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Marley was dead; to begin with. There is no
register of his burial, and he must have been
buried in so many yards. To say
more, for anything in his hand in
saloon to begin with.

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Welcome to issue twelve of The Blue Notebook

Many thanks to our writers for an inspiring selection of essays for this issue, in order of appearance:

Jane Simon considers the book form’s juncture with photography as a place for looking differently at domestic detail. Her essay explores the effects of Anna Fox’s use of the [very] small book form upon the viewer’s mode of looking at the domestic. Fox’s book works My Mother’s Cupboards and My Father’s Words (2000) and Cockroach Diary (2000) concentrate upon domestic habitats and the people and objects that move through them.

Ampersand Duck in Canberra, Australia provides a showcase of letterpress printing activity in her local geographic area, in relation to the wider national and international transformation of letterpress printing from a bibliographic by-product of commercial output to an art and design genre that is gaining a new following and a new audience.

Adam Murray on ‘Preston is my Paris’, co-founded by Murray and Robert Parkinson in June 2009. The project originally began as a photocopied zine specifically focussing on the city of Preston in the UK, but has since developed into a multi-faceted photographic archive consisting of 40 self-published works that address themes relating to everyday life and social consciousness. In contrast to other photographic investigations of everyday life which often result in gallery exhibitions or lavishly produced books, Murray and Parkinson intentionally appropriate vernacular methods of production and print materials such as photocopying and newsprint with the aim to produce an archive that deliberately intends to engage with an audience beyond the conventional art world. Murray discusses this body of work and the role that the tactic of self-publishing has in a contemporary photographic context.

Tim Mosely seeks to contribute to the emerging critical discourse on artists’ books by locating the “haptic” within the making and reading of books by artists. In his article Reading by Hand: the Haptic evaluation of artists’ books, Gary Frost writes about “touch as a mode of communication” and identifies the haptic as new aspect of the discourse. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their seminal text A Thousand Plateaus bind the haptic to “smooth space” within creative practices. Their theoretical framework and critical terminology of the haptic warrants an application to artist’s book practices.

A Williams proposes an argument for Artists’ Publishing as a theoretical vehicle to move toward a terminology/taxonomy reconciling artists’ books practices with new media developments and shifting attitudes to the ‘Book’ in the digital age.

Many thanks to the artists who accepted Tom Sowden’s invitation to produce artwork for this issue:

Alexandra Czinczel, Jon Dunning, Cath Fairgrieve, Nicolas Frespech and Christa Harris. And thanks to Tom Sowden for this issue’s ‘laser cut‘ cover design.

Thank you to our referees, Dr Anne Béchard-Léauté (France) Maria Fusco (UK) Susan Johanknecht (UK), Jeff Rathermel (USA), Dr Paulo Silveira (Brazil) and Ulrike Stoltz (Germany) for their continual duties.

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We welcome your ideas for articles for future issues - submission guidelines can be found on our website at: www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/bnotebk.htm

The address for the online colour version of this issue is: www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/blue_notebook/0207/0331/9959/TBN12.pdf

And finally, many thanks to you, all our readers and contributors for your ongoing support for The Blue Notebook through sending ideas for essays, articles, reviews and artworks, and of course subscribing.

Sarah Bodman
Fig. 1, Cover: *My Mother’s Cupboards and My Father’s Words*
© Anna Fox, courtesy James Hyman Gallery, London and Tasveer Arts, Bangalore.
The actual book measures 7.5 x 10 cm

Top left to right: Figures 2 and 3, Bottom left to right: Figures 4 and 5.
Four page spreads from: Anna Fox *My Mother’s Cupboards and My Father’s Words* 2000 © Anna Fox,
courtesy James Hyman Gallery, London and Tasveer Arts, Bangalore. The actual book measures 7.5 x 10 cm
Domestic details in the photographic artist’s book

Jane Simon

This article considers the juncture of the book form with photography as a place for looking closely at domestic detail. Anna Fox’s book works My Mother’s Cupboards and My Father’s Words (2000) and Cockroach Diary (2000) concentrate upon domestic habitats and the people and objects that move through them. Fox’s concern with documenting her own family’s lived-in spaces and domestic rituals in My Mother’s Cupboards and My Father’s Words and Cockroach Diary is accompanied by an attention to the works’ scale and to how a photographic project designed as a book asks us to look differently at objects, practices and behaviours in the domestic realm. These two small books train our gaze on the overlooked and provide an opportunity to consider the relationship between domestic interiority, autobiography and detail in photography.

Fox’s photographic practice places her amongst documentary photographers who focus on their own or familiar everyday spaces, habits and relationships rather than documenting the world of others from the perspective of an outsider. Val Williams aptly describes Fox’s photography as being attuned to ‘ordinary secrets’ (2007, 11), the commonly experienced, but often undocumented or unspoken about elements of daily life. Fox directs our attention to those elements of domestic life – the dust and the cockroaches – that remain invisible in more celebratory or romantic discussions or images of domestic interiority. Her work can be placed amongst the history of women artists, filmmakers and writers who have been concerned with what is at stake in the domestic realm and who have shifted focus from the public spaces of the street to the interior space of the kitchen, the home office, the staircase, the neglected corners of everyday lived-in space. Fox has documented, for example, the house she lived in with family and friends in 41 Hewitt Road (1996-1999) and her households’ activities and objects – cooking, baking, the ‘presents’ left by her hunting cat – in the narrative sequences that make up Notes from Home (2000-2003).

Many of the themes in those works tap into the rich vein of domestic detail that I focus on here, however this article focuses on two works which intentionally use the intimate space of the small scale book to explore domestic life: My Mother’s Cupboards and My Father’s Words and Cockroach Diary.

Contemporary photographic art has a tendency towards the large and the epic (Batchen, 2003; Davey, 2008; Simon, 2010). When Geoffrey Batchen laments the disappearance of photographic intimacy between a photograph and a viewer – a disappearance enabled by the popularity of the large scale print – he makes the important point that ‘modern gallery spaces long ago abandoned the domestic interior as their model and have adopted instead the scale and antiseptic aesthetic of the showroom or the warehouse’ (2002, 250). The gallery as showroom with massive photographic prints is ridiculed by Moyra Davey who views it as ‘the art world at its most absurd: Mount Rushmore-scale pieties, dwarfed only by the deafening ka-ching of the cash register’ (2008, 114). The influence of galleries is one factor that impacts the scale of imagery (Wells, 2004, 291). The need for photographic art to be noticed amidst the epic scale of works displayed in large international art festivals is another reason for the tendency for photographic art to be large. And of course changes in photographic printing technologies, which have made printing larger sizes easier, have facilitated the shift towards large scale photographic artworks (Moschovi, 2008, 146).

While photographs are reproducible to various sizes, ‘in actuality they usually come to us with quite particular dimensions, for quite particular reasons (technical, commercial, aesthetic)’ (Batchen 2002, 253).1 ‘Too often, it seems, the particular dimensions have to do with commercial imperatives, although of course specific works and artists do employ large-scale prints thoughtfully. Davey, for example, highlights Hannah Wilke’s Intra-Venus series with its enormous photographs of the effects of cancer treatment on Wilke’s own body as ‘one of the rare instances where large-scale photography seems to be justified’ (2008, 95). Imre Szeman & Maria Whiteman make a case that Edward Burtynsky’s and Andreas Gursky’s ‘big pictures are attempts to map the big picture’, by using massive scale to force viewers to confront the immense effect of globalisation (2009, 554). And Michael Fried – in relation to the work of Jeff Wall and others – is insistent that the emergence of tableausized photographs is linked to aspirations to draw on the ‘beholder-addressing significance of paintings’ (2007, 495).

While the above examples speak to the desire to claim a viewer’s attention through large-scale photographs in galleries, a different mode of attention is asked for by artists who are drawn towards what Sarah Bodman describes as the ‘quiet democracy’ of the artists’ book (2008). Photography and the book form have a long history and there is mounting interest in photobooks as art objects (Miles, 2010, 52). Photobooks, like large scale photographs, are of course not immune to the commerce of the art world. However their scale may be less driven by the concerns of the gallery showroom – indeed, the book form often sits oddly with the hands-off approach of contemporary art galleries.
Fig. 6, Anna Fox, Book and Card Sleeve: *Cockroach Diary* 2000 © Anna Fox, courtesy James Hyman Gallery, London and Tasveer Arts, Bangalore. 15 x 10.5 cm.

Fig. 7, Anna Fox, Cover: *Cockroach Diary* © Anna Fox, courtesy James Hyman Gallery, London and Tasveer Arts, Bangalore. 15 x 10.5 cm.
Not all photobooks can be classified as artists’ books. Some photobooks follow a predictable model of the commercial monograph with the aim of a highly polished book. For a photobook to be described as an artists’ book it needs to be more than a direct translation of photographs on white walls to photographs on white pages. An artists’ book that uses photographs engages with the form of the book to explore how the photograph is received: to promote active consideration, to enable a tactile experience or to invite an intimacy in looking at a photograph. As Drucker describes:

At their best, artists’ books participate in a significant investigation of the book as a tactile, material presentation of text and/or image in a format that challenges received conventions. Not every work has to be radical, or even innovative, but by disrupting the patterns by which lived experience is encoded into meaning through and as representation, artists’ books have the advantage of complexity, density, and intimacy as a communicative form (my italics, 1994, 41).

The use of the book form as a means for a more intimate, hands-on experience of photography outside of the museum or art gallery is evident in the two works by Fox under consideration here. For Fox the book form is not an incidental format, but a structuring form for exploring the concepts within it. Both My Mother’s Cupboards and My Father’s Words and Cockroach Diary are designed using inexpensive printing, and use simple stapling as the binding: these are books to be handled and not treated as precious objects. My Mother’s Cupboards and Cockroach Diary ask for slow looking and careful peering and provide a means to consider the role of scale and the book form. That both books focus on domestic details invites us to consider the intimacy and materiality of the domestic experience.

My Mother’s Cupboards and My Father’s Words (Fig. 1) takes us into the world of Fox’s parents’ domestic space. The tiny book measures 7.5 x 10 cm and fits into the palm of the reader’s hand. The pink cardboard cover, cursive text, and opening photograph of a cupboard scene of delicate pink and white crockery prepare the viewer for a nostalgic gaze at Fox’s parents’ things and words. However this ‘short story in words and pictures’, as the subtitle declares on the book’s title page, is not at all pink and pretty as the cover and opening photograph implies.

The book combines small colour photographs of Fox’s mother’s tidy cupboards together with excerpts from her father’s comments about, or directed to, Fox’s mother, grandmother or herself (Fig. 2). My Mother’s Cupboards is an example of what Bachelard meant when he wrote in The Poetics of Space that ‘the miniscule opens up an entire world’ (1994, 155). The scale of the book and the small photographs mean you feel drawn inside the space of the miniature. The ‘entire world’ – to use Bachelard’s phrase – that gets opened up in My Mother’s Cupboards is one of family relationships, the detail of the household cupboards and the meanness of Fox’s father’s comments. Every photograph of the cupboard’s contents is interspersed with a quote from Fox’s father, which were recorded by Fox while her father was ill.\footnote{A picture of a neat pile of plates, and floral crockery is preceded by the minute cursive text ‘I’m going to tear your mother to shreds with an oyster knife’ (Fig. 3). And the quote ‘I’ll cut your bum off and serve it in slices, like raw ham’ is followed by a photograph of a cupboard containing a neat pile of rolls of paper (Fig. 4). Reading the acerbic tone of the tiny text and turning the small pages to find neat cupboards full of domestic objects – cleaning materials, kitchen objects, a child’s highchair, folded sheets – jolts the viewer from the awkward space of conflict to the familiar space of domestic things contained in cupboards.}

While My Mother’s Cupboards is in some ways a cutting work, it falls into the tradition of artists’ books which use humour and surprise as a structuring feature (Farman, 2007). Using tiny cursive ‘pretty’ font to print words such as ‘She’s bloody rattling again. Can you stop your bloody fucking rattling’, which are in turn juxtaposed against a tidy cupboard of whistle clean wine glasses (Fig. 5), is perhaps a tongue-in-cheek laugh at the façade of domestic order that can paper over the messy, the chaotic and the nasty sides of family life in domestic spaces. Fox’s gaze at her mother’s cupboards avoids the common nostalgic perspective that pervades most contemporary approaches to material objects or things (Frow, 2001, 270). If there is a nostalgic gaze captured in the photographs of domestic objects in My Mother’s Cupboards it is not a nostalgia that is an uncritical celebration of the domestic or the past. The objects are not offered up as evidence, or reassurance, of belonging, or a search for familial proof of how history has produced the present. These photographs don’t present the domestic objects as saturated with personal memory (indeed some of the cupboards contain collections of cleaning products which hardly carry nostalgic weight), but rather as evidence of a particular relationship to domestic objects and to housework. As much as the photographs ask us to look at the objects they invite us to scrutinise their neatness and order, alongside the sharp comments of Fox’s father’s words.

