

BECOMING WHAT THE BOOK MAKES POSSIBLE:  
ASPECTS OF METAPHORISATION OF IDENTITY AND  
PRACTICE THROUGH ARTISTS' BOOKS

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Vol. I

### Abstract

A practice-centred view of artists' books, coupled with a descriptive vocabulary/structure from formal criticism helps us to engage with some of the most insoluble problems of artists' books criticism. Our history does not necessarily point towards a centring definition or identity for artists' books, but towards a practice that always engages with other forms and identities. This engagement, rather than a solid identity from which to speak offers a way out of the artists' books 'ghetto'. This is already prevalent in practice, but requires additional narration and reflection to become part of our critical apparatus.

Thus, a dialogue of formal and practice-centred critical engagement with artists' books is proposed. But this is prey to deconstructive reverses in the interpenetration and co-dependency of its valent terms. Similarly, I present dichotomies of strategic and tactical forms of practice. The tensions held thus in play I evoke as metaphorical, and a hermeneutics of 'metaphorical practice' narrates the artist's relationship to these terms. Metaphor is employed as a means to model the creative tension of terms thus held in proximity.

Thirteen interviews are used to examine uses of metaphor as a way of artists pursuing practice in books, including 'the book-as-space/time', the analogue self enacted through books, the 'promise of reading', etc. These are shown to exhibit a metaphorical consistency of practice that opens up some of the tensions a more formalist view of artists' books indicates, but *cannot explain*. The research makes explicit certain tacit practices of artists' books' practice, in doing so offering a model for its interpretation through the extended significance of metaphor in artistic practice. This is offered in the hopes of suggesting new approaches to some of the tensions proving insoluble to the critical functions of the field as it stood at the time of research.



## **Acknowledgements.**

I am glad to have the opportunity to thank some of the people who have given me their guidance, assistance and who have provided me with opportunities to speak with others about some of the ideas in this thesis.

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For her unflagging support and inspiration, I would like to thank my partner, Linda Moody, without whose patience I could never have brought this project to completion.

To the artists whose company and hospitality I have enjoyed, very many thanks. Coming to you in the role of a researcher, you have made me very welcome, both in your homes and studios, and in your

practices. I have from the beginning felt a profound sense of community that I have tried to explore here.

To friends who have offered themselves as sounding-boards and patient listeners, my thanks. The hours you have spent listening to me are appreciated. In particular I would like to thank my friends Lindy Clark , Andrew Atkinson and Andy Saxon, whose contributions and advice have always been of help. Some of you have helped just by providing an example to me.

My parents' unfaltering belief in my ability to carry on is owed no small debt of gratitude: I could not have done so without you. I begin by thanking you now.

Though I have benefitted from advice and insight, professional and casual, from many quarters, any shortcomings in the following are of course my own.

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Additional material not included in the thesis is included in appendices A (Edited transcripts of interviews, and B (Recordings of interviews) given in volume 2. These appendices are to be considered ancillary to the thesis itself.

## **Author Declaration**

According to the regulations I declare that during my registration I was not registered for any other degree. Material for this thesis has not been used by me for any other award.

Andrew Eason

October, 2010.

## **Copyright**

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement

## **Organisation of the Thesis**

This thesis is organised as follows. Volume I, the thesis, is self-contained, but is accompanied in a separate volume by appendices A and B, respectively the edited transcripts of interviews undertaken, and the recordings of the same presented as Mp3 files on a CD-Rom affixed to Volume II. Their inclusion is for the convenience of the reader as ancillary material. They are not intended as part of the thesis and their

inclusion should not be inferred as such. Readers may supplement their view with these materials if they wish, but they are not necessary to the thesis.

The bulk of the research material thus referenced consists of the thirteen interviews I conducted with book artists about their practice. These artists were: John Bently, Tracey Bush, Peter Chasseaud, Helen Douglas, David Faithfull, Jane Hyslop, Susan Johanknecht, Julie Johnstone, Reassemble (John Say and Sheena Vallely), Lucy May Schofield, Tate Shaw, Christine Tacq and Carolyn Trant.

## **Referencing Conventions**

The references given in this thesis are to bibliographic materials, following a standard referencing style (ISO 690), and to the interview materials presented more fully as appendices. These necessitate a slightly different system of references. The conventions may be explained via the following examples:

Example 1: "Helen Douglas 1: 38.48"

Example 2: "Douglas, 1999, p21" or "Douglas, 1999"

*Example 1* refers to material taken from the interviews I conducted with book artists as research for the thesis. Specifically, this citation refers to interview number 1 with Helen Douglas, with the material quoted



beginning at approximately 38 minutes and 48 seconds into the recording. The form of the transcribed materials (Appendix A) and the recordings on the CD Rom (Appendix B) use the same structure- thus the interview in question is always called “Helen Douglas 1” and its file name is “Helen\_douglas\_1.mp3”.

*Example 2* refers to material identified in the thesis’ bibliography, here using ISO 690 style guidelines to refer in the first instance to material on page 21 of the work cited, or in the second instance to the work as a whole (in this particular case a journal article.

A shorthand way of steering clear of confusion is that bibliographic references are given with the author’s surname only, whereas references to research appendices are given with the author’s forename and surname together.

# 1 Introductory Materials and Objectives

## 1.1 Describing the 'Analogue of Introspection'

How do we communicate to others, who don't already know, what an artist's book is? We find it difficult. (*You* may not have difficulty, but you will quickly find someone who will argue with you.) We lack a stable definition. And as soon as we settle on one thing, we must hedge it about with qualifications and debates. The person we are talking to raises an eyebrow at this confusion, and we are left with the feeling that we have failed to communicate quite why we find these things compelling.

Yet histories of the artist's book exist, exemplars abound.

Canonical collections rank up dozens of highly-praised books that falteringly delineate categories, types, histories of working, bound up in a flux of eventfulness, technology and individuated practice. But so inventive is the artist's book in retrospect and projecting itself into the future, that such delineations provoke unceasing tension. This is healthy enough, but, lacking a sense of closure, it precludes the development of a higher-order comparison of such identities with the broader scope of artistic practice. This thesis does not dissolve such issues, but it does offer a supplement to two of the strongest traits we encounter in the field.

There is, on the one hand, the urge to create identity, and on the other, the fear that in artists' books unresolved issues with narrating themselves as a form they, again, preclude a level of discourse that would enliven and engage the field. What the thesis offers is twofold.

Firstly it is argued from a critical perspective towards the preponderant reading of the existing literature, that the urge to create separate identity, with identified forms and an identified history, is informed by a mistaken reading of the history of artists' books. (This urge is perhaps mythical. As a project to really create the 'one true identity of form' that expounds the artist's book, who, really, believes in it? But we all know what this urge is.) The field is better served by a reading that 'pushes towards' the intersection of artists' books with other practices, where the identity of the artist's book is always bound up with the practices and means of other forms in the century-or-so of their existence. And this reading is not only possible, but is, I argue, already finely-presented in some of our most valuable critical texts, which we popularly misread as constructing a monolithic identity that it in fact shows to be composed of a mass of intersections with other arts, technologies, practices and movements<sup>1</sup>. Our critical dialogue takes a turn for the worse when it rereads itself as tending towards a centre

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<sup>1</sup> Outstanding amongst such texts is, of course, Johanna Drucker's *The Century of Artists' Books*. (Drucker, 2004)

within itself, which is to say: when we start using the literature to construct an identity for artists' books, we are reading into a varied, hybrid history, an identity whose centring force goes against what artists' books actually do, which is: they make contact. They carry across. The thesis presents this reading of artists' books, contrasting the search for identity to artists' books heterogeneous and engaged character, with an argument as to its necessity and consequences, as part of the thesis' critical position towards the field in its opening chapters.

Secondly, the thesis addresses the fear of the un-narrated form by offering, instead of a history, instead of a formal identity, a narrative of practice. Instead of mapping the typology of the field and saying what *those*, and *those*, and *those* are, (or *when* and *when* and *when*), this narrative emphasises the possibilities of practice. Thus, instead of a structure of forms, there is narrated an (incomplete) range of possibilities. Here, such possibilities are presented as rooted in the artist's book's performance *as* and *through* metaphor, for the community it creates and is created by. That this circularity is mediated at all levels through metaphor is something I examine in depth throughout Chapter 3. *The Analogue of Introspection* referred to is the artist's book as a metaphor for the mind, and marks the 'inner limit' of the thesis. That is, that examining the metaphorical practice of artists' books leads us by stages

to a view of their effect upon and production of affect within consciousness. The narrative of practice the thesis elaborates offers a range of possibilities that the use of books as an artistic practice opens up, and we can see some operating more deeply or effectively than others. If we wish to characterise the field based on such weightings, then that remains a possibility, but it can never be a definition. The view of practice that the thesis opens is suitable for introduction to wider discussions: of the artist's book as performance; the artist's book as situation; the artist's book as part of a wider practice; the artist's book as a hybrid practice itself, etc. It thus offers a manoeuvring step to turn our critical heritage towards a wider application.

Here is my first insistence on the incompleteness of the thesis as a lone narrative. I will have occasion to repeat it. A narrative of practice alone does not suffice to offer the artist's book to a wider understanding. There must be (and are) other histories of the book to accompany it. But the value of the narrative of practice is that it does not deny many truths about artists' books that cannot be described by a 'centring' history that devolves more and more towards intrinsic formalism.

## 1.2 Some Dichotomies

What is described through this thesis is a narrative of what is ‘intrinsic to the extrinsic’, in other words, artists talking about the ‘interior’ practice that informs their books. This is why most of the material you will see consists of extracts from interviews with artists, rather than pictures from books. That artists do talk about individual books is of course necessary and important, and appropriate figures are included<sup>2</sup>. But this is a view that supplements and informs the formal and the visual. The narration of practice is part of an interwoven dialogue of material and internal practice that produces artists’ books.

The dichotomy of intrinsic and extrinsic is not the only one you will find being interwoven through this narrative. The thesis also approaches practice as a dialogue of strategic and tactical, of technical and metistic<sup>3</sup>. These are offered as ways of approaching the ‘give and take’ of practice. What, for example, do we mean by an ‘artistic strategy’? We usually apply it as ‘a means to operate in a given situation’. Surely this is a tactic? A means rather than an end? Artistic ends are difficult for artists to describe for the most part. There is (usually) an intention, but one that exists in a rush of feedback from environment, and materials, and it is subjected to the tyrannical decisiveness of the

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B

<sup>3</sup> I.e. relating to the ‘art of strategy’ which I will shortly refer to in further detail.

artist who may at any moment have a change of mind. The presence of a possibility of narrative only compounds this. Practice is guided by both tactics and strategy.

But even an artwork that ‘knows’ where it is going does not expect that it will know from the outset absolutely *how* it will get there, and this describes the relationship between technique and *metis*. Technique knows what is materially possible, but *metis* is the art of strategy.<sup>4</sup> It is *metis* that allows us to *carry on* towards a ‘goal’ whose whole context over time may have changed, even to the extent of changing the end.

What have these to do with artists’ books? The thesis wishes to examine the idea of artists’ books as a *practice* and offers these relations as part of a projected hermeneutic of practice. It’s no simple matter to recount the innumerable responses to situation and material involved. The fact that artists use metaphors to explain their practice is linked to these relationships, because metaphor, in its irreducible quality (‘Achilles is a lion’ actually means ‘Achilles both is *and is not* a lion’), can capture a dynamic tension in language, and invites us to narrate-out the

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Dillon offers a definition: “*Metistic* intelligence is not epistemology in the traditional sense of the term because it assumes a radically related polymorphous, polyphenomenal and polytropic world of change... For those of a strategic disposition, *Metis* is nonetheless the strategic art that such a world necessarily calls into being.” (Dillon, 1999)

differences and similarities involved. Thus (for example) an artist does not literally “dream through the book”, but her offer of it as a metaphor gives us a way of interpreting her practice’s play through the relationships involved. Framing practice between these dichotomies is intended to present some of the modes of action and decision that artists’ metaphors of practice attempt to engage with. Artists’ metaphors of practice describe their way of working, and this describes the tension, the swing and sway between different possibilities and modes of thought like strategy/tactic technique/metis, etc.

This thesis seeks out such metaphors of practice to show how working with books gives access to ways of working and thinking about work, which in turn gives us new ways of talking about artists’ books.

### 1.3 Thesis Structure and Methodology: A Brief History

The reader will note that this is quite a long piece of writing for a thesis about art, (which are often accompanied by a practice-based component). This is because it is submitted as the majority of the support of the thesis (accompanying assorted academic requirements and materials), rather than as an accompaniment to practice-based research. The place of my own practice in this research is as an indicative practitioner (of which more below), rather than as a researcher - through



- practice. This replaced initial intentions to find a way to research the questions I was interested in through practice. But what sort of questions could I ask that my book art practice would answer? Not the ones I wanted: or rather, making *any* artist's book would answer. There was no book I could make that would test any theory that I was at present considering. Rather, I could look at what my own practice already was, to do two things: to offer my own practice as a subject (for which no additional works were necessary). Secondly: to present myself as an indicative practitioner, possessing what ethnographers refer to as a 'unique adequacy of methods'<sup>5</sup>: someone whose participation in the community of study was informed by their 'native status' within it. Being able to draw on 'insider' knowledge of the setting, the theory goes, puts the observer in a 'uniquely adequate' position to give an account of what is going on – and further, what is *normally* going on, because the observer is thoroughly acquainted with the normative frameworks of the setting. The theory is that a 'native' observer is less disruptive, and can report the meanings of data because they understand the field of significance the meaning occurs within. Concomitant to that, and no less problematic than with other methods of observation, is the problem of objectivity. Unique adequacy by its very nature recommends an

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<sup>5</sup> Garfinkel 1967, in (Wakefield, 2000)

involvement by the observer – a professional or otherwise cultural engagement that goes hand-in-hand with the observer's competence as a 'native'. But this produces subjective involvement in the events of the setting. (So, the type of conversational interviews I conducted feature quite a lot of *conversation*, which necessarily includes a lot of me.)

There are two approaches to this problem. One is simply to mitigate it by making the problems as obvious as possible: by clarifying the observer's relationships explicitly. That is part of my method through section 2.5 which presents my practice, but also states formulations of the experiences and presuppositions that informed my first interests in taking on the research, a framework that is carried forward explicitly into the preparations for interviewing. The analysis of the interviews themselves necessitated the formulation of related-but-different approaches, as we shall see in Chapter 3, but these were emergent from the interviews alongside the explicitly stated frameworks I engaged with my participants under (of which more in a moment).

Secondly, the problem is made *part* of the process by philosophical means: the research is not regarded as a strictly objective process, but as a hermeneutic one, whose methods are those of different varieties of interpretation whose approaches towards objectivity are

slowly engaged through turn after turn of the reviewing process<sup>6</sup>.

Situating the thesis amongst other critical narratives of the artist's book (offering as they do, other ways of interpreting artists' books) is one way of achieving this, and, internally, I offer several different approaches to interpreting the material by presenting them in a structure that engages with time, offering a presupposition followed by subsequent analyses.

This does not negate the subjectivity of the observations, but it does allow us to create a relationship to research material that takes the subjective responses as part of the process. It is one of the difficulties of any kind of qualitative research, and particularly for any kind of participant observation, to take the observer out. What we can do, and what I have done in this thesis, is to put the observer more clearly in.

### 1.3.1

The structure I have adopted for this research is therefore informed by two considerations: that it express the place of the observer relative to the study, and that it present an account that includes the 'time of interpretation': in other words that there is a before-and-after to the presuppositions I bring to the research. The research therefore proceeds

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<sup>6</sup> See Alvesson, M and Skoldberg, K. *Reflexive Methodology*, particularly their chapter on hermeneutics (pp52-110), and the section therein on poetic hermeneutics, (pp87-95). (Alvesson, et al., 2000)

through establishing a critical position relative to the issues that structure the field of Artists' Books (sections 2.0 -2.4), reviewing others' works and producing a generalised set of topics that would inform later sections.

These same generalised topics are then used to analyse my position as a practitioner of artists' books and evaluate my competency as a 'native' observer, adequate to the task of evaluating my subjects' statements in relation to the field as a whole. (Section 2.5)

These generalised topics, and a structure of examining propositions which arose from them were used to form a presuppositional framework that informed my interviews. Chapter 2 as a whole presents a review of my contemporaries and myself as the 'starting point' of the research, a starting point that was used as a position from which to conduct the interviews that are presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 2 thus preserves the construction of a presuppositional position as part of an overarching narrative of the hermeneutic of investigation.

This is followed by a presentation of the research materials as a series of metaphors (the various parts of Chapter 3), diverging from the framework that was initially proposed, but having a relationship to it. This relationship is partly considered in the course of the analysis itself, and partly elaborated through the evaluation that follows in the final sections of the thesis (Chapter 4). The analysis of the research materials

prompts the application of an assortment of approaches and models to the themes which are exposed, whose convergences build towards the 'inner limit' of the 'analogue of introspection' I note in section 1.1.

Why the divergence from the structure I adopt through Chapter 2? These changes indicate a particular engagement with the other people whose testimony regarding their work forms the original research the thesis undertakes. It is as much their story as mine. In fact, the encounter with my interviewees fills out some of my presumptions, but confounds others: this is part of the hermeneutic approach, and is reflected by a reinterpretation in the form of changes to the structure from that which informs Chapter 2, to the series of metaphors that inform Chapter 3.

This form of engagement with the research is akin to what Paul Ricoeur calls 'critical solicitude'<sup>7</sup>. A useful working definition for our purposes may be found in van Hooft, S, *Life, Death and Subjectivity: Moral Sources in Bioethics*,

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<sup>7</sup> (Ricoeur, 1994 [1990] p. 273) "...critical solicitude is the form practical wisdom takes in the region of interpersonal relations." It is judgement tempered by a solicitous respect for the other and the intention to work towards the 'just mean' through the critical resources of experience. It contrasts with (but often informs and softens) the hermeneutic of suspicion (always trying to interpret what the text, the utterance, etc *really* means). To do justice to the other and to ourselves, a critical solicitude is sought that tries to encompass both the desires of the other and ourselves. We might see in this echoes of the relentless interpretation Sontag wishes to peel away, (Sontag, 1995 [1966]) and a key to what we could offer in its place other than an equally incomplete formalism. An 'erotic' criticism would have to include some form of critical solicitude.

When rules are applied to concrete situations, the otherness of persons demands to be recognised in the context of their particular needs and values. So there needs to be a combination of ... [practical wisdom]... understood as particular judgement together with critical thinking understood as applying the test of universalisability... Solicitude for the other should take precedence over critical thinking aimed merely at rational consistency.

(van Hooft, 2004 p. 77)

The interviewees influence the critical makeup of the thesis: aspects of their responses confirm aspects of my presuppositions, whilst altering others. To understand their responses relating to the position I establish through Chapter 2, I adopt an attitude of critical solicitude: the *particular*, as evinced in individuals' response, helps shape the judgements I make.

But, it is worth emphasising, I, too, am part of the interpretation. I don't take everything at face value but sift it according to the position I have established.<sup>8</sup> Since I try to achieve the best new understandings, syntheses and insights through my interpretational engagement, without

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<sup>8</sup> A similar position is given something of a 'fictional' turn by Martha Nussbaum's *Poetic Justice*, where she examines Dickens' exhortation to "approach reason by way of fancy" in his novel, *Hard Times*. The empathy we feel for even fictional characters can be an education in a more solicitous way to pass judgement upon others. We can err by being either too credulous or by being too Gradgrindingly rationalist.

accepting a completely relativist position to the various texts, but instead try to engage creatively in the creation of understanding according to my lights, it is a *critical* solicitude. My 'lights' are merely those areas where I claim the adequacy to make distinctions, to make moves. We can think of these as my competence in various language games, or roles, or areas of experience, as described in Chapter 2. These are my areas of adequacy to make 'wise' judgement, in the sense of *phronesis*<sup>9</sup>: I have enough practical wisdom of those fields to make my pursuit of my presuppositions somewhat worthwhile. The purpose of such a claim of adequacy is not to provide a totalising stamp of rational correctness, but strives towards a 'vector': a clarity of momentum for my presuppositions to be able to draw inference from what they collide with.

