

### Spending time within books

In my work as a researcher in the field of artists' books, I encounter new books on a daily basis. Artists send information on their publications to go into the *Book Arts Newsletter* or the biennial *Artist's Book Yearbook*, or write about their work for our journal, so I have the privilege of being able to survey activity regularly. Collaborating with artists, publishers, curators and academics in the field informs my own practice as an artist and my understanding as an educator and researcher. Discussing the past, present and future of the book in the digital era is a constant topic for anyone involved in the field. It can be energetic and passionate, dismissive and divisive. Post Generation Y, will physical books still retain their functional value? Or will they become a romanticised relic of the past? In our university library many of the books on students' reading lists are available digitally, for parity of access, but as creative practitioners, the students insist that they want to read them (and view the images they contain) on paper, and to be able to concentrate on the text off-screen. So we have both. I believe, and am hopeful that as long as there is still a relationship between the physical acts of printmaking, printing ink onto paper, and binding, that the practice of creating (and consuming) books will continue for the foreseeable future.

### The Function of books

British artist John Bently writing on the 'Endangered Species of the Book', recalls the role of the fictional character Hantá in Bohumil Hrabal's novel *Too Loud A Solitude*. Hantá's job in a state pulping plant is to crush books deemed no longer necessary or functional; works by writers, philosophers or artists who are now out of fashion. Hantá saves as many books as he can by lining his apartment with them; the rest he makes what tribute he can to, creating artful, sculptural bales which will commemorate their sacrifice as they fall into the crushing mill. His work is endless, as books fall out of approval or fashion by the state or the public.

The rapidly ascending death of the physical book in the light of new media was touted years ago as millennials took to their laptop screens and Kindles, but it wasn't to be. Books as physical objects and artefacts have become more appreciated, and changes have taken place in publishing, production and reception of books as a functioning object. One which Bently argues is as necessary as "a chair, a needle or an overcoat; it is a helper, a carer, a tool, providing assistance often unnoticed in our everyday lives." (Bently, 2017: 7). By coincidence, the current exhibition that has just been installed in our library by the collaborative artist duo Pineapple Falls (Maddy and Paul Hearn) is called '*Things That Function as a Book*', a display which comes with its own 'reading list'. The exhibition displays a selection of pieces from the artists' archive; objects gathered during everyday tasks such as a trip to the local supermarket. Their list includes items such as: bus timetable, ice-cream napkin, plastic dolls house, knitting patterns. They say: "We are interested to echo structural details of books and are curious about the simple action of opening and closing and turning pages."<sup>1</sup>

One artist's book which has had a huge impact on the function of other books is Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay-Terk's *La prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France* (1913), which many historians cite as the precursor for the

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<sup>1</sup> The full reading list can be downloaded at: <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/pineapplefalls-2/>