The urge to display the underside of domesticity carries through to Cockroach Diary. The book is composed of two separate sections – a double book of text and colour photographs collected between 1996 and 1999 – enclosed in a green slip cover (Fig. 6). The book measures 15 x 10.5 cm, making it larger than My Mother’s Cupboards, but still smaller in scale than most books.
Fig. 8, Anna Fox *Untitled from Cockroach Diary* 2000 © Anna Fox, courtesy James Hyman Gallery, London and Tasveer Arts, Bangalore. 15 x 10.5 cm.

Fig. 9, Anna Fox *Untitled from Cockroach Diary* 2000 © Anna Fox, courtesy James Hyman Gallery, London and Tasveer Arts, Bangalore. 15 x 10.5 cm.
Like *My Mother's Cupboards*, *Cockroach Diary* is a personal work in the sense that it documents Fox's own everyday. Both of these works, while based on Fox's own experiences, avoid the ‘sappily confessional’ tone that Drucker bemoans as so common in the genre of artists’ books that rely on the personal (1994, 24).

Like *My Mother's Cupboards*, the text in *Cockroach Diary* is based on the accumulated jottings of Fox. This time however, the text is handwritten and is a facsimile copy of a notebook containing a series of diary entries that tells a narrative of cockroaches invading Fox's share house in London. The cover of this section of the book is a direct reproduction of the ‘diary’ complete with 99p sticker and store barcode on the cover (Fig. 7). The other section contains photographs which provide photographic evidence of the little pests and often their deaths, squashed into tissues (Fig. 8).

Unlike the organised cleanliness of the photographs in *My Mother's Cupboards*, the images in *Cockroach Diary* show floors, benchtops and cookers that have stains, dirt and crumbs and which feature tiny cockroaches alive, stomped on or squished in small scenes of death. This is ‘not an easy or comforting picture of “home”’ (Williams, 2007, 219). The photographs are printed full page, and the eye has to search out the cockroaches which remain minute on the page. In one image the creature is a tiny brown speck amidst a pink landscape of domestic surface of some kind (Fig. 9). The use of flash photography means the cockroach appears as though frozen: caught at a crime scene by the authorities’ sudden flashlights. In another photograph a cockroach appears caught mid step on blue and red tiles, with the toe of a shoe poking just into frame ready to crunch the pest. In the next photograph it appears to have been juicily squished, the shoe no longer in frame.

The handwritten diary entries are equally evocative of mess and the drama that the little creatures cause in the household (Fig. 11). One entry, for example, reads:

> loads of roaches around cooker on top. Oven on, they seem to come out when it gets too hot for them – get Gareth to kill them with a knife.

I am absolutely frantic & threatening to leave home if somebody doesn’t do something about them. Gareth says don’t do that. Kitt says I’m too dramatic and he likes the roaches anyway.

The narrative which focuses, at one level, on the specific details of the cockroach invasion, spirals outwards to document the relationships between members of the household and their connection to the house itself. What is acute in *Cockroach Diary* is the sense of how detail (and attention to the detail) can shift our focal relationship with a text.

According to Rebecca Hogan – who writes about the relationship between gender, detail and the genre of the diary - ‘[t]he diary is par excellence the genre of the detail’ (1991, 95). *Cockroach Diary* evidences this claim as it focuses in on the minutiae of an argument with a housemate, an encounter with a cockroach or a phone call with the local council. The description of events recorded on August 31, 1997 in *Cockroach Diary* demonstrates the ability of the detail to bring the periphery into focus:

> Jo’s birthday.
> Diana’s dead.

Cockroach large in the kitchen in tumble dryer – largest I’ve seen here 1.5cm at least – I desperately want Kitt to spray it with Secto he desperately doesn’t as Secto is so poisonous children won’t leave kitchen . . . I’m screaming spray it Kitt’s shouting no it’s on the chair – I’m photographing – I ask him to pass spray I could do it now – kill it – but he won’t pass it – he wants me to calm down 1st – I tell him he’s making me worse he says I’m frightening the children, I’ve made him panic too then he sprays it – not dead, so he stamps on it . . .

The shifting from a friend’s birthday, to the death of Princess Diana, to the in-depth description of the fight about, and killing of, the cockroach, takes us from the realm of the public event (the death of Diana) to the private close-up world of a fight in a kitchen. This oscillation from the public to the private, from events in the exterior world to the domestic interior, shows how Fox uses detail and description – within the pages of a small book – to shift our viewpoint from the macro to the micro.

Given Fox’s emphasis on capturing slow accretions of daily experiences, David Chandler suggests she ‘might now more usefully be called a diarist than a photographer’ (2007, 16). While I am sympathetic to this description, there needs to be a closer interrogation of the relationship between gender and genre in this distinction between being a diarist and being a photographer given that the genre of the diary has a history of being denigrated as a feminine mode of life writing (Hogan, 1991, 96). Williams makes a similar, but more careful, claim when she says that for Fox ‘documentary photography may also be a kind of autobiography, an intense peering into her own life as reflected through photography’s idiosyncratic mirror’ (Williams, 2007, 12).³ For the works under consideration in this article the term ‘autographics’ (Poletti, 2008) might be useful as a way of capturing the importance of written narrative in Fox’s work – in the form of jotted diary entries, or collected mutterings of a family.
Fig. 10, Anna Fox *Untitled from Cockroach Diary* 2000 © Anna Fox, courtesy James Hyman Gallery, London and Tasveer Arts, Bangalore. 15 x 10.5 cm.

Fig. 11, Anna Fox *Untitled from Cockroach Diary* 2000 © Anna Fox, courtesy James Hyman Gallery, London and Tasveer Arts, Bangalore. 15 x 10.5 cm.
member – alongside the photographic, and as part of a constructed book whose scale, layout and text/image relationship is crucial to the text’s overall meaning. The use of the miniature and the small with its implications of preciousness and delicacy makes the representation of ambivalence towards the routines, tensions and habits of domestic life within My Mother’s Cupboards and Cockroach Diary more potent.

It is clear that when Fox does use photography and text to focus on her own life, the narrative that unfolds is based on an accumulation of seemingly trivial domestic details and an insistence on the inseparability of autobiography, domestic space and photography. One way of understanding Fox’s focus on specific domestic objects and spaces in My Mother’s Cupboards and Cockroach Diary is through Kathy Mezei’s discussion of the links between life narrative, domesticity and photography. She writes:

Interior domestic spaces (furniture, rooms, doors, windows, stairs, drawers – familiar, everyday objects) which have and could be perceived as banal and ordinary, and hence insignificant, are vital to the shaping of our memories, our imagination, and our ‘selves’ (Mezei, 2005, 82).

This idea that the detail of a piece of furniture, a window, or the contents of a cupboard can spin outwards a range of narratives about oneself, is precisely what Moyra Davey is talking about when she talks of the possibility that we might ‘infer the complexity of a life from a handful of very selective and superficial details’ (2008, 14). In the case of My Mother’s Cupboards and my Father’s Words, Fox offers up photographs of cupboard interiors alongside her father’s comments with no broader context: there is no portrait of Fox’s mother and father, no representation of a whole house or even an entire domestic room. These selective details – cranky statements and cupboard interiors – play with the idea that a compelling and intricate narrative can be inferred from a small careful collection of details. This has a very different effect than, for example, a series of photos of Fox’s parents which would appear to lay out more information and provide a more rigid narrative for the viewer.

My Mother’s Cupboards and Cockroach Diary direct us to focus on domestic details. These books play with the ability of the detail to take us elsewhere – to open up a world from the miniscule and to show us how close scrutiny can refigure our focal relationship to a text and lead us to attend to peripheries and margins. Fox’s books offer a gaze that gets snagged on details which might open onto other destinations, spaces or thoughts. If Fox’s books of photographs and text invites imagined narratives, they ask for narratives of nothing big or grand, and the book form provides the photographic intimacy that is so often lost in the gallery.

Jane Simon researches and teaches across media studies, visual cultural studies and photography at Macquarie University in Australia. Jane also practices photography and makes artist’s books. Her work has been published in Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies, Emotion Space & Society and Cultural Studies Review. She is currently researching representations of domestic interiors in contemporary photographic art.

This essay was presented as a paper at the symposium Photography and the Artist’s Book, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections, Friday October 21st 2011

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Notes

1. Batchen gives the example of Cindy Sherman’s Untitled Film Stills which were first exhibited at 10 x 8 inches, the size of a film still. While Sherman’s later work has increasingly catered to the art market’s desire for large scale photographs, reprints of the earlier Untitled Film Stills have been subsequently produced four times larger than the original series (Batchen 2003, 251-252). This results in a loss of their reference to the smaller format of the film still.

2. The pairing of a quotation with a photograph evokes Susan Sontag’s claim that ‘A photograph could also be described as a quotation, making a book of photographs like a book of quotations’ (Sontag in Davey, 89).

3. This is an example of why Williams describes Fox’s work as having ‘innate comedy’ as well as being ‘intensely melancholy’ (2007, 12).

4. Davey’s own photographic practice is compelled by domestic detail – she photographs dust, her desk covered in papers and mugs, her fridge, her bookshelves, her record collection – and she writes about the relationship between photography, reading, books and domestic life in her essay ‘Notes on Photography and Accident’ in her book Long Life, Cool White: Photographs and Essays.
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The Humours of the Artists’ Book. Farman, N. (2007), unpublished PhD, University of Western Sydney


The quiet democracy of the contemporary artists book (or, why do artists make books?) Bodman, S. (2008), in Books that Fly, July 5th 2008, University of Brighton, Faculty of Arts and Architecture.

An Imagined Collaboration between Felicity Bright and Simon Carson.

It seems unlikely that I would take this opportunity to write about a collaboration that was, in my eyes, unsuccessful, but here it is. The artwork here is a marriage of styles which I believe works on paper but not in reality. Each artist succeeds here in diluting the force of their own contribution rather than heightening it. Bright has written a sentimental account of aging as loss, inspired, so I am told, by J. K. Rowling’s description of the dead body of a historian. Her earlier works in this vein rely on a horror so vivid as to render the descriptions almost callous in their unsentimentality. Carson has removed a fair amount of power from his degeneration series by placing the pieces on one page, where the individual differences may be scrutinised, a step away from railing on the book to make the stealthy descent overwhelming in time as well as subtilty. The overall effect of the collaboration is of an individual lack of confidence in a single idea, resulting in an overworking of the obvious, taking the power of creative interpretation out of the hands of the viewer. SR
Figure 1: The front page of the *Sydney Gazette*, before and after the arrival of fresh supplies of type by the *Coromandel* in May 1804. Image: *Wayzgoose: The Australian Journal of Book Arts* (Sydney: Wayzgoose Press, 1985), No. 1, p. 12.

