments, including the modern theory and practice of psychiatry and the process of analysing human behaviour. She points out that definitions and purposes of psychiatry and photography were hauntingly similar:

(Psychiatry) involves the transference, sublimation and the mental associations that made a human subject into a simple recording device while the observer devoted him or herself to bringing out the elements that might identify ‘the initial pathogenic complex.’¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Carolyn Steedman, *ibid*, 2002, p. 45

¹⁰¹ Marina Warner, “*Eyes, Lies and Illusion*,” London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2005, exhibition catalogue

Photography, also was conceived as the process of using a ‘simple recording device’ to surveil and capture a perception of the world for the observer, or operator to then produce meaning with. The camera, psychiatry and the archive are all ‘panoptical’¹⁰² tools of revelation, knowledge, access and light. Their pervasiveness grew during the 19th century to define western culture’s obsessive approach to looking at, analysing and storing the materials, artefacts and the traces of human history.

The technology of optics however is one of increasing the potential for illusion and trickery. Warner points out that by the 21st Century the ‘perfection of visual technologies has destabilised experience until we cannot be sure if we are not the dreamers but the dreamed.’¹⁰³ There has been doubt cast over whether the ‘simple recording device’ or its operator - the observer - offers a truthful and whole image of reality. Warner quotes Slavoj Zizek when she says, ‘illusion has turned us into wanderers in ‘the desert of the real.’¹⁰⁴ The 21st Century is seeing a falling away of faith in any single technological or institutional practice being a reliable source of veracity and neutrality. As a consequence, there is an increasing interest in mirroring this societal scepticism by utilising speculative methodologies to research the contents and the idea of the archive. Artist and critic, Diana Taylor, in her book, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, states that ‘Western colonisers constituted the archive in opposition to embodied practice and knowledge, separating the source of “knowledge” from the “knower”’. She explores the growing discourse and the practices that challenge a traditional idea of what an archive - and what archiving – is. Taylor encourages a focus on ‘performative, bodily forms of knowledge that are transferred in a non-archival system of transfer’.¹⁰⁵ She describes an

¹⁰² See Anne Schwan and Stephen Shapiro, *How to Read Foucault's Discipline and Punish*. London: Pluto Press, 2011

¹⁰³ Marina Warner “ibid” p. 17

¹⁰⁴ Slavoj Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, London: Verso Books, 2002

¹⁰⁵ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, New York: Routledge, p. 2-3, 2003

increasing resistance to archival practices that replicate ‘colonising modes of production, when shreds of former activities and knowledge are deposited and viewed as static representations of past actions.’¹⁰⁶

The pervasive use of archives as a resource for new cultural output by the artist-researcher in the 21st Century utilises the camera, scanner and other current recording devices to create a near-continual stream of digital and digitised versions of archival material. The often-touted potential of the digital to offer ‘complete’, and ‘exhaustive’ versions of archives suggests a new level of possibility for the digital archive to offer access to previously unseen, and unseen parts of, material. The desire to build digital archives has become pervasive within institutions and organisations. According to The National Archives website, ‘the original order’ is a fundamental principle of archiving:

Archives are kept in the order in which they were originally created or used. It is essential to understand this when working with archives so that this original order is preserved. This original order allows custodians to protect the authenticity of the records and provides essential information as to how they were created, kept and used.¹⁰⁷

The original order of the Bloodaxe Books administrative archive is a commitment to the preservation of a body of documents complete in its incompleteness. It is a whole made up of holes. My initial concerns in the research project involved working in the holes in the archive. I saw my search for Janet as a sort of filling in, or a speculative reclamation of those gaps. I wanted to disturb the original order that shapes the understanding of the archive as the *arkhê*, ‘the original, the first, the principal, the primitive.’¹⁰⁸ I realised that the reasons,

¹⁰⁶ Diana Taylor, *ibid*, p. 2-3, 2003

¹⁰⁷ The National Archives, “Archive Principles and Practice: an introduction to archives for non-archivists,” 2016, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/archive-principles-and-practice-an-introduction-to-archives-for-non-archivists.pdf>.

¹⁰⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996

processes and consequences of being missing from the archive, was in fact part of the definition and story of the archive. It is the gaps in the archive that become its beginning, its point.

The search for Janet had shifted from being a search for a character or characteristics not just inhabiting the edges of the archive, but an exploration of how stories are imbricated from fragments of things shaped by - and in turn have shaped - the outskirts of the archive. In her autobiographical book, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, Carolyn Steedman reflects upon the ways 'the central interpretative devices of the culture don't quite work'¹⁰⁹ when studying those occupying the borderlands. She states in the introduction that the book is 'not about what really happened', but is about the act of interpretation and 'how people use the past to tell the stories of their own lives.'¹¹⁰ I wanted to avoid seeing through any single theoretical or interpretative lens to respond to the traces of the marginal in the archive. I wanted to find a way to search for Janet that would allow me to continue to use the post-it notes as the starting point for new work, but that would build upon the collective and collage-like form of knowledge transfer that had begun when working with Anna Woodford. The research project would focus on conversations in order to emphasise the breaking up and refracting qualities of interpretation. It would be a way to avoid dwelling upon the effects of a single voice speaking on behalf of, or about the archival object. Anna Woodford had seen the post-it note and had seen through it to a personal memory, inflected with her own historical or sociological interpretation of the note and its significance. I wanted to continue to invite others to do the same. By the collaging of work made alongside others, my video pieces would inevitably become skeins of different perspectives. 'Animistration' I realised, with its functional, organisational and creative

¹⁰⁹ Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, p. 5, 2000

¹¹⁰ Carolyn Steedman, *ibid.*, p. 8

components, could operate as a poetics of *seeing through*. It was at this point in my research project that the search for Janet became the search for ‘Janet.’¹¹¹

¹¹¹ From this point onwards, I decided to enclose Janet in single quotation marks based on *The Chicago Manual of Style*, chapter 13, p. 30. This states that ‘single quotation marks enclose quotations within quotations.’ DOI: <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/book/ed17/part2/ch13/psec030.html>

Bridging Chapter: Video as an Archive as a Body
A Literature in Light

On an afternoon in 2003, I videotaped a man who was standing on the very top of the curve of the Tyne Bridge. From the window of my tiny quayside flat, the man - a featureless shadow on a grey-white sky - was as small as a toy soldier, possible to pinch between my finger and thumb. I had recently bought my first video camera; a Canon XM2. It was renowned for the quality of its image, and the powerful zoom was especially magical. I remember that day so vividly as it was the first time that I had put a DV tape in the camera's deck. Before that, I hadn't recorded anything on the camera. I mainly used it as an instrument to improvise with as part of a performance ensemble I was a member of. I would use an s-video lead to plug the camera directly into a video projector and, by cradling its lens in my lap, I would project extreme closeups of my skin onto a white wall or screen. Images of my warm, moist hands slowly turning and rubbing together. It was an intimate, immersive experience. The projections were visceral and pink. I only used the camera as a conduit; I didn't record the performances. The tapes were expensive and instead I would take delight in their ephemeral, fleeting existence. It felt freeing to leave with nothing but memories of colours and shapes, and of nail marks impressed into my palms. That day in 2003, I was searching for something worthy of being recorded, kept. In an instant I had shot the man on the bridge. My finger pushed on the zoom and he came toward me. When I realised I had the capacity to see his face, but not to reach and touch him, my head pulled sharply away from the viewfinder and I stared at the camera anew. I stopped recording. I removed the tape from the camera's deck and I am sure I threw it into the bin. Sitting on the floor, with my back to the window, I breathed a soft mist onto the lens and I wiped it with my shirt sleeve. I paused to look into the reflection of my own eye for a moment, and I then put the camera away.

The artist Bill Viola describes what a CCTV camera can see from its perch in a supermarket carpark.:

It has seen the same man get out of his car each morning, his body gradually sagging, less resistant to gravity, as his gait imperceptibly slows over the intervening time. It has seen the unbroken procession of days and nights, the cyclic changes in the sun and moon, the growth of trees and the perpetual variations of weather with the accumulation of its harsh marks. It has seen the parade of fashion in car design and clothing, and witnessed the evidence of human intentions and impulses in the sudden material alterations in the landscape.¹¹²

In the essay, Viola envisages this particular video camera as an archival object, that should be preserved ‘with the hope that someday some future technology could coax from (it), the subtle residue of a lifetime’s experience.’¹¹³ My Canon XM2 camera actually now sits unused in a cupboard in its bag at the back of the utility room in the cellar of my house. It still works as a conduit, though contemporary projectors no longer have the necessary ‘s-video’ port to allow me to channel the world through it. It also started ‘eating’ DV tapes pixelating and glitching footage a few years ago and it became unreliable as a recording device. Whenever I come across it, when I am looking for something else, I only have to feel the weight of it in my two hands and I cut to standing in my living room and the man is standing on the bridge.

Viola’s description frames the camera as an archival ‘body’ that should be preserved as an object or artefact of its time and also as an archive of bodies, containing traces of human experiences in the material world. In describing the camera as a witness that ‘witnesses’ other bodies, preserving their activities for the future, Viola alludes to the idea of the camera as an extension of the human body. Viola’s ‘subtle residue’ is the trace of bodily fluids, sweat, smudges and smears. This residue goes beyond marks on the camera’s hardware like DV tapes or digital software and disc-drives. The ‘subtle residue’ is also the emotional trace of the

¹¹² Bill Viola, “Video Black – The Mortality of the Image,” *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House: Writings 1973 – 1994*, edited by Robert Voilette, Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, p292, 1995

¹¹³ Bill Viola, *ibid.*, p. 78

camera's subject, and the trace of the intentions and impulses of its operator, who is both agent and recipient of signs when engaged in using the video camera as a research tool. My broken camera in the cellar is now a Heideggerian 'thing' in that it no longer functions as a camera. This thing has become something else though. When I pick it up the man on the bridge is resurrected. Contact reanimates my residual memory and my practice has been shaped by this my broken obsolete camera. The camera, its black bag, me, the man, the reflection of my eye, my mixed feelings about the videoed motif, are all 'entities' that affect each other through what Karen Barad, a 'dynamism of forces'¹¹⁴ in which all designated elements, that is objects and things, are emitting and receiving, shaping and reciprocating. Barad and other feminist theorists, or 'New Materialists,'¹¹⁵ such as Rosa Braidotti, Donna Haraway and Elizabeth Grosz, emphasise in their work that 'the co-constitution of material and discursive productions of reality'¹¹⁶ happens through the constant and shifting intra-action of 'entities' or things. The camera is a product of many such 'intra-actions' between machine and human. The camera is continually figured and re-formed by people, and people are also shaped by the camera:

Does something mechanical like a camera teach its user how it works?¹¹⁷

The above quotation comes from the essay, "Work and Love" by poet Fanny Howe, regarding making a short video about mystic, Simone Weil. In it she contemplates videomaking. Having never made a video before, she learns to operate the camera from a place of 'unknowing', and describes the process of making her video as a process of letting the piece

¹¹⁴ Karan Barad, "ibid.," 2014

¹¹⁵ See Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (eds), *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics*, London: Duke University Press, 2000

¹¹⁶ Stacy Alaimo, and Susan Hekman, (eds) *Material Feminisms* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, p. 6, 2008

¹¹⁷ Fanny Howe, "Work and Love," *The Wedding Dress: Meditations on Word and Life*, California: University of California Press, p. 124, 2003

of work 'emerge from what was given to me'. "Work and Love" is one of a series of elliptical essay-poems contained within Howe's collection, *The Wedding Dress*. It is a diaristic reflection upon her heuristic approach to the video's production. Donna Haraway describes an 'embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist projects' that 'allow us to become answerable for what we learn how to see.'¹¹⁸ There are echoes of Haraway when Howe says that she 'trusts' the camera will teach her through an unfolding understanding of how it works. She describes video as 'a literature made out of light, lit from itself, ignited by electrical currents.' Video is made from processing pulses of light in once analogue, now mainly digital signals.¹¹⁹ Its 'light' exposes, but exposure of what was previously dark results in loss of information. Light affects behaviour, as Foucault demonstrated with his description of the panoptical light that enables the all-encompassing view of the prison. The light itself shifts and changes the patterns and behaviour of that which is lit. Consequently, what happens in the shadows is then lost. Consequently, meaning shifts and value is changed. Howe's finished video piece, *Simone Weil Avenue*, operates as a map of signs, of light rippling over, on and through squares and surfaces, seen on the pilgrimage toward the gravestone that is itself a square slab. It begins with a rippling beam of an orange car light moving across a street sign, spelling out the title. Bright white flakes of snow flicker and fall, seen through a six-square paned window like noise on a tv screen. A hand is writing in a white-leafed notebook, the words are not possible to read. There are flames in a grate; an illuminated church. A pigeon silhouette flies through a strip of deep blue sky, flecked with glaring white clouds. A shadow of a person sits in a pool of light, drinks from a shadow cup. The shadow of leaves from an unseen tree are dappled on Terracotta tiles. In the video, there is one montage - a grainy black and white newsreel clip of human bodies under snow, a nameless soldier stands over them,

¹¹⁸ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, no. 3, p. 581, 1988

¹¹⁹ Sylvia Martin, "Nan Hoover: Impressions," *Video Art*, edited by Uta Grosenick, Germany: Taschen, p. 58, 2006

wisps of white steam from tea clouding his face. The voice over, spoken in English and French, is drawn from Simone Weil's last notebook. Howe has cut and composed a found text that she has then sutured to the video footage she herself has recorded. Weil's words sit in resonant juxtaposition to Howe's images. In the essay about the video, Howe recounts that a filmmaker friend told her she had made the whole video in reverse, with decisions about the script coming in response to the visuals. If this could be judged as a mistake, it nevertheless becomes a part of the video's unfolding. This form of knowing is not paradigmatic. It does not reveal Simone Weil, but reveals an understanding of Weil through a haptic, emotionally guided experience of places she frequented. It is not a documentary of Simone Weil. It is one person's journey from unknowing to an inner form of knowing. Howe's video-making process relies on a conscious awareness 'of randomness and uncertainty as the basic stock in which it is brewed.'¹²⁰ It is an experiment in creating an artwork that seeks to preserve the shape and form of the unspoken.