subsequent development of artists' books in Europe. In 2017, the 'Booknesses' event that celebrated 21 years of Jack Ginsberg and artists' books in South Africa included a significant exhibition at UJ Art Gallery, Johannesburg. *Booknesses: Artists' Books from the Ginsberg Collection*, curated by David Paton and Rosalind Cleaver showcased an astounding 260 international artists' books from Ginsberg's collection. This was a masterpiece of curatorial practice. Not only did it involve showcasing important international artists' books practice to the visiting public, it also drew on the Ginsberg collection as a significant research resource in South Africa. Paton used an original from the edition of *La Prose du Transsiberien* (1913) as a framework from which to interpret and curate an exhibition of 260 works coordinated under headings from the content and context of *La Prose*. This in itself was a clever curatorial premise, but it went further. Reflecting not only on the first exhibition of Ginsberg's collection from 1996, it also responded to and developed upon the exhibition curated by Riva Castleman, *A Century of Artists' Books* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1995). The Castleman exhibition was seen as 'the' exhibition of its time, and caused some controversy in what was selected and what was not (for example, the artist and critic Johanna Drucker responded with a selection of 'The Century of Artists' Books'). To have surveyed the Castleman selection and responded through researching Ginsberg's collection in order to propose another iteration which scoped way beyond the MoMA show (at least double the size, including far more seminal examples of practice) and through the catalogue, examining a far wider investigation of contemporary works in relation to the development of the field over the last 50 years was an incredible achievement. The artworks were grouped and colour coded to assist navigation through the exhibition as a journey exploring aspects from *La Prose* as a means of discussing contemporary themes such as journeys, landscape, death and the senses. The accompanying publication edited by Robyn Sassen includes a chapter by Paton 'Simultaneous Journeys: Thematics in the curating of Booknesses: Artists' Books from the Jack Ginsberg Collection' which unpicks the curatorial premise. The *Booknesses* exhibition also covered in scope 100 years of artists' books history, from Stéphane Mallarmé, Max Ernst, Joseph Beuys and Walasse Ting to Ed Ruscha, Gilbert and George, and contemporary practitioners such as Veronika Schapers, Annesas Appel, Buzz Spector, William Kentridge, Barbara Tetenbaum, Izet Sheshivari, Robbin Ami Silverberg and Inge Bruggeman. This brought significant insight and new knowledge to the field internationally, and disseminated new knowledge through an extensive publication and free online archive which gives access to anyone wanting to research this subject further.<sup>2</sup> Whilst this event was taking place in South Africa, in the USA Kitty Maryatt was finalising the pre-production of her ambitious project 'La Prose du Transsibérien Re-creation' of *La Prose du Transsibérien* which recreates the original *La Prose* in an edition of 150 copies (plus 30 hors commerce), hand pochoir stencilled and letterpress printed. Maryatt is Director Emeritus of the Scripps College Press in Claremont, California, having taught book arts and typography at the college for 30 years. She spent years researching the history of *La Prose* at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Bibliothèque Fornay and the Jacques Doucet Library, established a census of copies, testing the pochoir process at Atelier Coloris, and colour-matching in preparation for this undertaking. The project was presented at The 2018 Reva and David Logan

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<sup>2</sup> The complete Booknesses archive can be viewed at David Paton's artist's book research website: <http://www.theartistsbook.org.za>

Symposium on the Artist's Book at the Legion of Honor in San Francisco in July 2018, and the edition will be completed by the end of this year.<sup>3</sup>

The Liberature movement, founded in 1999 by Katarzyna Bazarnik and Zenon Fajfer, expressly considers the totality of a book. Their aim is to present material artefacts as the author originally intended them to be published, and that each separate part of the book; text, paper, design, cover - should be as important as the other. Liberature (Polish *liberatura*, from Latin *liber*, i.e. 'book') is now a formal movement and has a Reading Room collection devoted to it in Kraków and a publishing line in collaboration with the publishing house Ha!art. As Bazarnik explains:

*The spur to propose liberature as a genre different from artists' books and concrete poetry came from a self-reflection on form, space, as well as the book and text as literary media, when we were working on our triple-volume book Oka-leczenie. Nothing betrays at first glance that Oka-leczenie consists of three codices attached to one another in such a way that they form a kind of concertina. (O)patrzenie has a torn-off corner of the cover, which a lot of readers and librarians take as an accidental damage and meticulously repair it. They grew out of texts (out of telling stories and expressing emotions) – out of texts that were seeking space to accommodate themselves in it. In the beginning was the word. In the beginning was writing, which for us, unlike for Derrida, did not signify absence but presence: of visible, perceptible words imprinted on some material, palpable matter that could be formed into a meaningful shape. In other words, we were writing books rather than texts, as we consider the book in its material form to be an organic element of our work, and not a transparent container whose shape should not interfere with words transporting the reader to sphere of disembodied meaning.<sup>4</sup> (Bazarnik, 2009: 1)*

Liberature builds upon the material ideas and works of writers such as B. S. Johnson (*House Mother Normal*), Stéphane Mallarmé (*Un coup de des*), Laurence Sterne (*Tristram Shandy*) and James Joyce (*Ulysses*). It also references the printed works of William Blake and includes contemporary Polish artists such as Radosław Nowakowski who has been publishing books under his own Liberatorium imprint since the 1970s. Nowakowski describes his process as:

*The publishing house (rather small press) different than the others because the whole process of book making (imagining, writing, drawing, designing, editing, typesetting, layouting, printing, binding) occurs in one place - in the attic of my house in Dąbrowa Dolna - and in one head, in my, Radosław Nowakowski's, head. Thus a book published by LIBERATORIUM is really a coherent work, all its elements fit well one to another, take part in telling the story and have semantic value (some more, some less) – of course, this does not mean that a part of the process can not*