## 2.0 Critical Issues: Themes in the Field of Artists' Books and in my Personal Practice

### 2.0.1 Introduction

It would probably be wrong...to seek in the existence of ...

themes the principles of the individuation of a discourse.

Should they not be sought rather in the dispersion of the points

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<sup>9</sup> I have substituted 'practical wisdom' for '*phronesis*' in the preceding (i.e. Van Hooft) quotation. Richard Kearney examines the place of *phronesis* (a term from Aristotelian poetics) in narrative in (Kearney, 2002 pp. 142-150)

of choice that the discourse leaves free? In the different possibilities that it opens of reanimating already existing themes, of arousing opposed strategies, of giving way to irreconcilable interests, of making it possible, with a particular set of concepts, to play different games? ... [C]ould one not rather mark out the dispersion of the points of choice, and define prior to any option, to any thematic preference, a field of strategic possibilities?

(Foucault, 2002 [1969] p. 40)

#### *2.0.1.1*

The above quotation indicates that the structure that follows is provisional. I am setting out a 'skeleton' to present the critical issues relevant to artists' books. In doing so, I am creating just those sorts of 'thematic preference' that Foucault would wish to leave unfixed. In a sense, the structure that follows is a necessary fiction used to create comparison between different ways of seeing and making artists' books.

However, I will work back towards those 'points of choice' resulting from my encounter with the field's structure as it stands. This 'structured field' is a temporary projection. This provisional status reflects my view of canons and critical values as most valuable when seen similarly. Thus what follows is a critical review of the debate as it stands



in the field, whose effectiveness as a way of describing the field I will begin to question as Chapter 2 comes to a close.

#### *2.0.1.2 Tensions and Expectations*

Underlying critical evaluations are presuppositions, expectations, about what books and art *do*, *look like* and are *for*. As we will see in section 2.1, (see in particular 2.1.1.1.), different expectations arise from proponents of differing propositions about the definition, identity and purpose of artists' books.

These differences are played out across a complex and rapidly shifting field of practice, rendering closure – the definition that such propositions aspire to – unlikely to achieve consensus.

#### *2.0.1.3 Klima's Categories*

The framework set out below is influenced by the issues Stefan Klima offers at the beginning of his *Artists' Books: A Critical Survey of the Literature*. The three main issues identified are:

“[firstly]Definition; [secondly] the book considered [as] an object and its challenge to a new kind of reading...; [thirdly]The desire to challenge an art establishment.”

(Klima, 1998 p. 7)

In my own themes there is an anxiety about what we think of as the *identity* of artists' books. We are accustomed, in a simple art-historical sense, to thinking of the *evolution* of an art form on a chronological basis, inheriting structure and practice from antecedents along the way. The history of artists' books, best expounded in *The Century of Artists' Books* allows us to see how the practice of working with books is not something that is continuous or teleologically-inclined. Instead, it encounters new realities in numerous incarnations. The continuous identity, as such, of the field is *illusory*. It has been many different things. It is many different things, and it will be many more. Only when conceived of as a 'zone of activity' (Drucker, 2004 p. 1), does the idea of the field achieve a resolution that allows us to ask questions of it as an entity. The field of artists' books consists in its relations with the media form it is predicated upon and the *other* practices and issues with which it dialogues. These change all the time. Subsequently I am inclined to question whether the best way to take artists' books seriously is to *not* consider them as a distinct art form, but to emphasise "Artists' Books" as simply one strategy of practice amongst many available.

This sense of anxiety underlies all of my discursive categories, where the identity of the form is held in constant tension. This is borne out by the almost obsessive concern with definition that has been a

feature of the discourse for over 30 years, (the crossfire of this will inform many of the quotations given over the following pages) and the extensive relations that artists' books have with other forms.

#### *2.0.1.4 'Native' Criticism*

What might be described as 'native' or 'local' criticism mostly comes from inside the Book. This 'inside' isn't exclusively intrinsic or extrinsic; formalist nor interpretive, but the product of both. But it does depend on a much greater narrative participation by artists themselves.

There is, I think, a growing awareness that a 'native' body of critical work might come out of critical thinking predicated in the book as a creative site. Matthew P. Brown, asks

"Can theory evolve from the language of artists, and can practice recognise the theoretical implications of its genesis?"

(Brown, 2007 p. 8)

This describes a schism between the ways forward offered by a criticism 'outside of practice' and the things that go on 'inside practice'.

<sup>10</sup> It's not a new idea. Clive Phillpot, speaking in an interview with Nancy Princenthal in 1990 said of the debate in the 1970s and 80's that

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<sup>10</sup> This perception informs my decision to frame my interview research with artists as elucidating practice rather than about criticising particular books, while still speaking about many books in particular as sites of practice

“...It didn’t match what was happening, and I stopped bothering with the attempt to define the field... I wasn’t satisfied in giving a shape to something, when the shape didn’t match what was out there.” (Phillpot, et al., 1990)

This concern echoes Foucault’s that in attempting to devise thematic structures we risk setting aside the real range of possibilities our field or discourse offers. We can see also, that the accepted critical definitions of ‘intrinsic’ formal criticism, and ‘extrinsic’ criticism that ask what the work means in context, would be destabilised by the inclusion of that which was ‘intrinsic to the extrinsic’ in our project for definition. What is inside the book is an analogue of what is inside the artist and the reader both, as we will eventually see.

#### 2.0.1.5 My own categories for describing critical issues in Artists' Books.

I offer four related categories, related to those that Klima offers for debate. These are:

- (2.1) Definition
- (2.2) Access to Legitimacy/Discourses
- (2.3) Markets
- (2.4) The Artist's Book Medium/Book as Artwork

The first three have elements which are strongly related to the world *outside* books, and the last has more to do with the world *inside* books. However, this structure aims to show how all four parts interpenetrate and are dependent upon one another, and in fact, as we proceed to Chapter 3, we will begin to see that such a critical structure is insufficient in itself to describe the reality of artists' books' creativity. The crosscurrents that will begin to develop shortly are just the first indication that we need a parallel narrative to properly understand what is going on, one which I will begin to uncover in Chapter 3. But to return to the present structure, the first of these categories is the *definition* of artists' books, with two main foci. These are: the conversation about the medium, its identity, formal qualities and features; and the conversation about artists' books' purpose.

## 2.1 Definition

### *2.1.0.1 Long-running Nature of the Debate About Definition*

Klima credits the Moore College of Art with the first use of the term 'artists' books' in 1973, in their exhibition of the same name (Klima, 1998 p. 12). This suggests that people have been arguing about what the term means on and off for at least 37 years, an argument that continues to pervade discussions, seminars and conferences. The first thing that happens is that someone will ask the now traditional question about what, precisely, they *are*. Because the history of artists' books is one of working *with* media, or *with* other streams of practice, it has multiple identities and multiple values. To some extent, this explains the continuing fretfulness on the subject.

### *2.1.1 Framing the Definition Debate: The Identity of Artists' Books*

Part of the continued popularity of this debate is due to the inheritance the field derives from one of its high points in the late 60s and early 70s, the time of Fluxus, and Intermedia. This was also when Foucault was writing about the intertextual flux that queries the fixed boundaries we ascribe to discourses and media; and when Dick Higgins was writing about the practice going on between media. Thus:

...the Duchamp pieces are truly between media, between sculpture and something else... The ready-made or found object, in a sense an intermedium since it was not intended to conform to the pure medium, ...suggests a location in the field between the general area of art media and those of life media. (Higgins, et al.)

And:

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut... it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network... the unity of the book, even in the sense of a group of relations, cannot be regarded as identical in each case. The book is not simply the object that one holds in one's hands; ...its unity is variable and relative.

(Foucault, 2002 [1969] pp. 25-26)

Books, Foucault was telling us, and even The Book in the sense of a social construction, depend on a relativism held 'in-pattern' by all the social constructive forces that go into making up the idea of books. What happens when someone starts working with those ideas?

As soon as one questions that unity, it loses its self-evidence; it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse." (Foucault, 2002 [1969] p. 26)

Both Higgins and Foucault question the nature of boundaries between media, boundaries defeated by the realities of practice (intermedia artists are working in-between definitions), and by the actualities of discursive fields, described and 'normalised' according to their own self-referential lights. Artists' books created in this milieu take advantage of a gap in description in order to emerge as 'something else', some thing, that in Ed Ruscha's case is 'just a book', but which clearly has a different agenda to the paperback it so closely resembles. In the case of Dieter Rot, the reference to the book is stretched but symbolically maintained, so that the statement is not the cool denial of 'just a book', but the challenge (or promise) to the incredulous (onlookers to his 'literary sausages', for example), that this is *still* a book. Other contemporary practices, such as the hypertext works of Radoslaw Nowakowski, (see <http://www.liberatorium.com>) or the blurring of the boundaries between literature, concrete poetry and artists' books by the exponents of Liberature, e.g. (Bazarnik, et al., 2005) However, the ways of seeing the world which make such manoeuvres possible, also make the sum of such book-related activity rather difficult to circumscribe. But this is the world that gets carried into, and retained in a debate that is still ongoing between the proponents of a thousand different schemes of definition. Other ways of interrogating what books do – in terms, here, of



artists' practice – which evade the 'centrifugal' dissipation of a thoroughgoing relativism, or the 'centripetal' force of formalism, is precisely what this research aims to provide.

#### *2.1.1.1 The Hybrid Identity of Artists' Books*

Johanna Drucker's landmark history *The Century of Artists' Books* is unsurpassed as a survey of how artists' books have been part of every major movement in art in the last century, with Drucker's assertion that artists' books are the quintessential 20th-century artform explored in depth. What the book shows, however, is that artists' books have always worked alongside *other* things. *Other* technologies, *other* forms of practice, *other* areas of debate and art movements. It is not only that the artist's book is always a technological hybrid, it always uses the networks of discourse, legitimacy and definition that 'belong' to these other areas. Of course it works both ways, and the 'other areas' are also taking full advantage of the book's technology, legitimacy and forms of discourse and distribution. But the entity of the artist's book itself emerges as a protean assembly of different associations based on the book. This was *and remains* an open door, thankfully.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In the past, ways of making a new kind of book have arrived with new technologies assuming the definition of the book. Is a printed book as much a book as a hand-illuminated codex? Yes? If a new technology arose that sufficiently reproduced aspects of the book that we prized, wouldn't we think of that, too, as a book, like any other, differing only in the technology of its production?

#### *2.1.1.1.1 Hybrid Identity: different tensions*

Most attempts to define an artist's book... are hopelessly flawed... or too specific. Artists' books take every possible form, participate in every possible convention of book making, every possible 'ism' of mainstream art and literature, every possible mode of production, every shape, every degree of ephemerality or archival durability

(Drucker, 1995a p. 4)

Here, Drucker points out the ways in which artists' books are deeply involved with other art forms, technologies and practices. In this hybrid state, it is little wonder that it is difficult to discover an identity for artists' books that helps us compose anything as clear as a definition. Instead there are points of tension: propositions around which debate condenses.

In the following paragraphs I will discuss some of the possible schema that the debate has touched on. There are almost always exceptions to any given proposition, hence the debate is nigh-inexhaustible.

### *2.1.1.1.2 Working with Other People*

Janet Zweig questions the often-cited quibble that a good artist's book must be down to the artist alone:

...the received wisdom in answer to the often repeated and by now infinitely boring question, "What is an artist's book?" is almost always some permutation of "An artist's book is a book that is conceived and produced entirely by the artist." Why in the world should this be true? ... An artist's book... can be visual, tactile, sculptural, temporal, experimental, theatrical, conceptual, subversive, and more. It might take a lot of people to pull this off, or it might take one.

(Zweig, 1995 p. 3)

Adding to others' observations about artists' books' definition as a hybrid form, Zweig also asks a question about their production that works in opposition to the proposition that real artists' books are produced by a lone artist, and not, say, with a publisher. The question creates tension around what expectations our criteria for definition are based on. Are the circumstances of production really the criteria on which we wish to base ideas about what is or isn't an artist's book? Tensions exist around other topics too, notably craft and production

values (see 2.1.1.1.3) Though criteria offered for definition are often useful, they should be seen as provisional.

#### *2.1.1.1.3 Production Values*

On the notion of production qualities and craft, Gray Fraser questions the acquisitions policy of LAC (Library and Archives Canada). Some books were accepted by the library, and some were not, on grounds that they were simply lasercopies:

[these books] are not reproduced via off-set printing (they are laser printed). Therefore I think the issue being raised under the guise of printing technique is not that of reproduction method, but rather the binding of these two bookworks ... Does one have to learn traditional printing and binding techniques and incorporate that craft into the work of art to make an artist's book?

(Fraser, 2007 p. 15)

Here again there is a debate going on about the indicators that we would use for definition (however casually supplied). Fraser's comment on craft production simply points up one of these expectations being applied, seemingly adrift from the content of the books he describes. On the subject of the Lone Artist and their possible collaboration with others, Zweig has offered a thought about times when it proves to be useful to

work with others. Preacher's Biscuit Books, and Book Works, which I will mention again below in section 2.3.2, are good examples of publishers whose output does not seem to suffer from the restrictions commonly ascribed to the *livre d'artiste*. If anything, these publishers have helped artists to produce works that are certainly artists' books.

The hybrid nature of artists' books, offering as it does a wide range of possible roles, strategies, collaborations and technologies, seems to offer the debate an endless supply of characteristic points. Echoing Drucker's note that "Most attempts to define an artist's book... are hopelessly flawed... or too specific," it is difficult to see how to be specific *at all*. My research focuses on artists' relationships to books as a starting point, attempting to build up from this, rather than down to a typological base through the perilous structures of Book Art's nomenclature.

### *2.1.2 The Accessible Book*

The exhibition *Blood on Paper*, at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, was criticised for providing too many examples of 'big name' works that had been produced as *livres d'artiste* in collaboration with a publisher, and for providing too little contact with the works on display. The books remained beautiful but remote objects of artistic veneration, rather than the communicative construct they reference through the

appellation 'book'. Accessibility was a greater problem than the selection of work in this exhibition.

The book on show that *least* resembled a book was, ironically, the most accessible:

Charles Sandison's *Carmina Figurata*, high up and out of reach was perhaps the most accessible piece in the show; it wasn't behind glass, just floating above, with words moving like tiny creatures under a microscope ... Physically untouchable, yet actually asking the viewer to spend time with it.

(Bodman, 2008)

The 'book' so described is in fact a projection on the ceiling of the exhibition. It has no tangible physical form, yet it provided a chance for engagement that the other books denied.

#### *2.1.2.1 The Accessible Book: Our Expectations of the Book*

Part of the privilege of encountering books has historically been personal contact.<sup>12</sup> We *need* contact with artists' books because the work is incomplete if we cannot turn the pages. As Phillpot points out, to display the artist's book in a form other than its intended one is to destroy the work, "since it is dependent on the book form". (Phillpot, 1976 p. 209) It is ironic that we can have a better book-experience, with

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<sup>12</sup> With, for example, the word of God. The 'Protestant' desire of the democratic multiple is to confute the power of the 'orthodoxy' of the gallery system.

a 'book' which is only nominally in book form, which is intangible, yet more available, than a sumptuously printed codex behind glass. The 'democracy' that contemporary artists' books often espouse is partly the democracy of contact, the desire to communicate broadly to others. (see 2.4.4 for more on the wishes artists harbour in relation to books, and section 3.9 for more on the possibilities opened up by books for metaphorical 'contact' with others). It also stands quietly in relation to the fanfare with which an earlier idea of wide publication was described.<sup>13</sup>

#### *2.1.2.2 The Accessible Book: Accessing Circuits*

The book has its own forms of mobility: its own circuits of communication. Here I am introducing an idea that recurs in section 2.2 on legitimacy and 2.3 on distribution factors. The communications circuit is discussed here firstly because it is part of our idea of what a book *is*. Part of our definition of books in general depends on the social links it generates between those who produce it and its consumers. The forms books take is informed by the demands of those social links and the modes of production and distribution that are also part of the network. When artists make books, they *always* work with these links

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<sup>13</sup> Designated by Drucker as the 'Democratic Multiple'. See 2.1.3.1

and this meaning<sup>14</sup>; sometimes respectfully, sometimes not. Sometimes intentionally, and sometimes just as part of what it means to make a book.

Maria Fusco talks about the artist Cildo Meireles' work in terms of its piggybacking on other media or cultural forms, the sense in which it works *with* other media. Meireles' body of work *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* used iconic materials which were distributed widely (the best example is a Coca-Cola bottle) as a medium for dispersing his own interventions, almost in a viral sense:

...the object itself... being this sort of carrier... which can be in some way infiltrated or piggybacked on, ...has a definite relationship in my head with things like artists' books. Especially with... certain types of contemporary artists' books... which look, smell and stack like average books [but which have] some sort of different rationale or purpose to them... [Cildo Meireles] is interesting to consider in terms of circuits and things which are already existing... this idea of the circuit that embodies the creator's ideology, but it's passive at the moment you insert something into it... (Fusco, 2008)

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<sup>14</sup> I am determined to defend this assertion as a logical consequence of the symbolic denotation 'book'.



This links to an important and well-known aspect of *book history* in general (the interdisciplinary study of the forms and effects of books in history). Robert Darnton's essay *What is the History of Books?* explains his outline of the communications circuit<sup>15</sup> which encompasses authors, printing, publishing, literacy and reception;

The reader completes the circuit because he influences the author both before and after the composition. Authors are readers themselves. By reading and associating with other readers & writers they form notions of genre and style.

(Darnton, 2002 p. 12)

This has relevance for artists' books as much as any other kind, and from the example Fusco gives from outside the artist's book field, we can see an artist who has deliberately mobilised his work's utilisation of a communications circuit not unlike that of book history. In this case it is an 'ideological' circuit that is being used in order to trespass onto the ideological ground of, for example, Coke, in order to show through a contrasting statement how polemicised the normal functioning of that circuit is. Fusco continues with another example, from the Tate Modern Bookshop, of another kind of trespass:

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<sup>15</sup> This was also a key point in the talk I gave at the Scottish National Poetry Library in September 2008, *Artists' Books and the Shared World of Reading*

[At the Tate Modern Bookshop, when they do a stock check]  
every year they find between 30 to 50 books that they haven't  
bought and they're ... always artists' books... that's quite  
interesting with the idea of the passive circuit, the ideology,  
people inserting things... (Fusco, 2008)

This points out the aura of legitimacy that bookshops confer, and  
the great desire to distribute and communicate that some book artists feel  
in spite of the fact that they will not make money on the sale of these  
books (*it*, as is a bit doubtful, they *are* sold).<sup>16</sup>

### 2.1.3 What are artists' books for?

What is the purpose of artists' books? Can they 'Challenge an Art  
Establishment' as Klima's survey of the debate wondered? Is it important  
to work with the book form in an interesting way? The notion of a  
theoretical mission to artists' books, as a tool to challenge prevailing  
modes of distribution and marketing of art, is an important one that  
recurs in 2.1.3.1 and in section 2.2 and 2.3 on *Access to Legitimacy* and  
*Markets*, respectively. The more general idea of the artist's book's  
purpose is also closely linked to the artist's desires and intentions in  
making work, which I intend to examine under the fourth of my sections,

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<sup>16</sup> The idea of finding ways into other circuits of legitimacy in fact has its own  
section below (2.2), but it is a key notion in understanding the appeal of the hybrid  
form of books, which is strategic on this level as well as at creative and technical  
levels.

on The Artist's Book Medium/ The Book as an Artwork (See 2.4), which centres more on the artist's experiences of making.

#### *2.1.3.1 Purpose of Artists' Books: The Democratic Multiple*

*The Artists' Book as a Democratic Multiple* is the title of a chapter in Johanna Drucker's *The Century of Artists' Books* in which she examines the surge in the production of cheap, numerous editions of books that were intended to be widely distributed and available, and moreover, as an alternative for some artists to the traditional gallery system. Although Drucker notes the existence of enthusiasm for the book as an alternative platform for exhibition earlier than the mid-20th-century, she is broadly in agreement with Joan Lyon's description as given in the introduction to *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*:

...artists were finding that the books could be artworks in and of themselves. ... alternatives began to develop to provide a forum and venue for many artists denied access to the traditional gallery and museum structure... Many saw the book as a means for reaching a wider audience ... others anticipated the appropriation of images and/or techniques of mass media for political or aesthetic reasons.