A signal does not necessarily mean that you want to be located or described. It can mean that you want to be known as Unlocatable and Hidden¹²¹

These words in the video are not illustrative of the images Howe has captured, or vice versa. They run in parallel with each other. According to William C. Wees, video-poetry is the production of 'associations, connotations, metaphors and symbols that cannot be found in either their verbal or their visual context alone.'¹²² Howe's video becomes a 'video-poem,'¹²³ and the video is an extant text, 'splattered with white light and darting static' and produced by processing the video camera's electronic pulses of light into words and visuals, 'inventing a

¹²⁰ Fanny Howe, *ibid.*, p. 7, 2003

¹²¹ Fanny Howe, *ibid.*, p. 6, 2003

¹²² William Wees, "The Poetry Film," *Words and Moving Images*, edited by William Wees Michael Dorland, Mediatexte Publications, p. 109, 1984

<http://www.george.aguilar.com/projecta.htm>

¹²³ Tom Konvyes, *Videopoetry: A Manifesto*, September 6, 2011, https://issuu.com/tomkonyves/docs/manifesto_pdf

new poetry.’¹²⁴ The tangential act of collaging different media, gathered from different sources when making a video-poem creates an arbitrary space to both generate and paradoxically interrupt new relationships between narrative and image.

Howe made the video, ‘*Simone Weil Avenue*’ in 1996. She reflects upon making the piece in an essay collated in her book, ‘*The Wedding Dress*’. The book is a journey that maps an understanding of Weil through her own circumstances as a wife and mother living in Boston and Massachusetts in the 1980s. She sees her own attempts to make sense of a tempestuous, fragile and ultimately disastrous Catholic marriage through poetic, written and visual meditations on Weil’s work. The prologue provides a framework to reading the essays. In descriptive, straightforward language it seeks to ground the reader in Howe’s lived experience in order to be able to navigate through the more oblique, implicit motifs contained within the essays. The introduction is in fact an afterword that reflects Howe’s ‘bewilderment’ as it unfolds in the main body of the book. Howe acknowledges that writing in two different styles is done in order to explicate the aims of the work. Howe’s introduction to *The Wedding Dress* offers an insight into her personal life and especially into her experience of being a mother. This underscoring becomes a guide for the reader in their approach to the essays. I have attempted to do something similar. The following part of this chapter aims to provide a framework for the oblique and implicit aspects of the two main chapters of my thesis. In order to be able to understand why I was drawn to the ephemeral traces of the administrator in the archive, I have found it necessary to articulate aspects of my life experiences that have been running, and continue to run, in parallel to my search initially for Janet and consequently for ‘Janet’. The following text is a ‘bridge’ that traverses the chapters of the thesis and the situated, subjective and personal subtext of the research.

¹²⁴ Fanny Howe, *ibid.*, p. 125, 2003

...

After my third child was in my arms I began to feel that I contained in my body a fourth child, and sometimes I would hallucinate, hearing the sound of this missing child crying. In some way this sensation began to correspond to the experience of “covering” and soon I could honestly and deeply feel myself to contain another self, a shadow.¹²⁵

My PhD research videos and thesis are peppered with small references to childbirth, motherhood, IVF and adoption. During the PhD, I have been trying to become a mother. This bewildering and sometimes desperate endeavour has at different times shaped, distracted from, and felt like the overwhelming subtext - subject of the PhD research project. Over the past four years I have gradually become more aware that the contradictory heart of this archive research project is that I seek to uncover something, at the same time as there is a part of my life that I desire to keep private. This incongruity between and within parts of my life slowly revealed itself as a drive as well as a kind of puncture in my research process. I became acutely aware that protecting and hiding certain things was a responsibility, and an unavoidable, expedient aspect to a fully lived life. I had to stop and consider how to attest to my growing sense that there was an inherent value and purpose, as well as a desirable texture, shape and form to hidden, and hiding things. It led me to consider that in ‘lighting’ the archive, I also needed to tend to its shadows.

Since January 2019 I have been preparing to adopt a baby. The responsibility to protect another’s privacy is now a singular and overwhelming experience. It fundamentally challenges contemporary, now-normative social and cultural patterns of the production and sharing of information. To be actively engaged with the pursuit of privacy is to find oneself on the outside. The artist, Oreet Ashery, created a fictional character called Genesis in her 12-chapter

¹²⁵ Fanny Howe, *ibid.*, p. XX, 2003

collaborative video series, *Revisiting Genesis* exhibition. Genesis lives through the video files shown at the Wellcome Collection in 2019.¹²⁶ Genesis also exists on YouTube, and ‘is sometimes manifested as an iPad.’¹²⁷ I was struck by Ashery’s use of multiple streaming or screening platforms to emphasise a sense of formless identity. This movement was a way of successfully creating a ‘safe space where vulnerability is made visible.’¹²⁸ Ashery states in the catalogue that social media’s current demand for engagement, communication and exposure means ‘to withdraw becomes more of a political statement.’¹²⁹ The deep realisation of my own sense of responsibility for another’s privacy has imbricated itself into my practice. Consequently, I have come to realise that my research project - the video work and accompanying thesis – is a set of contours mapping the tensions between revelation and concealment.

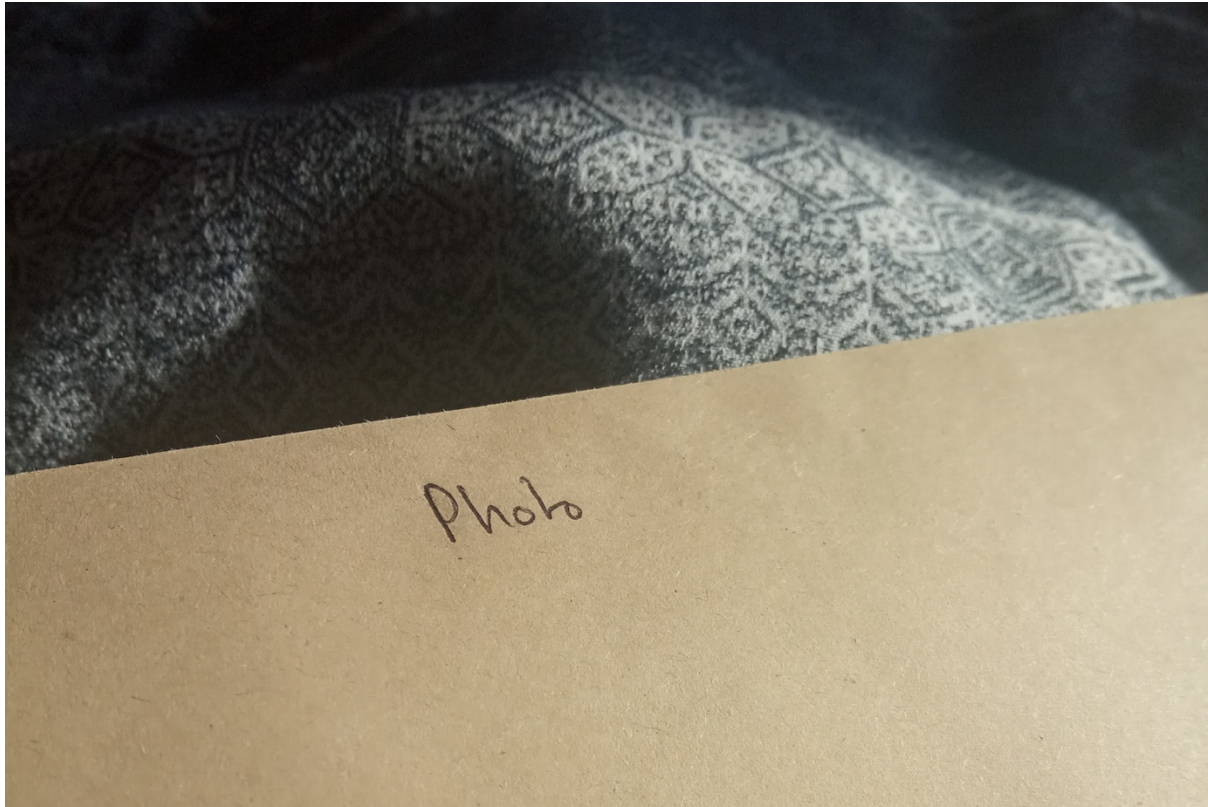
On the 18th September 2019 I was sitting in my bed; I had just taken this photograph of an unopened envelope and I was looking at it in my mobile phone’s ‘gallery’.

¹²⁶ Jo Spence and Oreet Ashery, *Misbehaving Bodies*, Wellcome Collection, London, May 2019, exhibition

¹²⁷ Barbara Rodriguez Munoz and George Vasey, *Jo Spence and Oreet Ashery: Misbehaving Bodies*, Wellcome Collection, London, May 2019, exhibition catalogue

¹²⁸ Barbara Rodriguez Munoz and George Vasey, *ibid.* 2019

¹²⁹ Oreet Ashery, *Misbehaving Bodies*, Wellcome Collection, London, May 2019, exhibition catalogue



Kate Sweeney, *Photo*, 2019, digital photograph, author's home, Gateshead

In that moment, the photograph embodied the tension at the heart of the previous three years of my life, given over to the matter of becoming a mother. It was a photograph I wanted to share and show, and it was a photograph I wanted to keep hidden. Like the video *Simone Weil Avenue*, it was a photograph that ‘wants to be known as Unlocatable and Hidden.’¹³⁰ I wanted to emit a signal; I am a keeper of something secret – a secretary. I sat for most of the morning, watching a window-square patch of sunlight move across my bedsheets. That same sun was also moving across the wall of my studio and across the photograph, *Janet, You've Done it Again!*. Whenever I look at the photograph, I can still feel the flat weight of the phone in my hand. I can hear Phyllis ask me why I am taking a photograph instead of opening the envelope.

The camera is now a pervasive technology for making photos and videos, widely used and acknowledged as being a part of a paradigm shift in the technological development of

¹³⁰ Fanny Howe, *ibid.*, p. 7, 2003

public-facing acts of creativity, sharing and communication and surveillance. The camera also induces a functional and often overlooked obligation for keeping things private. There have been significant times and situations in my life as an artist that this duality has created an enigmatic and unresolved tension. My PhD research project over the last four has inadvertently become a place where this tension has surfaced and consequently the project has gradually become an unfolding examination of that tension.

In January 2017, I made a 2min.25 sec video at the IVF clinic with the camera on my phone. It is of Jackie, the nurse we would make contact with on every visit, demonstrating how to mix and then inject the 'Buserilin'. This injection was to be done every day for 3 weeks. Phyllis and I were so nervous about getting it wrong that I asked Jackie if I could video her demonstration as a reference.

Well we are not really...

I mean you are responsible...

Do you think you will need...?

Ok, as long as you don't get my face in!

It was clear to me, as we sat on very low light blue chairs with our knees touching, in a sky-lit but tiny room, that she was doing something professionally inadvisable and personally uncomfortable by agreeing to me videoing her hands. I am not sure that she felt she could say no though.

Can you make sure you delete it once you know what you're doing?

It's just...

Every morning for three weeks, with the camera propped on the kitchen table against the fruit bowl, we would try to position a needle and vial in Phyllis' hands, just like Jackie's.

Pausing and rewinding, pausing and rewinding, we watched this video many, many times. The injections bruised my skin - each one a record.

My cameras and my computer became the place that these private, functional videos were made, stored and drawn from. The time period of making, storing and drawing from them unfolded initially in parallel with my archive-based PhD research project and then, traces of them, parts of them, thoughts about them began to incrementally fold *into* the PhD research project. The private and the public has become intertwined in digital 0's and 1's.

In order to keep things private, the camera (and the person using the camera) has to work against itself. The technology is designed so that images and videos are ready to share instantly, with the flick of a finger. One is constantly aware of working against the technology that both harnesses and *teaches* a desire to share. A commitment to keeping certain images and videos private means resisting the instinctive and cultivated desire to share what does not feel wholly mine.

After each unsuccessful stage of trying to become a mother, I produced drawings, animations and photographs.



Kate Sweeney *Cyclobird*, digital photograph, author's home, Gateshead, 2018.

Some of the drawings were made from memory and as part of a habitual, cathartic routine. Others were produced in response to the functional photographs and videos made of nurse Jackie, before deleting them. The drawings and animations began to create a private, partial record of my experience. Traces of the desire for and responsibility of privacy were a ‘subtle residue’ in my camera, in my images and videos. They contained the traces of nurse Jackie, and were shaped by the necessity of concealment. Partial ownership, partial permission, partial evidence; she was a part of, and apart from, the work.



Kate Sweeney, *Buserilin*, 2018, Pencil on Paper, A3

Drawings, photographs and papers from my research project were literally interspersed in chaotic piles with my IVF drawings, as well as letters, notes, needles and vials. I began to

separate and gather together into boxes. The process of gathering, choosing, discarding highlighted the inevitability of the archive's state of discontinuity and interruption.