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<sup>3</sup> You can read more about the project and view the census at: <http://laprosepochoir.blogspot.com>

<sup>4</sup> See: <http://www.liberatura.pl> A pdf download of *LIBERATURE - Literature in The Form of The Book* can be found at: <https://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/news-archive/contrad09/conpdfs/liberature.pdf>  
A video of the book *Oka-leczenie* can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gsDdj4oFBFc>

*occur outside: I often write and draw while travelling, I can also go to a big printing studio... other places are not a problem, but other heads may be a problem...*<sup>5</sup>

Nowakowski refers to his artist's book *Sienkiewicza Street in Kielce* (2003), as a 'street sentence'. Lithograph printed from his original drawings and handwritten texts, the book unfolds to over ten metres in length to reveal the entire facsimile of the street. He describes its narrative as such:

*A man is walking along the street. It's the main street in the town he does not know at all, where he has stopped accidentally and has to spend a few hours. He is not in a hurry, so he's walking slowly looking around, listening, letting thoughts to flow across his head. He stops from time to time and then goes on walking flapping and clacking... walking along the street-sentence... reading-writing this sentence-street... This is not a book about a street. This is not a book about what's going on in a street. This is a book about what's going on in the head of somebody walking along a street.*<sup>6</sup>

*Sienkiewicza Street in Kielce* is a seminal example of Liberature in that it completely encompasses this experience of walking, thinking and listening in the printed text and image and in its physical structure. It's a human experience we can relate to, and in unfolding the pages we can also walk the journey along the street for ourselves.

The Laurence Sterne Trust in the UK recently launched a call to republish an experimental narrative from the 1930s, through the crowdfunding publisher Unbound. The Trust's aim is to recreate an experimental work first published in *The Torquemada Puzzle Book*, written by *The Observer* newspaper's crossword compiler, Edward Powys Mathers (aka Torquemada) in 1934. The original murder mystery *Cain's Jawbone* (a perfect candidate for Liberature), was 100 pages long, printed and bound out of sequence, tasking the reader to rearrange them in their attempt to solve the mystery. The Laurence Sterne Trust calculates the total possible combinations of pages as 32 million, with only two readers having solved the puzzle since 1934. The new project for *Cain's Jawbone* reached its funding target in April 2018; Unbound will publish the book in September 2019, as loose pages within a box, and the Trust has announced a competition to solve the mystery that will run for one year from the date of the book's publication.<sup>7</sup> Access to crowdsourcing for experimental publishing allows adventurous artistic and literary projects such as these to become a reality. Rather than digital publishing killing the physical book, it can be very useful in supporting the creation (and public awareness) of a physical outcome.

### *The possibilities of new media*

Ten years ago, I was invited to give a talk on 'The quiet democracy of the contemporary artist's book' for the *Books That Fly Conference*, University of Brighton, 2008. I had recently visited 'Blood on Paper: The Art of the Book', an

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted from Nowakowski's statement on the Liberatorium website: <http://www.liberatorium.com/info/info.html#ang> [Accessed 13/09/18] An interview with Nowakowski about his publishing practices can also be read at: <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/nowakowski/>

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from Nowakowski's statement on the Liberatorium website: <http://www.liberatorium.com/ulica/ulica.html> [Accessed 13/09/18]

<sup>7</sup> Find out more about the project at: <https://unbound.com/books/cains-jawbone>

exhibition at the V&A in London, which had showcased artists' books published by Ivorypress. The exhibition displays behind glass and ropes left the books inaccessible, and I found myself drawn to the only part of the exhibit which allowed me to experience it with any meaning, Charles Sandison's *Carmina Figurata* (2008) a digital installation projecting on the wall, high up above the books entombed in their cases. *Carmina Figurata*, forms a homage to concrete poetry's typographical movements and a nod to its origin in the Latin term for 'shaped songs' used as a means of meditative reading in Renaissance era.<sup>8</sup> These spatial-line poems were utilised by poets and composers to deliver messages through visual and spoken means to their audiences (Schiltz, 2015: 276). Sandison's *Carmina Figurata* allowed the reader/viewer to watch the projected words connect and disappear, sending signals to each other and their readers which mesmerised me to the extent that I forgot all about the large, inaccessible physical books also on show. In 2009, having visited the same exhibition, the South African artist and academic David Paton wrote an excellent paper 'Ideologies and Identities in Digital Artists' Books: Parallels Between Charles Sandison's *Carmina Figurata* and Willem Boshoff's *Kykafrikaans*' which discusses the relationships between these two works, both codex and digital, and posits an argument for the 'ideological identity of digital artists' books' (Paton, 2009: 2).<sup>9</sup> I'm excited about the future possibilities of digital publishing practices that exist alongside and can add value to physical, paper-based books. Digital can allow us to access other routes into physical artefacts through installations and projections, audio and spoken words and interactive narratives. Some encounters with new means of presenting and reading books in the digital era include:

The Electronic Literature Collection, founded by the 'Electronic Literature Organization', is a free online resource showcasing digital texts.<sup>10</sup> It includes examples such as *Ars poetica*, Zenon Fajfer's screen-based poem as a piece of digital Literature. The writer Alan Trotter's hypertext work *The Brain Drawing the Bullet* can also be viewed on the site or directly on the author's own site.<sup>11</sup> I first encountered Trotter's work in February 2013, when he was conducting doctoral research into unusual narrative forms at the University of Glasgow.<sup>12</sup> We met at the London Centre for Book Arts (LCBA) where my colleague Tom Sowden and I were running an artists' books surgery day, and discussed his project in terms of how it might be presented in a physical book form. We were captivated by Trotter's "unreliable text with an unstable narrator" and quickly realised there was no possible means of creating anything near the digital narrative experience within the fixed physical form of a printed book. *The Brain Drawing the Bullet* remains one of the most exciting pieces of digital literature I have encountered. To read the story you need to move through the text, clicking on the arrows at the end of each section. This produces a series of linear columns of text but the reader realises something is happening. As you progress through the narrative, words in the previous columns suddenly disappear to be replaced with alternative accounts of the characters' actions. It's a wonderfully creative piece of modern fiction, inspired by biographical

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<sup>8</sup> For example, see: 'The *Carmina* of Publilius Optatianus Porphyrius and the Creative Process': <https://www.somegreymatter.com/carmina.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Paton's paper can be read in full at:

[http://www.theartistsbook.org.za/oid/downloads/2/ideologies\\_identities\\_digital\\_artists\\_books.pdf](http://www.theartistsbook.org.za/oid/downloads/2/ideologies_identities_digital_artists_books.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <http://collection.eliterature.org/3/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://greaterthanorequalto.net/thebraindrawingthebullet/>

<sup>12</sup> Alan Trotter's PhD Thesis (2015) *BODIES OF WORK - B.S. Johnson's pages, Alasdair Gray's paragraphs, and interventions into the anatomy of the book*. <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/6852/1/2015trotterphd.pdf>

representations of the writer William Burroughs, and Burroughs' use of the 'cut-up' technique to create experimental narratives. As Trotter explains:

*Electronic literature has the opportunity to reduce the role of the text by becoming more film-like or more game-like – but with The Brain Drawing the Bullet I wanted to stay with the text and explore the difference between text as it exists on the screen and as it exists on the page. In particular that the reader who rests on the digital text as on something solid should be prepared for a lurch if it decides to abandon them.*<sup>13</sup>

Trotter's later work, *All This Rotting* (2016) was published in the digital series *Editions At Play* by Visual Editions, London, UK. Again, it utilises the instability of the narrator, depicted in the breakage and slippage of the text display on screen.<sup>14</sup>