(Lyons, 1985 p. 7)

The democratic multiple may not have overturned the orthodoxy of the gallery system, (though it has opened up some practices), but it remains, in a somewhat quieter form, a current in contemporary artists' books practice, though it is not attended by the hopes for a new order of art that were at least part of the dreams of the most enthusiastic in the sixties and seventies. Contemporary democratic multiples are more likely predicated on the democracy of the niche/cult as exemplified in 'zine culture and in the works of artists like Mark Pawson. What these works lack in glossy finish they make up for in energy of dispersion, cheapness, and a palpable wish to connect with other people. The outlay costs of producing an offset editioned 'democratic multiple' in the style of Ruscha *et al* remains off-putting for most. However, the advent of self-publish-on-demand print services in recent years has made access to a higher production value affordable for virtually anyone with an internet connection. The production of *large* editions, while easily achieved, would still be costly. This is a different kind of democratic multiple which is multiple only on demand. It remains to be seen whether or not the prices of such books will ever reach the point where they can challenge self-assembled lasercopies, photocopies, or inkjet output as a means of inexpensive production.<sup>17, 18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See (Harper, 2008)

Drucker alludes to the costs involved in her acknowledgement of the democratic multiple's importance in the history of artists' books.

[The Democratic Multiple] became a definitive paradigm for artists' books. But to use it as a delimiting criterion for determining what is and is not an artist's book seems both unreasonably narrow and nostalgic, and also seems to ignore the realities of artists' lives and the economic conditions for the production of their work.<sup>19</sup>

Artists are probably more likely to ascribe their urge to distribute books 'democratically' to a wish to communicate themselves rather than explicitly to link it to a political choice or as part of a mission to subvert the international gallery system.

#### *2.1.3.2 Purpose of Artists' Books: 'Challenging an Art Establishment'*

Has the project that Klima alludes to, "To challenge an art establishment" failed? In that the topic is no longer so frequently at the core of contemporary practice in the same form, we might think so.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "A. J. Liebling famously wrote, "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one." A desktop laser printer is a miniature printing press... I can produce a book on my laser printer that will be so close to a conventional trade book that most people will be fooled." (Siegel)

<sup>19</sup> (Drucker, 2004 p. 71) Drucker here clearly identifies one of the critical tensions I allude to in 2.1.1.1 The notion of delimiting the definition of artists' books in this way is just one of several such points of tension.

<sup>20</sup> Those Marshall Weber refers to as a 'mysterious international cabal of radical left wing intellectuals furiously committed to freedom of expression', (Weber, 2006) namely librarians, offer a challenge to the gallery system by offering access to

However, it remains the case that artists using books are frequently to be found working with communities, and exploring alternative modes of distribution, networking and legitimacy. It is arguable that the challenge has not really gone away but has subsumed (or ‘unlabelled’) itself within wider discussions with titles like ‘strategies’, ‘collaboration’, and so on. Drucker makes the point that the idea of the democratic multiple cannot remain independent if it sits still: it is eventually swallowed by the practices of the art establishment it sought to subvert, and continued practice becomes complicit in the establishment’s own discourse and values.

Fine art frequently is ... both what it claims to be  
(independent thought, discrete from the other forms of cultural  
expression, a separate domain of alternative values) and what  
it pretends not to be (bound up with the values of the status  
quo and the ideological system that sustains it)  
(Drucker, 2005b p. 17)

Most artists’ books dodge this absorption by staying within their own circuits rather than being featured in the mainstream gallery system. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern some links between the mobility that would keep one step ahead of impending absorption by the

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numerous institutions for book artists through their library system; see ‘2.3 Markets’, below.

establishment, and the theories of intermedia and intertextuality that are also pertinent to books. If we can see that such inter-play is integral to artists' books practice, then it is often being used as a strategy to attempt to lodge one's work in the always-temporary<sup>21</sup>, illicit spaces *between* disciplines, practices and descriptions. I will argue elsewhere<sup>22</sup> that this is evident in the creative practices of book artists through the mechanism of *roles* in creativity. The always-moving, temporary quality of such practice may not be engaged in as an ideological act, but rather as one that allows a practical freedom of thought, the use of books as *places to think*, and places to *be* what the book makes possible.<sup>23</sup>

### *2.1.3.3 Purpose of Artists' Books: Maximising the Potential of the Book*

Another formulation of what artists' books purpose should be is that they should maximise their use of the medium. They should engage with the possibilities inherent to the book, and do so in a compelling way.

Johanna Drucker again:

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<sup>21</sup> See my section including 'temporary construction' in the work of Helen Douglas, (2.4.5)

<sup>22</sup> See my section on roles in artists' practice in 2.4.2

<sup>23</sup> For a view in which such practice is characterised not so much as 'democratic' as 'anarchistic', see Hakim Bey's notion of the *Temporary Autonomous Zone*: "... a guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen..."

(Bey)

We might characterise this as a view which radicalises a deliberately amateur practice.

...is this an original work of art that makes creative use of the book format? ...

This first quotation encapsulates her programme of distinction.

Drucker then asks many questions that query the book's value as a work of art: if she is satisfied that it is indeed of interest, she continues:

does it do this in an aesthetically compelling way? [This] is not the same as beautiful... well-made...[or] highly produced.

Based on the foregoing, she finds she is now able to assess how the work of art uses the qualities inherent in the book:

...what kind of dialogue is created within the book, among its elements (page to text, image and text... gutters and margins, etc.) And what conversation is it having with the broader sphere of art or life?

(Drucker, 2005a)

This idea of what the purpose of artists' books *is*, intersects clearly with the criteria one would apply to the formation of a canon<sup>24</sup>. There is something of a clash of intention in this programme however. (I will explain this in the following paragraph) Constructing distinctions in this way confers legitimacy on the formal results of the artistic process; on objects, not on the mode of their production. It produces valuable nouns:

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<sup>24</sup> see also section 2.1.5.1 *Viewing the Field: Configuring a Canon*



terminology that names good examples of types. This is a programme of critical distinction that sees what artists' books are for, in terms of *objects*. Although this is indispensable, is there also a way to ask questions that informs our critical view on the production of artists' books as a practice? As well as allowing physical formal outcomes, the practice of artists' books also allows ways of making, of imagining, of doing, of being. I believe that this is important to the artists who make books.

The programme of critical distinction outlined by Drucker (and typical of any commonsense approach to criticism), seeks to distinguish how the object under scrutiny has intersected with the discourses common to art. It seeks to know how the book explores questions and problems of production set up by the artist. It looks at how this is achieved and critically regards the result. In all of this there is a passionate and clear sighted interest in the ways and means of making art with books. But in the final analysis, it reifies the creative process in creating Good Examples. There is a conflict of intentions here, because in seeking to see the value of artists' books more clearly, such a canon only aggregates symbols of the *types* of objects which can be produced. It does not describe the creativity which it so clearly wants to extol. To

do so, it must narrate practice as well as describe objects.<sup>25</sup> We need to discuss exemplary practice as well as exemplary works. We need to capture the affect of working with artists' books as well as scrutinising the effects that take place within them.

#### *2.1.4 Who Makes Books? The place of Artists' Books in Artists' Practice.*

To what extent is making of artists' books to the exclusion of other forms of expression important? This question brings us again to the anxiety around how we should treat artists' books. Although clearly an artform in their own right, as Drucker reminds us<sup>26</sup> it is just as clear that they need not be the only part of an artist's practice. Just because there *is* such a thing as artists' books, it doesn't follow that Book Artists make *only* books.

In reluctantly accepting the term 'artists' books', Clive Phillpot did so acknowledging the "implicit suggestion that artists' books were just a sideline for artists whose principal activity was... painting or sculpture." (Phillpot, 1982 p. 77)

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<sup>25</sup> This is something Drucker does more successfully in *The Century of Artists' Books*, because of the variety of situations artists' books are described in.

<sup>26</sup> "Given the role which artists' books have played in most aspects of modern and contemporary art, it is particularly important to recognise them as a form in their own right, not an incidental spin-off of other concerns" (Drucker, 2004 p. xvii)

In fact, Phillpot has been strongly critical of the term, saying that describing books made by artists as 'artists' books' stopped people from encountering them as openly as might be the case:

the very phrase artists' books may prevent us from getting outside the artworld... those books shouldn't acquire that almost pejorative label artists' books – they are books.

(Phillpot, et al., 1985 p. 11)

The artist Sally Alatalo protests similarly:

This is another thing that is very important to me, to acknowledge these kinds of projects as books... why do we call things 'artists' books'? In my mind they're not so different from many books. I mean the content shifts, but the content shifts across books all the time... we don't call it artists' painting, we don't call it artists' sculpture to distinguish it.

(Alatalo, et al., 2009 p. 34)

Although it is clear that artists' books are works of art in their own right, it is obvious that without other media to work with, and other critical disciplines to offer ways of speaking about artists' books, artists' books themselves would be greatly impoverished, or impossible.

The notion of an all-encompassing identity for artists' books is based on an illusory idea that the artist's book exists separately from the

media it interacts with, leading to a great deal of trouble trying to pin down definitions. Such an identity does not exist. Instead there is a great deal of heterogenous byplay with other people's – other disciplines' and technologies' – critical language and history, and a similar freedom of association with whatever technologies and processes can be allied in some way to the book form.

There is a group of artists, however, for whom the artist's book forms a great part of their practice. They choose books partly because of the effect books have on their creativity. The accumulation of such effects really *does* belong to artists' books, in a way that the congeries of formal description and critical borrowings *does not*.

Importantly, such a 'native' poetics of effect and affect can only be supplemental to a wider criticism that connects the artist's book to the outside world. The 'criteria for judgment about what constitutes an interesting artist's book' that Drucker offers, dwells not only on what is available in the book, but acknowledges the links to be made with the outside world. A balance must be struck between the thirst for a 'native' body of criticism (and the risk of continued insularity that it carries), and acknowledging artists' books dependency on exterior discourses (and the therefore less-coherent sense of *identity* that accompanies such an acknowledgement). In Phillpot's admonition 'they are books', there is an

implicit setting aside of the notion of a book artist. There are artists who make books. There is the world of books. There need not be any such thing (in this statement) as a book artist, nor a specialist form of art that they are known habitually or exclusively to produce. Would it be better to abandon the thirst for defining boundaries the better to permit the trade of ideas that is the important commerce of critical analysis?

Whether we can describe the definitions of the book in art or not, the way it comes to life in the world is through its associations with other media, other ideas. With the ways it *crosses* boundaries. What people think of as the book is *a/ways* an amalgam of different technologies and situations, and the things we transform through the unique form of the book are *a/ways* accomplished by us as artists combining several roles.

This can sometimes be difficult to see, even as a book's creator, since one creates them out of a deep involvement in books and their capabilities. But such practice has (even unwittingly) always to do with other realms of practice, other crafts, techniques, strategies and roles.

The history of trying to define artists' books has taught us that attempts to circumscribe those practices are apt to slip through our delimiting terms, precisely because of books' heterogenous nature.

### *2.1.5 Viewing the field: Ways of Seeing Artists' Books*

Reviewing all these places of the artist's book's manifestation, it perhaps makes sense to see our view of artists' books as a practice with an identity or definition as something which is really dependant on point of view, since it is the case that artists' books always exist *with* other artforms, other ways of being. The field of artists' books is only that: the *view* of a zone of different practices, held together only by the field's references to the book form, to reading, and to the book's possibilities in the world. Common cause, common identity beyond this is, I increasingly believe, illusory.

There remain those common areas of form, reading (function), and strategic function (distribution and legitimacy). How these are encountered *in creative practice* is what I am researching.

Johanna Drucker writes:

...artists' books are desperately searching for a public identity, one which will allow them to position themselves... within a mainstream arena of the arts. (Drucker, 1995a p. 4)

The tendency in mainstream contemporary art is for artists to ally themselves not so much with one area of expertise, but rather to pick out areas of strategic function (often in collaboration), so that the artefacts produced are less the product of a particular expert and more the

document of artists' ongoing connections. The books thus produced are indicative of a more performative view of the artist's practice. As such, artists' books would function not as an identity, but as one of several possible strategies.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the belief persists that in order to have relevance, artists' books must claim an identity of their own. Such an identity won't come out of a more elaborate typology of types of artists' books, though it will help if we have a better idea of what makes an artist's book worth looking at.<sup>28</sup>

What we do have in common as that group of artists for whom the book is their primary mode of expression, belongs to the effects and affect of the book upon practice in privately creative and publicly strategic ways, rather than to the appearance of our books, or the ways we function in the world, which are endlessly different.

#### *2.1.5.1 Viewing the Field: Configuring a Canon*

In describing the main features of the debate surrounding description of the artist's book medium, I have touched several times on the notion of creating a system of useful values, or canon, for the artist's book.

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<sup>27</sup> See also Maria Fusco's comments, (2.1.2.2), on the work in Meireles' series on *Insertions into Ideological Circuits*, where an artist is really 'piggybacking' on other forms as a strategy for getting access to particular channels of discourse.

<sup>28</sup> A process which as often will help erase distinctions of what constitute the proper borders of the artist's book as we admit strange new works that produce good experiences, like Sandison's *Carmina Figurata*.

The majority of the recently-completed *Manifesto for the Book* (Bodman, et al., 2010) developed from their project *What will be the canon for the artist's book in the 21st Century?* is made up of interviews and case studies with a number of book artists. While at no point eschewing the selection of a canon from works deemed to be important, it does not follow in this view that such a canon defines practice as well as *historical* exemplars. Form develops in partnership with artists' ways of working as narrated in depth through the series of testimonies, contributions and discussions – and of course in the ongoing development of the works themselves. I have viewed this as a shift away from the 'noun' definitions of the typology-of-form type of canon, towards the 'verb' activities or, if you like, 'situational strategies' suggested by a history of such manoeuvres and the ongoing inventiveness with which they continue.<sup>29</sup>

There is also some discussion and interest centred on the Wikipedia artists' books page online (Various Contributors, 2004). The artist Emily Artinian expresses dismay that there has not been a more intense participation from the makers of artists' books:

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<sup>29</sup> I find this encouraging since it leaves open the opportunity to talk about ways of making/distributing, etc, as well as fixing on examples. My criticisms of what canons typically leave out, in 2.1.3.1 might find resolution in the wider focus this project seems to have taken up.



It is a great irony that our field... seems to have responded so tepidly to the medium that defines our age. It's time more of us weighed in, enabling others around the world to access and understand what I think we would all agree is one of the most important forms in art, communication, and society at large.

(Artinian, 2008 p. 43)

Francis Elliott notes that "the internet has become the new literacy" (Elliott, 2008) speaking of his views in regard to the artists' books page on Wikipedia. This links both to the sense of connectedness that Foucault mentions, and more specifically to the literacy that is part of the communication/ideological circuits touched on above (2.1.2.2). If we are to make the most of our history, it behooves us to have some understanding of it. Artinian's dismay that we don't want, on the whole, to bother very much with participating in the discussion about what that history is might just mean that artists are too busy, but it is, as she notes, a situation of some irony.

What we see in the field of book art could be described as the efforts of artists of various sorts to come to terms with how to use the book and what it can do for their practice. Typically we see those with a background in print represented most strongly – after all, books are a print form. But we also see poets and bookbinders and painters participating in what we have come to regard as a shared concern. There

are numerous other routes into the book. We do not have to go very far to find a parallel concern with books among photographers, and, though the photobook, as it is known, retains a sense of separation from artists' books, it is clear that they are dealing with similar critical concerns.

Darius Himes' article *Who Cares About Books* surveys the photobook form's lineage, poetics and efforts to list seminal works from the photobook perspective. Similar themes emerge: the intimacy of the book; the power of its poetics; the legitimacy it confers upon a body of work; the distributive power it affords, including parallels in the hope of a "public photography", echoing the dream of the democratic multiple. Himes pursues this into the consequences of the self-published print-on-demand book.

... What it means for photography is an ever-broadening diversity of voices. An entirely new generation of critics, curators and publishers see the book as a central form of expression within photography and are passionate about engaging in a dialogue with artists and photographers who are exploring that "deep area". The job of photographers ... is to learn the language of a complex art and craft ... before stating that they want to publish a book of photographs.

Himes also shows us that those surveying his field have made efforts to

define their subject that echo those offered by book art critics. He quotes John Gossage's preface to 2004's *The Photobook: A History*:

Firstly, it should contain great work. Secondly, it should make that work function as a concise world within the book itself. Thirdly, it should have a design that complements what is being dealt with. And finally, it should deal with content that sustains an ongoing interest.

Note the (independently-formed) similarities with the 'exemplary practice' advanced in (Drucker, 2005a), which I critique in section 2.1.3.3. Photobooks do not have the same taboos associated with publisher involvement that sometimes affect our dealings with artists' books, but if photographers' engagement with books begins to equate fluency in the book's poetic possibility with the work of sole producers, similar notions may well emerge. Efforts to procure an interrogative structure like this are good insofar as they prompt interesting questions, but when they enter into proscriptive formal rules; "what is and isn't a book" for example, rather than allowing the work to argue its own way, they enclose and delimit, rather than aid critical enquiry.

Another similarity to note is the relationship with the viewer created through books that I have called “making-reading” in book artists’ practice. Himes notes the serial nature of images creating

a stream of questions ... that betray a readiness for, and a predilection toward, establishing a narrative in our mind ... It seems that the very act of turning pages, of physically moving one's arm and seeing the next image appear before our eyes after the last one, serves to establish connections and relationships ... A hallmark of greatness .. Is ... where the photographer is highly attuned to these possibilities of connection.

The relation this gives a photographer to the audience might encourage photographers, much as the other artists I have noted, to engage with the book form, specifically because of this sense of connection.

What we see here is a form engaging with the book on similar terms to artists' books, and it is revealing that the photobook creates many tensions between definition and possibility that artists' books also create. It seems that it is the encounter with the book as the "other half" of a practice that creates such tensions. For example, does the work fit the book, and vice versa? What is the relation of photograph and book? Is it a separate artform? And so on. Of course there are artists who

achieve a more perfect fusion, and whose incorporation of book and visual, book and language, book and poetics, is so deeply involved that the process evolves, through its praxis, a form of great unity. But what that unity consists in is not, in photobooks or in artists' books either, a matter only of effects: of books' physical qualities and their poetics. It is also a matter of their affect for practice and towards audiences. If our definitions do not find a way to talk about this, they tell only half the story. It is the photobook's similarity in these regards, despite the fact that it comes to the book from a different field, that makes the similarity significant. Forms find the book, and find their way with it, in effect and affect both. It will be said, of course, that makers bridge the gaps in practice between photobook and the artist's book, (Helen Douglas for one). This is true, and it is just the sort of combinatory, metaphorising emplacements of roles within the 'space' of the book I write about in this research. But photobooks nevertheless possess a distinctly photographic provenance, despite books' own tendency to dissolve such boundaries. The critical choice for the future of artists' books' is: Would we rather develop a provenance, or play with books' possibilities? David Miall, writing about the capability of the literary canon to regenerate itself notes:

New interpretations generally compete with extant rival views, suggesting widespread disagreement over what a given literary text “means”. This phenomenon argues against institutional determination of the literary canon (since no institution worthy of the name would tolerate such an array of incompatible readings)... Reinterpretation is thus a sign of the inexhaustible vigour of the canonical texts at issue, not of our weakness as critics.

Although our canon might be more likely to pay attention to formal and material aspects of the book than its narrative interpretation, nevertheless, if the book art canon is worth anything much, it will never be completely explained, completely described. And, if we want to be empirical about what we want to see in this canon, we need to look beyond formal effects or intrinsic interpretations alone.