Kate Sweeney, *Feet (On Studio Floor)*, 2018, Pencil on Paper, A3, Digital Photograph, Author's studio, Gateshead

Maria Tamboukou says that ‘archival documents make connections with the researcher’s spatio-temporal rhythms.’¹³¹ That was when I began to see intersecting elements of my work and life becoming archival, becoming an entanglement of space, time and matter.¹³² Tamboukou draws on Foucault’s idea that living is a process of constantly folding out into the world¹³³, to argue that ‘whilst working in the archive, the researcher is creating an archive of her own, which gradually becomes part of wider fields and bodies of knowledge.’¹³⁴

¹³¹ Maria Tamboukou, “ibid.,” p. 631, 2014

¹³² Maria Tamboukou, “ibid.,” p. 631, 2014

¹³³ Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” *Technologies of the Self*, edited by Patrick H Hutton, Huck Gutman and Luther H. Martin, London: Tavistock, pp. 16-49, 1988

¹³⁴ Maria Tamboukou, “ibid.,” p. 625, 2014

In order to work with the technology of the contemporary camera I have worked against its capacity as a tool for instantaneous sharing and communication. I have had to unlearn some of the things that the contemporary technologies of image-making and sharing have taught me. I have developed deliberately slow, multi-layered, collaborative, non-linear and fragmentary processes of video making. This PhD research project traces my own shifts in thinking, from ideas about the possibility of speculation and interpretation of hidden stories, to include a more personal exploration of the shape and form, and potential agency, of the hidden. The videos produced for this PhD research project contain something like Bill Viola's 'subtle residue' of my private and personal experiences from the last four years. I have thought about, and approached the administrative section of the Bloodaxe Archive as a site, and then a source for research. As a site, I have endeavoured to uncover and explore the smaller, more enigmatic, seemingly inert materials it contains. I initially was seeking to speak *about* these materials. As the research developed, I became increasingly engaged with these materials as objects to speak *through*. I came to see their enigmatic silences as their strength and agency as opposed to the received wisdom in the idea of archival silences as mainly a suppression or 'lack' of mattering.

Chapter 2: Holes as the Archive
 ‘Janet’: *A Drawing and a Tool for Drawing*

Section 1: ‘Janet’ font

To make a new alphabet of the discarded props of a conversation can lead only to fresh discoveries in language. Concentration is the desired end, as in an anagram whose density is the measure of its destiny.¹³⁵

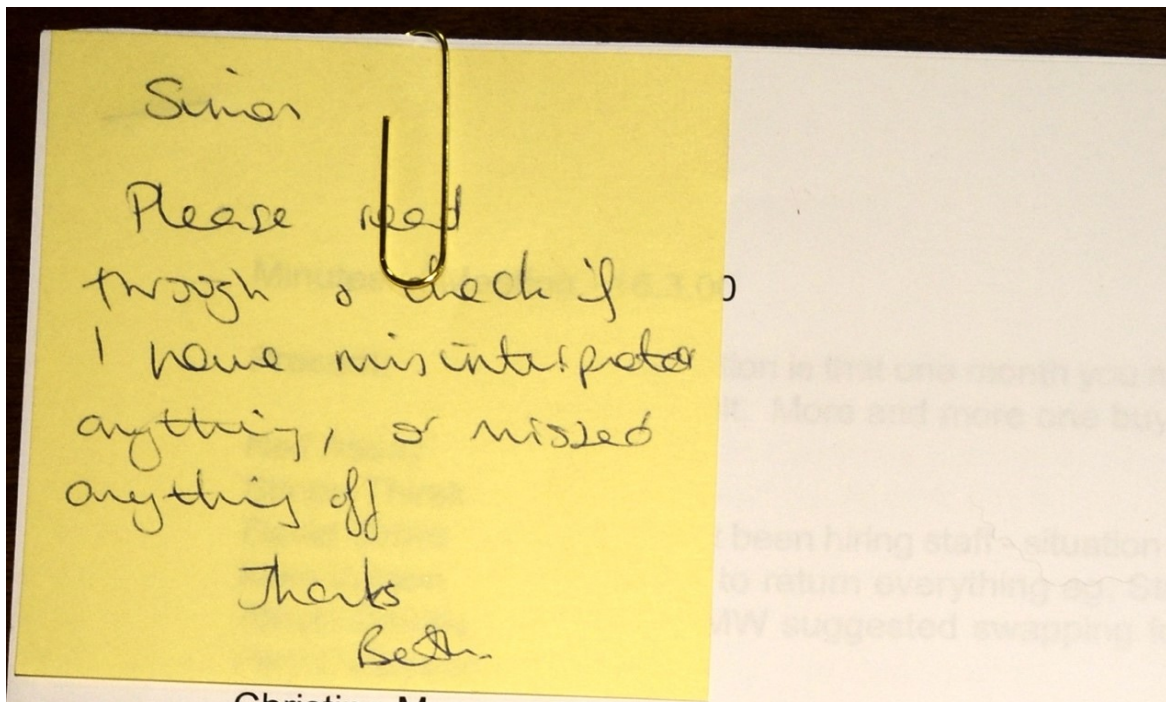


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A font is a set of letters, a typeface of one particular size and shape. This paragraph, for example, is typed in ‘Times’. A font is also a container, of water for example, in a church. And it is the source of an idea. ‘Janet’ is a font, hand-drawn from this post-it note:

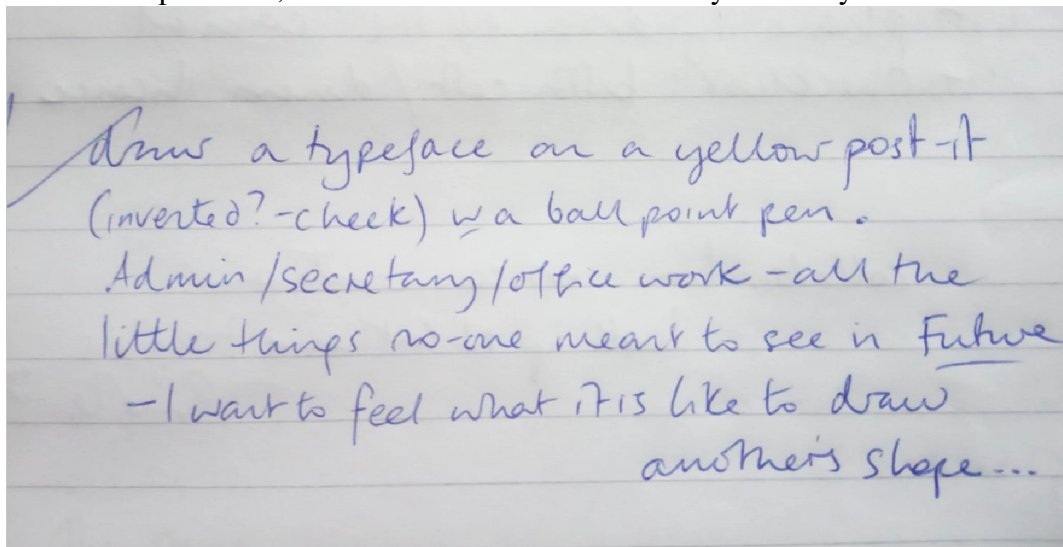
¹³⁵ Jillian Suarez, "Man Ray's Alphabet Book for Adults," review of *Alphabet Book for Adults*, by Man Ray, *guggenheim.org*, August 27, 2015: <https://www.guggenheim.org/blogs/findings/man-rays-alphabet-book-for-adults>

¹³⁶ Man Ray. *Finger*, drawing in book, "Man Ray's Alphabet Book for Adults," review of *Alphabet Book for Adults*, by Man Ray, *guggenheim.org*, August 27, 2015: <https://www.guggenheim.org/blogs/findings/man-rays-alphabet-book-for-adults>

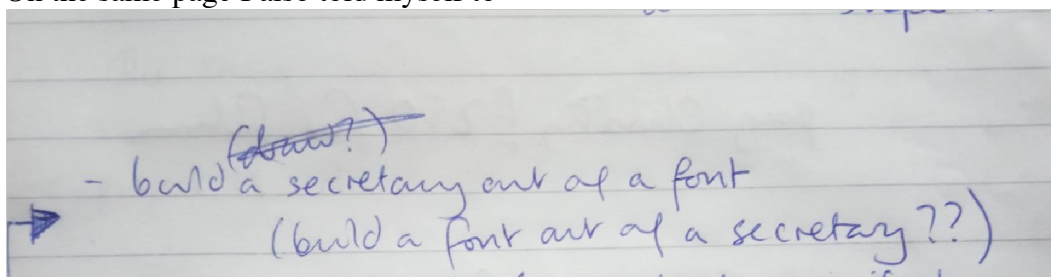


Kate Sweeney, *Post-it Note: Misinterpreted*, 2017, Digital Photograph, Bloodaxe Books Archives, Newcastle University

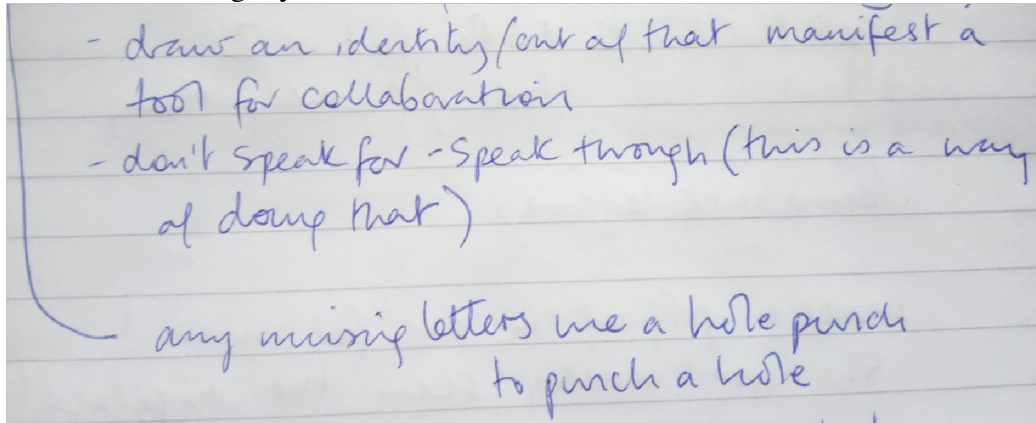
On the 4th April 2017, I wrote down an instruction to myself in my notebook



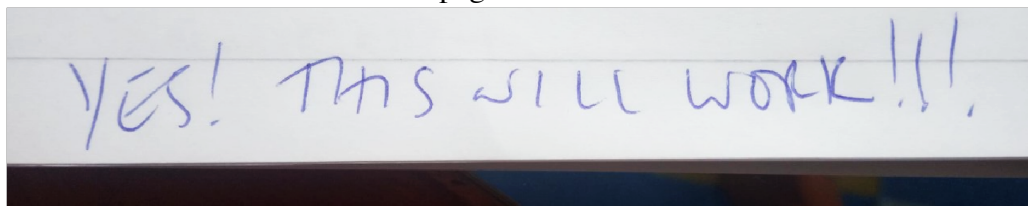
On the same page I also told myself to



I continued, telling myself to



And I concluded at the end of the page that



Following my own instructions, whilst sitting in the murky strip-lit archive storage room, I sketched out a font directly from the round letters on a post-it-note. As I traced the curves and lines of the glyphs – firstly drawing in the air with my pursed fingers and then on paper with a pencil - I thought about Beth, the author of the note, diligently writing in ball-point. I thought about how she would never have assumed for one of those seconds it took to write the note that anybody would look again at the yellow apology so neatly attached over a corner of A4 meeting minutes. Beth, like the eponymous and yet absent ‘Sara’ in the poet Holly Pester’s book, ‘*go to reception and ask for Sara in red felt tip*’¹³⁷ is marginalia. Pester’s Sara ‘blurs the distinction of archival information with its tactile matter’ and yet, through the durational attention of Pester, Sara ‘becomes part of the story.’¹³⁸

I imagine Beth would never have contemplated that a person would look for days, weeks at her note. The sculptor Robert Smithson said ‘look at any word long enough and you

¹³⁷ Holly Pester, *go to reception and ask for Sara in red felt tip*, London, Book Works, 2015

¹³⁸ Holly Pester, *ibid.* 2015

will see it open up into a series of faults, into a terrain of particles each containing its own void'¹³⁹. Smithson's series of 'faults' are letters that develop a canyon-like 3-dimensionality when apprehended over time, transforming the word from text to object, with the language of texture, shape and form incised within and between individual crevices and bends.

Literal usage becomes incantory when all metaphors are suppressed. Here language is built, not written. Yet discursive literalness is apt to be a container for the radical metaphor.¹⁴⁰

For Smithson, the word and the letter, when isolated or withdrawn from context, become sculptural and environmental matter - a material for an artist to work with. The act of carving, extracting - or simply put - the writing out of words transforms them. Beth's post-it note is literally meant to operate as a prop of a conversation, to be discarded. Those handwritten words on the post-it note contain traces of emotion, feeling and intention, as well as familiarity, hierarchy and uncertainty. Drawing those letters, dwelling on them, means traces of those feelings are transferred to me through my hand. The idea of drawing out a typeface from those conversational traces is a returning, reminiscent of creating Ann Cvetkovitch's archive of feelings. Drawing a typeface could be described as building an archive of affect. In the introduction to the book, *A Lexicon for an Affective Archive*, its editor, Guilia Palladini draws comparisons between the human body and an archive through an evocation of a scene in the film, *Fahrenheit 451*.¹⁴¹ Sitting next to a small boy in a forest, an old man speaks the contents of a book that he has learned by heart. Bringing the words up from within, he pours them into the ears of a young boy, who repeats them out loud in order to drink them in, to contain them, and preserve as much of the book as possible. This bodily form of transferal, Palladini goes on

¹³⁹ Robert Smithson, "A Sediment of the Mind: Earth Projects," Robert Smithson: *The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flan, California: University of California Press, p. 107, 1996

¹⁴⁰ Robert Smithson, "Language to be Looked at and / or Things to be Read," Robert Smithson: *The Collected Writings*, California: University of California Press, p. 61, 1996

¹⁴¹ *Fahrenheit 451*,

to say, is an archiving technology and a lesson in ‘how to turn yourself into an affective archive.’¹⁴² This technology seems so fragile and dynamic because the human body is fragile and dynamic. It is -we are - prone to making mistakes. Beth’s message on the post-it note is an unassuming acknowledgement of a fundamental aspect of the human condition.