Figure 2: Map of Canberra region, listing press activity. Image: Ampersand Duck.
The Survival Of Letterpress In Australia

Ampersand Duck

According to Roger Butler, Head of Prints at the National Gallery of Australia, in his book *Printed: Images in Colonial Australia*:

When the First Fleet arrived at Port Jackson, NSW, in January 1788 a printing press was included in the essential cargo needed to support the colony to be established there. In the late 1790s printing commenced…³

Letterpress equipment has apparently been present in Australia exactly as long as white settlement, but the fact that nearly a full decade passed before it was actually used (when printer George Howe arrived as a convict) is symbolic of our nation’s casual approach to print culture. Printing itself soon became an essential part of Australian history and communications, but Australians are pragmatic people and letterpress was discarded as a commercial process as soon as better print technology developed. A private press movement did not arise during its lifetime in the same strong way that it developed in the United Kingdom, the United States and Europe, so scant attention has been paid to the preservation and continued use of the equipment.

Unlike our closest typographical neighbour, New Zealand, Australia does not have a united body of letterpress printers.² Communication between our printers is rudimentary, resulting from chance encounters at exhibitions or conferences. There is no central knowledge base of equipment or output (although this is beginning to be addressed on the internet), and most equipment and spare parts suppliers are based overseas, which places anyone wanting to work with handset letterpress back into the position of a printer from the end of the eighteenth century. (see Figure 1)

This essay showcases the printing activity in my local geographic area, the Canberra region, as an example of the wider national (and international) transformation of letterpress printing from a bibliographic by-product of commercial output to an art and design genre that is gaining a new following and a new audience.

First, allow me to present a hypothetical scenario that spans forward from, say, just after World War II: imagine a geographic region that has a city and a number of small country towns around it. In the city there would be a few commercial printeries that do jobbing work for local businesses, including the output of a nearby publishing house; typically, someone from the editing or commissioning arm of the publishing house decides to try their hand at making something that is more elegant than their everyday product, or hankers to print their own poetry, or maybe the poetry of their friends, and so they start a small private press. They buy a press and some type, often turning to the printery for advice, and print chapbooks and Christmas cards and occasionally a book when they can spare the time to produce it.

The larger country towns in the region have a newspaper press and maybe one jobbing printer, although the newspaper often played both roles.

As time passes, the press equipment in the city becomes commercially unviable because printing technology shifts rapidly from handset text by teams of compositors through various leaps including linotype, phototype, photopolymer plate and, to date, directly digital printing by a mere handful of workers; most of the lead and wood type and presses are scrapped in various ways³ but a few are saved by the press workers and aspiring private presses; some presses remain in use by small jobbing printers for die-cutting and creasing, or the press workers stash them in their garages and maintain them like an old beloved motorbike. One or two are passed to an art school, and in the country towns maybe a whole newspaper print-shop is saved as a museum.

There is another lull of time as the owners of the presses get old; if they are organised and able, the printers sell their equipment on to a new and keen generation, but more often, if the printers die suddenly, or didn’t keep in touch with each other, their families have no idea who to contact and they sell it all for scrap. Consequently, the amount of surviving equipment in the region decreases by the year.

Suddenly, letterpress has a small resurgence in the area: some of the art school students start playing with the old equipment that has been sitting in a corner of the printmaking area, and they print artists’ books. A local graphic designer discovers via the Internet that debossing seems more personal and funky if they use an old press to do it, and they find a platen press to start up a business printing computer-designed ‘letterpress’ wedding invitations and cards; thanks again to the Internet they can sell them locally, nationally and internationally.

Meanwhile the people of the region remain oblivious to letterpress printing, apart from reading a few newspaper articles about the ‘rise of the handmade’ and noticing that there are some nice cards in the local gift shop.

This is of course a complete generalisation, but elements from it are applicable to any regional community in the Western world, and my region is no exception, although in the context of Australian printing history,

1
2
3
THE CONVERT

Three Sonnets

by

KEVIN HART

February

Feb

Sandy dovecote, sheep,
lightnings between its weeds,
all its plains past-bound.

Inside cancelled time
dawns drink their mirroring shields,
hailing the waterfalls.

Days crackled like clay pigeons
squawked from shot and Tweet.
Two cultures: sun and shade.

Days dazed with actuality
like a beetle shot,
snipping frail off twigs,
by afternoon, perspiration
with whole cloud Adelaide
that man fifteen drops.

Figure 3: A detail of a small trifold poetry pamphlet printed by Open Door Press, 1975. Image: Ampersand Duck.

Figure 5: A page detail of *The Idyll Wheel* (Les Murray) with wood engraving by Rosalind Atkins (Canberra: Brindabella Press, 1989). Image by Ampersand Duck.
the Canberra region is remarkable in the quality and range of its output and in terms of influencing a new generation of Australian printers. (see Figure 2)

The area has most of the things I just described, including a printing museum formed wholly around the changing production equipment of the *Queanbeyan Age* newspaper.4 One of their key figures is Jim Wood, who is in his late 80s and worked at the newspaper from his teens. The museum has a small but keen band of volunteers ranging from graphic designers to machine buffs. They don’t produce a lot of printed matter, but they love to make the machines go, and are always happy to spit out a slug of linotype for visitors.

Staying at the purely commercial end of the scale, Canberra still has a small number of letterpress jobbing printers, although they are remarkably hard to find. I keep hearing tales of people making business cards by hand in the suburbs, but they must only work by word of mouth. The one that I have met is of the contemporary breed: Louise Redman, trading as *Poppy Letterpress*, is a graphic designer who bought a Chandler & Price platen press and a photopolymer plate developer to print cards, wedding invitations and sundry gorgeous computer-designed prints, selling more stock out of her region than in it, and much of that overseas.5

Australia’s capital city, Canberra is a purpose-made centre of Australian governance and culture, situated halfway between Sydney and Melbourne. Thanks to the presence of institutions such as the National Library of Australia (NLA) and the Australian National University (ANU), there is a strong population of people who have bibliographic connections.

*Open Door Press*, active in the 1970s, was self-described as “a small press managed by Canberra poets that published hand-set broadside poems”; the founding printers being poet Alan Gould and author/academic David Brooks when they were situated at the ANU. They also used a Price & Chandler platen press that moved from garage to university basement and to garage again as space and university approval waxed and waned. The press is hardly ever mentioned outside of rare book seller catalogues, but their output was consistent, producing a number of interesting small pieces, never too ambitious, by and with poets who have gone on to be highly acclaimed. (see Figure 3)

*Duyfken Press* is one of only two presses from the region listed in Geoffrey Farmer’s comprehensive snapshot of Australian private presses up to 1995, *A Private Pursuit*. It is a classic example of a private press established by someone from publishing or some such book-related profession; in this case, an librarian (now retired) from the National Library of Australia, Bill Thorn. Thorn is a great collector of books about books; he does more bookbinding than printing and his output is mostly Christmas cards these days, but he has been printing them for a very long time.

Alec Bolton was also from the National Library of Australia, but whereas Thorn was a librarian, Bolton was plucked from the publishing industry to be the first Director of Publications at the Library, and eventually took early retirement to concentrate on his presswork. Bolton’s *Brindabella Press* without a doubt produced Australia’s most beautiful traditional fine press volumes (as opposed to *untraditional* fine press volumes). (Figure 4)

Bolton trained in London when he was posted there by Angus & Robertson in the early 1970s, attending night-classes side-by-side with young trade apprentices. He was married to the poet Rosemary Dobson, and together they contributed significantly to the cultural life of the Canberra region when they moved there permanently in the mid-1970s. Bolton worked exclusively with Australian writers and artists such as Les Murray, Christina Stead, Barbara Hanrahan and Rosalind Atkins. He had an elegant and spare touch with page design. He produced over 25 books and various broadsides in his career; he died suddenly in 1996, with many more books planned.6 (see Figure 5)

The Canberra School of Art, now the Australian National University School of Art, has a rich history of

Figure 7: Gary Poulton, *Correspondances*, 1986, letterpress and cut paper. Image: *Artists’ Books and Limited Editions* (Canberra School of Art: GIW, 1992).
letterpress printing and artists’ book production. The first Head of School was German printmaker Udo Sellbach, and he not only set up the school with a Bauhaus structure, but also stacked the teaching staff with artists who were trained in Europe and therefore had quite different approaches to artmaking. This especially applied to Czech artist Petr Herel, who founded the **Graphic Investigation Workshop** at Udo’s urging and spent the next twenty years teaching his students to see image and text as equally important, and to experiment widely with the concept of drawing and book production in an *art d’âne* and artist’s book context.

Herel had his own press, **Labyrinth Press**, in collaboration with the late French typographer Thierry Bouchard. They would work on their books between France and Australia, with most of the text printing undertaken in Paris, only occasionally in Canberra when Bouchard was a visiting artist in the workshop.²¹

The Graphic Investigation Workshop (GIW) produced a fabulous cornucopia of diverse artwork. A tantalising portion of the output is archived in the ANU Rare Books Collection, and I regularly take my students to visit it. Every semester the GIW staff, students and relevant visiting artists would work as a group on a key text, with the end result being a *folio* of prints, a book or maybe a series of installations, frequently involving letterpress production on the large Graphix cylinder press, overseen by typographer Peter Finlay, who, like Jim Wood, had worked with type from his teen years (also on a newspaper) and was rigorous in maintaining teaching traditional methods whilst coping with unusual art-student textual desires.

One such project was **Australia Poet** (see Figure 6), a collection of concrete poetry hand-set & printed by students with visiting artist/poet Richard Tipping. This book/folio was recently described by an Australian rare bookseller in his catalogue thus:

> It stretches our patience to describe this piece of meretrichious, solipsistic, self-indulgent 1980’s [sic] tripe but this is the sort of infantile nonsense still being encouraged in our ‘arts’ institutions and still being paid for by our taxes (which is the real problem). … The participants were the usual suspects and a bunch of nobodies.¹⁰

It is a playful grouping of visual puns and concrete poetry! The GIW output was quite ahead of its time in Australia, and nearly everything in its archive would not look dated in a contemporary book arts exhibition.

Unfortunately the GIW collection is badly documented, and none of it properly digitised. I can only recommend, if you are in Canberra, a visit to the collection. Many people who graduated from the GIW are familiar names in Australian creative circles: Paul Uhlmann, Kirrily Schell, Danie Mellor, Paul McDermott and Jonathon Nix to name a few. GIW graduates tend to retain a philosophical attitude towards the merging of visual art, text and life that shows in their work, whether art-based or not. (see Figure 7)

Les Petersen is another graduate from the GIW; a few years after he finished, he established **Raft Press**, which operated in collaboration with the printmaking access studio, Studio One (now Megalo Arts Access), during the 1990s.¹¹

Raft Press was a prolific burst of activity and true to its GIW heritage. Petersen wanted to use letterpress in a way that pushed its boundaries: he gave himself goals like ‘The Book Project’ of 1991–92, where he invited 29 artists to collaborate with him to make books over a twelvemonth period. Each artist spent two weeks with him, and so every two weeks of that year an artist’s book was printed and made; at the end of the project they were all exhibited together nationally and internationally. They were not conventional books, but sculptural and experimental. Raft Press survived at high energy for 6 years, but Petersen developed health problems from press solvents and had to disband the press in 1996. Unfortunately there are very few images of Raft Press volumes, but the books themselves are still around; this is another project that cries out for digitising and documenting.