## 2.2 Access to Legitimacy/Discourses

The question of how to talk about artists’ books seriously, and how to link them to wider discourse is reflected in the attempts to define the form in section 2.1. The ‘desire for theory’ links not only to the desire for theory to partner practice as part of the cognitive or cogitative

experience of creativity, but also to the desire that new ways to talk about artists' books will mean that they are talked about more widely, and taken more seriously. Thus the desire for theory is also about the desire to access a greater range and depth of legitimacy in the wider world. Practice reflects this too, with artists' use of different forms of expression and adoption of different roles inserting them into different circuits of legitimacy<sup>30</sup> quite as much as their use of different forms of distribution helps them to insert themselves into different circuits of communication.

### 2.2.1 *The Ghetto*

The sense of enclosure within the terms of the 'world' of artists' books, and the wish to see artists' books embrace (and be embraced by) a wider world, is as much about how the books are thought about, written about, spoken about, as it is about distribution. I have already touched on the strong currents of desire for wider *availability* of artists' books<sup>31</sup>, underlying the so-called 'Democratic Multiple'. What about the distribution of the *idea of* artists' books? What about the field's openness to other ways of thinking about books? How do we take books seriously/get taken seriously?

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<sup>30</sup> See 2.1.2.2 *The Accessible Book: Accessing Circuits*

<sup>31</sup> See 2.1.3.1 *Purpose of Artists' Books: The Democratic Multiple*

Clifton Meador's *The Small Pond* begins with three pertinent questions:

Why are artists' books a marginal practice in the art world?

Who pays attention to artists' books?

What is the future of artists' books as a practice?

(Meador, 2006)

Meador asks how we might temper the legitimacy found in the book form itself "granted without any sense of responsibility or understanding of the power of the voice of print." with a greater awareness of what it means to work well, and he suggests that this is to be found in a more open rapport with the world at large:

[Artists' Books] have never quite made it into the mainstream of aesthetic discourse. Consequently, they lack a critical mass of practitioners and critics.

(Meador, 2006)

It is difficult to take books seriously, difficult to criticise them well, because they exist in a ghetto:

A walled-off, secure place that is really a prison. Safe, but removed from the main discourse... Book arts and artists' books are a safe place, removed from the main conversation about art...



(Meador, 2006)

There has been and remains the tension I have already spoken of,<sup>32</sup> that in opening the borders of this ghetto the chance to define and thus better understand the artist's book will be lost. This has always played against the competing tension that in defining values for artists' books, some aspects of the undefined creativity of an intermedia form are stifled.

### 2.2.2 Critical Necessities: Clarity and Flexibility

We need a criticism that can pick its way between these tensions by addressing itself to a greater clarity in discussing artists' books, as well as incorporating sufficient flexibility to adapt itself to strange new forms of artists' book hybrids. 'Clarity' need not presuppose *fixed* definitions (though it does presuppose a vocabulary of relative values). This must be allied to a flexibility of description that allows itself to be disrupted by new events, from either within the hybrid practice of artists' books, or interdisciplinary incursions from *other* ideas and practices. We cannot have one without the other. Discourse about artists' books cannot otherwise address itself to the field, and simultaneously what Meador refers to as the "mainstream of aesthetic discourse", unless it can speak to book artists *and* remain flexible about describing what it is they are

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<sup>32</sup> See 2.0.1.2 *Tensions and Expectations*

doing. (Because this changes all the time.) This is difficult. In seeking to create definitions *in the name of* clarity, we merely build new walls. There will always be room for creative byplay with strong definitions to create more pronounced statements, or, conversely, a looser interdisciplinary relativism that provokes imaginative and unexpected creativity. The marriage of these two varieties of creativity is in fact an old, old story. If we want to create a voice for artists' books we have to take that marriage seriously. Clarity *and* flexibility are necessary to artists' book criticism<sup>33</sup>.

It is unarguable, as Johanna Drucker points out, that in order to insert artists' books into contemporary arts it seems essential to take seriously the terms on which books are conceptualized as an artistic form – especially from within the networks of artists committed to books as their primary medium.

It is less clear to me, at least, that this means

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<sup>33</sup> Similar remedies are proposed by David Miall in his *On the necessity for empirical studies of literary reading*, (2000) for his field. Surveying literary criticism, he sees a field crisscrossed by difficulties in pinning down values amidst a constantly changing canon. He notes that this doesn't mean that we are "bad critics"; just that things change. Elsewhere, considering the effect of metaphor in literature, he underlines the need to look at more than just the metaphor's formal, grammatical composition, but also its effects in thought: "necessity of separating the verbal element of a metaphor from its effects in thought – like the new theory in science, the unfamiliar view of the subject may effect a permanent change in the thought of the reader; the meaning of the ... words... remains stable." (27). If we want to be particular about artists' books, we need to accept that the canon will continually renew itself (and that that will be all right); and we need to note that what we define has a life beyond its formal attributes. Empirical studies of the value of artists' books could never derive from the objects *alone*, (strange as that might seem).

... making distinctions between what is and isn't a book as well as what makes an interesting and vital work and what doesn't.

(Drucker, 1995a p. 3)

Making distinctions about what is allowable as a book may be useful in an ad-hoc, tactical sense (as used extensively by cataloguers to map their collections.) But as a sustained distinction it is suspect, since it would seem to disallow much that *is* “interesting”, created in the name of books by someone who has a different idea about “what is and isn’t a book”. I think a more useful question would be (to paraphrase) “what is and isn’t interesting?” which implicitly avows a personal viewpoint. We are, after all, trying to create a conversation, not rules. We can give our own opinions and descriptions *clarity* as opposed to *definition*. It follows that the personal viewpoint involved is not concerned with approaching closure, except on a personal and provisional basis.

Our recognition of critical discourse should make room for extremes. This ranges from the theoretical/strategic pronouncement that has analytical power and creates structure, to, conversely, the poetic/tactical engagement that performs an as-yet-unrecognised interdisciplinary contact and enlarges the reach of the field. Neither is effective without the other. To recognise the ‘critical commonwealth’

they collectively represent, we need an oversight, a recognition that *practical* criticism should be derived from across the range of both extremes. There should be scope for a structuring criticism that helps create clarity whilst accepting its ultimately provisional nature. Alongside this there needs to exist a narrative of the 'landscape' of practice that will at times create tension as it challenges accepted structure with structures of its own<sup>34</sup>. For practice to do this, it needs to be able to speak up for itself.

We are beginning to build up the critical mass of examination that leads us towards thematic preference – towards the values reflected in a canon (and liable, under the sway of strong preferences, to change). The history of such changes will be written in the logs of resources like Wikipedia and similar forums. Such conversations are *strategic* because at their best they speak partly from within the book arts, and partly from outside. They *reach across*. They have a wider, strategic, view. They are interdisciplinary. In order to access a more powerful discourse and gain greater legitimacy for the artist's book, we need to continue speaking of technique, language and understanding from *outside* the book arts. It means letting go of the borders a little, and being a bit more flexible about what the critic's nominal job is. Those providing 'the wider view'

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<sup>34</sup> Aspects of the 'landscape of practice' metaphor are touched on in 2.4.5 *Mediating Relations/ Metaphorising Practice*

need to take on the wider view they lay claim to. They should open up the genre's language, not close it down.

It may be the job of those commentators we style historians and critics to generate the language needed to talk about such links and leaps, but they will find an unspoken interdisciplinarity is already present. Artists already make these leaps across the border, but they do it from *within* practice, *tactically*. They work with materials and experiences to get somewhere unexpected. Although artists, being people, also work with strategic notions of 'the big picture' much of creativity is tactical and performs work close up, *directed by* a flexible strategic intent. As I have noted, artists' books have always worked as hybrids in concert with other disciplines, technologies and discourses, even if that hasn't always been reflected in the ways we have spoken and written about them. Artists themselves are particularly bad about this, as Drucker seems to hint with her statement that a more thoroughgoing conceptualisation needs to come "especially from within the networks of artists committed to books as their primary medium.

Opening up the discourse generally is a task that the community is trying to take on in the work towards a 'critical mass of practitioners and critics', embodied in the resurgence in newsletters and publications available. In the U.K., this includes the *Artist's Book Yearbook*, the

rapidly-growing *Book Arts Newsletter*, and *The Blue Notebook*. The character of the *Manifesto for the Book* (Bodman, Sowden, et al., 2010) is testimony to this also. Visible from the UK are the US publications *JAB* and the sadly-missed *Umbrella*. Efforts like these produce numerous sources describing the field, and in so doing the field becomes less opaque to outside forces reaching in, and we have a better opportunity of reaching outside it. This is in keeping with contemporary practice, which characteristically develops practice as a series of portable strategies that can be adopted into numerous interdisciplinary frameworks: hence the art world is crammed with residencies, cross currents, cross fertilisations and forays into the language and environments of different disciplines and different social conditions, different histories and different media. The strong craft tradition that inheres in the general book arts favours expertise over change.

This is great for the book, but not for artists' books.<sup>35</sup> The book considered as an environment to work in has its own traditions and flavours that artists can draw on, as well as an aspect of communicative utility that means that books also represent an opportunity to enter a potent circuit of communication. The authority of the published book

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<sup>35</sup> A critical outlook that tried to exercise flexibility as well as clarity would, I think, rediscover the creative value of much work previously disqualified as deluxe editions etc, and make much of what craft-oriented people value available to wider appreciation. One cannot blame the 'craft element' for being defensive about a body of criticism that denigrates the pains they take.

that Meador mentions is no small thing. But the sheer gravity of that tradition exerts a false sense of changeless security that artists' books do well to escape from, even as the artist learns (and hopefully retains and passes on) the lessons that the craft has to teach. In order that the book be taken seriously in the outside world, there have to be apertures, open to the world outside books.

In practice, this has always been the case. Books are always about something, always part of something else, as Foucault (across the span of several decades, now) reminds us. But we have persisted in trying to limit our discussion of them to the world of books. We have a strong, pedagogically-useful but critically-limiting *history of the artist's book* that has been read largely as a defence of the notion of the artist's book against arguments that it is not art. This defence has gradually become recognised as insufficiently permeable: hidebound. Our criticism cannot adequately engage with the ways that our books embrace the world, and because of this (as Meador points out above) it is difficult to learn from others who have done it well. We lack a language to share insight into how to do a good job.

Dick Higgins writes:

Perhaps the hardest thing to do in connection with the artist's book is to find the right language for discussing it... the

language of normative criticism is not geared toward the discussion of an experience.

(Higgins, 1987 p. 12)

Our criticism, in fact, is still geared towards *objects*. This alone is not always the best way to engage with the discourses of contemporary practice.<sup>36</sup> Both the reception of the work and the situated strategies of the artist in working in a particular way are important in contemporary art discourse.

Although Higgins' comment about artists' books inaccessibility through their experiential nature is not necessarily dealt with by Drucker's advocacy of a 'descriptive vocabulary' (Drucker, 2005a) (which *risks* being taken to mean a typology, bereft of involvement with the creativity it describes), accessibility is the key notion common to both. Perhaps we lack critical penetration of artists' books because they are beyond the methods of normative criticism. (A failure of criticism). Or perhaps our anxieties and traditions about the definitions and practice of book making have ensnared us in critical inactivity. (A failure of reflection).

Probably both. We need the language, and ideas with which to talk about books, *and* we need the critical distance to shelve ideas that no

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<sup>36</sup> Contemporary practice has caught up with the idea of the book form as art. We need have no more anxiety on that count. We need to provoke some new conversations.



longer work. Canons, and their interpretation, *change*. This is a mark not of failure, but of the continued liveliness of the field. We will discover solutions through our efforts to look at what artists' books *are*, using ideas and language tempered, crucially, by a willingness to perceive artists' books as a small part of a bigger conversation.

In showing us that artists' books permeated the art world of the 20th Century, *The Century of Artists' Books* makes a grand case for saying that books are important, but we have been so involved with defending the credentials of the artist's book as an art *object* that we have preferred the separateness of distinction to claiming its rightful place in the wider world of art *practice*. To paraphrase Phillpot's complaint ("they're not artists' books, they're books"), those books should not be "artists' books" – they are *art*.

### *2.2.3 Bringing in the New*

Even if artists working with books have been slow to generate a proper conversation about the conceptual processes involved in their art, their art itself has always incorporated material from outside the world of books. Publishers have often been instrumental in orchestrating meetings between worlds in a similar way, even seeking contributors whose

insight would be novel because it is ordinarily not focused on artists' books. Tate Shaw's revealing answer shows that his intention in publishing includes a desire to bring fresh material into the world of artists' books:

[Question]6.Do you visit artists at specialist artists' book fairs?

[Answer][Preacher's Biscuit Books] does not look for our publications to come out of specialist gatherings. Instead, we endeavour to publish those who have not previously made artists' books. We do this in the hope that interdisciplinary artists will bring non-book ideas to the medium...

(Shaw, 2007)

Similarly Maria Fusco (Editor of *Put About: a Critical Anthology on Independent Publishing*, with Ian Hunt), (Fusco, et al., 2004) has consistently drawn areas of the debate across into a more mainstream, if philosophical/conceptual, direction.

The debate identifies the need for wider critical perspectives if artists' books are to come out of their entrenched positions regarding their definition, and engage with the issues that are part of contemporary art practice. It would be ironic if we failed to do so, since artists' books practice itself has much to offer.

Central to my own efforts in researching artists' books practice is the concept of *roles* and how artists adopt them within artists' book practice to eventuate different sorts of work and different ways of thinking about work. Roles allow different ways of working so as to pursue the legitimacy of other forms. Thus one works as a poet, as a printmaker, as a designer, as a photographer. These and other roles are part of the creative experience of making artists' books. These are tactics which help create a reflective distance. They cannot be described as *strategies* until they are part of the general discourse: until they are narrated. I want my research to contribute to the enunciation of that experience.

## 2.3 Markets

If the struggle for definition meant that artists' books suffered a paralysis of anxiety lest they be mistaken for ordinary books, the ordinary book market itself showed no such hesitancy and swiftly matched pace with many artists' books' visual and presentational strategies:

... book design has become part of making books that sell. It is in this way that artists' books have had the largest influence in visual culture. Not, as we all hoped, in promoting and educating visually literate readers who could read and enjoy abstruse conceptual artworks, but as a way to turn books into appealing consumer objects ... the publishing industry has adopted artists' book-like strategies to promote sales.

(Meador, 2006)

The conversation around artist's book marketing is intimately linked with both the conception of what artists' books are (their definition), and how and why they should be taken seriously (their legitimacy).

The decision to make an artist's book is one that is caught up in all sorts of desires on the part of the artist.<sup>37</sup> Amongst these are the desires for a greater contact with others, a greater distribution of a valuable idea, the wish to access other theatres of legitimacy through the publication of

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<sup>37</sup> See 2.4.4 *The shared world of reading/ Books and desires*

a work which enters into the publishing communications circuit, and more. All of these desires must find their way in the world, and that crucial aspect of the publishing communications circuit again offers us a clue: that books are not to be seen alone. They are part of a continuum that includes all the people involved in their production, distribution and consumption. (If books change the world in doing so, as Marshall McLuhan notes<sup>38</sup>, then it is partly because the whole human world works this way.) Everything that culture makes is part of a market of ideas and artists' books are no exception. How the artist takes the book into the world is important. I have touched already (2.1.3.1) on the impulses that are described under the heading of the 'democratic multiple'. There are still free and modestly-priced books that appear all the time that are testament to the strong impulse book artists feel to share. The important place that specialist artists' book fairs have on the calendar indicates that the market is a community market with a strong sense that there is some unity to our shared use of the book as a springboard towards our divergent goals.

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<sup>38</sup> E.g. "The uniformity and repeatability of print permeated the Renaissance with the idea of time and space as continuous measurable quantities. [Since print makes communication 'fissile and uniform' it amplifies communication] The immediate effect of this idea was to desacralise the world of nature and the world of power alike." (McLuhan, 2001 [1964] p. 191)

Few artists make much money from books, but persist in the hard work that goes into their production<sup>39</sup>.

Many artists feel that including the cost of preparation time would price the work out of all proportion. Is it more important to make a decent profit or get your work out?  
(Bodman, 2007 p. 15)

The above (freely-available) publication surveys artists' and collectors' ways of selling and acquiring artists' books and pays particular attention to the specialist fairs I have mentioned, as they form an important marketing and networking opportunity for the field.

There is a more direct link between the artist and the buyer in the field of artists' books than any other art discipline. Many book artists are unsure of the market potential of their work and this is particularly difficult in their situation as they are usually directly responsible for interacting with the purchaser. We have interviewed artists about producing and distributing their work, and the importance of artist's book fairs and events

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<sup>39</sup> For a pertinent discussion of the lengths people will go to share their creative impulses, see also (Hyde, 2006). Many artists also make work available freely online, for example, Clifton Meador's free Lulu downloads (<http://stores.lulu.com/cliftonmeador>), and Francis Elliott ([www.franciselliott.com](http://www.franciselliott.com)). The publisher Featherproof, makes a whole range of 'Light Reading Mini-Books' available for free: ([www.featherproof.com](http://www.featherproof.com)) Elliott's offering is ironically truncated: one book previously offered has been replaced by a solicitor's cease-and-desist warning after it was confused with a famous artist's work.

for building relationships with purchasers and other artists.

(Bodman, 2007 p. 5)

Alongside the difficulties of making books that make money, and artists' counterbalancing enthusiasm for distribution, there is the immediacy of the artist's book market. Selling books to the public or to institutional collections is most often a face-to-face transaction. This becomes not merely a handbook of places to sell, contacts to make and advice on how to market your books, but an indicator that marketing artists' books is part of the communication circuit: that being your own distributor is another role that artists making books take on. For some, this too is an attractive feature of the form. Acceptance into the circulation of this circuit is relatively straightforward compared to the gallery system or the commercial press: one needs books and the relatively modest wherewithal to hire a table at the fair.

### *2.3.1 Face to face with institutions*

Artists talk quite a bit about their interactions with customers at fairs and with collectors via appointments at various institutions in the course of the CFPR survey, (Bodman, 2007), which helps illuminate this important aspect of artists' book making. It is striking that artists' books permit artists to penetrate institutions that might otherwise be beyond their reach, through inclusion in the libraries attached to those

institutions. To be able to bypass the gallery system and wind up in museum collections via the 'short circuit' that books provide is no mean attraction, and perhaps explains *in part* why artists are willing to pursue a medium where 'proper' costing would price the work 'out of all proportion'. The sense of community and the presence of a mass of networking and critical aspects to this community are nonetheless real, and work hard to deserve the privilege that the combination of the printed book and the library system (as opposed to the gallery system) afford books' infiltration of major institutions.<sup>40</sup> Part of the field's anxiety is also to be found here: do all the books that end up in the libraries of major institutions deserve to be there? Johanna Drucker's calls to librarians to better represent and enunciate the artist's book's qualities in their cataloguing and selection, point to a wish that the library system might show a less omnivorous, more discriminating tendency.<sup>41</sup> The short circuit that artists' books take advantage of combines the communications circuit of printed books, with the contacts that artists make with the collecting staff of those institutions (primarily librarians). Work towards a contemporary artists' books canon, and a resurgence in

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<sup>40</sup> This is also, of course, similar to the 'piggybacking' Maria Fusco notes in connection with the 'insertions into ideological circuits' she discusses.

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Bury notes that "collecting from living artists is something that librarians are not necessarily prepared for or good at", asking librarians to consider some scheme or other to guide their collecting strategy. Bury offers several possibilities, but leaves it up to the collector, "Ultimately it all comes down to knowing why you want to collect artists' books." (Bury, 2007)



interest in critical aspects of artists' books will help to shape and moderate this inclusion. I hope, however, that book artists will continue to find new ways to engage with their collectors that continue to outstrip the methods of anticipating or circumscribing artists' books' 'proper' activity, and I look forward to future generations of librarians as keen to expand their interpretations as those who grace the profession now. Many academic libraries will be taking their cue from the courses taught in their faculty, and many students will be finding their way into artists' books not because of those courses, but because their library happens to have the books. Such unintended consequences are typical of the nature of books themselves. For artists, this contact with institutions is, as the participants in the *Artists' Books Creative Production and Marketing* surveys remind us, a personal contact, one that the combination of books, library culture, and the self-organised-and-distributing culture of fairs and events has made possible.