Simon, Please read though and tell me if I have misinterpreted anything, or left anything off
Thanks Beth

Each letter that makes up Beth’s note is copied out by me. Every missing letter - capital and lower case - is replaced with a hole punched into paper, as is every punctuation mark and each number. ‘Janet’ is full of holes, made up of glyphs and gaps. Each shape is a geometric point, or a location of these archival traces. ‘Janet’ has become the source of, and container for, a body. The punched holes are dots, or points. When Kandinsky posits the idea that the point is ‘a union of silence and speech,’¹⁴³ he goes on to say that the point has been given its material form in writing, and that ‘it belongs to language and signifies silence.’ It is, he says a delicate silence, overpowered by print around it until we grow or expand the size of the point. The union of silence and speech can be moderated, changed. It is moving: animated and affective.

Trying to copy somebody’s handwriting is difficult at first. The singular, swift-moving strokes become tempered and look, somehow, too considered. The hand wavers and the lines have to be back-tracked over. So, it is necessary to free one’s wrist and exercise each letter in the air before they can be penned into paper. In the book, ‘*Lines*’, anthropologist Tim Ingold explores the differences and similarities between drawing and writing, stating that we use lines for both and in each case, ‘the line is a trace of a manual gesture’. With reference to Nicolette

¹⁴² Giulia Palladini, and Marco Pustianaz, *Lexicon for an Affective Archive*, Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, p17, 2016

¹⁴³ Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, New York: Dover Publications, p. 25, 1979

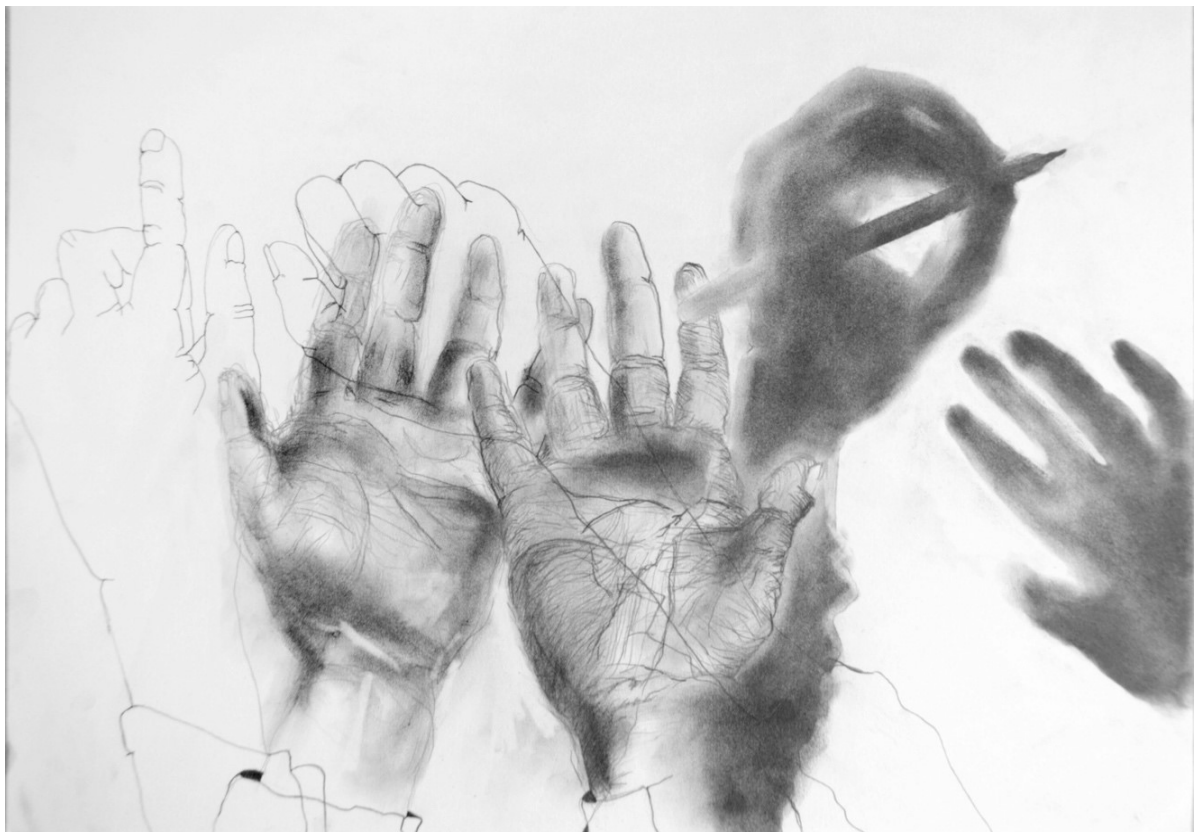
Grey's book, *Lettering as Drawing*, he goes on to say that 'a line that is drawn is one that moves.'¹⁴⁴ Creating lines, whether they are drawings or letters involve their own levels of emotional engagement. Until children can read, he posits, letters are glyphic and learning to draw them before they are a part of words or language is mimetic; like learning a sequence of short, nodding dances. As I drew each letter, or 'fault' in my sketchbook, I was conscious of sealing off that individual letter from its original status and meaning as being part of a word, and was instead creating a single silent but latent image, a rune of sorts.

The more I attempted to learn each shape, the more I felt I was *becoming* Beth. As I draw in the air over Beth's words, I couldn't help but read into them and *feel* them, as well as observe my undulating wrist. The line becomes not just a trace of a manual gesture but also of an emotional gesture. The imaginary line of flight taken by the hand as it draws out the faint trace of the emotional and manual gesture contained within the increasingly plaintive-seeming, thorough, deferent words – 'Please read through to check if I have misinterpreted anything or left anything off' – creates an empathic connection between Beth and myself - the author and the drawer – *through* the words.

I have repeatedly used the word ephemeral in my writing to describe the temporary, throwaway nature of the post-it-notes in the archive. The ephemeral is transitory, fleeting, fly-by-night. Ephemera exists in air, are moved through air. If I imagine a drawing of the idea of 'ephemera' it is something caught on a breeze. The copying of the letters from the post-it-notes is akin to drawing in the air. Drawing as a physical act is a form of digitising. It is a transformation and interpretation of something seen and felt using the digits - the fingers. There is a kinetic connection from the line and travelling through the fingers and up into the arm. In '*Lines*', Ingold describes the fourth-century Chinese calligrapher, Wang His-Chih's love of geese, a love stirred by the synergy he felt with them when drawing them, his undulating wrist

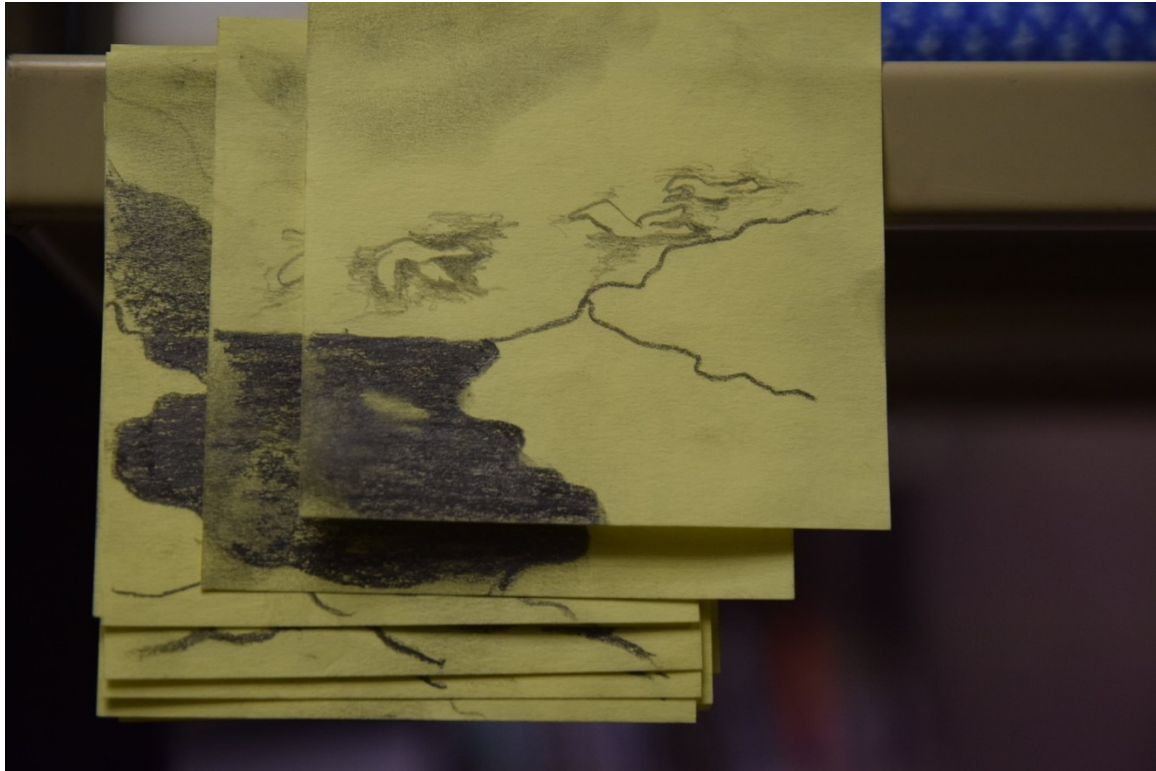
¹⁴⁴ Tim Ingold, *Lines*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 132, 2016

movements resembling their line of flight. The resultant marks are a combination of the image of the bird combined with the drawer's feeling for the bird. Looking down, my hand is gooselike when it is drawing. The pencil is a wooden quiver of its feathered predecessor, fingers are clasped around the graphite beak and move like 'earthed lightning.'¹⁴⁵ Thinking back, I see that the goose is digitising lines of flight over snow-white (or post-it-yellow) ground in many of my drawings and animated sequences.



Kate Sweeney, *Archive Hands*, 2018, Pencil on Paper, A3

¹⁴⁵ See Seamus Heaney, "Postscript," *The Spirit Level*, London: Faber and Faber, p. 1996



Kate Sweeney, *Postscript (Work)*, 2017, digital photograph, Newcastle University Special Collections, Newcastle

Digitising is a process of transcribing, or drawing. It is also the process of conversion of analogue material into a form to be processed by a computer. I digitised the individual hand-drawn letters in order to transform them into a digital font, to be downloaded and contained within the 'Font Book'¹⁴⁶ of a laptop or computer. I scanned each letter from the pages in my sketchbook using my old image scanner¹⁴⁷ and laboriously copied, pasted, moved and resized them in the photo-editing application Photoshop.¹⁴⁸ For every missing letter, number and punctuation mark I decided to copy, paste, move and resize a scanned image of a hole, punched into my page using a hole puncher.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ 'Font Book' is a font manager by Apple Inc. for its macOS operating system. It was first released with Mac OS X Panther in 2003. It is 'Mac's main app for working with typeface allows you to create font libraries, install as well as remove fonts, as well as inspect and verify the fonts you have installed on your Mac.'

<https://www.lifewire.com/how-to-manage-mac-fonts-with-font-book-2260816>

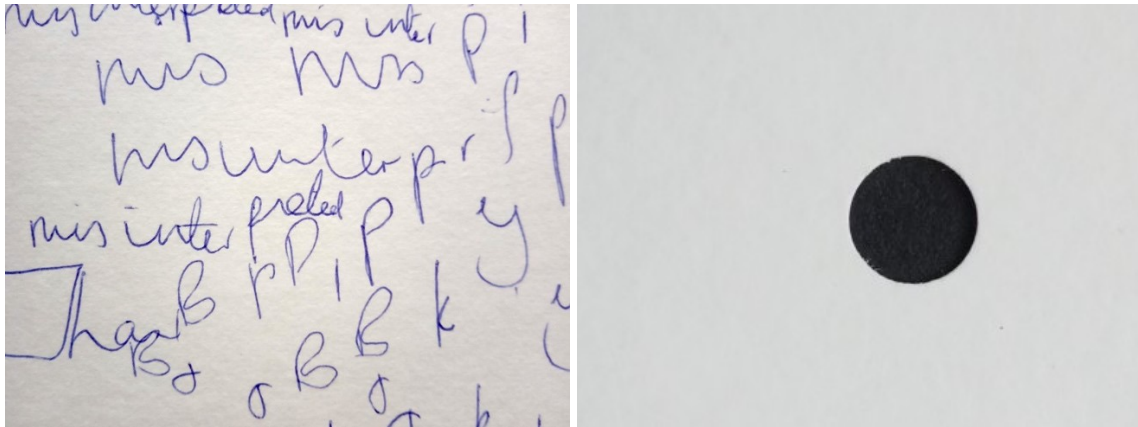
¹⁴⁷ An image scanner is a successor of early telephotography and fax input devices.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image_scanner

¹⁴⁸ Thomas and John Knoll, Adobe Photoshop: 'a raster graphics editor developed and published by Adobe Inc. for Windows and macOS. It was originally created in 1988 by Thomas and John Knoll.'

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adobe_Photoshop

¹⁴⁹ Friedrich Soenneken filed his patent on November 14, 1886, for his *Papierlocher für Sammelmappen*.¹⁴⁹ Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hole_punch





Kate Sweeney, 2017, digital scans of author's notebook, author's studio, Gateshead

I uploaded each letter into the template of an online font-building application called 'Calligraphr.'¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Spikerog SAS, *Calligraphr*, version (2016), computer program, <https://www.calligraphr.com/en/>


calligraphr

I	"	%	&		
!	()	+	,	-
.	/	0	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9
:	;	=	?	@	A
B	C	D	E	F	G

 Include all those four markers untrimmed on your photo or scan.

www.calligraphr.com 


calligraphr

H	I	J	K		
L	M	N	O	P	Q
R	S	T	U	V	W
X	Y	Z	a	b	c
d	e	f	g	h	i
j	k	l	m	n	o

 Include all those four markers untrimmed on your photo or scan.

www.calligraphr.com 

calligraphr

p	q	r	s		
t	u	v	w	x	y
z					

 Include all those four markers untrimmed on your photo or scan.

www.calligraphr.com 

Then, pressing the return on my computer keyboard, I instructed ‘Calligraphr’ to create ‘Janet’.