The Graphic Investigation Workshop was also disbanded when Herel retired in 1998 and the space merged with Printmaking to form the Printmedia and Drawing Workshop. The letterpress facilities stayed in a separate studio initiated by Herel and run by Dianne Fogwell as the **Edition + Artist Book Studio** (E+ABS). The E+ABS editioned prints and produced artist’s books for professional artists who were not book or print-makers, using graduates and students as technical production assistants. The production standards were world-class, and as an apprentice system it worked extremely well, honing technical and administration skills. Printmedia students also had the chance to use the facilities, which allowed the letterpress equipment to be shared and to keep different modes of textual production available to them. (see Figure 8)

In 2006 Fogwell left the art school and the space reverted fully to the **Printmedia and Drawing Workshop**, where it now exists as the Book Studio, a space focused on teaching book arts and typography to students from throughout the school, and undertaking various typography projects with artists when they arise.
Figure 8: Katharine Campbell, 2000, 2000. Letterpress and intaglio printing. Image from _Love Letter to Gutenberg_ (Germany: Kehrer Verlag Heidelberg, 2000), p. 35.

Figure 9: Detail of page spread and inset of slipcase and cover for _I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise_, Hartman Wallis & Phil Day (Braidwood, NSW: Finlay Press, 2006). Image: Ampersand Duck.
Ingeborg Hansen and Phil Day were graduates of the Graphic Investigation Workshop, and Day was at one point a technical assistant in the Edition + Artist Book Studio. Upon graduating, they moved to Goulburn and then Braidwood, an hour from Canberra, and established the Finlay Press, a private press named after the GIW typography teacher, Peter Finlay.

Without doubt, Finlay Press, using Day’s graphic skills and Hansen’s writing and design flair, produced some of the most exciting untraditional private press work in Australia, second only to the Wayzgoose Press. (see Figure 9) They developed a distinctive house style: small, affordable, stab-bound volumes with hand-made slipcases. They used original, quite irreverent texts and often bawdy images, and collaborated only with Australian writers, predominantly local ones. They also started a more commercial offset-printed arm called Finlay Lloyd Press, publishing quality volumes of essays and a graphic novel by Mandy Ord.

Unfortunately, Day and Hansen dissolved their partnership a few years ago. Phil Day is now in Canada, still producing artists’ books. Ingeborg Hansen has moved into Canberra and is working at Megalo Print Access Studios, combining letterpress with screenprint as poster work.

Many of the presses mentioned here have not co-existed, but developed as the equipment is recycled between them. For example, Les Petersen’s Raft Press equipment was bought by John and Joy Tonkin, Canberra-based fine bookbinders. When Alec Bolton died, his presses stayed in the area (one going to book artist David Hodges), and his type went to Finlay Press. When Finlay Press disbanded, they sold Bolton’s type to me. The equipment at the art school, having survived a number of name changes, will stay in its room as long as the people in charge value it as a resource; the local technical college administration (Canberra Institute of Technology) didn’t value their collection of Heidelberg presses, and they were sent to scrap only a few years ago, despite pleas from interested buyers.

Finally, myself, Ampersand Duck, a graduate of the art school who started studying in the Graphic Investigation Workshop and finished in Printmedia & Drawing; worked under Dianne Fogwell in the Edition + Artist Book Studio and kept working in the Book Studio. I worked with Alec Bolton on an academic book project and spent much time talking about presses and type with him before he died; I keep in touch with Bill Thorn, Peter Finlay, Phil Day and Ingeborg Hansen, and I do occasional work with Petr Herel. (see Figure 10)

I work with letterpress with one eye on its past and one on its future, and am very interested in its transition from an outmoded commercial technique and graphic design fetish to a useful tool in the printmaking palette (see Figure 11 overleaf). I try to print with as many people as I can, and I offer a residency in my studio each year to selected ANU School of Art graduates, because if knowledge and interest isn’t cultivated and encouraged, letterpress won’t survive. The equipment is too fragile yet cumbersome, too dependent on good will to survive without enthusiasm.

In my hypothetical historical scenario, I mentioned the old printers selling their equipment to a new generation. Who are these new people? From my investigations, they are no longer people who worked in publishing or were inspired by visiting printing businesses as a child (this being the motivational story told by most non-trade printers over 50); they tend to be either graphic designers or artists wanting to push their work out of the digital, away from flat, overly slick production and into a more haptic zone. It’s a very different motivation, and will result in a fundamental shift in the way letterpress is used.

Finally in this story, there is a remarkable footnote to the region’s letterpress credentials: Richard Jermyn’s common press in Pambula, on the far south coast of NSW, built by hand using local timbers and local craftsmen, even forging their own metal parts. Built to an American pattern, it is a similar design to the first press that came to Australia on the First Fleet. (see Figure 12 overleaf)

I witnessed its initial printing session in 2009, complete with leather inking pads. Standing in the basic tin

shed amongst scrubby gum trees, I could imagine the strangeness for George Howe, working the ink in a similar building in the strange Australian heat. Jermyn is a letterpress enthusiast, and as someone who doesn’t use email, he’s probably as isolated as Howe was – but he’s comfortable in his solitude, as obviously many printers in Australia are. We are scattered, our history is neglected, but when actually surveyed, the amount achieved is impressive and our combined enthusiasm should help letterpress survive.

Notes


2. NZ has the Association of Handcraft Printers Inc, a small but vibrant group of printers from both islands who correspond regularly and have an annual wayzgoose.

3. A Vandercook press I encountered in Dunedin, NZ, had been saved from being used as a ship’s anchor.


5. Poppy Letterpress: www.poppyletterpress.com.au


11. For a listing on Raft Press, see Sever and Fogwell, *The Print, the Press, the Artist and the Printer…*, pp. 64–6. They also list Studio One (pp. 69–100), and more information can be found online: http://www.museumsandgalleries.act.gov.au/cmag/StudioOne.html

*Ampersand Duck* (Caren Florance) lives and works in Canberra, Australia. She is a printmaker who identifies as a private press with a contemporary twist, using letterpress, printmaking and paper-play to produce a wide variety of work on the book arts spectrum, from fine press volumes and broadsides to book sculpture. Her press name is Ampersand Duck.

Caren teaches book arts and typography on a sessional basis at the Printmedia & Drawing Workshop of the Australian National University School of Art, and has taught many bookmaking workshops for printmaking and community bodies. Her workshops have a strong emphasis on play and exploration.

Caren is a member of Craft ACT, the Bibliographical Society of Australia and NZ, the NZ Association of Hand Printers, the Fine Press Book Association, the New Australian Bookplate Association, the Canberra Craft Bookbinders Guild, and is on the Board of the Print Council of Australia.

This essay has been written up from a presentation: *The Touch of Words: why letterpress lingers in Australia*, given at Impact 7, Multi-disciplinary Printmaking Conference, Monash University, Melbourne Australia, Thursday 29 September 2011.

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Adam Murray & Robert Parkinson *Preston is my Paris*, June 2009
14.9 x 21 cm, photocopy, edition of 50
The Poetic Archive: Photography, Everyday Life and the Tactic of Self-Publishing

Adam Murray

The following essay is based on a paper co-authored by Adam Murray and Diane Smyth presented at the Photography & the Artists' Book seminar held at Manchester Metropolitan University on Friday 21st October 2011

Introduction

In June 2009 Robert Parkinson and I produced a printed publication the contents of which featured: one found 6 x 4 inch colour photograph, one letter bought from Preston Market dated, ‘Paris le 26 Mai 1934’, four Polaroid photographs, the lid of a metal tin digitally scanned, one black and white medium format photograph, one black and white 35mm photograph and two colour 35mm photographs all of which were related in some way to Preston, Lancashire, the city where we both lived and worked. The publication was put together using desktop publishing software, printed in black and white on an office photocopier, hand stapled and folded, then an edition of 50 was distributed for free around the city.

Although originally motivated by far more modest intentions, this publication was to become the first entry into an archive of original work consisting of printed publications, live public events and digital applications all produced under the title of Preston is my Paris. Eclectic in terms of subject matter, aesthetic style and methodology, the body of work has sought to investigate themes relating to everyday life and social consciousness. This paper will discuss this body of work and the role that the tactic of self-publishing has had in a contemporary photographic context when dealing with subject matter of this nature.

Art and the Archive

Everyday life has provided artists, writers, scientists, historians, ethnographers and philosophers with countless points of enquiry throughout history. Admittedly, the approaches taken by these different disciplines vary considerably and it would be wrong to make a direct comparison between a scientific study and a subjective body of photographic work. There are though points of crossover that link this catalogue of study with the central common motif being the concept of the archive. (Sheringham 2006: 352-353)

Founded in 1936 by Charles Madge, Stuart Legg, Kathleen Raine, David Gascoyne and Humphrey Jennings, the Mass-Observation project is arguably the most appropriate example of what is possible when a variety of disciplines collaborate with a shared focus of exploring, depicting and understanding everyday life. The combination of backgrounds in poetry, journalism, painting, filmmaking and photography that the originators of Mass-Observation came from, blended with approaches more akin to anthropology and ethnography, resulted in a comprehensive archive of everyday life in Britain that, rather than being celebrated for the scientific achievement, is revered by some as producing a complex body of work that is ‘at one and the same time mundane and poetic.’ (Highmore 2002: 75)

It is more than simply the ambitious scale and extraordinary nature of Mass-Observation that has proved influential to more contemporary practitioners. This was one of the first projects of this kind to be aware that the responsibility of gathering data and material should not simply be the preserve of an elite few. Highmore describes how the general public were recruited to act as ‘what an anthropologist at the time would call “native informants” and “participant observers”’. (Highmore 2002: 87) This awareness of the need for a variety of voices to be involved in the project is central to contemporary approaches to archives and consequently links to more post-modern concepts relating to originality, authorship and hierarchy within projects, a topic that is dealt with in an essay by Hal Foster. Focussing more specifically on work produced in a contemporary art context, Foster makes the link between artists, Thomas Hirschhorn, Sam Durant and Tacita Dean, by describing them all as having ‘an archival impulse’ (Foster 2004: 3) that underlines their practice. Although predominantly discussing French artists such as Sophie Calle and Christian Boltanski, British academic Michael Sheringham shares Foster’s observation about the archival methodologies that can be found in some artworks, suggesting that the projects share ‘a fondness for inventory and enumeration, a love of constraints, and a fascination with objects, space and identity.’ (Sheringham 2006: 343)

This fascination with space, detail and observation is a topic that can be traced through the work of French writer Georges Perec, who is also identified by Sheringham as having an influence on contemporary artists such as those listed above. Although renowned for his experimental approach to literature such as the book A Void (1969), a novel written entirely without using the letter ‘e’, it is his obsession with the ‘infra-ordinaire’ (infra-ordinary) (Perec 1989) that is most relevant to the theme of this text. In essays such as Approaches to What? (1973) and The Street (1974), Perec passionately describes a very practical, almost inventorial approach to exploring that, which is normally ignored in everyday life.
Adam Murray & Robert Parkinson *Preston is my Paris* 3, August 2009
14.9 x 21 cm, photocopy with C-type print, edition of 50
The concept of actively exploring the world through process and practice that Perec advocates, relates to a number of photographers, including the work of Japanese photographer Daido Moriyama. Although the work may initially seem to be a very subjective interpretation of the world as he encounters it through practical exploration, occasionally emphasised by book titles such as The World Through My Eyes (2010), Moriyama’s Record series owes much to an archival method of working. By adopting the prosaic terminology ‘record’ followed by a straightforward numerical system as a title, a contradiction is created that encourages the reader to see these highly subjective photo-stories as individual entries into a larger archive of images. The decision to then initially publish the work as printed books rather than in an exhibition context means that readers are able to build their own archive of Moriyama’s work and begin to create their own narratives and meanings as the collection builds.