### *2.3.2 Creating the discourse that allows us to move away from 'home circuits'*

I am not sure what proportion of the artists exhibiting at a typical artist's book fair would describe artists' books as the main or only part of their work. A majority of them would, I think, describe their practice in these terms. However, it is important to take account of the fact that

numerous artists' books are made by artists for whom the book is only one amongst several strategies their practice employs. As I have mentioned above<sup>42</sup>, a significant source of such work comes from work done in conjunction with publishers like Book Works. Artists whose participation goes beyond the 'home circuits' of bookfairs and libraries have access to forms of discourse and modes of legitimacy that a less-cosmopolitan inwardness lacks. The 'home circuits' are a hard track to break out of; they are comfortable, but afford a very comfortable groove in which it is possible to get stuck. Breaking out of this is essential to gaining a foothold in the world beyond, and as Francis Elliott points out in a discussion about Wikipedia and Artists' Books, a critical dimension offers discussion that can make links between different disciplines:

Artists' Books... stand to gain immeasurably from the possibilities of discussion, dissemination and contextualising that can be woven into essays published on the internet. Indeed, it's only through these discussions, whether published traditionally or digitally, that any work acquires gravity. (Elliott, 2008)

It's not without irony that a field like artists' books, which thrives on its intermedia/interdisciplinary heritage and possibilities, and which

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<sup>42</sup> See 2.1.1.1.3 *Hybrid Identity: Production Values*

prosper through connection with libraries, (whose purpose is to provide access to the materials needed for the discussion Elliott reminds us is necessary), has so much trouble in making its part of the discussion available to a wider audience. Indeed, it is paradoxical that so much energy should go into the desires behind the 'democratic multiple' to see the message such strenuous dispersal tries to carry, seemingly disappear. I would connect this back to Drucker's complaint that book-centric artists in particular, need to take up the challenge of "[taking] seriously the terms on which books are conceptualized as an artistic form". (Drucker, 1995a p. 3) If we are to think about how artists might take their work with books seriously, we need to include those things that make up the practice of working with artists' books in the scope of our critical discussion about artists' books.

If we limit our critical function to the type of canon created via a historical review alone, or to questions of definition alone, we miss out on a big part of what makes artists' books so interesting to artists. That large area is briefly surveyed in the following section.

## **2.4 The Artist's Book Medium / The Book as an Artwork**

In this last of my four sections reflecting on the field of artists' books (after Klima) we will look at some aspects of books themselves, over

against the more social or external aspects discussed before. But this is not to be a formal examination of the artist's book. Here I want to bring up both effects and affects: effects being some of the formal poetics and techniques of the book; and affects being (roughly) that with which their makers' and readers' experience is inflected. So this is a section that looks both inwards and outwards: towards the intrinsic book, and towards its extrinsic relations of affect.

There is difficulty here. These categories – “inside”, “outside”, break down. My purpose is to pursue the difficulties involved in trying to make such distinctions, and thus to emphasise the important place of affect in artists' books.

#### *2.4.1 Inside and outside*

At the beginning of this chapter I mentioned the perceived schism between criticism 'outside' and 'inside' practice. Typically, traditionally, critical thought comes from outside practice: it looks at and analyses work from the outside. But more recent critical work on art as research has looked at how art-making can itself function as a site of critical reflection. E.g. (MacLeod, et al., 2005), (Sullivan, 2005). In the field of Book Art it has taken a long time for narratives of practice to enter fully into a debate that has long held onto the authority of criticism as an

‘external’ discourse: but the *contents* of such a discussion are not new. Keith Smith has been talking for many years about the relationships between content, medium and narrative. E.g. (Smith, 1992), (Smith, 1989) Serious discussions of how narrative effects in individual works are achieved have always had to acknowledge the bookform’s specific effects in doing so. The elusive pursuit of ‘bookness’, a phenomenological quest to capture the experience of books otherwise subsumed to a sealed essentialism has been a backstory to many of the discussions about artists’ books’ definition. These all blend effect and affect.

If the perceived schism between artists’ book practice and theory is to be narrowed, then, as Matthew P Brown put it, theory needs to:

evolve from the language of artists, and ...practice [needs to]  
recognise the theoretical implications of its genesis.

(Brown, 2007 p. 8)

(This does not mean that theory must evolve “from artists’ alone” – but it does mean that we ignore ‘the language of artists’ at peril of missing something important. David Miall, (Miall, 2000), writes a good deal about how literary theory lacks an empirical basis partly because it often overlooks the experiences of its readers as either uninteresting or untestable. Artists’ books’ readers will one day have a similar role to fill

in giving us a better understanding of the field). The history of “the book as an art object” has been one dominated by the assertion of the book as an art *object*, and the defence of definitions attendant on that assertion. Additionally, the critical legitimacy of the art object has lain in the hands of external authorities. The topic is now more complex, and perhaps less fraught with the sense of the need to stake out artists’ books’ right to exist.

#### 2.4.1.1 *The Book Art Object/The Book Artist’s Objective*

The phrase in the heading denotes a conceptual turn. Partnering the book as an art object (focus of formalist description, surface of experience, zone of definitive tension), I want to view the *idea* of the book as an element in artistic creativity. This is a way of partnering effect and affect.

What does this mean? Not all artists working with ‘book’ make recognisable books as such. (Though most do, of course). We viewers remain quite free to disagree with anyone’s denotation of the book object. But there is not necessarily a special category of object that this focus on ‘book’ produces.<sup>43</sup> Who would a more stringent definition benefit? Collectors, editors and librarians of various types for whom the

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<sup>43</sup> The badge *excuse me, one moment*, produced by Becky Adams as Book Art illustrated in (Bodman and Sowden 2010 p. 6) is one example.

arbitration of boundaries is part of a job description. Some histories require such a view. But it would not benefit artists, nor fully describe their objective. A material view of books' effects is indispensable, and of course it needs a vocabulary of form. But just as indispensable is the narrative of affect. How does working with books affect artists' production? What does the artist's book do to its viewers? This happens inside heads and cultures, not books (though there we can excavate its traces). Some of this is difficult to narrate. I have proposed some inroads into a number of metaphors artists employ in working in books in Chapter 3. Aspects like books intermedia-quality, and their presentation of metaphor on many levels (production, consumption, grammatical, narrative) are difficult to describe. We should not shrink from these realities because they are hard to describe. (And they can be *described* rather than *defined*. As a specific, they evolve too quickly for taxonomy.) They are as indispensable as the formal specificities without whose anchoring force they would evaporate, and into whose worldbound materiality they breathe the metaphoric imagination.<sup>44</sup>

It is only recently though, that the field's thirst for critical discourse that really reflects practice has legitimised 'modes of practice' as a

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<sup>44</sup> Matthew P. Brown's relation of the 'weak claim' of intermedia and the 'strong claim' of 'potentialities specific to the book format and their... distinction from other media' differs from this proposal. I do not see why we cannot make both claims. That we already do is the source of much – hopefully fruitful – tension. (Brown, 2007 p. 8)

genuine arena in which critical reflection takes place. We have come to a point where we are ready to accept critical material from inside practice<sup>45</sup>, as Mary Tasillo proposes:

powerfully different critical insights come from those with creative expertise and those with a creative ignorance, if you will. Criticism suffers when either perspective is missing.

(Tasillo, 2007 p. 12)

### 2.4.2 Roles

Roles offer the opportunity to access different circuits of legitimacy, different senses of community.

But there is another, 'affect' side to roles, where they form a bridge between being and doing. By acting 'as if' one *were* something or someone other than what one's immediate identity offers, one extends possibility. Because books offer many such roles, they offer many such possibilities. Roles play a part in extending the flexibility of practice and theory both: they expose *both* to cross-fertilisation by other terms of reference. In practice, roles hybridise what one does. In theory, they hybridise how one thinks about it. In both realms, there is a poetic gap between what one is doing and how one describes it that allows creative

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<sup>45</sup> The *Manifesto for the Book* (Bodman, Sowden, et al., 2010) offers many such insights. In my research I offer several more, together with some critical overviews of what they indicate.



play. They are 'points of choice that the discourse leaves free'.<sup>46</sup> Roles, in opening the possibility of pairing with new terms of description and imagination, 'metaphorise' practice. Choices made 'as if' one were a graphic designer, say, expose one to practices and intellection that are otherwise unlikely.

Let us now turn to some other aspects of books effects and affects.

### *2.4.3 Tactile/Narrative/Space and Time*

Regarding the book as an experience in time, Ulises Carrión's *The New Art of Making Books* offered a clear vision of how the mechanism of the book could be seen as something that functions in both space and time, delivering new poetic possibilities to its makers and readers:

A book is a sequence of spaces. Each of these spaces is perceived at a different moment - a book is also a sequence of moments. (Carrión, 1987 [1975] p. 31)

Carrión's essay appears as early as 1975, giving voice to a conceptual view of the book's possibilities and function, including its tactile phenomena, an aspect often referred to by those encountering artists' books. It's easy to forget what a new experience being able to

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<sup>46</sup> The quotation, from Foucault (Foucault, 2002 [1969] p. 40) we have already seen. Here, I am using it to connote a "pause" in the discourse- a moment of carrying across where we do not know the outcome. This is a moment of the unknown, before the surface of interpretation closes again over what metaphor has opened up.

actually handle the artwork often is to those encountering artists' books.<sup>47</sup> For those making books, too, the tactile materiality of their design makes a difference, especially to those brought up to creativity on the computer screen. The tactile is still a powerful contemporary topic in artists' books, brought up to date through this desire for work one can actually touch, rather than simply look at on the screen. Mike Nicholson, reviewing a 2008 symposium at Tate Britain notes,

[Silke]Dettmers opened the proceedings by acknowledging... a growing interest in making book art. Is this, she asked, a result of 'screen-flight' - students moving towards 'an otherwise unmet need for the physical and tactile'?

(Nicholson, 2008 p. 21)

Narrative, obviously enough, remains a feature of importance to artists and readers. Betty Bright describes the readerly experience of narrative in an artist's book:

the intellect of the reader seeks to anticipate or interpret each revelation amidst unleashed emotions, as body and book join in a private, sensuous encounter. The touch and paging through an artist's book hearkens back to childhood in a

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<sup>47</sup> There is a *readerly* aspect of controlling reading that I want to come to in connection with this: see 2.4.4 *The shared world of reading / Books and desires*

delight of movement, in the pleasurable accumulation of sequence, and in the esoteric relationship of text with image. What a reader recognises in an artist's book is the reinvention of the art of storytelling within the incremental, organic unfolding of a book.<sup>48</sup>

There is pleasure to be had both as a reader and as a maker of books. Paging through a book, the tactile and indeed intimate encounter that books facilitate is one that is both familiar and full of surprises. In describing the effect and affect of books, we also describe how books work with the desires of readers and makers.

#### *2.4.4 The shared world of reading / Books and desires*

One of the ways in which we get hung up in defining artists' books is in defining the physical object, *book*. Judy Barrass and Charles Brownson, replying to one another on a forum on the artists' books website *Artist Books 3.0* (<http://artistbooks.ning.com>) discuss alternate ways of approaching the problem. I have already commented on the

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<sup>48</sup> (Bright, 2005 p. 261) This is a sensuous description that prompts us towards the conception of an erotics of the artist's book. Such would need to encompass the agency of our desire as well as the formalist sensation of our experience. We could offer a reading of Sontag's *Against Interpretation* (Sontag, 1995 [1966]) on this basis. Just as striking to me is the relation to the desire for narrative progression towards closure as fulfilment we see in (Kermode, 1966) and (Brooks, 1992). Paul Ricoeur's writings on narrative E.g. (Ricoeur, 1984 [1983]) offer an interpretive hermeneutics that opens itself to all of these possibilities. (See 3.9.3)

debate around defining artists' books above<sup>49</sup>, but what Barrass and Brownson suggest in terms of *reading* is interesting.

Barrass: "...I am wondering if a consideration of the notion of 'reading' might be a more useful way to approach things."

Brownson: "...reading as an anchor concept has its attractions. Reading is a temporal process and carries with it interesting implications. ... 'Reading' is not so divisive a term as 'book' and 'publish' have turned out to be, yet I suspect ...that it will still support sorting of artists by mode, strategy, gap between perception and comprehension, etc..."

(Barrass, et al., 2008)

Rather than using the concept of reading as an analytical tool, as Brownson suggests, I began to explore the common ground that reading could bring to the disparate types of book-experience offered by the wide range of different ventures into book-related art. In a talk given in 2008, I spoke about the 'shared world of reading' that all books engage with, regardless of their appearance, and, indeed, regardless of whether they can actually be *read*:

I see an artwork that issues a fitful promise to get us to that shared world of reading. Very often this is so, and there are pages and words, and some kind of structure that takes place

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<sup>49</sup> See section 2.1 *Definition*

in the world of reading...elsewhere there is a withholding of reading, a promise made to be broken. The object is a book, it says. It takes up my attention and I engage with it, but it reneges, tells me that no, it *isn't* to be read. ... Sometimes the book threatens to explode when I open the pages.

... But their attraction to me is still because they claim the world *proper* to books.

(Eason, 2008)

Such books make claims on our *desire* to read (even when they shut us out). When artists make books for others, they make them in the full knowledge that books lead into this shared world, that they engage with our readerly desire to take part in this shared world (perhaps this is one reason why we speak of books as a democratic instrument)<sup>50</sup>. Here are two short quotations that reflect aspects of artists' books relationship to readerly desire:

an artist's book ... has a relationship, however tangential, to what we consider a book, whilst implicitly challenging its authority. By contrast, any book that implicitly accepts and exploits that authority, veers toward being a *Livre d'Artiste*.

(Elliott, 2008)

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<sup>50</sup> The desire to enter into reading and the desire to publish are twinned here. Both are desires to connect with the shared world of reading.

And:

Unique bookworks are often only one step away from mute sculptural book objects that at best simply provoke reflections on the history and role of the book as a cultural phenomenon...[Books] also achieve... the potential to reach many people who would not cross a threshold framed with classical columns in order to see books or art behind glass.

(Phillpot, 1987 p. 106)

Note that in the first quotation (Elliott) it is we, the readers, who consider the artwork under our gaze a book (or not), and in the second (Phillpot), we who are provoked into reflection on the book as a cultural phenomenon. We bring our expectations of the book with us, and as Phillpot points out, those expectations and desires are so familiar to us that they can lead us towards experiences we might otherwise avoid. At best, we might hope for the experience Nancy Tousley enthused about in her catalogue for the exhibition *Learn to Read Art* in 1990:

Turning to a shelf of artists' books, one can re-enter an intimate encounter with a work of art. Artists' books offer oases in a media-saturated world... something real, something imagined, something to stimulate... presented through a one-on-one relationship experienced in privacy.

(Tousley, 1991 p. 17)

The desire<sup>51</sup> felt towards books by readers is paired by artists' desires for what the book affords. Sarah Bodman's talk at *Books that Fly*, touched on aspects of *why artists make books* that presented a series of reasons, partly as desires to achieve certain personal creative aims. These included:

- The desire to engage with the public;
- Making books is pleasurable: the medium is being used because the artist clearly enjoys it;
- The desire to share experiences<sup>52</sup>
- The desire to bring written and spoken word (and, I would add, the strategies and possibilities of design, publication, poetry, etc) into the fray;
- The desire to control-

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<sup>51</sup> See also footnote 50, 'twinning' publishing and reading.

<sup>52</sup> A statement by the book artist Lucy May Schofield is illustrative of this desire: "Inspired by an unrelenting desire to make, coupled with a passion for the written word, I make objects to house stories which may otherwise go untold. In creating visual narratives I accompany the viewer on a journey through an honest, intimate recollection, a memory or feeling, often manifesting in an installation, multiple or artist's book.

These works are born from a passion to communicate, to generate a dialogue and create a world in which there is time enough to read." (Schofield, ca. 2008)

"artists making their own books follow the whole process through from conception to finished piece... this is important, not only in maintaining control of the whole process, but allowing them to consider the reasoning process of how the book will work."

(Bodman, 2008 p. 3)

#### *2.4.5 Mediating Relations / Metaphorising Practice*

The sections on Markets (2.3) and on Access to Legitimacy/Discourses (2.2), above, make plain the artists' wish to find ways of introducing their work to the public (and to the attention of the art world), and the wish that artists have to share has also been touched upon briefly. Perhaps the circuit of communication is one where the desire to connect is felt by both parties.<sup>53</sup> The sense of connection to others through books, and into the world of books is sometimes quite mysterious. How can it be that the book has such power to move us and

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<sup>53</sup> The wish that book artists sometimes have to communicate, to share, has been a subjectively powerful experience for me as I have gone about my research, with particular artists palpably feeling the desire that their work should connect quite intensely.

In an interview conducted by Sarah Bodman and Tom Sowden with the artist Radoslaw Nowakowski (Radek) this desire is illustrated very strongly. Radek would overcome the difficulties of publishing in Poland (at the time) by stacking multiple layers of carbon paper and paper together and battering away with a manual typewriter. One can imagine Radek using the strength of his fingers on the typewriter to 'push through' layer by carbon-paper layer, towards the people on the other side. Radek's effort allows them to come through the 'paper window' he opens up, letter by letter. See <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/nowakowski.htm> for more on Bodman and Sowden's interviews with Radek.



accompany us in our lives? Why do we engage so strongly and so empathetically with books? Also mysterious is that 'poetic gap' that I spoke of in relation to how the adoption of many roles in artists' book practice helped to 'metaphorise' practice. Are these mysteries related?

In both there is a journey or transfer across: from one person to another in the circuit of communication, mediated by the book; from one identity to another, mediated through roles. In both transitions there is a gap where new things can intervene, and books are *where* it can happen. Helen Douglas seems to me to talk about this in casting the book as the 'place of her making':

I have decided to speak from the book, the place of my making, the place where my expression is made concrete, and where all three Nature Landscape and Book come together.

...And yes also to Book

That is the place of my making

where I can gather all within the gatherings

and weave my visual narratives as text to the page

in and out

teased to the surface

inside to out

expressing this to my viewer in an intimate and contained way

published. (Douglas, 2005)

Douglas' previous background in textiles is referred to here, but also her relationship to landscape (where she has elsewhere referred to 'stells'. Stells are temporary holding pens that allow for a gathering – of sheep in the borders setting. These allow one a vantage point, or a point of composure in the landscape). I have referred in the sections above<sup>54</sup> to an intermedia aspect of books allowing one to slip from one practice to another, eluding (or eliding) full description as one does so. Here in Douglas' description this is characterised as a temporary measure, a *gathering* of possibilities; the stell as a temporary constellation that allows for new connections to emerge and be construed. The process of construal and construction is amply described by Douglas herself. In speaking of the desire to publish, we can see how the desire for expression is composed *outwardly*. Preceding that, if we can see that Douglas is describing how books allow a temporary construction that allows the composition of thought, we can see how the desire to make books is composed *inwardly*. In speaking about roles, I have tried to get artists to narrate this inward composure.

In the sections above I have tried to provide a provisional articulation of the main themes indicative of the discussions going on in contemporary artists' books practice. Underlying much of the debate are

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<sup>54</sup> see 2.1.1.1 *The Hybrid Identity of Artists' Books*

tensions regarding the definitive description of the artist's book and its values. Because these are intrinsically linked to the book's participation in other media (and vice versa), and the ways in which books have been linked with every major Western art practice over the last hundred years or so, such definition remains difficult. In many ways the book's own values militate against this. Contemporary practice seeks a balance between a sense of mobile, strategic practice, and a sense of values that allow one to make critical judgement on good and bad examples of artists' books. There is in this balance an emergence from years of defensive defining that sought to establish books' right to be seen as art. It is increasingly apparent that in order to be taken seriously, the discussion should attempt more to describe the art of artists' books, rather than continuing to try to erect fences around the term 'book'.

When books are seen as part of *what artists do*, (the most valuably descriptive verb here seems to be 'to publish'), the debate ceases to centre solely around objective definition and begins to examine books' performative aspects as a social phenomenon and an artistically-

expressive form. It is in this context that my own practice as a book artist exists.