●y fingers fly over the key●bard.

There – no● ‘●anet’ has a shape●

My fingers fly over the keyboard.
There – now ‘Janet’ has a shape!

The digitisation of archival materials is a manual process of preservation and loss. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida suggests archives have little to do with the past and are there to launch a future. Archives contain remains. ‘Janet’ is an archive of fragmentary, meagre remains of other archives, there to launch a future. Highlighting loss in the process of preservation is an explicit and strategic approach to responding to archive ephemera that creates holes and gaps and space for new work to be made. ‘Janet’ is complete in its incompleteness. This complete incompleteness becomes a speculative device for speaking through the archive that incorporates the hidden and enigmatic origins of the font and in turn explores the possibility of the font being a device for revealing the shape of the hidden. An entry in my sketchbook reflects upon the process of making ‘Janet’. I wrote:

The intertwining fragments of histories of these women's place or absence in histories that they were a part of // the subjective reason I pick them to work with is a personal one, their fragments look back at me in the bits of my everyday // the feminism that embraces and celebrates women's multitasking, sharing and collaborative practices – I don't want to forget that // the recognising of the conditioning that creates the avoiding, the desire to hide. What is an ellipsis? Is there is something positive in hiding and being hidden... but what is it?

The holes in ‘Janet’ are an ellipsis. ‘An ellipsis is, according to the website *dictionary.com*, a mark or marks as ..., or * * *, to indicate an omission or suppression of letters or words.’¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/ellipses>

They indicate the presence of something lost, or hidden. A key principle of N. Katherine Hayles' writing on literature in the digital age is the assertion that information can never be divorced from the physical device that transmits it and the body that employs it.¹⁵² As a hand-drawn and digitised font, drawn from ephemera in an archive 'Janet' is a processor of fragments and a product of fragments. It is both a drawing and a tool for drawing. 'Janet' is a transmitter of text, carrying signals from its source, and a body of text produced using itself as a map or a trace of those transmissions.

I sent the font via email to different people, inviting them to use 'Janet' to compose a piece of text. It could be a note, a poem, an idea or just a simple reply. The rest of this chapter recounts and explores in detail three of the resulting works made with 'Janet'. I have opted to write about the collaborations that relate in some way to each other. In this way they form a scattered narrative that aims to speak of my developing and re-shaping of *Animistration* as a methodological approach to using archival objects, focusing on collaboration as a way of seeing and then speaking through the archival-ephemeral.

The 'Janet' font is a body, moving through other bodies to become another body, and then another body, and so on. 'Janet' was operating like Guilia Palladini's notion of the affective archive being 'the deposit, the habitat, and the means of production of historical potentiality.'¹⁵³ The affective archive is moving, and it can be moved. 'Janet' became, and also created an affective archive of a heterogenetic, multiplying and generative process. The creating of an affective archive was a point of departure from my initial approach to archival research and practice. Potentialities became possibilities and speculations. Working with ephemera meant now accepting the archive as a location made up of holes. This required, as art historian Jo Melvin says, 'new lines of knowledge production' and that 'lacking hard facts

¹⁵² Hayles, N. Katherine (1999) 'How We Became Posthuman: *Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*'. University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London

¹⁵³ Lexicon of an Affective Archive'

leads to different research tactics, following hunches.’¹⁵⁴ ‘Fanny Howe describes her heuristic processes of writing poetry and making video as ones done not ‘with a spyglass /

But with a wild guess

And only three words: ‘You never know’

‘Janet’, I hoped, would allow the collaborations to begin as wild guesses and allow those who were interested in working with me to follow hunches. A hunch is intuitive. It means following instincts that are themselves shaped by experiences that then become embodied knowledge, or praxis that is utilised when working, hunched over materials full of gaps, holes and spaces, in the quiet of the archive.

Section 2: *Blank*

After delivering a seminar about my research in which I had screened the video, *Work*, I emailed ‘Janet’ to poet, Linda France. It was an invitation for her to speak, not on behalf of or about, but through ‘Janet’. It was an invitation to Linda to make new work using the gift of a writing tool. Our conversation at the end of the seminar had drawn out some coincidental and resonant themes within our separate practices. I think I recall Linda saying that using ‘Janet’ would be a way of sitting next to each other without being in the same room. Six months after passing ‘Janet’ to Linda, she emailed me a poem - written using ‘Janet’ – called *Blank*.

¹⁵⁴ Jo Melvin, “Holes in the Archive – To Fill or to Leave, that is the Question...,” *Bright Light* (2) p. 65, 2015, <http://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/8014/>

Blank

When we were —, we were
 rarely overlooked, nothing —
 about their attention —, —.
 —, our faces were Mercury. We
 often didn't — what to do with
 our hands or —. They'd soon direct
 us and we had — choice. Is that
 why we felt —, disinclined to
 hold their pace, our own core.
 No — we are —, we are
 generally ignored, as if we were
 —, not just empty, excised, —
 taken to the nth degree, —
 distilled to homeopathic potency,
 not even a placebo, —, elided,
 demeaned. We can't articulate
 this —.

Walls, floors, ceilings, doors all — so
 we staunch each other's — and
 rise.

Winda Wance

As a printed document it is possible to see how *Blank* utilises the concrete and structural qualities of 'Janet'. Each glyph, whilst still resembling hand writing, is no longer a

part of a joined-up word or sentence but a line or ‘fault,’¹⁵⁵ broken away from the whole. Words are interrupted and invented by holes, redactions, gaps or dashes. Each glyph is a sign, a remnant or part-picture of the archive it originates from, and a part-archive of an affective process of transformation and of becoming a poem.

● h e n ● e ● e r e —, ● e ● e r e

Responding to both the metaphorical and the structural potential of ‘Janet’, Linda has determinedly extracted the implicitly feminist possibility of ‘Janet’ as a tool for articulating a female experience that mirrors the archival in its fractured elusiveness. In preserving the architecture of ‘Janet’, we also exclude and silence. Looking at the poem’s appearance on the page before attempting to engage with the text turns the page into an image. By attempting to ‘fill in’ the holes and gaps, and anticipate what the poet’s intended words may have been, *Blank* then becomes a mirror. The first part of the poem is a meditation on looking and the effects of being perused and judged. When the gaze shifts, or is withdrawn, the second part of the poem contemplates the inarticulable act of having to (re)form a self in the cavity left by the absent stare. ‘Janet’ holds and withholds a look.

Printed out on white 80gsm printer paper in black inkjet ink and held in one’s hand, *Blank* is a script or a score to speak out loud. The ‘Janet’ font contains no ‘w’, so there is no making whole. *Blank* is a visual epistemology of the ‘Janet’ font. It is a way of understanding it that is presented and processed visually. Reading, or sounding *Blank* out loud requires an imaginative act; one has to speak through the lexicon of the archive. The holes, redactions, gaps and dashes are the liminal spaces in which ‘Janet’ becomes speculative and it is through the incantation of those spaces that an affective process of translation takes place. I wanted to make a recording of Linda reading the *Blank* poem to use as part of a video piece seeking to

¹⁵⁵ Robert Smithson, *ibid.*, p. 68, 1996

enliven the ‘Janet’ font and explore its status as an affective archive. The intention of the recording was to use it as a soundtrack for a video piece about the origins of ‘Janet’, imbricating my visual response and Linda’s textual response to the font, and producing a chimerical and multitudinous body made up of overlapping and juxtaposing parts (as opposed to one that would use the poem to either illustrate or be illustrated by the video’s visual elements). I wanted the sounding out of the poem to become a conversation through ‘Janet’ with the archive.

Poet Susan Howe's incanted version of her book, *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives*,¹⁵⁶ given at The Woodberry Room and available on Harvard University’s YouTube channel¹⁵⁷ is an exploration of how the methodologies of working from archival research contain and map out traces of the technologies that facilitate that research. The video enables us to hear and see the tenuous uncertainties and hesitancies Howe embraces and utilises in her delivery style. The fragility of her voice is a powerful, performative example of the imaginative, stilted, hopeful acts of ‘reaching’ required for a poetics of research that has taken decades to perfect. She discusses contemporary archival practice and how, through its engagement with the digital, it is moving from a technology of memory and storage to one of predictive algorithms promoting communication, sharing and accessibility. Howe's acknowledgement that these 'new ways' are exponentially exciting suggests she is herself not immune to the possibilities that digital research offers. Her book is a ‘swan-song’ to the old ways but its online presentation is an incantation that incorporates and demonstrates – contains and maps out – her engagement with, and the consequences of, the ‘new ways’. These new ways include ‘databases, computer searches, the study of literature as a system, the recovery of key words and related projects.’¹⁵⁸ They also include the medium of video – both as an

¹⁵⁶ Susan Howe, *ibid.*, 2014

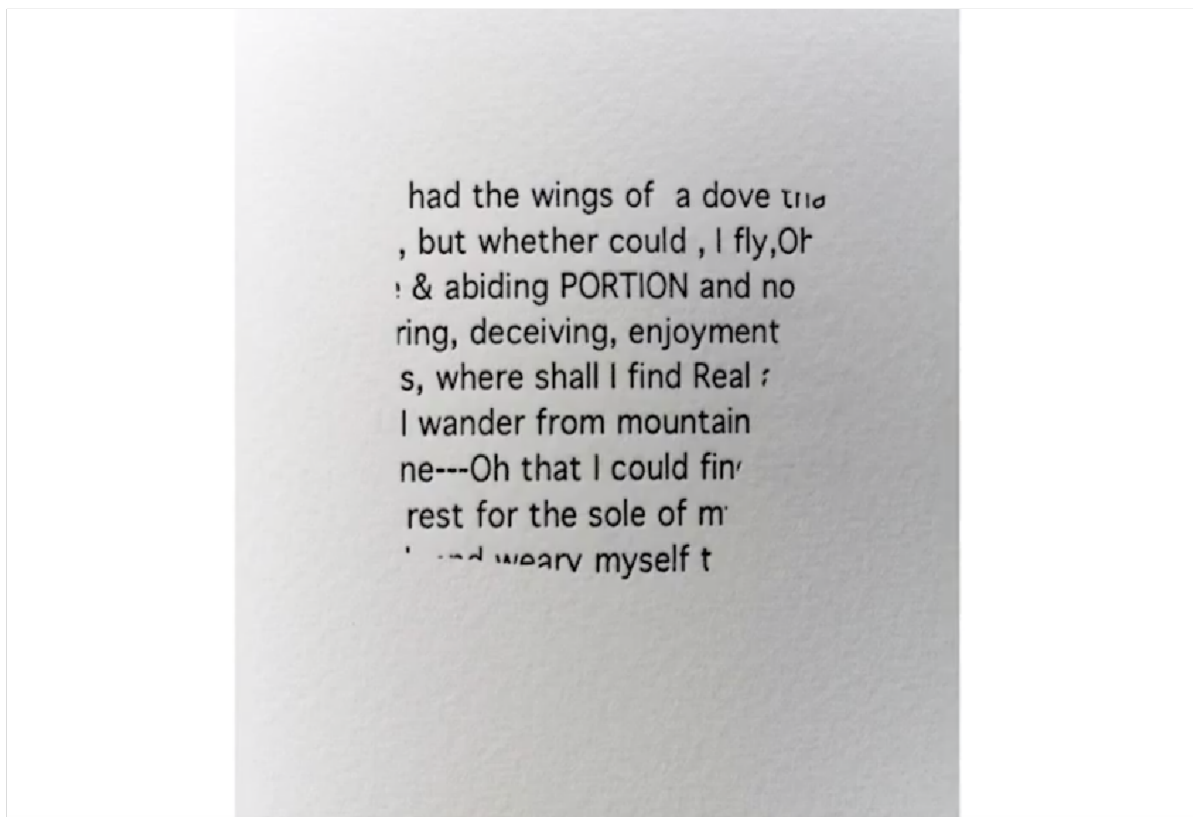
¹⁵⁷ Susan Howe, ‘*ibid.*’, 2014

¹⁵⁸ Susan Howe, ‘*ibid.*’, 2014

archival research tool, and an archive itself. The new ways are also the opportunity to inhabit, articulate and produce somatic, affective archival methodologies and practices, the online presentation of her book being an example. After she is introduced to the audience, we watch her walk to the lectern and begin her talk with small coughs and hesitations and fractured sentences.

'Thank you so much Kristen! I am deeply moved. And to think you are working on Thoreau... God! Anyway. Ahem, (cough), just. Err. This. First.'¹⁵⁹

Some 55.47 minutes into the lecture, the viewer can see a fragment of text projected large on a screen behind Howe's head. It is a photo or scan of part of a paragraph on paper typed by William James. The fragment has been cut as if with scissors; the snips have sliced at varying angles, horizontally, leaving only a word's crescents and vertically, omitting whole letters.