Moriyama’s engagement with the photobook is often cited as being an influence on a contemporary group of photographers who have chosen the printed book as the primary outlet for their work. In an essay titled The Drive to Archive: Conceptual Documentary Photobook Design, Melissa Miles discusses the work of photographers such as Stephen Gill, Mathieu Pernot and Matthew Sleeth and suggests that the work they produce ‘mirrors documentary photography’s increasingly fraught but tenacious relations to the ‘real’ world to produce equally paradoxical archives.’ (Miles 2010: 66)

It is important to acknowledge the significant influence that these practitioners and writers have had on me throughout producing Preston is my Paris. In some cases they have provided conceptual and methodological prompts, others relate more to aesthetic or practical processes and ideas. What has been significant throughout the work however, is that although informed by often quite complex, academic ideas, the intention to produce work that is able to be engaged with by a diverse audience is paramount.

The Tactic of Self-Publishing

The act of self-publishing has seen a large resurgence in recent photographic practice and is very much in vogue. This has resulted in a mixed collection of work; in some instances the decision to realise the work in printed book format is entirely appropriate and not involving established publishers in the production process has meant that the work often has an immediacy and innovative approach that is missing from a lot of ‘coffee-table’ art books. There is also the group of practitioners who seem to have tagged on to the trend for self-published work as an easy way to promote their practice rather than as an informed decision about this being the most appropriate way to present their work.

The decision to produce self-published printed matter should always relate directly to the context that the work is being produced within and when Robert and I began the original Preston is my Paris zine series, although we did not describe the work as being self-published, we were making a virtue of the circumstances we were in: small city, small arts culture and small production budget. Photocopying and producing the publications ourselves was simply the most cost effective way of getting a publication out to the local audience that we were directly aiming the work at.

As Preston is my Paris has developed, the decision to self-publish has become a much more conscious one, something I would describe as a tactical decision. Referring to the publication The Practice of Everyday Life by Michael de Certeau, Ben Highmore describes de Certeau’s interpretation of the concept of the tactic:

Tactics is the inventive employment of possibilities with strategic circumstances: disguise, surprise, discretion, secrecy, wit, play, bluff and so on. Crucially, tactics don’t operate outside a strategy that they can confront; to do this would require a counter-strategy, they are in the ambiguous position of ‘being inside but ‘other’: ‘they escaped it without leaving it’ (xiii) (Highmore 2002: 159)

I am very aware of the rich heritage of photographic publishing and the power and opportunity that working with a mainstream publishing house may offer and that when any photographic publication is produced, it is likely to be considered within this wider context. However, deliberately eschewing these publishers has meant that I am able to set the agenda with regards subject matter, production time, format and distribution, yet still function within a strand of photographic publishing; as de Certeau describes it, I have ‘escaped it without leaving it.’ (de Certeau 1980: xiii)

I believe that self-publishing is more than simply the latest stylistic novelty and it is intrinsically related to the fundamental conceptual intention of Preston is my Paris, that can be succinctly described as a project of engagement, a term I use to describe a number of facets of the work. From a personal point of view I use photographic projects to engage with a variety of subject matter; I aim to encourage audiences to engage with subject matter that they would not necessarily normally pay much attention to; I aim to engage with audiences both within and beyond the traditional art world and as a consequence of all this draw attention to that which is so often overlooked or forgotten.
Adam Murray & Robert Parkinson Preston is my Paris Guildhall Project Space, February 2010
This desire to explore engagement, I believe, is a direct result of circumstance. Living in Preston for a decade played a crucial role in the development of my work. To begin with there is a definite sense of anonymity within a city such as Preston. Although Preston does have a history of its own, to a national and international audience this is less obvious than other towns and cities in the North West of England such as Blackpool, Manchester and Liverpool. These other places have a distinct identity to them whereas for the majority of people Preston is simply a place to pass through on the West Coast Mainline. This lack of awareness is something that I wanted to change.

Within the city itself there are also issues relating to the engagement of local residents with art and cultural practice that I do not think are addressed effectively. There is the established Harris Museum and Art Gallery which stages a variety of exhibitions and is a significant institution, however, such spaces can feel quite intimidating to someone who is not familiar with art practices and little alternative is offered. The cultural world that exists in other major cities is also not prevalent in Preston. Whereas in somewhere such as London there is an audience that would not hesitate to pay £50 for a photographic publication, this is not the cultural norm in Preston. By saying this I am by no means making the assumption that local residents do not want to engage with art and photography, I believe it just needs a different approach which is where the tactic of self-publishing and live public events plays a role.

Choosing to produce the original Preston is my Paris zines as affordable photocopies was effective in that Robert and I were able to give them away for free with minimal personal cost. We did discover that there are issues though in terms of who would actually pick up a publication of this nature. In order to address this we organised a live event that was to act as both a form of initial retrospective for the project and also as a way of engaging a general audience with the work that we were doing.

In February 2010 Robert and I set up a temporary gallery and project space in an unoccupied shop in the Guildhall Shopping Centre in Preston. On the walls we displayed all the imagery, photographs and found items that had been featured in the Preston is my Paris zines, we had copies of the zines available for audiences to read through and we also set up a photographic studio. By deliberately setting the space up in a shop that is located on a thoroughfare to a main transport hub, a diverse variety of people became aware of the project that would not necessarily deliberately seek out an exhibition of this nature. The photographic studio was used to take portraits of visitors to the space that were then used in future editions of the publication. I also collaborated with photographer Jamie Hawkesworth to produce a fashion-based project that featured clothing sourced entirely from Preston and models scouted from the city over a specific weekend. This resulting publication from this project, titled Denim, has since functioned to make the project better known amongst a professional photographic and art community.

Arguably the most well known and critically celebrated of the publications that we produced during the first eighteen months of the project has been Preston Bus Station. Although not part of the original zine series, this body of work encapsulates all the significant factors of the practice behind Preston is my Paris: everyday subject matter, engagement, collaboration and printed matter.

The initial motivation behind the work was to focus on the one building that provides a constant source of debate not just in the city, but also national and international contexts. Built in the late 1960s, Preston bus station has the capacity for 80 double decker buses and parking for over 1000 other vehicles. Celebrated by some as an example of utopian modernist architecture whilst reviled by others as having completely outlived the initial purpose, it has provided subject matter for a number of photographic projects. These projects have tended to focus very much on the architectural structure of the building and not the people that use the bus station on a daily basis.

Over a weekend in September 2010, Robert, Jamie and I set up a project space in an unoccupied National Express ticket office based in the heart of the bus station. Throughout the weekend we spent time engaging with staff, commuters, shoppers and diners, learning about their opinions about the building and producing a photographic archive of our experiences. This approach was very much informed by the ‘native informants’ (Highmore 2002: 87) concept that Highmore discusses in relation to Mass Observation.

When deciding the most effective method of output for this project, it was important to return to the fundamental intentions of Preston is my Paris. We knew that we wanted people who actually used the bus station to be able to acquire the publication that we produced; therefore choosing the appropriate format was essential. The collaborative nature of the project and aesthetic styles (colour, black and white, medium format, 35mm and Polaroid) meant that a photocopied zine was not appropriate. This was work that demanded colour and larger dimensions than A4. We also wanted a general audience to feel comfortable engaging with the work and not feel that it was too precious or intimidating. For these reasons we decided that using a newspaper format was...
Adam Murray, Robert Parkinson & Jamie Hawkesworth *Preston Bus Station*  
October 2010, 29 x 38 cm, newsprint, edition of 500
the most appropriate. Large scale, colour and affordable to produce were all very practical considerations that meant we could afford to give copies away in the bus station and then sell copies for a cheap price without relying on an external funding body or publisher.

There were also strong conceptual intentions behind using newsprint. A newspaper is something that audiences engage with on a daily basis and a format that does not require another machine such as a laptop or iPad to read. By appropriating the vernacular format of newsprint, it was our intention that people would feel comfortable engaging with the work in a way that they may not do with a more hand crafted artist book. This commitment to producing affordable publications and appropriation of vernacular print format is something that has continued throughout the rest of the Preston is my Paris projects.

The Poetic Archive

Since completing Preston Bus Station, the subject matter of the publications that Robert and I have produced has diversified beyond Preston. We have completed work in other English towns and cities such as Carlisle, Brighton and Derby as well as more ostensibly exotic places such as Berlin, Paris, Tokyo and America and as of December 2011 have produced 40 individual publications. As the collection of work builds up, the concept of each publication being a small part of a larger archive becomes more apparent and the way the body of work functions develops.

Throughout the existence of Preston is my Paris, collaboration has been an important part of the creative process. This has been realised in a number of ways, for example, collaboration between Robert and I, working with other practitioners such as Jamie Hawkesworth and actively engaging with residents and users of places such as in the Guildhall Shopping Centre project space and Preston Bus Station. Beyond this direct face-to-face collaboration however, the role of the audience has been crucial. Each practical intervention is edited and disseminated for interpretation by an audience who are viewed as a significant part of the authorial process. Foster suggests that it is this ‘call out for human interpretation, not machinic reprocessing’ (Foster 2004: 5) that makes artistic work informed by archival practices different to traditional databases.

When considering how an audience may interpret the work, the focus changes depending on whether projects are viewed individually or as a whole. As individual projects or photo-stories the main focus of thought is drawn to the paradox that is inherent in the subject matter of everyday life; even the most mundane scenes for insiders will be fascinatingly exotic for outsiders. If someone who has lived in Preston for a number of years was to read one of the original zines, then they may interpret the work with a sense of everyday familiarity or possibly nostalgia. For someone living in another part of the world, seeing this depiction of English life may be as exotic as a photo-story in a publication such as National Geographic would be to me.

This focus of interpretation shifts as individual projects and publications are juxtaposed with others from the Preston is my Paris archive; now the concept of montage become much more apparent. This is a concept that is dealt with in great clarity by Highmore, who argues that ‘montage is the most appropriate form for representing everyday life as the pell-mell of different worlds colliding.’ (Highmore 2002: 93) The ‘charge’ that is released by different ‘elements’, ‘unanticipated coincidences’ and the ‘attempts to see the world as a network of uneven, conflicting, inassimilable but relating elements,’ (Highmore 2002: 93-95) are all concepts that I recognise in the archive of photographic publications that I have produced.

I believe that the decisions that have been made throughout the project in relation to self-publishing are crucial for the success of this approach. The rapid turnaround time from taking the photographs to producing a printed publication (on some occasions less than a week) and the frequency at which I have been able to release new publications means that collectors of this prolific body of work are constantly being given the opportunity to develop new interpretations, identify new relationships and consequently develop an increasing consciousness about everyday life today.

The other joy of this approach is that it seemingly has no obvious conclusion. Appropriating some elements of an archival methodology and maintaining fundamental ideals has given the project a form of structure, but allowing for inconsistency with regards specific subject matter, aesthetic style and publication format has meant that the body of work is seen as a continuous exploration of everyday life; ‘it falls on the side of unfinished business, of becoming rather than being.’ (Highmore 2002: 146)

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Bibliography


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The Book of Laughing and Crying

Volume I

Latitudes 0°-14°

North and South

Title detail (from title page) The Book of Laughing and Crying, John, Smith, 2004

Front cover: The Book of Laughing and Crying, John, Smith, 2004
This essay seeks to locate the “haptic” within the making and reading of artists’ books, and to contribute to the emerging critical discourse on books by artists.

In his article *Reading by Hand: the Haptic evaluation of artists’ books* Gary Frost identifies a new aspect to the discourse. He writes about “the aesthetic consequences of a work of book art in the hands of the reader where tactile qualities and features of mobility are appreciated. This is a haptic (pertaining to the technology of touch) domain where the study of touch as a mode of communication is at work.” He locates this idea within what he acknowledges as the “great environment for evaluating artists’ books” that Johanna Drucker has provided the field.

Frost’s article is brief. His phrase “touch as a mode of communication” grounds the descriptors of the haptic that he proposes might be useful in the emerging critical discourse. It’s clear that his ideas are well founded in the practice of making books. Research into critical discourses that relate the haptic to creative practices soon identifies significant variance within them. In particular the engagement of the haptic by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in the chapter, 1440: The Smooth and the Striated, of their book *A Thousand Plateaus* is significant for the emerging critical discourse. Deleuze and Guattari bind the haptic to “smooth space” and give examples of smooth space within creative practices. Their seminal text facilitates critical investigation of artworks both through a theoretical framework and critical terminology.