## 2.5 Surveying my own Practice as an Indicative Practitioner of Artists' Books

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a basis to judge my competence as a practitioner of artists' books. My research methodology calls for my participation in the field I am observing, and for an adequacy of methodological engagement with the field on my part, so that I can make critical judgements from a position of relative parity with their practice. (See section 1.3.) In this section I will reflect in my own practice, the areas I have used in the previous sections 2.1-2.3.

### *2.5.0.1 Categories*

Taking Klima's categories (2.0.1.3) as a starting point, I have in several respects offered an alternative critical analysis that in my opinion, better reflects the articulation of relevant contemporary critical issues. In particular, I wanted to recontextualise the 'definition' debate as problematic, and point up some of the discontinuities and unrealised potentials in critical narrative emerging from 'inside practice' that Klima's more historical overview cannot capture.

As might be expected, my review of how my own book art practice as indicative of critical practice, similarly does not conform fully to the

themes Klima offers. The landscape has changed, and the concerns of my own practice do not intersect with all of the issues Klima offers as typical. The following section will broadly use the same 'skeleton' used in sections 2.1-2.4, to survey my own status as an indicative practitioner of artists' books.

As I proceed, there will be areas where my own practice does not fully explore the range typical of the field as a whole. This is to be expected: no single artist explores all the possibilities that their field opens to them. However, as a PhD student and researcher, I have had many opportunities to encounter others' work and working processes, and have read widely about artists' books. All of this has of course informed the reflective practice that is integral to my work on artists' books – likewise my 'informed' state is reflected in the presuppositions I bring to my field research with other artists.<sup>55</sup>

The question I ask in relation to these themes below is 'how does my work/working practice examine, or otherwise engage with this theme critically?'

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<sup>55</sup> A general overview of my research methodology, including my status as a participant observer whose outlook of necessity includes a degree of presupposition is the subject of section 1.3

### 2.5.1 Definition

The theme of the definition of artists' books has, as I point out in section 2.1 and following sections, been a subject of prolonged debate and deep uncertainty on the part of the artist's book field. My analysis of the debate has drawn me to the position that, while the construction of a provisional formal vocabulary is a necessary step in the articulation of critical engagement with artists' books, the debate often gets mired in an unnecessary over-description of the permitted physical, technological and distribution features of the artist's book.

As a practitioner, my interest in this is moderated as an exploration of formal qualities and tactics of practice, rather than as a quest to create (or deliberately undermine) authoritative exemplars. Inasmuch as the books I make are *about* books at all, I work towards discerning 'ways of making' that I can use, rather than 'types of book'. Where I *am* interested in critical issues that impinge on the definition question, I am far more interested in exploring the 'grey areas' *to see what happens*.<sup>56</sup>

Developing these effects sometimes, upon reflection, could be seen as 'challenging the book', but this is not an explicit intention.

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<sup>56</sup> I think that this is a much more typical characterisation of experimentation with the boundaries of the field's definitions than one that would describe itself as 'investigating definitions'. I think artists are more interested in playing with definitions than creating them.

### 2.5.1.1 *Signs*

For example, although my books typically use a basic codex format, there have been projects where I have explored alternative forms of incorporating the book effects of narrative, design, etc. *Signs* (2007) is a project whose effects are still ‘without a book’. My work with *Signs* consists of photographs and films taken in-situ, of texts dispersed across specific landscape settings<sup>57</sup>, (Figs. 1-4) using music stands as a way of arranging words across real spaces, rather than across the space of the page.<sup>58</sup>

With *Signs*, I have been echoing aspects of my more regular practice, where words are dragged across the designed surface of a Photoshop image. Through the relationship with my other work, *Signs* sets up ruminations on the meaning of space in my production.

One facet of this is the code of perspective. Perspective forces particularly-ordered readings on the words taped to their music stands,

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<sup>57</sup> See: (Eason, 2007) for a relevant discussion of this project in my studio journal

<sup>58</sup> Marlene Creates’ work *A River of Occurrences*, Yukon 2003, seems to parallel this practice, placing textual interventions directly into real (photographed) spaces. Although Creates’ work functions in series she does not describe such work as book-like. My intention, perhaps belying my assertion that I don’t deliberately seek to challenge books’ definition experimentally, was to produce my work *Signs*, explicitly as a book project.



even if these contravene the competing code of left-to-right, top-to-bottom that normal reading requires. The flattened formal qualities of the signs in *Signs* are never flat enough that their perspectival cues disappear, and this photographic effect is not easy to reproduce in the purely digital realm through scaling and other cues for depth.



Figures 1, 2, 3, 4: from *Signs* (2007)

A narrative space that occurs elsewhere in my practice (reflected on by *Signs*) is that of layers in the digital files I work with. These are flattened by the print process, but this process preserves a view-through that figures a processional perspective: some things are in front of others,

additive and subtractive effects take place in a particular order, from a particular point of view. Still another form of narrative space is that created by sequencing, (the 'sequence of spaces' as described by Carrión (Carrión, 1987 [1975] p. 31). As one photo follows another, a journey through the photographic pictorial space is configured, producing the setting: the 'plot' that is the realm of the plot. With *Signs*, the photographic sequence is marked out in the photo itself: the spot on which I next erect the camera tripod is the spot on which the closest music stand is resting. Compared to the short films I have produced, simply following the trail, the effect of this feedback from image to method is appreciable.<sup>59</sup> Reflection on the value of this project to my practice is causing me to question my adherence to books themselves as the outcome that I seek to achieve. In querying the definitions of the book, even in this round about way, I have ended up challenging my beliefs about my practice.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> I have also been influenced by the formal procedures evident in some of the *Weproductions* books by Helen Douglas and Telfer Stokes from the early 70's. Works like their *Passage* literalise the 'gaze of the page', framing with page and camera to unite pictorial and page space for the purposes of a visual narrative. In *Signs* I was able to take my own steps towards similar effects.

<sup>60</sup> I believe it is significant that these challenges emerge through reflection that is anchored by the critical resources of media I am using with the book; e.g. photography, digital imaging.

### 2.5.1.2 Encounters with materials

If *Signs* could be interpreted as challenging the definition of the book, the theme is not a prevalent feature of my work. My work mostly exploits the codex format as a staging ground for encounters with a variety of research methods, materials, and roles<sup>61</sup>.

However, I have often explored ‘ways of making’ (see 2.5.1) eventuated by the use of different available materials and technologies that have sometimes drawn me further from the ordinary codex form.

Barring a few early experiments (e.g. *Ambergris*, *Magpie* and *Kabuki*, all 1996), which worked with unusual page structures, I have not taken up a particularly radical practice with regard to book structure. There are a number of books that do not conform to codex format, however. My ongoing *Whistling Copse* series including the books *Twelve O’Clock Wood*, *Under the Wire* and *Safely Infer*, which were all based on a long concertina format. This was inspired by Helen Douglas’ *Illiers Combray* (2004), but also designed specifically to take advantage of the availability of a wide-format inkjet printer. An earlier series, designated *The Morning and the Evening*, included three books, *Firmament* (2004), (Fig. 5) *Ocean* (2004), and *The Morning and the*

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<sup>61</sup> See 2.5.2.1



### 2.5.2 Access to legitimacy/discourses

In previous sections<sup>64</sup> I discuss how artists use artists' books to gain access to forms of legitimacy and openings to different areas of critical discourse through their use of books to piggyback into different 'ideological' circuits including that of publishing. The book as a framing strategy, allows artists to 'metaphorise' their practice, opening up poetic possibilities by acting 'as if', in different *roles* and *modes of practice* made possible by the book as a staging area for these operations. We will look at these ways of working, or aspects of hybrid practice, below:

#### 2.5.2.1 Roles/Hybrids

##### 2.5.2.1.1 Writing/Poetry: Radio

Text is very often the beginning of a book, giving focus and structure to a work so that I can work a 'counterpoint' visually. *Radio* (2004) can exemplify my concern with the textual element of artists' books.

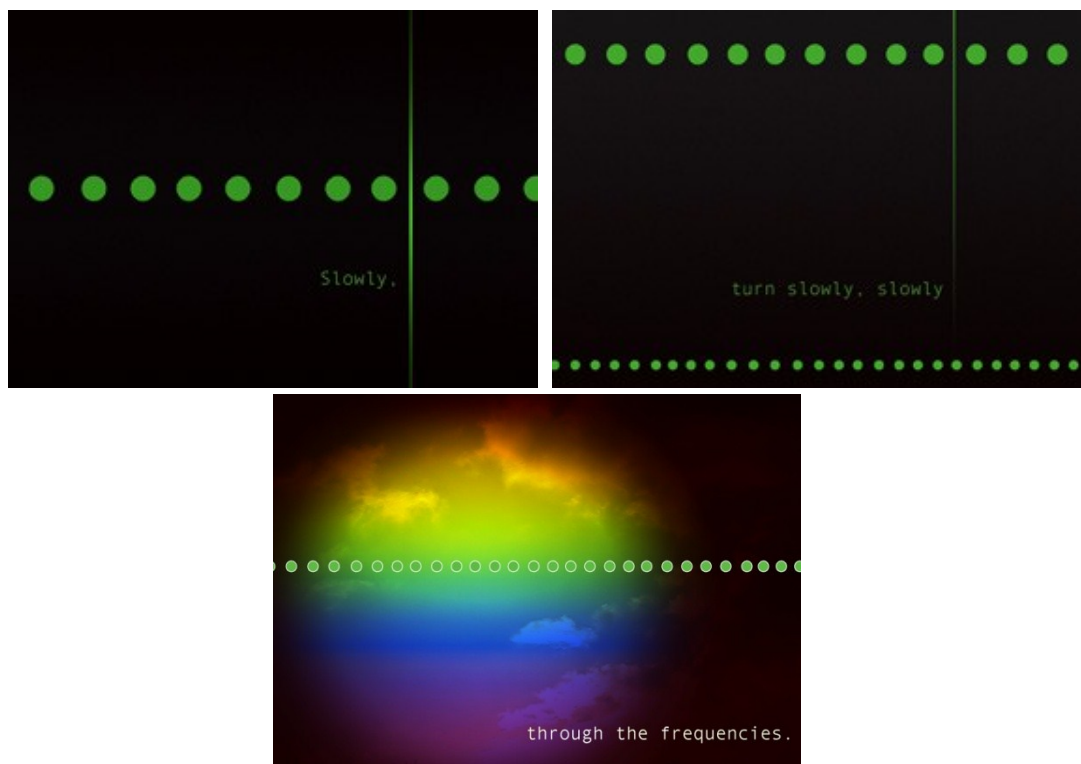
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<sup>64</sup> See section 2.2

In *Radio* (2004), the writing helped give focus to what would otherwise have been an exceptionally obscure set of subjects for a visual narrative. *Radio*'s subjects pair the uncertainty implicit in the quantum view of electromagnetism with the uncertainty of human communication. Is the communication by means of a wave or a particle? Are my experiences of other people real?

The writing draws the reader in, towards the private concentration of late-night radio-tuning: (Figs. 6-8).

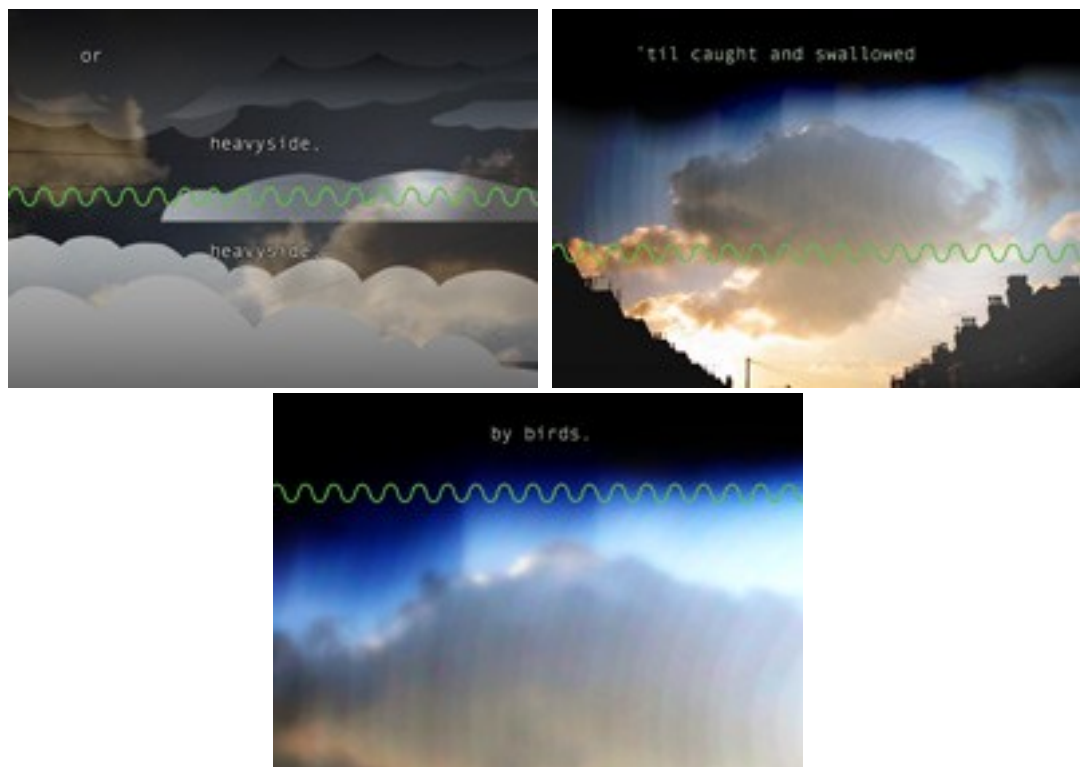
“slowly/turn slowly, slowly/through the frequencies”



Figures 6,7,8: from *Radio* (2004)

sets up the visual narrative in terms of radio dials, particles, waves, vision and images of the cosmos. The visual task here was to reflect

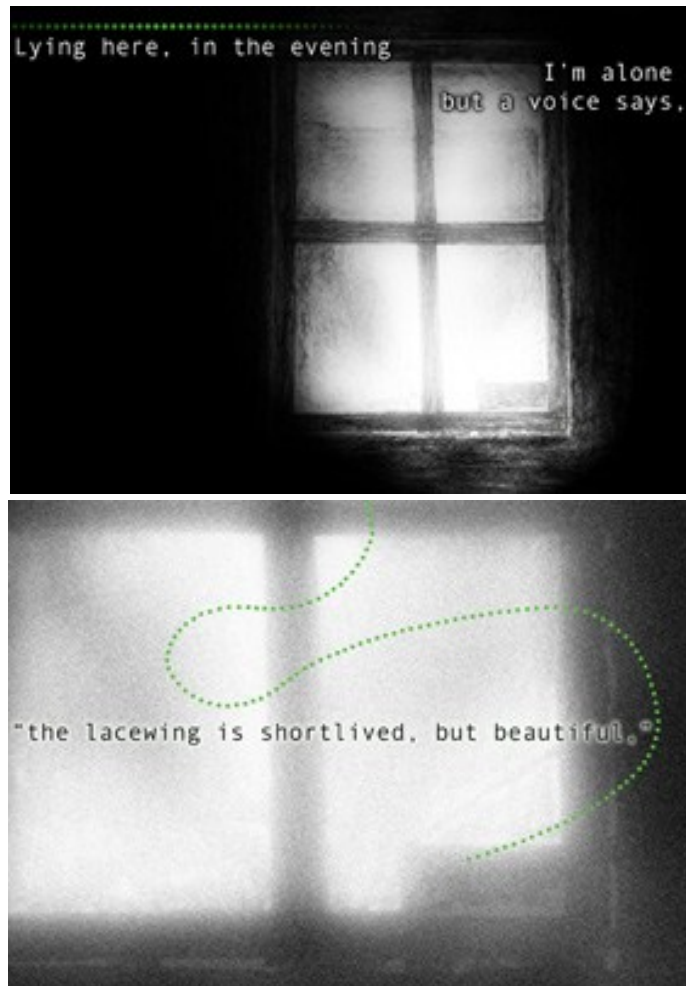
some of the language 'note for note'; an illustrative accompaniment that would reinforce the progress of the language itself as it gradually laid out the extent of its intentions. But while it does this, it has another job to do, recombining elements and introducing new ones. For instance, in *Radio* there is piece of minor textual imagery in the form of the lacewing. I use it early on in the piece to suggest the vagaries of probability about whether or not communication will actually reach us. (Figs. 9-11).  
'or, heavyside, heavyside/'til caught and swallowed/by birds'.



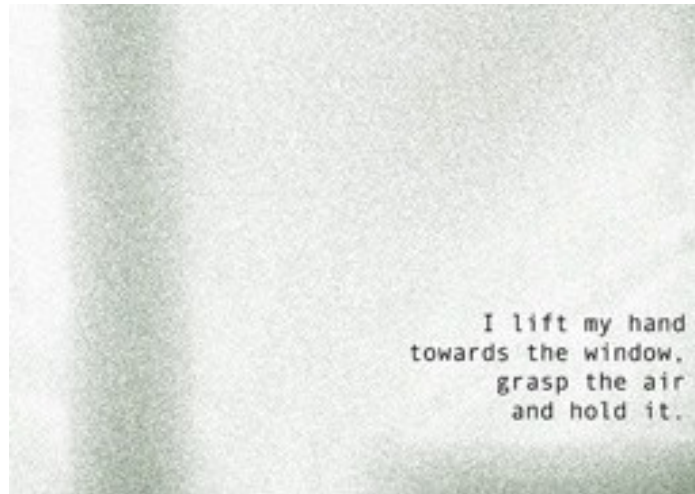
Figures 9,10,11: from *Radio* (2004)

The insect is not actually textually (or visually) referred to here, but recurs in the final pages, where the narrator is listening to the radio late at night. (Figs 12-14).

'...a voice says "the lacewing is shortlived, but beautiful"./ I lift my  
hand/ towards the window,/ grasp the air/and hold it.'







Figures 12, 13, 14: from *Radio* (2004)

In neither of these sections is the insect actually visually depicted, but the central section of the book describes the passage of a message or messenger from some cosmic distance (which is snuffed out at the last instant). Although I had not written the poem deliberately to recapitulate the lacewing in this section, that is how I used the book to reinforce and reform links between visual and textual imagery, and across the span of the book at that stage. The message becomes the lacewing itself, and in the imagery I had been using in the pages leading up to it, the luminous dots on the radio dial (which we might also see as quanta or points of data, through a similar interweaving of imagery of visual and textual nature), are also revealed to be the trail of the lacewing's flight. Over a sequence of pages the lacewing comes ever closer to its goal, but in the background a pair of car headlights approaches (Figs. 15-17) so that the tiny event whose occurrence has been engineered over vast reaches of

possibility, never actually occurs. (Figs. 18-19).



Figures 15,16,17: from *Radio* (2004)



Figures 18, 19: from *Radio* (2004)

"the supply lines/ of coincidence/ are cut".

In these relationships it is possible to see how I'm using the visual and textual elements of the book to involve the reader in a continuous crossing-over between visual and textual narrative schemes. This 'visual

chiasma' builds a hybrid metaphor using both visual and textual elements.<sup>65</sup> Imagery weaves in and out of the text's own imagery and vice versa and we are confronted by a range of poetic 'problems' to overcome as a reader in matching up 'schemes of sense'.

In the example above, I have identified my task in producing this book as that of a writer or poet alongside that of a visual artist. By taking up the tools of either role, I have been able to produce effects that either alone could not. Alongside the technical effects shown here through examples, there is also the creative *affect* of taking up such roles. Such roles offer a creative affect by allowing me to think of my task in different ways, and offer differing vantage points for creative reflection. Not only do they allow me to work in different ways at different times, they also allow me to shift my intentions around within the creative process, so that I can free up 'space to move' within the emerging work. This is what my notion of 'metaphorising practice'<sup>66</sup> means in practice: I can shift the terms of production around as I move through the work. Sometimes new possibilities emerge as a result.