The Ambient Literature project (2016-2018) “focused on the study of emergent forms of literature that make use of novel technologies and social practices”.<sup>15</sup> Three experimental works were commissioned including: *It Must Have Been Dark by Then* by Duncan Speakman, a book and audio experience which uses geolocation and satellite positioning to create an interactive book-walk. There is no prescribed walk, readers can choose locations or a route to walk around their own city or town, creating a personal map of their environment. Each reader's experience of the work will be unique, crossing over mappings and audio excerpts from other countries visited by Speakman with the reader's walk through their own city.<sup>16</sup> *Words We Never Wrote* by Tom Abba & Alyssia White - both writers and artists, was launched at the Hay Festival (2018). The book is an exploration of writing, reading and they way in which words are used, understood, and how they overlap and mingle during encounters with other language/texts. They cite authors such as “Borges, Calvino, Ocampo and especially the writings of Bruno Schulz”, as influences on both the concept and the presentation of the experience.<sup>17</sup> *The Cartographer's Confession*, by James Attlee utilises poetry, images, photographs, soundscapes and original music written for the project all accessed by a smartphone app. Each of the publications from the project can be downloaded to a smartphone or iPad as an example of experiments in digital storytelling. *Breathe*, by Kate Pullinger, published by Editions at Play / Visual Editions in collaboration with the Ambient Literature research project is a ghost story that plays on the interaction between the digital and real world through the device it is read on, the perfect means of spooking someone by it being delivered personally to their own phone.

Amaranth Borsuk is the creator of *Between Page And Screen* (2010), an early “digital pop-up book” which interacts between page and screen, coming to life when the animations are activated by a webcam to appear on the pages. It crosses the boundaries of artists' books, poetry and augmented reality in that the reader is both

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<sup>13</sup> Alan Trotter's author statement: <http://collection.eliterature.org/3/work.html?work=the-brain-drawing-the-bullet> [accessed 25/07/18]

<sup>14</sup> <http://visual-editions.com/all-this-rotting-by-alan-trotter>

<sup>15</sup> Ambient Literature was a two-year collaboration (2016-2018) between UWE Bristol, Bath Spa University, the University of Birmingham and Calvium, Ltd. established to investigate the locational and technological future of the book. Funded through a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK. <https://ambientlit.com>

<sup>16</sup> <https://ambientlit.com/index.php/it-must-have-been-dark-by-then/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://ambientlit.com/wordsweneverwrote>

involved and portrayed interacting as part of the performative element of this book.<sup>18</sup> Borsuk has recently written about the status and future of the book in her publication *The Book*, for the MIT Press Essential Knowledge series (2018). Borsuk argues that: “the book is a slippery and malleable object - an interface that has changed with time and geography to meet the needs of readers, writers, and the societies they inhabit.”<sup>19</sup> Her text explores the idea of the book as object, content, idea and interface in the 21st century, with an online archive of her investigation viewable at: <http://t-h-e-b-o-o-k.com> where she has also published a series of quotes by respondents to the question of what a book is.

Since Publish on Demand (POD) became available, it has opened many possibilities for artists to self-publish. The lack of cost in paying for editions to be printed as the books are printed to order and paid for directly by the purchaser, and the ease of international distribution. Artists such as Joachim Schmid ([www.lumpenfotografie.de](http://www.lumpenfotografie.de)) and Guy Bigland ([www.guybigland.com](http://www.guybigland.com)) use blurb.com and lulu.com respectively to produce editions of artists' books. The main disadvantage of using POD is that the artist does not know who has purchased their books if they are sold directly through the POD provider. Joachim Schmid has found a way around this system by making an online shop where customers order his POD books, which he then purchases and passes on which means he can sign the edition and check the quality of production before sending. He also then knows who has purchased the book. When myself and co-investigator Tom Sowden ran the *Manifesto* project from 2008-2010<sup>20</sup>, we were surprised that some collectors and artists engaged in traditional production processes such as relief printing and letterpress, did not consider POD books to be valid as artists' books. This was because the POD process allows for an unlimited quantity of books to be produced, in theory, the edition could potentially run into the 1000s which they believed would diminish the cachet of the book as a special object. We both thought that it would be a shame for artists not to make use of such an accessible publishing tool, so we decided to test it ourselves and see how the books would be received by an audience at book fairs. Sowden was excited to use POD for his Ruscha-style books as it offered him the machine printed, mass-produced aesthetic he had been looking for in making his tribute books. He used it to publish titles such as *Fiftytwo Shopping Trolleys in Parking Lots*, 2010, and *Fortynine Coach Seats Travelling Along the M4*, 2013. We also used POD to publish *A Place of Interest*, a collaborative artist's book made in transit for the 2010 Doverodde Book Arts Festival, Denmark. Alongside this I used POD to create *Closure*, an artist's book about the end of a love affair between a flower arranger and a plane spotter, 2009. To test our books, we took them to artist's book events and fairs and submitted them for exhibitions including: *CLOSURE*, curated by weloveyourbooks, UK, 2009; *BookPlusEtc* curated by Young-Ju Choi, Seoul International Artist's Book Fair 2009; Manchester Artist's Book Fair; Small Publishers Fair London; 12th International Contemporary Artists' Book Fair, Leeds, and BuchDruckKunst, *6th Norddeutsche Handpressenmesse*, Museum der Arbeit, Hamburg. They were also taken into inventory for galleries and specialist artist's bookshops including 23 Sandy in the USA and bookartbookshop,