Susan Howe, *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives*, Woodberry Poetry Room, 2014, Screenshot

¹⁵⁹ Susan Howe, 'ibid', 2014

Howe attempts to sound out the fragment of text. Rather than make complete the incompleteness of the fragmented paragraph, Howe attempts to sound it out through the imaginative lexicon of the archive. By sounding out half letters and broken words, she is attaching sounds to the archive's ellipses and vocalising its hidden qualities through muted 'ahhs' and diffident 'uhhs'. This mirrors the hesitations in her own introduction and one is offered the opportunity to encounter the online video as an archive, containing evocative and evasive fragments that become starting points for research. Howe's work is defibrillated by the challenge posited by the fragmentary, inarticulable material that archival research brings forth - what she describes as its 'spontaneous particulars' – and what Carolyn Steedman describes as 'the desire to recover moments of inception: to find and possess all sorts of beginnings.'¹⁶⁰ They are the starting point of a conversation through archives with the past. Howe demonstrates the archival mode of the lecture as a recorded performance and its eventual manifestation as an online video–artefact through the fractured and faltering delivery of her sounding out of the William James paragraph, that is reflected in the irresolute intonation of her voice throughout the whole lecture. At 22.17 minutes, Howe states that 'in research libraries and collections, we may capture the portrait of history in so-called insignificant visual and verbal textualities,'¹⁶¹ however, it is her approach to creative exegesis as an embodied form of praxis - through the performance of the lecture and its subsequent video - that she demonstrates the 'new ways' as being research tools that further her concerns, not so much for 'what we might know of our cultural past as with *how* it might be encountered differently.'¹⁶² In the first chapter of *Archaeopoetics*, Mandy Bloomfield seeks to demonstrate how the work of poets such as Howe 'challenge entrenched oppositions between meaning and (meaningless)

¹⁶⁰ Carolyn Steedman, *ibid.*, p. 5, 2002

¹⁶¹ Susan Howe, '*ibid.*', 2014

¹⁶² Mandy Bloomfield, *Archaeopoetics: Word, Image, History*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, p. 2, 2016

materiality,'¹⁶³ She argues Howe's work complicates the work of theorists such as Michael Fried and his delineation between signification and 'mere mark' and the idea that 'more than just its materiality is required for a signifier to be a signifier.'¹⁶⁴ Howe's small sounds, made in the effort to converse with James through the archive, are poesis; the articulation of something that did not exist before. The 'new ways' facilitate and become a platform for Steedman's 'moments of inception'.

In the text piece, *A Conversation about Blank*, I have transcribed the conversation between Linda France and myself that was incidentally captured between different recorded iterations of *Blank*. Every time I look over the transcription, I am reminded of the day we did the recordings. We were sat in a hot and too-small room in the university. I had no idea how Linda planned to verbalise the gaps and holes in the poem and had assumed she would just pause, leaving silences that I would then work into. Instead, Linda's spoken versions of *Blank* are suggestive, visceral even. I typed out the conversation because, when I listened back to it, I could hear my own surprise at the provocative nature of the ooohs and aaahs replacing the ●●●s and the ———s of the poem! *A Conversation about Blank* is a dense text. Even though my part of the conversation is aligned to the left and Linda's to the right, the lack of spacing means it is difficult to demarcate the two voices. Sentences interrupt other sentences. Sentiments are overstated and the sense of the direction of the conversation has to be gleaned out from hesitant, misinterpreted and understated ideas. I knew I was talking to myself as much as I was talking to Linda. The half words, exclamations and interjections reflect a mixture of uncertainty, panic and our desire to please.

¹⁶³ Mandy Bloomfield, *ibid.*, p. 5, 2016

¹⁶⁴ Michael Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. xiv, 1987

A Conversation about *Blank*

The following is a transcript of the incidental conversation, between poet, Linda France whose words are documented in the right-hand column and artist, Kate Sweeney, whose words are documented in the left-hand column. The conversation was captured accidentally as they recorded four versions of Linda's poem, 'Blank'.

Even doing things like this can be useful. can't they?

umm
even oh I think so

Just that is sometimes the point of doing these things isn't it?

yes, they take you
they take you back to these things
to your own place

yeah and sort of make you
let me see so I'm just going to do the microphone levels.
Sooooo, I might stand if this isn't too awkward so this is the first one....

(Linda and I record *Blank*)

That was amazing! That was amazing!

it's weird isn't it

I got. I got such a surprise when you started it hahaha
oh Hen. that is so good

well is that how you imagined it would be

it's warm in here. No, I had had had thoughts myself haha but I can't but I can't do it.
something like SSSSNIP! I suppose similar but less formed into words so that the
the words would still be words but anything that had the 'O' -the gap in - would
become like a like a sort of typed language. Shall I open a window?

ahhh
so, like H-E-N we oh I see
you know right ok
Yes, if they do actually open

I love the rhythm of it and the flow oh!
I might have to record it again because I think I got a couple of pops from the coughs
on the microphone

Mmm

mmm maybe you could turn away for the coughs just slightly

they weren't quite so cough-y when I did it on my own.
it was more of a... well it was. it's not quite a cough it's more of a...
like a tsk almost yes. it- it's like a strange
yes
erm. Like a strangulation actually.
it is meant to be a sort of silencing like the dash sort of

So it was sort of maybe we should try it again yeah
because I think I sort of knew it wasn't a cough yeah

well. I was thinking of the shape

yeah yeah

It maybe went in a different direction.
so it's almost like a movement

yeah yeah. Like a... but not. ha yeah like a kick or something?

yeah. it is a sort of. I know the sound it's sort of a...
Not a sigh but a... an effort maybe yes but not literal.
so I didn't want it to be recognisable as a literal no-thing

yeah

'O' is different. different.
It's a word as well so we have associations with it

yeah

F-fff. but it was very exaggerated

well I suppose but then. is it like a dash then?

does a dash sound? As a word that has a movement in it -
What do they say a dash is a...
No it's gone. something about an exclamation
it's not a shout but it's also not a whisper.
It can signify volume in a weird sort of way

Mmm. Would you? I mean we could do it again if that's alright with you

yeah well it's quite a hard thing to do
you naturally think performing but it is so performative

mmm

it's like.
and it's so.
I mean the blank one.
makes a lot of sense of both of the readings yes

The possibilities of conversation as a research methodology have been considered by Luciana Parisi in her chapter of the book, *Inventive Methods*. Parisi posits the idea of conversation being a ‘mental fiction’¹⁶⁵ along with other types of relational experiences such as emotions. She lays out the case for seeing these mental fictions as actual and quantifiable and therefore valid forms or methods with which to conduct research, without changing the status of the conversation from one of speculation and instability. As, *A Conversation about Blank* exposes, the texture of conversation, she says, is often humorous and ‘idiotic.’¹⁶⁶ It is acceptable to make no sense whilst attempting to make sense of ideas. A conversation is made up of potential meanings, rather than a single, actual meaning. Sense is often constructed later, in reflection. It is possible, then, to utilise a conversation as a way to generate something new out of lots of possible, undefined but particle-like starting points for the production of a piece of work. A conversation can be seen as a ‘speculative device leaning toward the production of the not yet actualised.’¹⁶⁷ Parisi (and others who may describe themselves as ‘New Materialists’) have returned to the work of English philosopher A. N. Whitehead and his ideas regarding an empirical understanding of the world through experience that runs counter to ‘scientific materialism’. Whitehead, according to Parisi, would classify empiricism as not just about our experience of matter, and materials. He argued that ‘scientific materialism’ discounts the significance of our senses and sensibilities and the experiences that make us emotional, relational beings.

The true method of speculation is like the flight of an airplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Luciana Parisi, “Speculation: A Method for the Unattainable,” *Inventive Methods*, edited by Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford, London: Routledge, p. 235, 2014

¹⁶⁶ Luciana Parisi, “ibid.,” p. 235, 2014

¹⁶⁷ Luciana Parisi, “ibid.,” p. 232, 2014

¹⁶⁸ A. N. Whitehead, *The Function of Reason*, MA: Beacon, 1929

Speculation, like a flight path, is considered to be a form of materiality with quantifiable and even tangible shape. With a shape and texture, conversation becomes a mode by which we can consider the significances of interpersonal and relational interactions. A conversation becomes a version of Palladini's affective archive in that it is its own deposit, its habitat, and a means of production. Parisi's chapter includes a 'manifesto' of sorts, that outlines what a speculative methodology seeks to uncover. Number three states that a speculative method 'exposes how the relations (continuities and discontinuities) between thought and fact become the motor for new social realities.'¹⁶⁹ The emotive utterances, captured on the sound recording device and presented in text in *A Conversation about Blank* resound with both the form and content of the written and Linda's verbal iterations of the poem, *Blank*. The document becomes a record of praxis and was then used to inform the editing and animating process of the consequent video piece, *BLANK*.¹⁷⁰

BLANK is a video shot through a peep-hole lens made by hole-punching office documents. Several narratives are suggested and intertwined. Landscapes made of paper, close-up details of scribbles, tears and graph-like lines become mountain ranges through which glimpses of video and animated hand-drawn memories are caught. *BLANK* is an interplay of audio and visual, a video that is to be partly read and partly heard.

BLANK was made partly on a Nikon D750 DSLR camera with a close angle lens, and partly using the inbuilt camera of an android phone. The video piece jumps through cuts of varying resolutions and qualities. Immersive, detailed paper micro-fibres are juxtaposed with unfocused pixelated snippets of an eye. This mix of image resolutions reflects the collage-like qualities of contemporary video practice. Artist and theorist, Hito Steyerl delineates the hierarchical status of images, understood through their quality or resolution and defends the

¹⁶⁹ Luciana Parisi, "ibid.," p. 241, 2014

¹⁷⁰ Kate Sweeney and Linda France, *BLANK*, September 9, 2019, <https://vimeo.com/352323980>

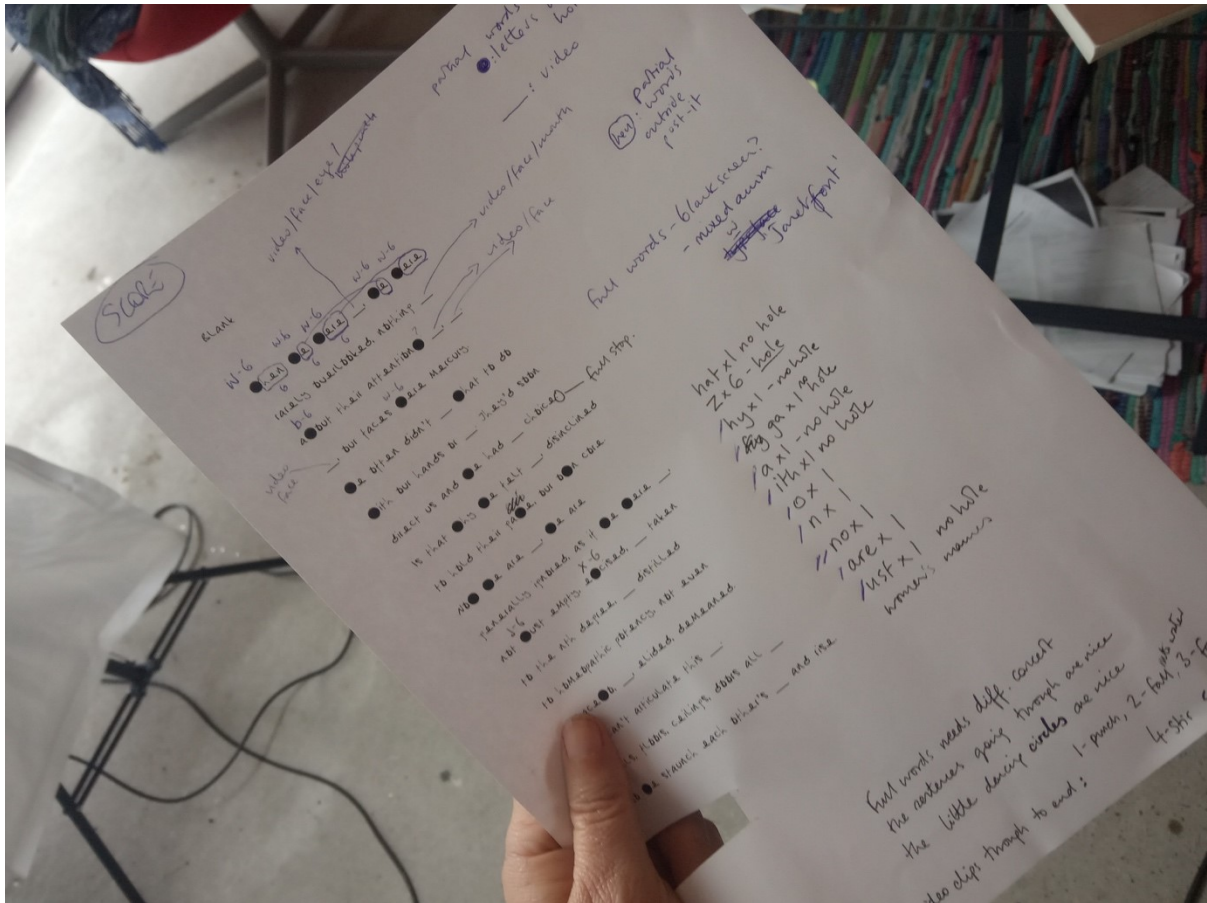
'poor image' as one that suggests the re-using and re-interpretive possibilities of footage that can be manipulated and become abstract¹⁷¹. *Blank* is cinematic in its single channel format, but it also acknowledges Steyerl's observations regarding the ways contemporary video practice is presented across various platforms and accessed in fragments.¹⁷² The video is seen as a homeless kind of art-form - badly installed, never quite sure of itself as a finished thing, only finished when 'written' as a file but even the word 'written' helps the metaphor along, without being an accurate analogy of writing. Instability is video's key quality. It is temporary as it can so easily be re-configured in order to continually manipulate narrative. This potential for transformation is an open-ended invite to multi-authorship that makes its production process oblique. This, and its immateriality make it impossible to solidify and finalise. It invites others to participate in its creation but the production process is oblique - what it will be isn't clear in the moment, so what it is more important is that it is a conversation, an unfolding, a drawing out.

I attempted, in the editing of *Blank*, to draw from the content and composition qualities of the text piece, *A Conversation about Blank*. The video's narrative and rhythmic structure is constantly broken and interrupted by Linda France's aural interpretation of the holes in 'Janet', that were a deeply personal and redolent set of sounds. The motif of the punched hole operates as an ellipsis as one might use in the transcribing of a conversation to indicate a breakdown in the flow of the idiomatic exchange. These moments of breakdown become liminal spaces for 'lines of flight' and contain the potential for the creation, or imagining of what Luciana Parisi calls the not-yet-actualised'.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," *e-flux.com* 10, November (2009): <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>

¹⁷² Hito Steyerl and Franco Berardi, *ibid.*, 2012

¹⁷³ Luciana Parisi, *ibid.*, p. 234, 2014



Kate Sweeney, *Blank with Annotations*, 2019, Digital Photograph, author's studio, Gateshead

This is a link to the video piece,
<https://vimeo.com/352323980>

Section 3: ●ittle ●iph't

Towards the end of 2019, I received a response to my invitation to use 'Janet' from sound artist and friend Lindsay Duncanson.¹⁷⁴ She sent me a small, 30-toothed, hand crank music box, a large roll of firm music box paper and a hole punch. The music box arrived in a postal package lined with hot water bottle rubber and wrapped in cotton wool.