#### *2.5.2.1.2 Historical Materials: Tiercel*

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<sup>65</sup> See 3.7.3 for a discussion of the visual chiasma in artists' books and its consequences.

<sup>66</sup> See section 2.4.5 *Mediating Relations/Metaphorising Practice*

In *Tiercel* (2001), I used the 10<sup>th</sup> / 11<sup>th</sup> Century Anglo Saxon poem *The Battle of Maldon*. This book was developed from an initial text I wrote in response to the poem, edited as the imagery and the text I wrote grew together. In writing the text I had been inspired by the ellipsis in the first few lines of *Maldon*,

“ . . . would be broken.

Then he commanded each young man

To leave his horse, to drive it far off,

and to go forth... ”

Continuing,

“he let from his hand, then, loved one fly,

hawk to the holt, and he stepped to battle.”

(Glenn, 2006)

Fragments of the poem are missing. *What* would be broken by the battle? My answer recalls a riddle from the *Exeter Book* – the ‘loved one’ that flies from the kinsman’s own hand towards the wood; a hunting falcon. (Fig. 20).



Figure 20: from *Tiercel* (2001)

Studying Anglo Saxon poetry following this, I discovered their poetry's love of alliteration and descriptions that combine identity and purpose. I put together a text in modern English that borrowed aspects of this poetry (and language from the much later history of falconry), to retell the story of the battle from the falcon's point of view<sup>67</sup>. Visually, I combined images from falconry with those of weaponry, echoing the identification of the hawk's features, character and purpose with that of an arrow in the text.

In *Tiercel*, I opened up a strategy for mining historical material along with the specifically textual practice of writing my way into a perspective on events using a character, which have become core parts of my practice: I could not have taken this on without books as a mediating factor. In order to take on the voice of the character and

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<sup>67</sup> See section 2.5.4.3 *Character/Voice* for further exploration of ways I have exploited this tactic.

present the reflections I had on the source material, I needed to make a book. Because I make books, I was able to start using historical materials frequently as a resource in my work.

### *2.5.2.1.3 Publishing*

Artists' Books of course also give me access to aspects of the book publishing circuit.<sup>68</sup> Because I produce books, I am able to sell books at book art fairs, and I can approach bookshops and galleries to sell them. I can also take them to librarians in major art institutions and hope that my work will be featured in their collections. The success or failure of artists' books publishing depends, as Maria Fusco puts it in her 2005 essay for *Art Monthly*, '*Handy Containers*', not so much on the successful dispersion of the artwork to 'all good bookshops', but on a

'series of delicate yet precise cultural tethers'.

(Fusco, 2004-5 p. 46)

My experience has been that this is broadly correct. My successes in terms of sales or distribution have largely been to institutions, to people who have seen fit to come to an artist's book fair, and seldom to

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<sup>68</sup> Also see section 2.3 *Markets* for a more general discussion of publishing and selling artists' books.

a broader commercial base.<sup>69</sup> The experience of *publishing* my own work, to the extent that I have taken on that role, is that I am glad to have control over how my work is received and how it is distributed. The prospect of marketing it more widely frightens me. Yet at the same time I feel affinity with those artists who feel that they want to give their work to a wider audience, some of whom, like me, lack the means of efficiently doing so. There's a conundrum in this. We would like to maintain control over our work – for me, this is partly because I want to manage the 'precise yet delicate cultural tethers' that mean my books win a place in the libraries of institutions with a suitable remit. On the other hand, we'd like our work to be more widely seen and enjoyed.

For my own part, I have experimented with the self-publish-on-demand printer, *Blurb*<sup>70</sup>. If producing my own books meant that I had full control over the outcomes within my technical capabilities, it was also dogged by long hours of piecework, technical problems, and an inability to turn out sufficient stock to meet every opportunity.

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<sup>69</sup> Some of those 'cultural tethers' are those that pull an interested audience towards artists' books fairs. Such tethers are indeed 'delicate yet precise', the more so since they remain fairly obscure. Perhaps this is one more source of tension regarding the definition of artists' books, in particular, such a definition's possible overillumination of the 'delicate', 'precise' appeal of the artists' book. If some of these delicate strands turn out not to be merely cobwebs, we need to understand them before we clean the whole lot out.

<sup>70</sup> See <http://www.blurb.com>

I turned to Blurb because my books are already available as digital files, (the books seem happy to germinate in different soils) and, in most cases, the basic formats could be preserved under the limited control that Blurb offered. Materially I am not *quite* content with the production on all of my books, though it seems to suit some more than others. *Radio* (2004), a book whose production I never felt I had got right, works far better as a Blurb publication (in 2009) than as a product of my desktop (in 2004). But the theoretical availability of unlimited numbers of books has not thereby made marketing them much easier, though I can now easily produce sufficient books to cover a table at a stall. If anything, it has brought the marketing problem into sharper focus, since an army of buyers has not come over the horizon after exposure on Blurb.

Artists' books have given me the opportunity to enter into the critical problems associated with publishing, through the more widespread desktop self-publishing route, and now through Blurb. If I had had the means to set up a small press, I would have no doubt used books as a way to explore small editions of fine press books too. Publishing remains a zone of debate about values; their relevance to contemporary practice; which ones aid artists' survival; about snobbishness (or good taste or good sense), about digital printing, and so on. I have, like many other artists in the field, been able to use my books



as a way to examine methods of publishing and the contexts in which publishing happens.

#### *2.5.2.1.4 Stylistic Contrasts*

As a visual artist (to say nothing of other roles where variation occurs), I have worked in a wide variety of styles. This range is compounded by digital mediation: everything passes through the same process and eventually appears using the same digital or photomechanical process. It is a factor of digital imagery that this eventual mediation certainly takes some qualities away from the original media, but it allows diverse means of production to seem to appear simultaneously. Thus an image in *The Remembrancer* (2003) (Fig. 21) combines the photographic background (with digitally added sepia tints and tonal alterations), with colour provided from a scan of an oil painting, used repeatedly through the book as a source of colour and texture.

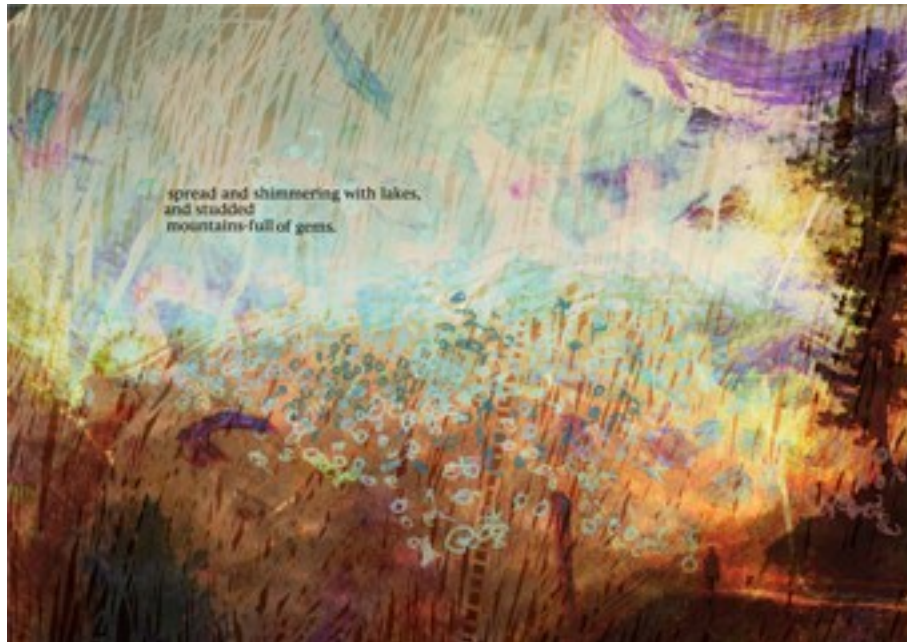


Figure 21: from *The Remembrancer* (2003)

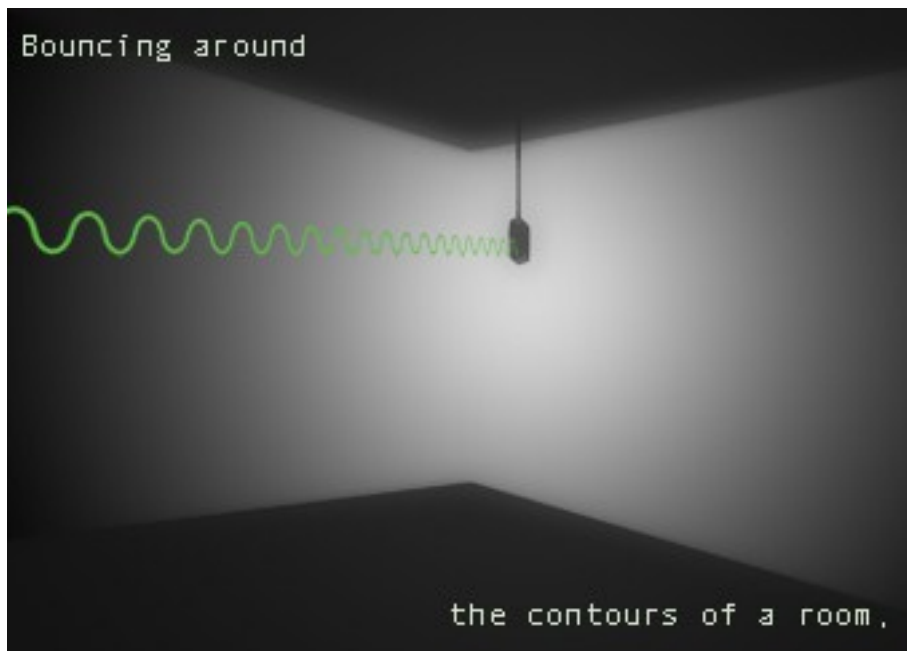


Figure 22: from *Radio* (2004)

Compare this to an image from *Radio* (2004) (Fig. 22) where the visual imagery is entirely digitally generated, is quite graphic, and which is designed to stage the initial sequences of the book in controlled

simplicity, far from the hectic visual tapestry of *The Remembrancer*. It is because books offer me a way to keep projects separate in their creative process, as well as in how they are regarded on completion, that I am able to work on them in such divergent ways. It is true that if I look across a number of books, obvious themes in terms of preferred subjects emerge, and it is still possible to identify my drawing style, despite the many-layered process. But it is obvious, I think, that these books (which were, incidentally, made in sequence with one another, *Radio* in 2004 and *The Remembrancer* in 2003), employ radically different styles in the general tenor of the book.

### 2.5.3 Markets

The engagement of my practice is largely dealt with in Section 2.5.2.1.3 *Publishing*. Writing with a wider scope, about the field at large, I discussed Markets in 2.3.

In structuring both my general overview and my survey of my own practice, I have been at pains to try to unpack the enabling features of artists' books, typically through the affect, flexibility and means made available through roles. One works "as a publisher", "as a poet", etc.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Additionally, in section 2.5.4, I propose "making-reading" as a term to describe the role in which one provides for the reading of others.

My approach to markets for artists' books is mediated through such roles (e.g. "as publisher", "as a member of the community"), and we shall see some of this in the roles and tactics adopted by artists in Chapter 3. Roles provide a tactical toolkit of ways one encounters situations and materials, but also distinctive strategic oversights of goals and structures.

#### *2.5.4 The Medium/Book as Artwork*

Although I have discussed the roles I take on in the production of my there are further points to add about the critical function of the medium itself: the way it works as a medium is the key component in its effect.

I intend to give a little more attention to some of these effects here, and in particular to aspects of narrative practice in my books. To begin, I want to ask the question: what is *critical* about narrative effects? In what way does reflection on them impinge on how the field of artists' books (and in particular my own books) discourses with society at large?

*Firstly*, narrative effects describe one of the important capabilities of the book. Reflection on the book's capabilities may give rise to new possibilities for the artists using books.

*Secondly*, they describe, via the concept of the artist's intention in 'making-reading', an important aspect, for me, of artists' books *practice*.

In the first part, narrative is part of a basic critical question – why use books? – because it gives part of the answer to another question – what do books *do*? Amongst some other things, books give access to both the reading reader and the creating artist, to just such narrative and rhetorical effects...

...which in the second part are extremely helpful in producing a mode of practice, namely ‘making reading’. Making reading combines and requires several roles. As a writer/poet I create a text, as an artist/printmaker/digital artist I make the images that respond and enlarge the text’s meaning. As a designer/publisher, I orchestrate the physical form all this will take and try to find ways to bring it to the attention of the world. (The concept of artists’ publishing gives an inkling of how we might encompass this practice as something that artists *do*, rather than an object that they produce.)

#### *2.5.4.1 Tactile Operation and Material Effects*

The notion of the “tactile experience” often comes up as a code term for discussions about craft or hand-made skills, but the tactile experience of books is relevant to many ideas of the book, not only the Book Arts-centric ones. The tactile sense marries up with the ability to hold the work in one’s hands, linking it to issues of intimate contact with the work and a sense of a full interface with the work itself, not to

mention full control of the technology itself: turning pages is itself a tactile experience.

Although I pay some attention to the qualities of the reader's tactile experience, it is not a central concern to me as it is for some. But I have experimented at times with the effects materials themselves can produce.

One example is *Ocean (2004)*, which unfolds to nearly 3 meters over a sequence of thinly spaced accordion folds that make the journey across the arc the book describes a long one. (Fig. 23).



Figure 23: from *Ocean (2004)*

This arch from earth to earth studded with the tributary arms of trees across the watershed of the forest's roof and back to earth takes far longer than a mere glance at some trees, and gives a good example of the reading effects I am trying to produce in the *Morning and the Evening* series. In all of these I am using a far more restricted textual palette: the books tell no *story* as such. Instead, the words used are lists: the names of letters; the names of rivers; the names of stars. This series is a rare example of my use of physical effects in the book form to create the reading experience, rather than the interplay of image and text over

separate pages. These books are composed of just one image, and they literally unfold as concertinas. It would notionally be possible to exhibit them as prints, but their strange proportions would be unwieldy, and the drama of their gradual completion as entities would be lost.

#### 2.5.4.2 Spatial Operation

In *Turndust* (2007) the sense of being party to the Miller's ruminations, of being *inside the Miller's head*, was important to the story. I wanted to be able to switch between a narrator's voice and the Miller's voice whilst keeping the visual world centred on the Miller's experience. To do this, the action of the book is bracketed between two sequences where we zoom over a series of pages first (at the beginning of the book) *into...* (Figs. 24-26)



Figures 24,25,26: from *Turndust*

and then (at the end) *out of the Miller's head...*(Figs. 28-30)



Figures 27,28,29: from *Turndust* (2007)

In book form this simple narrative gesture creates a sense of the dreamed/imaginary/visionary quality of everything inside, and despite its simplicity is a powerful way to gain control over the character of the world depicted.

The *repetition* of the 'head' motif is also a classic way of implying the closure of the narrative loop. Everything is the same on our return to the outside world, *but something has changed*. The status quo represented by the opening motif, is refigured by the story and *means* something different at the end of story. This is one way in which books can give us control over a symbolic space, through narrative and rhetorical techniques. The spatial operation here establishes a reality in which the story happens: the spacetime of its making.



#### 2.5.4.3 Character/Voice

Probably the most useful tool amongst the narrative strategies that making books presents me with is that of the character viewpoint. I can use characters, such as the hawk in *Tiercel* (2001), or the photographer in *The Remembrancer* (2003), to show sides of a story or situation that we know from other sources.

In critical terms this allows me to examine issues afresh: I can engage with views I don't agree with and say things I don't personally mean. This gives me a degree of mobility in terms of the things I can choose to look at, and is invaluable in helping me to find ways to use the historical material I enjoy working with. In these cases I have used character viewpoint as a way to shift perspective. In the example of *The Remembrancer*, the (partial) invention of the photographer character, and the outright fabrication of his reverie at the Banquet, I was able to produce a context that would allow me, and my readers, to view the source photographs from an unusual perspective. This mode of practice remains of interest to me today, and when looking for materials to work into, I am often searching for a matrix into which a character, real or imaginary, can be placed.

It is sometimes the case what the character 'does' appears at odds with the tenor elsewhere in the book. And it can be the case that the

character can say something that the imagery does not necessarily agree with. Such paradoxes in the 'direction' of vocality on a single page mean that the artist's book often says more than one thing at once, and assumes, in the totality of its voices a position that it is hard to define in simple narrative terms. The book allows for cross-currents to exist simultaneously and invites readers to participate in reworking the text according to their own readings of these currents.<sup>72</sup> This range of techniques to presents a richly-textured experience for readers, which is nonetheless geared towards a multi-vocal confluence.

#### *2.5.5 Comparing my Practice with that of the Artists' Books Field*

This experience of working from my own experiences in practice, trying to mirror the thematic structure I offer for the critical field with my reflections on my personal practice, has shown that the thematic structure has frequently to admit a certain porosity between its categories. Everywhere there is a sense of one thing relating closely to others. This is not necessarily intended as a reaction *against* the structure; it is merely obvious that the containment of categories and intentions, indeed of identity, cannot be maintained. There are too many links between its parts. I have from the outset been explicit that this structure

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<sup>72</sup> See Section 3.7.3 on the prevalence of the visual chiasma in artists' books.

is merely means for exploration. I do not imply that it is representative of artists' books practice as if complete. Rather, it is a means of collection, a series of forays along marked trails whose boundaries are more eroded the more I journey in to the subject.

Using that structure, then, what correspondences have I been able to detect between what is important to my practice and what is important in the field as a whole?<sup>73</sup> Overall, I have been able to demonstrate engagement in my practice over most of the areas I defined in general artists' book practice over sections 2.1-2.4. In terms of engagement with the definition of the book, my part exists not only in terms of a critical reading of the debate through my awareness of others' work, but also, (a little to my own surprise), to some extent in my material practice, challenging aspects of the book's definition and the definition of the field through aspects of my own practice in projects like *Signs*.

Other areas of significance in the field generally are the enabling qualities of the book medium and its significance in accessing the means of distribution. This is dealt with under two headings in my initial structure: (*Access to Legitimacy/Discourses* and *Publishing*) but of all the thematic areas I explored, the boundaries between these were most

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<sup>73</sup> Section 2.0.1.5 sets out my 'Categories' for exploring the field in general. In this current section I am over-viewing how I have reflected in preceding sections on those categories' significance in my own books.

permeable. The relationship between what one can do in and with books (which I explore in terms of roles in 2.5.2.1), and the ways in which one accesses the main circuit of distribution available (through publishing), are clearly part of the same art of practice<sup>74</sup>. I use my own practice to engage with this balance of roles and distribution. My books immerse me in the practice of working with the available techniques and working out the best ways of publishing the results. I explored this through discussions of the access I gained to modes of practice like narrative, research contexts (through my use of historical materials and character-driven vocality), combinations of different visual media, and aspects of roles as a designer and publisher. As well as reflecting on the mediating and enabling qualities of the book under discussion in the field as a whole, I have been able to offer my own conceptual pathway through the subject (the concept of 'roles'), and I explore this in my work whenever I am creating a book.

As with the other themes, the boundaries of the topics of 2.5.3 *Markets* and 2.5.4 *The Medium/Book as Artwork* are marked by their numerous links to discussions elsewhere in the chapter. Indeed, my summation of my work relating to the critical theme of *Markets* is subsumed to my discussion of *Publishing*, and the practice I explore in

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<sup>74</sup> This is a balance of external and internal engagements. Analogously, see the comments on 'tact' in (De Certeau, 1988 [1980] p. 74). See also the 'art of strategy' indicated by 'metis': see (Dillon, 1999).

*The Medium/Book as Artwork* can claim much of what I had discussed above as techniques belonging to roles like poet/writer as effects belonging to the book form. In these areas too, I have tried to demonstrate how my own practice engages with themes of discussion in the field as a whole, representing my own particular functioning through the decisions I have made about which of the possible artist's book effects to employ and what I use the artist's book to say.