The many dictionary definitions of Haphtics state that it is the science that deals with the sense of touch / the branch of psychology that relates to cutaneous senses, and that the Haptic is that which relates to the sense of touch. This broad edge of haptics is discussed by David Prytherch who focuses on four basic procedures of haptic exploration as analysed by Lederman and Klatsky in 1987. These are: lateral motion - identifying surface and texture information, pressure - identifying material firmness, contour following - identifying form and enclosure - identifying volume. These terms may prove to play a role in the evaluation of artists’ books. They reflect the scope of Prytherch’s article in which he states that research demonstrates:

That what we perceive through touch is significantly different to what we perceive through vision though it also implies that they are “perceptually linked and informing each other”,

that we learn to read through our touch, which is a symphony of simultaneously perceived information,

and that our perception of touch is best served with two hands.

He concludes with a quote attributed to B Russell in 1997, “Not only our geometry and physics, but our whole conception of what exists outside us, is based upon the sense of touch.”

Deleuze and Guattari’s abstraction of the haptic is very different to Prytherch’s description. They draw on Alois Riegl’s application of the haptic to the representation of space in early western art and incorporate it into an aesthetic model of what they term as “smooth and striated space”. They adopt the haptic and fuse it to smooth space specifically as it “invites the assumption” that smooth space “is both the object of a close vision par excellence and the element of a haptic space (which may be as much visual or auditory as tactile).”

For Deleuze and Guattari, smooth space is a haptic environment, one that is interpreted through an intimate relationship with it, corporeally and or experientially, involving any of the senses. They correlate it to nomadic existences, at its smoothest “like Eskimo space” or the “white out” of a blizzard. Navigating these spaces requires an intimate knowledge of and/or direct physical engagement with the environment. Any points of reference can only be perceived haptically. Using a number of models to clarify their concept they describe:

Smooth space as the path of a nomad, a path that passes through a point, a path that is informed by the nature of a point, whereas striated space as a path determined by points at either end of it, a path informed by its destination and origin.

Smooth space as traversing through an environment relying on an immersive perception of it, informed by an intimacy of the space, whereas striated space as traversing through an environment in reference to a mapping of it, informed by a territorialisation of the space.

Smooth space as close-range vision in which you can “lose oneself, without landmarks”, whereas striated space is long-distance vision by which you can ground yourself in reference to a horizon.

In their “aesthetic model” Deleuze and Guattari clarify that significant creative works are generated through both spaces. They relate smooth and striated space to three couplings, haptic - optical, close - distant and abstract line - concrete line. Smooth space relates to the haptic, closeness, immediacy and the abstract. Striated
space relates to the optical, distance and the readily understood (concrete). Smooth and striated space is defined not by the nature of a place, be it physical, conceptual, virtual or other, but by the nature of a body’s engagement with a place. Simply put the more reliant a person is on their “haptic” perceptions of a place the smoother is their experience of that space. Conversely the less reliant a person is on their haptic perceptions of a place, and consequentially more reliant on their optical perceptions of it, the more striated is their experience of that place.

Deleuze and Guattari describe how these spaces relate to each other. “(S)mooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into striated space” such as the mapping of the earth’s surface so satellite navigation can facilitate accurate and efficient travel. “(S)triated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space.” reflected in the descriptive term - a concrete jungle, a space constructed through striation however often experienced in the reverse by those who occupy it as a smooth space. In relation to creative works translations and reversals can occur at any stage of their conception, making and reading/viewing.

The modeling of aesthetic practices into smooth/haptic and striated spaces by Deleuze and Guattari raises a question that expands on Frost’s initial application of the haptic to the emerging critical discourse. Does Deleuze’s and Guattari’s abstraction of the haptic offer a means to advance the emerging critical discourse on artists’ books?

I begin to answer this question by evaluating John Smith’s 2004 artist’s book The Book of Laughing and Crying. Supporting this evaluation is a web-based copy of Smith’s book at: www.silverwattlepress.com/REaDBOOKS/BoLaC/BoLaC.html

In a recent description of his practice J Smith states,

I have deliberately employed a strategy of looking at a lot of children’s works and sometimes directly borrowing from them. I have built a repertoire of mark making and painting processes over a long period of time that I see as unlearning and effacing on the one hand and yet engineering and composing paintings on the other to produce a psychological affinity (in) the tradition of the Grotesque…. they are gestural, immediate and expressionist works. However the strategy of appropriating and manipulating a young child’s drawing in the composition of the features of the face is an intellectual decision I made to develop a format to produce a series of works. This creates a strong tension, of two figures kind of tearing themselves apart, within the face.

The genre of the grotesque often involves the combination of distorted human figures and patterning. Smith’s book reflects this, working on the patterns of numbers within the books pages he has drawn obscure laughing and crying faces.

The initial function of The Book of Laughing and Crying was as a marine navigational aid. With over a million mechanically printed numerical figures contained in tables on its pages, Smith selected this book as a representation of bureaucracy. He has drawn in Texta and highlighter pens over these tables. The book is replete with tensions exemplifying the tension between creative practice and bureaucracy, Jacques Derrida’s “insoluble tension between gathering through dispersion”, the tension between smooth and striated spaces as described by G Deleuze & F Guattari, and the tension between Johanna Drucker and Marshall Weber. The artwork’s reliance on the form of the book to be realised also exemplifies Ulises Carrión’s and Germano Celant’s defining perceptions of books made by artists.

When asked what the book’s initial purpose was (before it was altered), Smith described it as a book used “to find out where you are.” The book’s tabulated numerical values are used to interpret astronomical readings to accurately locate where you are on the surface of the earth. An extraordinary achievement in its time the book has long since been replaced by GPS technology - however the mechanical recording of numbers in the book, the grid structure and methodical mapping of the earth’s surface clearly reflects a bureaucratic structure. A structure that after dealing with for so long, Smith does not know whether to laugh or cry about. The red marks in Smiths drawing represent laughing and the blue marks crying. During the many hours spent in meetings that he has been required to attend in his capacity as a senior academic, Smith has developed a particular habit of drawing childlike images on the paperwork accompanying the agendas of such meetings. This drawing practice is the basis of the over 150 drawings in this artist’s book. They are childlike, though in no way childish, unrestrained and carefree of formal boundaries other than those of the book’s structure. The drawings lounge over the text and numbers, spilling over the surface of the paper as a child’s drawing might. As Smith has stated “the book represents bureaucracy and structure and I drew all over the fucker”.

In this context, as a reader’s enclosed hand reads the volume and pressing weight of the gathered pages, a burden of frustration is conveyed. This book contains an uneasy sadness as the number of drawings mount up, representing the many hours spent dealing with bureaucracy. The unresolved tension between creative practice and institutional structure permeates the pages.
Crying page: *The Book of Laughing and Crying*, John, Smith, 2004

Laughing page: *The Book of Laughing and Crying*, John, Smith, 2004
of this book. Under its aesthetic layers and typical Australian humour, this is not an appealing artwork; this is an articulate expression of frustration.

The multiple tensions in this artwork echo Derrida’s description of the book and gives weight to Smith’s choice of the book as medium. The first of six volumes, this book’s earlier function relied specifically on the gathered set. In the absence of the other five volumes the initial book has been lost. Derrida’s “insoluble tension” does not describe a tension that cannot be dissolved but rather the containment of two parts that will not dissolve, like a glass jar containing both water and oil. To be a book, the insoluble acts of gathering and dispersion must be held together in tension. Allow this tension to dissipate and the book is lost. Smith has recycled this volume relying on it to make a new book, to hold in tension the insoluble acts of gathering his drawings to disperse them. He could disperse them ungathered, but they only convey his intent gathered.

This reliance on the book, on the tension within a book as defined by Derrida, on the physical structure of a codex as vocabulary to convey content as Carrion describes, places The Book of Laughing and Crying succinctly within Celant’s defining idea of becoming an artwork through the book. Smith relies on the book, both conceptually and as medium to realise this artwork.

Smith’s pairing of a creative practice and institutional structure finds common ground in Deleuze and Guattari’s couplings of haptic - optical, close - distant and abstract line - concrete line. The 6 Volumes of the TABLES OF COMPUTED ALTITUDE AND AZIMUTH represent an intense striation of the oceans and Smith’s coupling of them to his smooth childlike drawings is a very tangible engagement with both spaces. He has never encountered Deleuze and Guattari’s maritime model of smooth and striated space, and his choice to alter a book that is the very archetypal striation of the oceans demonstrates the strength of his creative output. Looking specifically for the haptic, for smooth spaces in The Book of Laughing and Crying three can be readily identified.

Firstly, an obvious one is Smith’s’s drawing practice. His stated intent of unlearning and effacing his drawing practices are a deliberate pursuit of the haptic, of close vision and the abstract line. The drawings float, ungrounded from any perspective or little interpretive references; there are no horizons or landmarks other than the edges of the pages themselves. They are abstract with only hints of figurative content. They deface the initial book, dismissing a journey between two points. The narrative structure inherent in the codex does determine the sequence of the drawings though Smith has traversed this structure as a nomad reading a path, rather than following a path between the two points of the front and back covers.

Secondly, this altered book’s structure is a smooth space, not the striated space that the book was in its initial form. Smith achieves this literally and simply by taking it out of its initial context. In the new context the tables of numbers begin to reflect Eskimo space, a space without any tangible visual signs. A space where haptic perception is the only means of engagement, the only frame of reference. The horizon is referred to in the numbers though in a language inaccessible which effectively obscures it from view. While the case binding implies a specific sequence to follow, the inherent pattern of reading a codex offers little narrative.

Thirdly, reading The Book of Laughing and Crying is a haptic activity, a smooth space. This artwork, this book is a space that can only be interpreted through an intimate relationship with it, corporeally and or experientially, involving visual, tactile and auditory perception. At an elementary level the book must be opened which requires the reader to touch the artwork. Once initiated, the reading takes on a very different nature to the defined interpretive guidelines that determined the reading of the book in its initial form. A reader who comes across this book needs to spend time with it, find their way through it, seek out a resolution as they develop a familiarity with it and respond to it, or they may abandon it. This very evaluation of The Book of Laughing and Crying that you are reading demonstrates a haptic reading: smooth space within reading and that Deleuze and Guattari’s abstraction of the haptic can inform the emerging critical discourse.

Smith’s transition of a striated found book into a smooth artist’s book also exemplifies the differences between correlating artist’s book practices. The refined qualities read by the hand in lateral motion over the surface of the pages remind the reader that this book is a manufactured product, in stark contrast to the Texta drawings on the printed pages. The complex design that is commonly involved in the production of books represents a highly striated space, a space where many artists’ books are generated. Conversely, allowing the making of the artwork to inform the nature of a book represents a smooth space. This difference is what is contested between Drucker and Weber. Drucker’s efforts to ensure the emerging critical discourse is advanced, is a striation of the field. Weber’s concerns and resistance are an effort to ensure the smoothing of the field. Neither needs to be privileged as the two spaces merge into, and emerge out of each other.

The strength within The Book of Laughing and Crying lies in Smith’s reliance on both the physical structure that is
a codex, and the tension inherent in what a book is, to
give expression to the tension and frustration between
smooth and striated spaces. The found book, of dense
mathematical tables housed in a codex, facilitating
point-to-point travel over the oceans, is the striated space.
Smith’s childlike drawing practice, unlearning
and effacing, following yet defacing the path of the
codex’s structure, is a smooth space. They are held
together in tension becoming an artwork through the
book, the medium is and conveys, the message.