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<sup>18</sup> You can see a video of the book in action at: [www.betweenpageandscreen.com](http://www.betweenpageandscreen.com).

<sup>19</sup> Email from Borsuk to author - Query: How do you define the book? 03/04/18

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/canon>

UK. We have both continued to use POD as a free publishing tool for artists' books such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (for World Book Night, 2018)<sup>21</sup> and *A 4-hour walk on every road in the Southville Residents' Parking Scheme* (2016).<sup>22</sup>

### *The book as a material object*

British artist and academic John McDowall<sup>23</sup> has recently completed a doctoral research project: *The time of reading: artists' books and self-reflexive practices in literature*. In this project McDowall "proposes that the reading of an artist's book is one that may entail an experience that is distinctive to the medium, one that encompasses a shift of expectations of what a book is or does. That there is an awareness of the book held in the hands, and of its interactivity and deployment in time, and that this combination of tactile and cognitive negotiation of the mechanisms of the book's structure, sequence and content make for a particularity of engagement. As a dialogical relationship, coming from a personal and infinitely variable experience of the book by its reader/viewer, this is one that is inherently elusive and complex to analyse. In investigating the nature of the temporality of self-reflexive dynamics as an underlying characteristic of the medium, this thesis submits that the foregrounding of the synthesis in time of the mutable and the concrete may be an apposite and constructive approach to exposition and evaluation of this heterogeneous field."<sup>24</sup> McDowall's practice references and reworks aspects of literature, film, the experience of time in relation to both, and also how we read and engage with books. This might include alluding to, through imagery, the content of uncut pages, *In-octavo* (2013); representing the language of writers such as Rabelais, in *Escapade*, a collaboration with artist Sophie Loss (2016), or bringing words to our attention in *A list of something in Herman Melville's 'Pierre: or, The Ambiguities'* (2013).

Otto of ottoGraphic, also in the UK, is a graphic artist and book maker who also runs a screenprint studio. Part of his printmaking practice includes the publication of 'how-to' manuals based on screenprinting processes devised at his Marshfield Screen Print studio. These manuals are particularly interesting in that they are produced through the process they are teaching, and richly illustrated and presented as collectible hand printed artefacts as well as useful instruction manuals. For example *Image Making for screen printing* (October 2017), the 4th in his series of screenprinting manuals explains how he produces illustrations to take through the screenprinting process. Each chapter is illustrated with landscape images of Snowdonia in Wales, made by Otto during a trip in 2017. These beautifully printed images were inspired by the Impressionist paintings of James Dickson Innes, translated through the screenprinting process in the tradition of early 20th Century Russian designers and artists such as Vladimir Lebedev and Eduard Krimmer.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.blurb.co.uk/b/8647420-their-eyes-were-watching-god>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.lulu.com/shop/tom-sowden/a-4-hour-walk-on-every-road-in-the-southville-residents-parking-scheme/paperback/product-22693597.html>

<sup>23</sup> <http://ambruno.co.uk/john-mcdowall.html>

<sup>24</sup> <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/20652/>

<sup>25</sup> All of Otto's manuals can be found at: <http://www.centralbooks.com/publishers/OTTOGR/> the artist's website details more of his artists' books: <http://www.ottographic.co.uk>

British book artist and researcher Angie Butler was commissioned to make an artist's book in 2017 for the 'Making Books in Bristol' research project by the Centre for Material Texts at the University of Bristol, UK.<sup>26</sup> Her brief was to explore what it means to make a book in the city of Bristol and to reveal the ways in which we understand the physical form of a book in order to mediate the meanings of the book's contents. *The Object of Our Affection* was completed as a limited edition artefact made in collaboration with artists, printers and bookbinders in the city.<sup>27</sup> "As the pages are turned, three narratives reveal literary facts, anecdotes, and quotes about what books mean to us. The book informs its reader about how and why it - and other books - are constructed in this way. Various papers and inclusions of other materials can be handled and related to observations around language, text, paper and reading."<sup>28</sup>