Sitting in Lindsay's studio some weeks later, we began one of many conversations, held over many weeks, about the music box and why she sent it to me, incubated the way it was. Lindsay

¹⁷⁴ Lindsay Duncanson is a sound artist using vocal performance and producing hand-made scores from nature

explained the soft materials that suggested the potential of ‘Janet’ to cradle or buffer. She guessed, she said, that the music box would be kept for some time while ideas for using it gestated. On the day that ‘Janet’ had arrived in her email inbox, she told me that she happened to be searching the internet for a poem she had once known but now forgotten by the Orkney-based poet George Mackay Brown. When she first installed and used ‘Janet’, she had an image of the poem, *Orkney Tapestries*¹⁷⁵ open on her computer screen. Lindsay described starting to type me a letter. She said she had to stop though, because the words, typed in ‘Janet’ seemed to redact themselves, puncturing lines and sentences with dark circles. The font was interfering. The essay that the Mackay poem accompanied was exploring whether the poet used small breaks and dissonant moments of metre and pattern as a way of secretly embedding autobiography within the love poems he stated were written strictly in third person narrative. With the half-finished and abandoned letter and the image of the poem sitting side by side on the screen, Lindsay said that ‘Janet’ began to bear some sort of operational resemblance to the scansion symbols printed under the Mackay poem. Whilst the font obfuscates the structure of the text, they both create potential for interpreting new structures and signal the possible presence of hidden rhythms. Lindsay was struck by the idea of ‘Janet’ as a tool to create fragments of code, a score, or a guide. The music box was actually a ‘new arrival’ present. It also became a suggestion: a way for me to play, or draw out that broken rhythm.

I used ‘Janet’ to write a tentative short poem about my newly adopted son. The poem moved from whimsical lines in my head, through ‘Janet’, on to the page without ever being fully visible.

¹⁷⁵ The image can be found here: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-etudes-anglaises-2012-2-page-235.htm>

●ittle ●ight

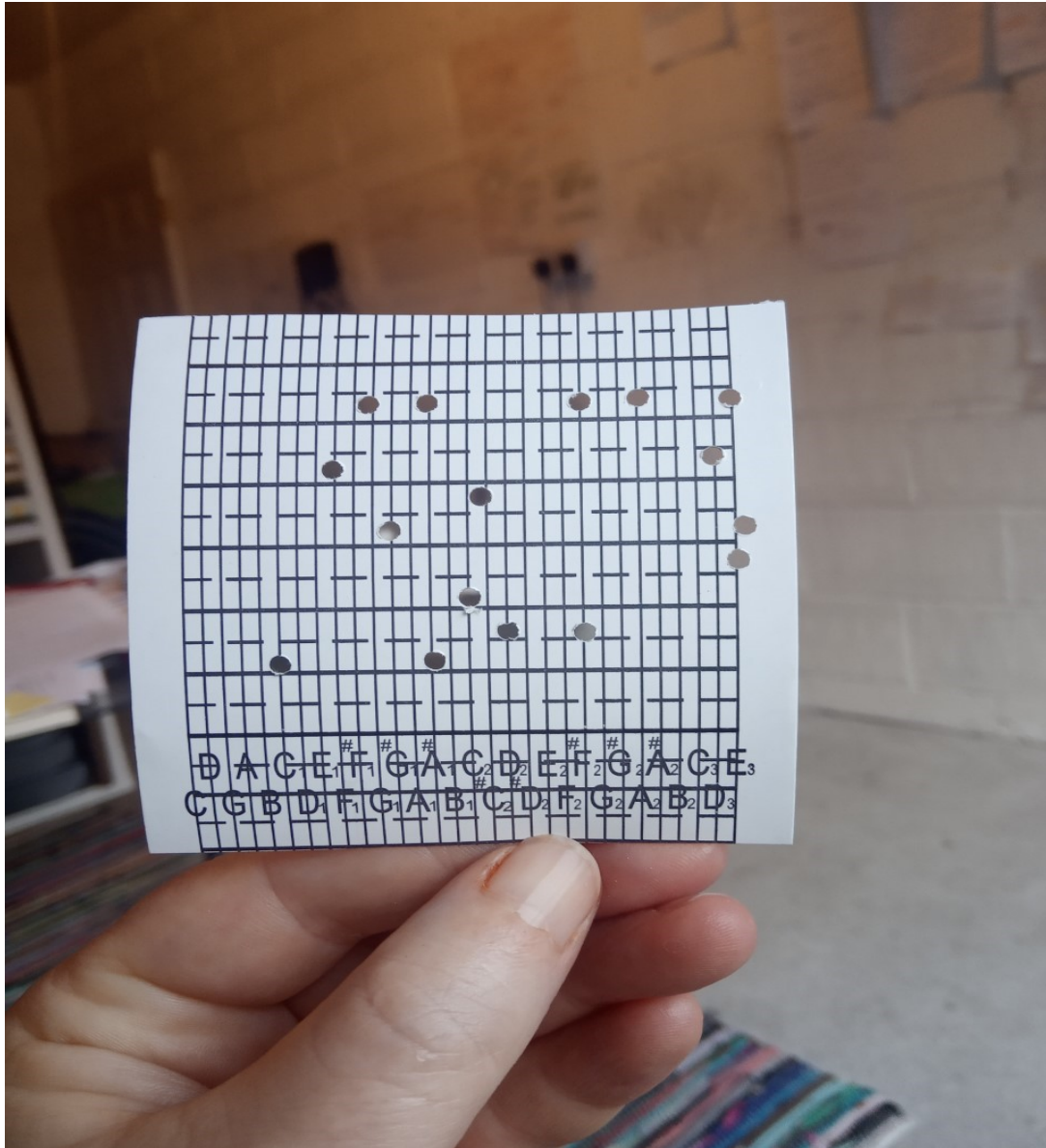
Sometimes my ●a●y●s head
 Smells like old li●raries —
 I have ●bri●ed here ●efore.

Whaling through hair
 I remem●er flicking inde● cards —
 Touching ●buds.

I ru● a tear
 Pushing ●ack the curled yell● frimpe
 ●ith my thum●.

●otes of dust are distur●ed
 Before drifting ●eyond the little light —
 ●oping to settle else●here.

There are 30 lines on the gridded music paper. They line up with the teeth in the music box. Each tooth is tuned to a musical note. I hole-punched my poem, ●ittle ●ight, into gridded music box paper and fed it through the teeth of the music box. 'Janet' resonated around a solid metal frame, a surrogate for a soft fleshy mouth' carrying and cyphering the sentiments and feelings I had experienced during the adoption process. A poem was coding itself with its own mode of production.



(Kate Sweeney (2019). Photograph '●*ittle* ●*ight*' punched into gridded music paper')

I produced the video piece, ●*ittle* ●*ight*, using the music box and my poem as a way of sounding out those feelings. The contents of the video pieces, *Blank* and ●*ittle* ●*ight* are personal, but both were borne out of conversations about the archive and so they allude to the archive, using archival metaphors in their content; the 'mirror' in Linda's poem, and the 'library' in mine. They are also both borne out of the archive. They contain, and are made by, traces of the original post-it note author's hand, and they can both be interpreted as being responses to traces of the administrator. In this way the conversational aspect of the

methodology, ‘Animistration’, guides the production process and so becomes a part of the meaning of the work – a thread in the skein.

A link to the video piece, ●iffle ●rphf:
<https://vimeo.com/432875318>

Section 4: Instructions for a Butterfly

At the very end of 2019, and at the same time as receiving and playing with the music box, I began having conversations with poet and colleague, Pete Hebden about the potential intersections between 'Janet' and his current PhD research. Pete and I had both worked together on the Poetics of the Archive project, involved in building the Bloodaxe Books online archive interface. His research centres on the ways contemporary online and digital technologies both develop and disrupt the production and consumption of a poem. We talked about how formats such as online video platforms are a conduit for experiencing poetry online. We talked about what effect that, as Pete put it, ‘hearing more, seeing more’ has upon a reader’s relationship to the poem. We talked about the impact digital technologies have upon the traditionally separate experiences of hearing a poet read their work in a live setting, and reading their work from a book.

I asked Pete if he would like to do something with ‘Janet’ and we talked about ways of using digital technology to speak into silences. We talked about the glyghs in ‘Janet’, that they contain traces of a moving hand We discussed how the spaces, the gaps and the black holes seemed to purposefully interfere with the process of meaning making. We talked of Deleuze’s concept of the spaces between undulating waves and dunes being what gives them their form, the constant movement that creates, flattens and re-creates them:

Space is two oppositional forces, the smoothing space and the striating space. They mix translate and traverse on another.

We talked about some of the ways myself and the artists and writers I have collaborated with have created work shaped by the spaces contained within ‘Janet’. I explained my idea that by ‘speaking through’ the font they have written, unwritten and re-written ‘Janet’s archival origins.

Pete and I occasionally met at a café on campus at the university. Our conversations would meander and often Pete would fidget, making little origami birds and animals. After an hour and a half when our coffee cups were drained, there would often be a small zoo of folded and fragmented notes. They often revealed one or two words that would act as reminders of our meet ups and Pete began collecting them.



Pete Hebden, *Origami Poems*, Digital Photograph, 2019

In November 2019 I began a period of parental leave and so our conversation shifted to emails. This continued during the lockdown brought about because of the global Covid19 pandemic. I have presented these emails unedited as they capture the ways the affective qualities of conversation are present in the digital, textual form. They document and reveal the

critical, creative and personal textures of our conversation, and how it shaped our unfolding collaboration.

13.11.19

Dear Pete
Hope all's well!!

Finally getting around to sending you the 'Janet' font... It's quite easy to upload into your fonts on the computer once you open the .ttf file

It would be great if you could write something with the font. Then we can see what to do with your text / the font / the music box / your coding research etc. from there. There is no need to definitively write it for the music box – I can work and respond to whatever you do!

02.12.19

Hi Kate,
How's things going at your end? How's L and P?

I'm still playing around with ideas for the Janet work, but I'm having a lot of fun with it! I used an online tool to create a set of word-lists of things that can/can't be said with (by?) Janet, which I thought might be useful in writing. It hasn't been, really, but it did get me thinking a bit more about the connections between the typeface and voice/expression/presence, which is good! Anyways, I'll try to get something real to send you soon. Let me know if you want to grab a coffee or anything soon.

03.12.19

Pete! this sounds great. I would love to get a coffee and talk about your thoughts - words that can't be said is really interesting - blanks - mirrors the piece I made with Linda France. Here's a link

L is doing really well - he is a funny and smiley baby and we having a really nice time (esp when we got him to sleep 'til 7am as opposed to 4.30 as it was in the beginning!)

Great to hear from you, Pete, this really is exciting! Xxxx

Ps have you seen this site? I like this piece using a poem by Judy Kendall at Sheffield Hallam, working with Steven Earnshaw...

<https://extra.shu.ac.uk/proof/>

26.01.20

Hi Kate,

I got a chance yesterday to gather up some of the bits of writing and notes that I'd been making around the Janet project and so I just wanted to get in touch. I've tried writing a couple of poem-type things, which I'll try to explain a bit here. Let me know what you think!

So, I've been doing some experimenting with materiality in reading - partly by going in a very non-digital direction - for a while now in some of the work that is connected to the PhD. Exploring what it means to encounter poetry digitally sort of pushed me into thinking about the ways we handle material objects, especially paper.

Part of this has involved some more origami, which I've been using to explore that idea of fidgeting, time-wasting, absent-mindedness. Over the past year I have started writing some concrete poems that are designed to be folded into shapes. The idea being that they are partly read while folding but become sculptural objects when complete.

Anyways, the reason this occurs to me as relevant: you know what's always been great material for a bit of casual time-wasting origami? A post-it note! Except for the sticky strip at the top, but you just stick that on your jumper a couple of times and it's pretty much gone anyway. Otherwise its small thin paper and its already square, which 99% of origami needs.

So, that gets me thinking, I really like this idea of Janet's silence as a decision, an agency, an active choice to be non-present (if I'm not completely butchering this concept), and I thought that this mis-use of office supplies (origami) had a tangentially related sense of slight resistance to it - another way of showing a spectral trace of a human presence/agency in an otherwise efficiency focussed machine (the office space, the archival process).

Maybe I'm getting a bit carried away here.

Anyway, I'm thinking that some 'Janet' - penned poems might work very nicely on some origami patterns.

My process so far with these origami poems has been to write on the paper while folding, then transfer this to a word or in-design doc in type (a right faff) and then print out. What I might try doing here though is using the Janet font to write the poems, which would then lead to holes in the final origami model, which could lead to some interesting effects, I think.

So that's one thing.

I thought it might work as a digital piece that displays a poem and slowly switches out lowercase for capital letters (which in practice, as a consequence of the sparse number of capital letters Janet font, means mainly switching out letters for dots) creating a poem that shifts around how much and which parts are readable at any one time. The fading out and switching of the letters becoming a digital stand in for hand folding the

paper. There's still a lot of work to do on this. I'd like the timings and the pace of the fading and reveals to possibly move in a kind of wave, but that might be a bit much.

Hope all is well with you! How is everyone at home? Let me know if you want to have a chat about any of this or just catch-up in general. I realised that I haven't said anything about all the stuff you sent me, but I found it all really interesting and it would be great to talk properly about it soon

Happy New Year!

Pete

05.02.20

Pete

I haven't even opened the site yet... sorry for such a short reply. We have had a bout of weird sickness in the house! But am up and at 'em again. I am printing it all out so I can read when L is asleep xxx

11.02.20

Pete

I am working slowly through your email and ideas and am having some big but un-formed thoughts... I LOVE the animation and the movement of the glyphs. There is something of the 'office' about it - the pace and the plod.