Poetically there is an aspect of Smith’s book that
ironically plays out this tension. The very structure
that allows Smith to so effectively express himself also
confines his expression. Like a child who starts a drawing
on a piece of paper only to find themselves running out
of space, Smith’s smooth drawings are informed and
confined by the striated edges of these pages, “it’s a joke,
but a very serious one” (John Smith).

This brief application of Deleuze and Guattari’s
abstraction of the haptic to an artist’s book raises
enough questions to warrant further evaluation of it. For
example, which book structures represent a
smoothing of artist’s book practices, and how have
artists relied on them to realise their artworks?

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**Notes**


4. Ibid p7

5. Deleuze and Guattari, pp 492 & 493

6. Deleuze and Guattari, pp 494, and from the notes to the chapter on page 574, No.28. See Edmund Carpenter’s description in _Eskimo of ice space and the igloo:_ “There is no middle distance, no perspective, no outlining, nothing the eye can cling to except thousands of smoky plumes of snow… a land without bottom or edge…”

7. J. Derrida, ‘The Book to Come’, _Paper Machine_, translated by Rachel Bowlby, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2005 in which Derrida defines what a book is to a point of tension, “the tension between gathering through dispersion” and that such a point is one of “insoluble tension”.

8. Both engaged in the emerging critical discourse Drucker and Weber seek to confine and influence the future directions of their field. Drucker in her call for the establishment of “a critical terminology… and a descriptive vocabulary” to facilitate the effective development of a critical discourse and canon of artists’ books. Weber argues that “Drucker’s concepts form a modernist body of writing in post-modernist clothing.”

9. Ulises Carrión’s text _The New Art of Making Books_ describes a space with a latent visual vocabulary and Germano Celant’s phrase “becomes a work of art through the book” from his catalogue essay for _Books by Artists_ shown at Art Metropole in Toronto Canada, 1981
Rebirth Of The Book And The Rise Of Artists' Publishing

A Williams

Part One: DEATH RIDES A KINDLE.

Are we living the days of the Book-ocalypse? If we look around we can see the signs. Google, the first horseman seeks Conquest of and over all books ever printed and ever to be printed. Amazon, the second horseman, declares War on every beloved bookstore we’ve ever known. Kindle, the third Horseman, heralds the coming Famine of the paper Codex. Is it just a matter of time before the fourth and final horseman descends, trumpeting the Death of the Book?

We’ve all been reading similar articles with the same tired puns and clichés for a few years now. Any mention of E-books, iPads or Kindles in a newspaper article or review on a Blog will inevitably cite ‘the death of the book’ and hype up the ‘downfall of print publishing’. It is hard to deny there is a palpable sublimated panic that permeates many communities and businesses whose lives, livelihoods and passions are devoted to books, including those of us in the Book Arts.

For many, it would appear there is good justification for this panic. In February 2011, we saw the collapse of Australian bookstore chains Angus & Robertson, Borders Books and New Zealand’s Whitcoulls, which sent shockwaves through the retail and commercial publishing industry. This is a story which is not confined to Australia either. As online vendors like Amazon operate with hugely reduced overheads, offer increased discounts, and deliver to your door service of books ordered from the comfort of your own lounge room, bricks and mortar retailers will find it impossible to compete. In addition, this recent Christmas, retailers recorded massive sales of E-Readers and a dramatic increase in online E-Book Sales, and the figures are only going to steadily increase as more consumers take up the new flashy digital alternative.

So, it is sensible to be asking some very big questions right now. Is digital technology finally going to defeat and usurp the analogue world of books? Are bookstores going to disappear? Is this the end of the paper codex? How will this impact on Libraries and Archives? Furthermore, what does this mean for the Book Arts? Does it render Book Arts less relevant? I would argue that a look to history should reassure us that no, digital technology will not kill the codex, just as writing did not kill our memory, printing did not kill writing, photography did not kill painting, and video certainly did not kill the radio star. And it could be said; digital technology will certainly not herald the death of Books, or Book Arts for that matter, but perhaps become their greatest proponent. Now is an exciting time for the Book Arts, and arguably there has never been a time when it has been more relevant.

Part Two: WHAT THE MUSIC INDUSTRY CAN TEACH US.

If we examine the two forms side by side, the similarities between MP3s and E-Books are quite significant. The advent of MP3s in the 90’s impacted heavily on the music retail industry and ultimately many stores have closed for the same reasons that bookstores now cite – an inability to compete with online vendors and the uptake of purely digital forms as a more convenient alternative to physical media. It’s easy to see why.

For a business, digital technology is undeniably cheaper and more efficient to sell. To sell it requires no retail real estate, there are no warehousing requirements, no transport costs. Putting it very simply, all anyone needs to sell digital media is a website, a room full of servers for storing digital files, and some programmers to maintain a website which creates a bridge between the files, the customer, and a bank account.

For the customer, it’s the convenience of logging on to a website, punching in your credit card or PayPal details and within minutes you have an album. A home computer, and all the related devices like the iPod or any MP3 player, can store massive amounts of music that alleviates the need for owning 100s of CDs, tapes or vinyl. An entire music collection can fit on something no bigger than a credit card and can go anywhere. The Kindle, Nook and iPad are exactly the same – a perfect portable Library with infinite storage potential. It’s not hard to see the appeal of being able to take an infinite amount of books and current subscriptions to magazines on holiday, or even just on the bus on the way to work.

For the Musicians themselves, MP3s have proved to be an incredible innovation. Self-publishing has boomed since the MP3 arrived on the scene allowing cheap, if not free, methods of broadcasting, transmitting and sharing music with audiences globally, allowing even the smallest voice to be heard. Again, there is no difference with the E-Book. This transmission potential is its greatest strength in many respects.

However, these digital forms are not without their downsides. For example, MP3s are vastly inferior in terms of sound quality when compared to a CD. They are intangible, non-objects, and as such are more difficult to form any lasting sentimental relationship with (which is often displaced onto the player itself, e.g. the
iPod becomes the object of desire. MP3s themselves have no ‘character’, and they don’t have the advantage of cover artwork, printed lyrics and liner notes to enhance the listening experience that other formats have. A reaction to this lack of character has been seen in a growing re-enchantment with vinyl records. Some smaller independent retailers are finding a new (old) supplemental revenue stream in vinyl sales that is helping them stay open. Behind this trend back to vinyl is a fetishistic passion for beautiful objects that any bibliophile will understand.

Vinyl records are all the things MP3s are not. Vinyl is not immediate, nor does it start at the touch of a button. There is a process to buying and listening to a record. Firstly, there is the thrill of the hunt, rifling through boxes at a jumble sale, or rummaging through shelves at a record store arouses a sense of discovery and adventure. The cover art is large and impressive which speaks to the music on the record and arouses curiosity. Anticipation builds holding the object in your hands. Getting the record home and removing the shrink-wrapping to reveal the cover is like opening a Christmas present when you are five. The ritual of playing a record further builds anticipation, from removing the record from the sleeve, carefully placing it on the turntable being careful not to touch the precious surface, then comes the drop of the needle to hear that introductory crackle and pop that oozes warmth (which reminds me of the tuning of an orchestra and the murmur of an audience before a performance begins). While the music is playing, you get a tactile and optical sensory supplemental experience from the cover art, and additional textual input from the images, liner notes and printed lyrics. To many musicians, giving their audience this more sophisticated experience is very important, as it becomes more than just pushing product, it is an experience that can’t be replaced or substituted by a digital device. One (digital) does not equate the other (analogue), but they complement each other in how they are similar, and how they differ. If each form is used and valued for its strengths there is a chance for a happily-ever-after peaceful coexistence, as each form finds a place and function in our lives that is unique. Books are a sumptuous tactile and visual experience, they fit with our bodies, nestles in both our hands and on our lap, but if we want to talk about transmission potential, portability, incorporating animation or exploring hypertextuality, an E-Book hold all the cards.

That being said, as for building a library or collection, musicians will testify that vinyl will outlast any other medium with less care and records are therefore well worth the extra investment. You can buy a record, and if taken care of, your children and even grandchildren can enjoy the same record at the same age. A CD on the other hand, is fragile, and has a lifespan of 10 years or so before it starts to disintegrate, as do CD players with their delicate and temperamental lasers. An MP3 or digital file can be easily be erased or corrupted, but will most likely be lost to a cycle of technological redundancy even faster.

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<td>Stitched Codex</td>
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Exactly the same comparison can be made with the world of books. A stitched codex could last hundreds of years, whereas Perfect Binding is less than perfect and has a significantly reduced lifespan. How are we to know what kind of lifespan any one E-Book platform or format might have? Large corporations love inbuilt redundancies in their technologies that promote repeat consumption and sales. Who is to say that we will not get caught in another disposable consumption cycle which is the norm with digital technology.

*
As we are now seeing many book artists exploring purely digital forms like E-Books, Flash Websites, Blogs, iPad apps etc., are we right to categorise these as part of the Artists’ Books or Book Arts disciplines? To me this seems to me to be at crossed purposes. There is definitely some exciting opportunities and new areas to be explored by book artists, however, doesn’t the impermanence and immateriality of digital media go against the grain of many of the basic tenets of book arts? When many of us have spent years striving for longevity, learning about archival papers, paper grains, strong and efficient construction principles, pH balance, glue consistencies and constituents, and spent hours and hours on complicated processes, folding and collating; is it correct to discuss something whose lifespan is relatively short and fleeting within the same discipline? Or for that matter, something with a pre-defined materiality that is beyond the control of the artist and outside the realm of expression? Perhaps we need another term to describe and discuss these emerging forms? One that is already being discussed: a field of Artists’ Publishing.

Part Three: REBIRTH OF THE BOOK AND THE RISE OF ARTISTS’ PUBLISHING.

Artists’ Publishing is a term or framework that can potentially enable us to discuss and reconcile new technologies, and emerging practices and forms, with current and traditional Book Arts practices. The term was rigorously discussed in Tom Sowden and Sarah Bodman’s *A Manifesto for the Book*, though for various reasons which the manifesto outlines, it was met with mixed responses, primarily defined by a frustration for the term to fit all things for all people. I feel discussing the field of Artists’ Publishing still has currency and has a great deal of potential, not as an overarching term to encapsulate all book related activity, but rather a separate though related field of enquiry.

The introduction to *A Manifesto for the Book* begins with a common assumption that almost anything can be a book if it is viewed that way.

If it is to be argued that a book has to be a sequence of pages inside a container, and if a container is considered as a physical entity — then as well as covers, a container must also be able to be a computer monitor, a mobile phone screen, a room, a box, the Internet. (Eds. Bodman & Sowden, Feb 2010, pge 5.)

If we take this argument to its extreme, then an oil tanker, a prison, an ice tray, and my digestive system is a book (and look at what that produces!). I feel that too often, through excitement and passion, we go a little too far with our claims about ‘what a book is and can be’.

Compounding this is a mood in on online forums and discussions centered around the book arts, of a frantic need or compulsion to ‘colonise’ new technologies in the name of the ‘Book’ as a defense to the threat of its extinction. There is talk of making websites as books, of phone-based books, of using social media to create books etc. These kinds of definitions or statements lead to what I call an *error of equivalence*. A website is not a book, it is a website. The same goes for text on a mobile phone, e-books, or any other digital form. They are not books, but a mobile phone, an e-book etc.

If we are to understand what these new digital forms are, and are offering, it is imperative we simplify and clarify our definitions; and a separate related field of Artists’ Publishing could help us to do so.

If we look at the etymology of the word Book, we see it relates directly to a material. According to Etymology online, the word book is derived from the German word *buche* meaning Beech, the wood upon which runes were carved. Current dictionary definitions point to the book as an object, of being sheets of bound paper with covers. The word points to the material carrier of the text. The word *publishing* on the other hand, relates to the act of making something public. A *publication* is the instance or result of this action, and is not specifically defined by its materiality, but more the intent. I often refer to publication as *public-action* and it is relatively immaterial how this is achieved.