The Australian artist and academic Tim Mosely references Derrida's "insoluble tension" to describe the situation of artists' books, Mosely thinks that "the tension that can't be dissolved is what gives artists' books their currency as they float between fine art and literature." His research into how we navigate through the book as a material object has investigated haptic touch as a means of privileging the hands over the eyes when we interact with these artefacts. Mosely's *Archipelago of Remnant Gardens* series of bookworks (2014)<sup>29</sup> expressly demand physical touch as part of their reception. Materials were chosen for their haptic qualities; rainforest ply cover to touch the forest of the subject matter, felt inlays to assure the reader / viewer that they should be feeling their way through the book. Mosely used Japanese papers to relief print right up and over the edges so there are no margins for delicate readers to hover their fingers over, they must touch the art in order to turn to the next page. The artist has also torn through some sections of pages to reveal part of the following view as a means of inviting the viewer to probe through with their fingers. It is an immersive experience in the feeling of paper and ink, and these beautiful books carry a social plea to consider the plight of the Sambaleke people and their rainforest habitat in Papua New Guinea. Sue Anderson and Gwen Harrison's books are exquisitely produced, hand printed and bound large-scale works whose visual appeal and tactile quality belie the harrowing contents within. Anderson and Harrison use etching, relief print and letterpress processes on fine papers with fine binding to present socially and politically charged accounts of Australian history. The beauty of the exterior engages the viewer / reader and before they know it, they are embroiled in factual retellings of historical (and contemporary) abuses of children, orphans, asylum seekers and colonial prisoners. (*Howl For A Black Cockatoo*) for example, compares the moment in history when Lewis Carroll was writing Alice in Wonderland in the UK, whilst in Australia, NSW government child welfare legislation saw young girls taken from their families and sent to Cockatoo Island, a former prison colony, to be cared for and educated by the state. It was a humanitarian failure. Anderson and Harrison's *Howl for a Black Cockatoo* was completed in 2015,

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/research/centres/material-texts/>

<sup>27</sup> Letterpress printed on a Vandercook No.4 cylinder press by Angie Butler (ABPress) using 14, 18 and 24pt Caslon type, loaned by The Whittington Press, Gloucestershire. Also features wood-letter and photopolymer blocks printed letterpress, hand typed text, a pochoir print, and painted and drawn elements. Artists' contributions and additional information is listed in the reader's letter (inserted at the end of the book). Bound by Rachel James of Bristol Bound Bookbinding.

<sup>28</sup> From the artist's library information sheet (01/12/17)

<sup>29</sup> [https://issuu.com/qcagriffith/docs/tim\\_mosely](https://issuu.com/qcagriffith/docs/tim_mosely)

as Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* celebrated 150 years. Their book intertwines Alice's adventures with the reality of daily life for the young girls trapped in such an inhospitable reality. These books sit within national and international collections, imparting their knowledge and assimilating their messages alongside formal historical ledgers and finely bound books.

There are also examples of books that reference and speak to other books. In 1982, the British artist Les Coleman made an exercise-style book called *With my Right Hand* (White Lies Publications), in which he produced a series of drawings using his right hand (he is left handed). Artist Erica van Horn later made a book in response called *With my Left Hand* (Coracle, 2006). Brazilian artist and academic Amir Brito Cador's book *A Night Visit to the Library* (Andante Editions, 2011) was made in response and as a tribute to Endre Tót's book, *Night Visit to the National Gallery* (Beau Geste Press, 1974). Brito Cador asks if we can recognise a book, rather than a painting, by its silhouette. Inside the book are silhouettes of his favourite artists' books.<sup>30</sup>

British book artist Cathey Webb recently completed a collection of artists' books *Twenty Library Book Shelves* made during her artist's residency at Bower Ashton Library here at UWE, Bristol.<sup>31</sup> The books' contents were gathered systematically from the shelves within the library and turned into poetic narratives that brought disparate books together. Webb's artistic practice is embedded in books and how we consume, appreciate and handle them. Another recent project by Webb, *The Marks We Leave*, asks the reader how they are holding the book:

*When we read a book, we leave marks which enhance or detract from the reader's experience. You may have a favourite old book covered in creases or marks that you would never swap for a pristine new edition. Your old copy may link you to a time and place in your life when you read it. This quality of books can influence the experience of reading; it can enhance or distract from the narrative and gives the book a life of its own. How does the reader hold the book: gripping it tightly or lightly touching the edge of pages? A group of volunteers each read a copy of the book with inked fingers, leaving clearly visible marks on the edition they held. Each of them hesitated prior to handling the book; a Western tendency where the visual sense is more prevalent than that of touch. Most of the readers commented about how unnatural the activity seemed.*<sup>32</sup>

In his book *Post-Digital Print – The Mutation of Publishing Since 1894*, Alessandro Ludovic describes printed books as 'steady' and digital books as 'unsteady' each of which has its own benefits and disadvantages. I believe that the stable, printed book as a cultural artefact remains a physical, intimate reading experience, one in which we both absorb and are absorbed. Digital publishing and dissemination of material offers a wider public experience but it often disappears too quickly when websites are rebuilt or moved. Immersion in a book involves spending time and concentration on being receptive. There are too many distractions in the digital arena, email alerts, hyperlinks and so on, that draw our ever dwindling attention away from the material

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<sup>30</sup> [https://issuu.com/amir\\_brito/docs/a\\_night\\_visit](https://issuu.com/amir_brito/docs/a_night_visit)

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.catheywebb.com/twenty-library-book-shelves.html>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/cathey/>

we are viewing as we flit between platforms. A book in the hand offers a solitary respite from the world around us, a means to escape to another place or time. Within the space of a physical book, we can individually engage with the maker's ideas or characters' voices, which in these encounters, speak only to us as co-conspirators, held and immersed in that moment.

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### **Questions to answer**

#### **1 When started your interest on the book?**

I have always loved books since childhood. My most treasured possession is a volume of stories by the Brothers Grimm that was a present on the day I was born. It gave me nightmares as a child but I insisted on reading one of the stories every night anyway. Even when I was very young I always had a book with me wherever I went, my favourite trip was to our local library to borrow new books.

**2 What was the initial for your interest on the book? Can you record a special incident?**

When I was at art college I spent a lot of time in the beautiful old library. Whilst I was browsing the shelves I picked out a book that set me on my path, it was by Susan Hiller, called Sisters of Menon. I was fascinated as I could see that it wasn't a 'normal' book, and decided to find out more about what it was. This was my introduction to artists' books and once I found my way in, I knew that was what I wanted to do from then on. It made everything fall into place, as I had been painting on canvas and paper, but mostly using the paintbrush to write with.

**3 What do you focus on when being involved in books? Which aspects in respect to the book you are especially interested?**

The content, always. I love how clever artists and writers can be with inventive narratives and concepts. I also love the way that you can carry or send them anywhere easily, and that people can hold them and share ideas and knowledge.

**4 Do you have alternatives to the book? Are there objects which would replace the book for you?**

No alternatives, and no replacements, there never will be anything the same as a book for me. Culturally too, books have so many values; sharing of knowledge and learning, escaping reality, broadening our perspective, I know you can do this through other means but books have a role to play in empowering the mind on an individual basis.

**5 Are materiality and content in your opinion on the same level? Are there books you are totally indifferent to shape, design, materiality? (because you focus only on the content)**

In artists' books the materiality should really be part of the content and context. The Liberate movement is a perfect example of the union of materiality and content in books. Content is always the most important thing, but if I was indifferent to a book's design I wouldn't pick it up and it would be my loss if it had amazing content inside. Sally Alatalo's clever use of the paperback book format remains one of my favourites (*Unforeseen Alliances*, Anita M-28 (Sally Alatalo), A Sara Ranchose Romance, 2001).

**6 Do exist on the other side books you abject by their content, but adore by their design?**

Not usually, but there are some incredible books that can trick you. Ann Tyler creates artists' books that contain the most harrowing contents, and I admire her for that and the way she presents the material. It looks very attractive as an artefact but then you suddenly realise you are reading about a racist mob lynching, or homophobic murder. She has a very clever way of getting a message across and making you complicit through engaging with it.