The precision of origami feels as though it is crying out for interruption - 'Janet's' could subvert such a linear process. I wonder if somehow instructions to making the origami and the digital piece and its poem could intertwine and be the location for this 'unfolding' (Foucault hahaha). Or am I misinterpreting?

I think the whole idea of disruption and challenge to the reader makes the space quite important to the whole concept and then may affect the content?

11.02.20

Hi Kate,

Thanks so much - it's great to hear that you liked the digital piece and that it seems like my stuff is giving you something to respond to.

I should say that the video '*Blank*' was a big part of what led me to make the digital poem. I really enjoyed the way that the reading of the blank dots out loud as 'oh' really disrupts the listening of the poem to begin with, but then the longer you're watching/listening, the more you begin to adapt to it.

I was trying to use the font to produce a similar effect on a reading interface, where initially the dots baffle/frustrate the reader, but the longer you're reading it the more used to the shifting and moving you get.

The timing/movement of it was supposed to be quite clunky and machine-y (those music box cards really reminded me of old-fashioned computer/time-clock punch cards), which I wasn't too sure about, but I'm glad that something of that effect came through!

It sounds like what you're thinking really fits with what I was also thinking about how the origami stuff and Janet might speak to one another.

With all my previous origami poems, I've been attempting to make something that functions both as a (kinetic/interactive) poem as it is being folded and as a (concrete) poem when it is built. Like you were saying, I think that Janet could be really good for interrupting/troubling this process and I *love* the idea of extending this to the instructions themselves!

Interweaving the concrete poem / video / digital aspects would be amazing and I think has the potential to reveal some really surprising overlaps between each one. I think this is going to be great!

24.2.20

Hi Pete

I did definitely get the clunky sense of movement - like a typewriter, and I love the idea of a clocking in machine too. I suppose the interesting thing about those sounds is they are arrhythmic and bodily so the 'hand' of 'Janet' can be heard through them - sometimes late sometimes early, sometimes chirpy, sometimes glum (hahaha does this makes sense?)

The thing I was thinking could be a bit complicated, but if each line of the final interweaved poem you write for the web page is only 30 characters - including spaces - long, it would match the number of notes played by a music box. Lindsay Duncanson, an artist and friend responded to the 'Janet' font by sending me a music box and I used it to make this little video piece 'playing' a short poem I wrote about L... (NB just a sketch...)

<https://vimeo.com/432875318/7341c0b227>

This might seem quite random but it is one of those arbitrary things that could help guide and shape the project...

Would it be possible to put sound into the digital piece? Could we use the music box to 'play' the switching letters??!!

24.02.20

Ooh! Let's try it! Can you send each note as an individual file?

The poem I've been writing for this digital piece should also work for the music box in its lowercase form (I think), as I've been consciously and coincidentally keeping each line under 30 characters anyway. Is that right?

11.03.20

Pete

I have sent you the sound files as a WeTransfer. Attached here are a couple of images of the gridded music paper with the holes punched in that I used to play each note – so you can see they correspond with actual music notation. They are rough cuts. You can hear the squeak of the music box as I turn the handle – quite nice?

21.3.20

Hey Kate,

We've just come back from London. Two weeks early but it seemed sensible, and plus one of the people we were staying with had a serious health condition so they were keen for us to be gone too!
How are you all doing over there? Hope you're all well and not going too stir-crazy!

Looking forward to speaking to you soon :-)

Take care!

Pete x

4.4.20

Dear Pete

His sorry for late reply - I didn't want to say in a text as it seemed a bit flippant but yes we are all totally fine but I do have symptoms and reckon I have it - I have been ill with a really weird heavy cold and I have no sense of taste or smell at all! God, I hope it passes soon.

Hope you and yours are well?

Kate x

Hi Kate,

Hope you're doing OK!

I've updated the online poem to include the sound clips you sent – see what you think :-)

<https://sidestep.me/janet-draft/>

You need to press the play button on the left of the page to make it work – its an internet security thing, but it doesn't need to be there in the final version!

All the best,

Pete

1.5.20

omg I've just had a wee look - it is gorgeous! Gave me goose bumps!! I will have a proper look tomorrow!!

2.5.20

Pete

Oh, this is so great! I love that it's a butterfly; something day-dreamy but also potentially chaotic.

I love that the poems never fully existed with 'Janet'. The sound of 'Janet' shifting totally interrupts the reading of the poem.

Just out of interest, did the poems ever fully exist? I mean did you write them in a regular font and then change the poem?

It's a battle between aesthetics and being a utilitarian tool and between music, or pattern and noise. The origami instructions are also like a 'Foucault's Guide to Collaboration'! I managed to get this before it played itself into illegibility...

unfolds and then turn over. Then,

fold diagonally ● both ● ways

unfolding again each time

no ● collapse. ● mind yourself sprung

● with potential. ● from here you could ● e

part chaos, part precision

2.5.20

Hi Kate

I'm so glad you like it! No! I did try to just write in 'Janet' at first but the actual 'art' (can I say that?!) stopped being about writing a poem, so I moved back and forward between the fonts and the words in different states - very structural.

I think you can still call it a poem, though? I know what you mean about the battle. For me, I feel like its aesthetic qualities increase the more you engage with it – is that 'thing' theory? Ha Because I was writing it for the digital space, it doesn't have a 'voice'. I have written it for a font - for a visual medium. So, the sound on the site is alien – to me it sounds like the web space's inner workings.

2.5.20

Oh yes like as if Heath Robinson imagined what programming sounds like ha. Actually, can you send me a screenshot of the coding? It feels like that is admin - where 'Janet' resides...

4.5.20

Hi Kate, sorry for late reply – here you go!


```
index.html x
Users > peterhebden > Desktop > Kate Janet font > erasure experiment > v2 > index.html > html
1  <html lang="en">
2  <head>
3  <meta charset="utf-8">
4  <style>
5      @font-face {
6          font-family: Janet;
7          src: url(JanetFont-Regular.ttf);
8      }
9
10     body {
11         font-family: Janet;
12         margin-top: 3em;
13         margin-left: 3em;
14         font-size: 15px;
15         letter-spacing: 15px;
16     }
17
18     span {
19         text-transform: lowercase;
20         color: black;
21         transition: all 1s linear;
22     }
23
24     .invis {
25         visibility: hidden !important;
26     }
27
28     .uppercase {
29         text-transform: uppercase;
30     }
31
32     .recolor {
33         color: red;
34     }
35
36     #play-button {
37         width: 10vw;
38         height: 10vw;
39         background-image: url("play.png");
40         background-size: cover;
41         position: absolute;
42         top: 0;
43         right: 0;
44         margin: 5vw;
45         cursor: pointer;
46     }
47
48 </style>
49 </head>
50
```

```

51 <body>
52 <p>This century could be a butterfly.</p>
53 <p>Each flap of its wing takes time,</p>
54 <p>scoops it up and pushes along a little further.</p>
55 <p class="invis">_</p>
56 <p>It lifts from one idle hand to another</p>
57 <p>and on its way pollinates moments </p>
58 <p>with stillness and cool clear unthought. So</p>
59 <p class="invis">_</p>
60 <p>start with the coloured side up.</p>
61 <p>Start with everything smooth and flat </p>
62 <p>before you, before the craft of damage begins.</p>
63 <p class="invis">_</p>
64 <p>Now fold in half, then unfold.</p>
65 <p>Fold in half in every direction there is.</p>
66 <p>Now collapse. Find yourself sprung</p>
67 <p class="invis">_</p>
68 <p>with potential. From here you could be</p>
69 <p>a water bomb, a flower, and of course</p>
70 <p>a butterfly. A whole summer's day is here.</p>
71 <p class="invis">_</p>
72 <p>But we know already where we are going.</p>
73 <p class="invis">_</p>
74 <p>And so point me away like an arrowhead.</p>
75 <p>Fold the upper layer only, taking</p>
76 <p>back the corners to the front point.</p>
77 <p class="invis">_</p>
78 <p>Confused? Hope to see a diamond</p>
79 <p>on the flat side of a pyramid. </p>
80 <p>Now turn things upside down.</p>
81 <p class="invis">_</p>
82 <p>The arrow points at you now. Bend it </p>
83 <p>back on itself. Such sharpness </p>
84 <p>is not why we're here.</p>
85 <p class="invis">_</p>
86 <p>Tuck away that swift, seeking point </p>
87 <p>and when you do, close the loop,</p>
88 <p>make something calm, happy to drift,</p>
89 <p class="invis">_</p>
90 <p>looking only for itself </p>
91 <p>And now I almost have wings</p>
92 <p>One more crease and you are finished</p>
93 <p class="invis">_</p>
94 <p>and I am finished. </p>
95 <p>Another hand-held moment </p>
96 <p>is over.</p>
97
98 <div id="play-button"></div>
99
100 <script src="jquery-3.4.1.js"></script>
101 <script>
102

```

```

103 // individual music box notes – CURRENTLY ONLY 7 TEST FILES
104 var sounds = [
105     new Audio("1.mp3"),
106     new Audio("2.mp3"),
107     new Audio("3.mp3"),
108     new Audio("4.mp3"),
109     new Audio("5.mp3"),
110     new Audio("6.mp3"),
111     new Audio("7.mp3")
112 ];
113
114 // putting each character into a span tag
115 $('p').each(function(){
116     var s = $(this).html();
117     var out = '';
118     for (var z = 0; z < s.length; ++z) {
119         var ch = s.charAt(z);
120         if (ch == '<') {
121             while (ch != '>') {
122                 out += ch;
123                 ch = s.charAt(++z);
124             }
125             out += ch;
126             continue;
127         }
128         out += '<span>' + ch + '</span>';
129     }
130     $(this).html(out);
131 });
132
133 //randomly selecting characters and switching case
134 function case_switch() {
135

```

Pete Hebden, *Code for Instructions for a Butterfly*, 2020, screenshot, artist's private computer

The online digital piece, *Instructions for a Butterfly*,¹⁷⁷ emphasises the loud resounding silence of 'Janet'. The code Pete has written randomly swaps the case of some letters, from lower case to upper case, and vice versa and that generates the visual changes that happen on the screen. Each time a hole appears, a corresponding music box note is played. Pete looked at the ontology of the font before writing the poem. The casing was the thing that struck Pete about 'Janet'. The casing in the original font, especially the number of gaps in the upper case, troubles a traditional relationship between cases and how they are used in writing. Upper case is normally used to start a statement; it formally asserts a writer's intention. In 'Janet',

¹⁷⁷ "Instructions for a Butterfly," Pete Hebden and Kate Sweeney, July 2, 2020, <http://sidestep.me/janet-draft>

sentences are curtailed before they begin. Intention and meaning are interrupted. Pete's algorithm flips lower case letters in random, unpredictable places, like a virus. 'Janet' gets her teeth into, and eats through the text; the normally soft nursery notes of the music box create a dissonant underlining of the interruption. This sound, for me, is the enigmatic signal of the archive.

Challenging any notion that her artworks were abstracted beyond textual and only pictorial, Susan Howe said that 'they are meant to be read'

I believe that every mark on paper is acoustic. So, the sight and sound of a letter or even the piece of one, a crossout, a misspelling etc., has a visual and acoustic effect that is part of meaning.¹⁷⁸

The title of Susan Howe's exhibition of her printed fragments of archive text at The Whitney Biennial, New York in 2014, *The Bibliography is the Medium*¹⁷⁹ continues Marshal McLuhan's postmodern epithet, "The Medium is the Message."¹⁸⁰ Collaboration is a way for me to navigate my own hermetic creations, in effect unsealing them. Through collaboration, 'Janet' has become a bibliography of users (artists, poets, writers). But 'Janet' is also just a ghost-like medium for other's expression. 'Janet' has a hand in shaping those user's work and thus has left (and can continue to leave) a digital textual and acoustic mark – an enigmatic signal - that transgresses the boundaries of the traditional archive.

This is a link for the online digital piece 'Instructions for a Butterfly':
<https://sidestep.me/janet-draft/>

¹⁷⁸ New Directions, "The Bibliography is the Medium," *ndbooks.com* (blog), April 1, 2014, <https://www.ndbooks.com/article/the-bibliography-is-the-medium/#/>

¹⁷⁹ Susan Howe exhibition address: <https://whitney.org/exhibitions/2014-biennial/Susan-Howe>

¹⁸⁰ Marshall McLuhan *Understanding Media*

Postscript

In November 2018, I presented my research as part of the *Insights Public Lecture* series at Newcastle University (I referred to this lecture in the ‘Introduction’). Neil Astley, the editor of Bloodaxe Books attended the lecture. The next day he sent me a short email that was titled, ‘Janet is here.’ Neil informed me that Janet had never actually worked for Bloodaxe Books. She was an outside typesetter who had an office in the basement of Milburn House on Dean Street. Neil also sent a link to a video stored on the online platform, *Vimeo*. It was a documentary made by the Tyne Tees Television Company in 1977 about Bloodaxe Books.¹⁸¹ His email went on to explain that the video gives the impression that she was part of the Bloodaxe office, but she wasn’t.

●*anet* is a short video produced from drawings made from the short appearance that Janet the typesetter makes in the Tyne Tees Television documentary.¹⁸² The drawings were done on the reverse pages of the three printed copies of this thesis, made for the examiners.¹⁸³

This is link for the online video ●*anet*:
<https://vimeo.com/450726556>

¹⁸¹ Bloodaxe Books, *Bloodaxe Books 1978-2018: Forty Years of Poetry with an Edge*, August 12, 2018, <https://vimeo.com/274657669>.

¹⁸² Kate Sweeney, ‘Janet’, August 20, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/450726556>

¹⁸³ The Covid-19 pandemic has meant the thesis was submitted as a digital pdf without the drawings. I hope to exhibit or present a pdf version of the thesis, scanned with the drawings, at a later date.

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