Now, let’s apply these definitions to forming a relationship between the Book Arts and Artists’ Publishing. The following diagram attempts to illustrate the nature of the relationship.

The first category in the diagram is the field of Book Arts. By that I mean practices that are focused on a material expression and material production. This could include:

* Artists’ Books, Fine Press productions, Livres d’Artistes, Installations, Altered Books, codices of all kinds, sculptural works, etc.
Basically, this is anything that is founded around material expression, where the network of material and textual relationships of the book are inseparable from the interpretation and reception of the work as a whole.

The second category is Artists' Publishing. This category is based around ephemeral, immaterial works whose purpose is focused more toward broadcast, transmission and/or dissemination. This category could include:

- Websites, Online Hypertexts, Blogs, E-Books, Phone based works, Hypertexts, Online Broadcasts, PDFs, PODCasts, Videos, Sound-works, Animation,
- Documented Performances, Catalogues, Manifestos, CD Roms, DVDs etc.

This category would be defined as not relying on what form or material shape the work takes, but focusing more to content delivery and having work publicly and freely available. This category also allows a great deal of interdisciplinary cross-fertilisation, where the differences between mediums such as videos and books can be explored. Sound artists could collaborate with a book artist and create a hybrid piece that uses Artists' Publishing techniques, and traditional Book Arts techniques to create an expanded work.

The intersecting category is the Common Ground. Primarily this is the domain of the democratic multiple. Materiality is defined more by function, or becomes a by-product of the means of production, which is more often focused on dissemination and accessibility. This could include:

- Democratic Multiples, Pamphlets, Zines and street press production, Print-On-Demand books, all types of ephemera, commercially produced books etc.

This category sits somewhere between material expression and publication. I should say that the lines between the categories are blurry, and are not definitive. They are to be used as a rough guide for categorising work based around materials and intention.

If we use these categories as a guide, then it becomes very difficult talk in terms of a digital work as a false equivalence to the book. For example, E.F. Stevens’ SMS based work Awaiting Transmission is described on the CFPR’s website as ‘an artist’s book in five instalments’.

In this proposed categorisation system, this work would be considered an ‘Artists’ Publication in 5 instalments’. It is a text-based work transmitted through mobile phone technology that is so fleeting and immaterial, it defies qualification as a book. It’s only relationship to books is that it is a text based work made by an interdisciplinary artist who also makes books. Importantly, this categorisation doesn’t take away from the ingenuity or relevance of her work, it just defines it in a way that meets and acknowledges the nature of the technology it was made on.

An SMS will never be a book. A blog is not a book. A website is not a book. Why must we talk in these terms? If we discuss these within the context of a field of Artists’ Publishing, we allow book artists to explore these new realms of expression and talk about what they are doing within the context that they are operating (i.e. within an expanded interdisciplinary field of art), without needing to equate everything with a book. It would be more appropriate to state “I am a book artist who is making a work using telecommunication technology”, as opposed to “I am making a phone-based book”. “I am making a web-based book”, becomes “I am a book artist who is posting additional content online and expanding my practice”. All it requires is for us to call a spade a spade.

Don’t get me wrong, I would never discourage any artist from exploring digital technology if it excites them and fits with their expressive output. It is exciting to see what book artists will bring to these new forms with their particular styles, passions and sensibilities. However, it is not necessary to try and colonise these new digital forms in the name of the book, or look for a book where it is not. Our focus should be on reinforcing and reinvigorating what books already are. As an alternative, Artists’ Publishing provides a structure or nomenclature that allows those artists that chose to, to move into an expanded field of enquiry that allows the existing borders of the book arts to expand and grow into new areas, without negating already established disciplines and principles.

AFTERWORD

A part of me wonders whether book arts practitioners are struggling with a breakdown of their identity as book artists because the form of the book is threatened which leads to the compulsion to see everything as a book? Is the ‘threat of extinction’ perceived also to be aimed at them? It is my view that the book is not under threat, but all we are seeing is a major shift in our relationship with them. There is no stopping the digital revolution any more than there is stopping waves from lapping on the beach or birds singing to the sun, so we may as well embrace it, and not fear it. For some of us, it will mean taking these new technologies head on and forging new ground for Book Arts, or Artists’ Publishing, or whatever we end up calling it, but for all of us, it will just mean continuing on with what we are already doing; and that is being passionate and committed to one of the most beautiful, complex and intriguing forms of cultural production and communication History has ever seen, and never losing our love of it.

Viva la Libre!
A Williams is an artist based in Sydney, Australia. He founded a small publishing house, Pickaxe Publishing with fellow artists David O’Donoghue and Tim Crawley. He’s the one that makes the books.
pickaxepublishing.wordpress.com.

Notes


3. ‘On July 7, 1994, the Fraunhofer Society released the first software MP3 encoder called l3enc. The filename extension .mp3 was chosen by the Fraunhofer team on July 14, 1995 (previously, the files had been named .bit). With the first real-time software MP3 player Winplay3 (released September 9, 1995) many people were able to encode and play back MP3 files on their PCs.’ Excerpt from Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MP3, February 2012.

4. This information comes informal discussions with a National Sales Manager from a major Independent Australian Music Company, and his experiences over the past couple of years.

5. See A Manifesto for the Book, pp 5-9


Bibliography
http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/canon.htm
ARTWORK CONTRIBUTORS

Nicolas Frespech (page 43)
Nicolas Frespech is a French artist (born 1971). He has worked with the World Wide Web since 1996, and teaches digital practice at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Lyon. His varied projects combine to form a work that touches as much on identity and its virtual and commercial standardisation, as on the concepts and phenomena of intimacy, Webcams and digital surveillance, media, games, or fiction.

Christa Harris (page 15)
I am interested in just about everything, and research plays a very important part in my daily life. My bookworks often deal with perception, utilising the space of the book as a place where answers are secondary to questions. To me, book handling is not a passive experience but one that forces a dialogue, and my work often plays on how far individuals will go in interrogating an idea before they discard it.

Recently I have been working with a variety of pseudonyms and faux identities to create seemingly unrelated artworks, which can stand alone or be taken as a whole, questioning the value of a black and white approach to truth, fiction and identity.

For more information you can contact me via email: miss.c.r.harris@googlemail.com or take a look at my website: http://otherwayuppress.wordpress.com

Alexandra Czinczel (endpage 52).
Alexandra Czinczel lives and works in London, UK
http://www.thechinchilla.com

Jon Dunning (page 43)
Jon Dunning is an artist based in Cambridge who takes photographs and makes books. He recently completed a Photography MA during which he produced a set of 13 individual books all of which are titled “The Fens”. The books attempt to expose the complexity of constructing a sense of ‘place’ graphically, utilising aspects of geographical information, historical fact, language, memory, falsehood and fiction.

He has since exhibited other books at the Sheffield International Artist’s Book Prize and the Photobook Shows in Brighton and London.

His forthcoming self-published book “No end to the things made out of human talk” is one of a number of ‘cover versions’ he has made of Ed Ruscha classics. http://www.jondunning.co.uk jondunning66@gmail.com http://jondunning.wordpress.com

Cath Fairgrieve (page 4)
These drawings are inspired by Dickens’ bi-centenary on February 7th 2012, and simultaneously play on The Blue Notebook’s title. They reference old tinware to provide a metaphor for Victorian domestic ideology and contrasting subject matter to examine contemporary home-life. I am nostalgic for an environment of ‘home’ where “the finer side of human nature has a chance of growing, as being sure of its nutriment and its welcome. At home a man…finds a field for the play of those affections in the exercise of which earthly happiness mainly exists”. (Henry Liddon)

Here a cup and measuring jug stand precariously near the edge of a table, whilst a defunct funnel looks unfamiliar being placed upside down: with time and age modest functional objects are transformed into curiosities that can evoke reverie. Compositional space is filled with text reproduced from Charles Dickens’ notebook ‘Memoranda’ which served as a sort of workshop for his imagination to plot ideas and character sketches. Like the tinware it too is unremarkable in appearance, only 5 x 7 inches, but one of the most important items in the Berg Book Collection containing jottings and revisions instrumental to his creative process. The act of drawing in a sketchbook similarly provides me with a physical space to engage my imagination.
REFEREES’ BIOGRAPHIES

Dr Anne Béchard-Léauté is a Lecturer at the University of Saint-Etienne, France, where she teaches design and English for the Department of Applied Languages and the Visual Arts Department. In 1999 she obtained a PhD in Art History from the University of Cambridge and has since developed a special interest in intercultural studies and the relationship between design and languages. She has also translated a number of design and art history books, mainly for Phaidon and Thames & Hudson.

Since recently working as co-author on the 10ºN/10ºS Design Exchange project between England and France she has developed a close working relationship with design curator Charlie Arnold. They are now starting an innovative and sustainable new contemporary textiles project called Habitacle between France, England and Italy.

Maria Fusco is a Belfast-born writer, based in London. Her collection of short stories The Mechanical Copula was published by Sternberg Press. She is founder/editor of The Happy Hypocrite a semi-annual journal for and about experimental art writing (www.thehappyhypocrite.org), and Director of Art Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London.

In 2009-10, she was the inaugural Writer in Residence at Whitechapel Gallery in London, and in 2008-9, the inaugural Critic in Residence at The Kadist Art Foundation in Paris. www.mariafusco.net

Susan Johanknecht is an artist and writer working under the imprint of Gefn Press. She is interested in the book as a site for poetic and collaborative practice. Her project Canning Chapters co-curated with Katharine Meynell, is a series of artists’ chapters thematically linked by ideological concerns of ‘well madness’, loss and conservation in the production of art work, using a combination of technologies.

Susan Johanknecht is Subject Leader of MA Book Arts at Camberwell College of Arts, University of the Arts London.

Jeff Rathermel is an artist, educator and arts administrator who lives and works in the United States. He is Executive Director of Minnesota Center for Book Arts (MCBA), the nation’s largest and most comprehensive institution dedicated to contemporary artists’ books. In addition, Rathermel is a visiting assistant professor at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota and a faculty member at the University of Minnesota and the College of Visual Arts in Saint Paul, Minnesota. He holds Bachelors and Masters of Fine Arts degrees from the University of Minnesota where he studied printmaking, hand papermaking, digital arts and traditional binding. He has curated and organised countless book art exhibitions and his personal artwork has been shown internationally.

Dr Paulo Silveira lives in Porto Alegre, Brazil. He has degrees in; Fine Art (drawing and painting) and Communications, and a PhD in Visual Arts - History, Theory and Criticism, from the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS).

Paulo is Professor for Art History of the Instituto de Artes at UFRGS, and also a member of the Comitê Brasileiro de História da Arte, CBHA (Brazilian Committee for the History of Art). He is the author of A página violada (the violated page) 2001, and regularly writes articles on contemporary art and artists’ books. He is a member (heading the artists’ books section) of the research group Veículos da Arte - Vehicles of Art.

Ulrike Stoltz is an artist who lives and works in Germany and Italy. Her focus is on books, typography, texts, drawings, and installations.

Ulrike is the Professor for Typography and Book Art and Design at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig, Germany (University of Art and Design, Braunschweig). Her current academic research project is on non-linear reading in books.

Co-founder and member of Unica T (“a ficticious person making real books”) for 15 years, until the group split in 2001. She has continued in artistic collaboration for 21 years with Uta Schneider as usus. www.boatbook.de

Trans-lation: Den Möglichkeitssinn Fläche, Raum und Stimme geben/Lending surface, space and voice to the sense of possibility - the bilingual catalogue (German/English) is available, for more info email: usus@boatbook.de

In English also available: CODE(X)+1 Monograph Series (No. 4): Ulrike Stoltz & Uta Schneider usus, typography, and artists’ books, The Codex Foundation, Berkeley, USA.