### 3: Tactics and Metaphor in Book Art Practice

#### 3.0.1 *Introductory passages*

The reader will note a change in approach as we move from Chapter 2 to Chapter 3 – from a structure that articulates a field to a *series of possibilities*. This reminds us of the quotation from Foucault I used to open Chapter 2. Replying to the foregoing ‘themes’ of discourse, we will now try to view some of the ‘points of choice that the discourse leaves free’. (Foucault, 2002 [1969] p. 40)

But why has my approach changed? In short, to begin a dialogue.

The experience I have been describing in the immediately previous section is one of relating to a structured view of ‘the main concerns of artists’ books practice’, through a view of my own practice as an example. In it, I express some concern, not so much because I fail to find points of comparison, (in fact there are sufficient) but because the structure itself needs to have such porosity to relate to practice. The structure provides but ungainly accompaniment to the experience of making. In other words, the state of critical debate structured through sections 2.1-2.4 does not match my practice (2.5) very comfortably. I was concerned about this, as you can tell from my closing remarks

noting that it was becoming “obvious that the containment of categories and intentions, indeed of identity, cannot be maintained”. And indeed, this fits in with the rhetorical aspects of what has gone before, arguing for a reading against a centring identity, and emphasising ‘clarity and flexibility’ as a way of opening up to a wider critical engagement requiring tact and poise from critics so as not to overdefine, whilst nevertheless seeing more clearly into what the value of artists’ books is.

The structural aspects of Chapter 2 as a whole attempted to survey a wide scope of artists’ books activities – both ‘external’ and ‘internal’. This quickly runs into difficulties as Phillpot and others note. The theory doesn’t seem to match the practice; and the relationship between theory (as ‘outside’) and practice (as ‘inside’) is tense and muddled. I am not advocating a separation of these values: but the ‘view down’ from the survey of the field is to be characterised as an external sort of view. And in its efforts to create typology, form, definition, it fails to capture the internal aspects of practice. When I try to incorporate more of this into the structure as it stands, I encounter difficulties: practice and form flip around, inform each other. Inside and outside resist categorisation according to the views projecting structure.

I have asked<sup>75</sup> whether this is a failure of criticism or reflections and surmised that it is probably both. The narratives of identity pursued through the structured view are less than satisfactory, perhaps because of a sense of competition across the dichotomy of intrinsic and extrinsic, form and interpretation.<sup>76</sup> As I have tried to make a surveying structure work, I have tried to characterise areas that seemed more ‘inner’ than ‘outer’ –more introspective than exhibited – and this, in its pursuit of reasons and effects, grows complex, knotting together ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ till the structural distinction grows blurred. The structure fails to cope with the reflexive whole of internal practice and external form. There are simply too many chains of connections for the distinction of these two views to be approached in this sense of an articulation of boundaries, and, anyway, the value of such a distinction is in the final analysis not very great.

What I am saying, then, is that the familiar categorisations of the field’s concerns and activities might suffice to tell us that artists’ books exist in the world, but that it indicates but *cannot explain* the ‘internal practice’ of artists’ books. I had initially formed the idea that my field research would fit into the structure I had used to analyse the field and

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<sup>75</sup> See Section 2.2.2

<sup>76</sup> The philosophers Paul De Man and Paul Ricoeur offer different critiques of this, deconstructing and interpreting this seeming-difference of inner and outer respectively. See for example (De Man, 1973), (Ricoeur, 1984 [1983])



my place in it. But my analysis of the interview materials themselves, picking out recurrent themes that bore on the propositions I have outlined as an approach to open up narratives of practice, indicated so strongly a 'set of possibilities' that it seems more apposite to set these out as an (incomplete) array of options.<sup>77</sup>

So the reader will see this change in approach and wonder if all before it has been abandoned. This is not so: I am in this chapter replying, in a sense, to the 'external' analogy of practice represented by the preceding. My hope is that such a reply may begin a dialogue (neither approach is without tensions or blind spots), which will not evaporate the tensions I have noted, but allow us to render such points of interest as opportunities rather than problems.

I began my interviews with doubts about the structure I had outlined, which was analogous to the critical state of the field of artists' books, containing aspects of its tensions, strengths and habits. This formed a framework of presuppositions which informed the outlook with which I began to ask questions.<sup>78</sup> My initial approach included a standard statement outlining the kinds of questions I wanted to ask, and a sample questionnaire, whose purpose was not really to provide answers I

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<sup>77</sup> I indicate in footnote 86 that we might superimpose a structural reading of 'langue and parole' (after Saussure) over the base metaphors of space and agency in the artist's book, explored below, but pursuing that is beyond the scope of the current thesis.

<sup>78</sup> Making this framework explicit is exactly the function of Chapter 2

wanted to spend more care on through the interview process, but rather to get the artists to begin structuring thought in the areas I was to interview them in. Underlying all of this was the intention that I would continue to pursue the propositions that underlay the structures I used in Chapter 2, namely:

A: Propositions about the enabling character of books

B: Propositions about the roles offered by books

C: Propositions about the narrative and discursive functions of books.

Pursuing the significance of these propositions (or not) remained the driving force of the thesis. Conducting these thirteen interviews with a variety of book artists and publishers, I came back again and again to questions intended to explore these areas in particular, and collected the mass of material that now forms Appendix A and the recordings contained in the accompanying CD-Rom. These interviews are conversational, probing, and they always attempt to conform to the language the artist uses to narrate their practice. My method of approach to other artists' practice was to find ways to talk to the artist about the issues at hand, in language that would conform to the ways that the artists themselves thought about their work. This raises as many disparities as it allows for thematic conformities, but it did allow me to

pursue the common threads of metaphorisation of practice through the structures and sensibilities of individual artists. Thus the interviews always attempt to contextualise themselves within the references they explore: the conversation sites itself within the language of the interviewee's practice. This is a delicate operation and one that involves the artist in opening up to a sympathetic conversational exploration of their work. This was not something everyone I approached was comfortable with, and not everyone wanted to have their practice opened up in this way. Out of my initial enquiries, only about half the respondents agreed to the interview research taking place. My intention had been to analyse these in the light of the structures that had gone before. But what I found emergent from the interviews was that it seemed far better at this point to create a different way of organising the materials that more closely reflected my results. (In this way, the structure of the investigation is determined by my critical solicitude towards the statements of those whom I interviewed).

What is this different structure, and why have I used it? This chapter presents the interview materials as a series of metaphors for working that emerged as thematic through the interviews. Some seemed possibly more important than others, some more complex than others. Here, the metaphor of *The Space of Making* is discussed first. It is a base metaphor

for all that follows, and, though more simple than some, it is among the more powerful and constant. These build in complexity towards the metaphor 'Two Lives', which intersects all of the others, and bookends the discussion before it moves on to 3.10 and 3.11 (which discuss more generalised matters in relation to problems set out in Chapter 1). If the *Space of Making* is the analogue space of the book, the 'other self' of *Two Lives* is the being that animates it. All of these metaphors intersect at various points with aspects of the structures we have seen before, e.g. markets, definition, distribution and so on, but these are approached as part of the artists' practice, rather than as a critical narrative. This is a narrative of that which is 'intrinsic to the extrinsic'- what goes on inside the artist. It is contrapuntal to the structure we have been trying to work with in Chapter 2.

However, if the structure explored in Chapter 2 has its tensions in the debates it spawns and the difficulty we have in conforming it to the realities of practice, the narrative I explore in this following chapter is not without its own tensions. But these are tensions of an internal kind, and they are tensions of the interpretation of the self, coupled with the almost-alchemy of making work. To put that another way, the tensions we encounter in Chapter 3 are between intention and material, between before and after, between strategy and tactic. Their resolution is an

ongoing process that some have styled as metaphorical (as we shall shortly see), and it is into the nature and uses of metaphor in such circumstances that we will shortly delve.

### *3.0.2 Relating Metaphor, Strategy and Tactics*

When I use the simile, 'Achilles is like a lion' I invite the reader to compare the qualities of Achilles and a lion. If I narrate this comparison or tabulate it in some way, it becomes an analogy. The common points of Achilles and the lion are 'ticked off' and we can sometimes see areas of comparison suggested by one that we can look for in the other to see how far their similarity carries through. Finally, if I create the metaphor 'Achilles *is* a lion', I am inviting comparison, (as with the simile), and to narrate the points of comparison built up creates an analogy. There is an important difference in terms of that 'is' however. In order to understand the metaphor, we have to imagine Achilles *being* a lion in order that we can understand how he inhabits the lion's identity. We must deliberately arrange a reordering of the semantic fields<sup>79</sup> of both Achilles and the lion, with at-the-time-unknown consequences for the intensional value of both. This is not the comparison of known properties, but an

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<sup>79</sup> See (Martin, et al., 1982) on the reordering of semantic field by metaphor: "The metaphorical employment of a term brings about a reordering of its semantic field, as well as those of the term with which it is used, so generating new intensional contents, most of which are yet to be explored." For science, about which Martin and Harré are writing, the metaphor renders a useful heuristic yield for theoretical pursuit.

imaginative, creative act. There is no clear dividing line between the real usages of these three figures of speech except the grammatical delineation. This is why it is easy enough to say what a simile/metaphor/analogy is when we pick apart the construction of a written example, but harder to pick out the use of metaphor in the flow of discourse. As with other things, there is a formal grammar and a practical usage involved. You will often see one or other of the figures of speech written down, but we *understand* them in a much more creative way. Understanding simile, analogy and metaphor calls on us to perform the mental work related to all three.

Here, I discuss the presence of tactics and metaphor in book art practice, and I propose that they are related in a similar way. What we figure in art practice as ‘strategy’ involves a model that typically uses a set of formal approaches towards a goal. The act of performing this we would more properly figure as ‘tactics’, as artists use their skills with materials and other expertise<sup>80</sup> to approach the strategic goal.

Within this strategic analogy there is, as I have said, the tactical work being done, and this is doing the work of metaphor: of ends realised through tactical means. When we make a leap towards the unknown within an analogy’s structure, we are performing the work of

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<sup>80</sup> In the sense of *métis* (see footnote 4) rather than *techne* (see footnote 82). The expertise involved is applied to the tactical, local, of-the-moment. The ‘art of strategy’ is to apply it successfully to the tactical reality.

metaphor, because we are imagining an identity into being where none presently exists.

We sometimes talk about hybrid *forms* in artists' books, and this deals well enough with the comparison of objects, for which simile suffices. In order to talk about hybrid *practice* (which may produce hybrid forms but which is not the same thing), we require an understanding of metaphor in practice, because hybrid practice involves the transfer of the practitioner's identity from one role to another.

I have proposed at various points in this research<sup>81</sup>, that artists' books 'metaphorise' practice, because they invite the artist to participate in numerous roles and through the various formal techniques available through the physical and symbolic forms of the book. It has been important for me to examine this phenomenon because I see it as the corresponding interior structure to the external structures that we see in the artwork itself. Practice is informed by available materials and techniques, obviously enough; but here I want to show how artists making books have used books as ways to metaphorically activate the strategies they use in their work, *by being what the book makes possible*.

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<sup>81</sup> See 2.4.5 in particular. It remains a strong theme in the ensuing Chapters 3 and 4.

It is metaphor that makes artistic strategy possible, turns it from a technical requirement into ‘the art of strategy’, into something metistic.<sup>82</sup>

The pairing – Strategy/Metaphor describes a tension between two ways of thinking about practice. Strategy is instrumental insofar as it implies goals, definitions, and the application of technical skills to accomplish ends. Metaphor proposes a goal: “Achilles is a lion: make it so”, but permits a different sort of flexibility towards the achievement. (And one of implicitly sensitised tactics). Metaphor implies an imaginative engagement with the other, ultimately changing both parties. (Strategy and Metaphor are thus respectively the domains of *technē*<sup>83</sup> and *phronesis*<sup>84</sup>, if you will). The metaphors of practice I examine below are framed by the creative relations of such ways of working, which parallel the dichotomies of intrinsic and extrinsic, tactical and strategic, grammar and metaphor.

The structure I thus propose to narrate is itself, inevitably, an analogy for what book art practice really is. Before we begin exploring

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<sup>82</sup> ‘Metis’- See footnote 4

<sup>83</sup> ‘Technē’- OED: “An art, skill, or craft; a technique, principle, or method by which something is achieved or created. Also: a product of this, a work of art.” The emphasis here is on technē’s sense as *technique* – a known skill, rather than an art of compromise, (in which sense we can view the practical wisdom of *phronesis*).

<sup>84</sup> ‘Phronesis’ – See footnote 9



these metaphors, we will briefly introduce the artists who allowed me to interview them about their practice.

### *3.0.3 Brief Introductions to the Participants.*

As I note in the section on the organisation of the thesis at the beginning of this volume, I conducted thirteen interviews as the main part of the research component of this study. I picked out these particular practitioners in order to examine a range of different styles and approaches to making book art. The material prospective participants were approached with made it clear that I would be asking questions that looked, or tried to look, quite intimately at their practice and their relationship to the book, rather than looking critically at the books themselves (though they would necessarily form a part of what we discussed). Not everyone I contacted was comfortable with this, since it would perhaps overly-describe something in their practice they, the artists, didn't want to describe in too defined a way. I have sympathy for this view, and so I would like to take the chance to again thank those who took a chance to share their practice with me. When interviewing, I have tried to open up a conversation about the artists' practice, and so, although I move towards the same ground of the relation to the book as a creative identity in each case, each artist has a range of more commonly-held, and more personal language for this, that I have tried to

accommodate and encourage the artist to articulate. Recordings of the interviews themselves form *Appendix B* to this thesis, while edited transcripts from the interviews are *Appendix A*. A brief biography of the participants follows:

### John Bently

John Bently's *Liver and Lights* series of books began just over 25 years ago in 1983 with the first few books as collaborations between Bently and Stephen Jaques and James Blundun. Later books (beginning with *Liver & Lights No. 8* in 1987) were more solo efforts, though Bently's books do still sometimes feature elements drawn from collaboration with others, (and notably materials drawn from his musical performances with various band members and collaborators), they are for the most part hand made by Bently himself. The *Liver and Lights* series continues to use hand-made printing and production techniques, and are supported by subscribers, some of whom are long time supporters of the series.

### Tracey Bush

Works by Bush such as the *Thames pH Book* (2001), and *River Stairs* (2002), record an interest in the specifics of place, elaborated on

by Bush through the *Nine Wild Plants* (2006) project and informing Bush's collection of ephemeral materials to create butterfly shapes in such works her series of butterfly works (ca. 2004-present). Bush continues to make book-related objects and teach workshops, but at the time of interview was moving away from books per se towards other areas of her practice, nevertheless asserting books' utility as an anchor for various projects.

#### Peter Chasseaud

Chasseaud's main relationship to books (through his Altazimuth Press imprint) has been as a way to present the materials associated with his photography practice. Earlier books have featured substantial themes of travel and the experiences of recollecting travel (e.g. *Afghanistan – a Journey* (2007), while others examined closer to home localities (e.g. *Thames – The London River* (2005), whose changes in history are reflected in psychogeographical investigations taken on through the artists' book and interpretation through contemporary and vintage photography. At the time of interview, Chasseaud was investigating another strand of his work, creating a pochoir-printed book about the First World War poet Isaac Rosenberg, a complement to other books which had conducted other researches into the period.

### Helen Douglas

Douglas' work with Telfer Stokes as Weproductions saw exploration of the book form and the points of view it captured in the viewer, via camera, gesture and form, and in the narrative and literal spaces it constituted and worked within. Works from Weproductions (e.g. *Chinese Whispers* (1975), and works such as *Passage* (1972) and *Spaces* (1974), credited to Telfer Stokes) explored this in depth. Douglas' solo work from around the time of *Wild Wood* (1999) seems to become more personal and lyrical in its subject matter, but never loses the intense relationship to looking that informed earlier work. Based in the Scottish Borders, Douglas work such as *Wild Wood* and the *Flit* series (*Ephemera 1*, *Ephemera 2*, *Whirligig*, *Buttercup* and *Long-legged Fly*, all 2006), have often made reference to the natural environment Douglas finds herself in; but other works take this gaze into different territories, such as *Illiers Combray* (2004, with Zoë Irvine) in which Douglas explores the interpenetrations of fable and reality, past and present, in the half-fictional world of Proust's settings.

### David Faithfull

Faithfull's books often feature an investigative or reconstructive element which uses the bookform to present a relationship to the

landscape- such as his 'palindromic' books *East Looking West/ West Looking East* (2000) or *Tide/Edit* (1997), or to a particular event (e.g. *Jettison* (2003)). Faithfull curated the exhibition *Inkubator* (2007) which created relationships between the reader, the books and between the books themselves by allowing readers to 'curate' the placement of books in differently-themed 'categories', based once again on landscape motifs.

### Jane Hyslop

Hyslop's work has typically worked with place-specific materials, surveying plants and materials in her Midlothian setting (e.g. *Wild Plants Collected in Midlothian* (2002)), particular structures( e.g. *Lothianbridge Viaduct* (2004)) or the buildings and monuments of her local city ( *Edinburgh, a Visual Handbook* (2007)). These all feature Hyslop's drawing and graphic style prominently. Hyslop's books structure her visual interest in her environment.

### Susan Johanknecht

Johnknecht's Gefn Press imprint has published around thirty books to date. Many are collaborative projects with other artists or writers, whilst others have examined the relationship between books and digital media. A fairly constant theme is the careful poetic use of language,

often printed as letterpress, as both a visual and linguistic component of the book's form. Johanknecht's use of form, text, and sometimes unusual materials for her books is always tempered by a sense of balance that serves the book's unity, even as the subjects of the book sometimes create a more tentative relationship towards books and the visual and written language they depend on.

### Julie Johnstone

Johnstone's work as Essence Press has moved between publishing a poetic literary magazine featuring Johnstone and others, and producing Johnstone's own work. Minimalist tendencies inform much of this work, with many works comprising of pages with just a few words on them. Johnstone's crossover between the visual aspects of poetry publishing and artists' books is articulated in her attention to form and her questioning of books' suitability as a medium for her works. Johnstone works with the Scottish National Poetry Library, and amongst other things helps to organise their annual artists' books fair *By Leaves We Live*.

### Reassemble (John Say and Sheena Vallely)

Using found objects and found sounds, Reassemble create multimedia pieces that use books as the core of a practice that embraces chance operations and the artifacts of media. John Say and Sheena Vallely have collaborated since 2004 years on pieces such as their *Mono Books* (n.d.), a series of one-off books produced through the printed interaction with found objects, or their *Book Drop* venture (most recently in 2007) which added to the random elements of the books' production by randomising its consumption (by placing it in a public place to be picked up).

### Lucy May Schofield

Lucy May Schofield's work has often made reference to the private world of the reader's (and the artist's) love life. A series of readymade love letters saw wide distribution alongside Schofield's smaller edition works. Schofield's work retains a note of intimacy through works like *forty-two* (2007), a highly-personal account in diary form of a residency/retreat in the Scottish Borders), and works where Schofield's use of site-specific materials are reflected through an intimately personal interpretation.

### Tate Shaw

With Kris Merola, Tate Shaw's Preacher's Biscuit Books has been publishing Shaw's books as well as those of other artists since 2004. The press deliberately seeks to publish book works from outside the normal sphere of book arts in order to fresh ideas and approaches into the field.

Shaw's own books, for example, *Ordinary Curtains* (2006), sometimes feature a 'compendium' aspect, where several apparently separate volumes are bound into a single codex, adding complexity to the book as a form that encompasses several voices. Other books, for example *God Bless This Circuitry* (with Andrew Salee, 2007) achieve a graphic version of the same complexity (added to in this case by the presence of a sound component).

### Christine Tacq

Tacq's P's and Q's Press presents her sumptuously-worked printed books, often featuring etching and collagraph. Tacq's work often reflects her interest in poetic sources and offers the reader a rewardingly rich journey into Tacq's reflections on the same. Based in Thame in Oxfordshire, a work such as *Sleepwalking Through Trees* (2006) is typical of the artists' work, rewarding the reader's close attention with



thickets of detail and closely-woven relationships of image, text and form.

### Carolyn Trant

Carolyn Trant's artist's books involve their readers in a space created by the artist – either literally, as with *The Falcon Bride* (2007), or more figuratively with pieces such as *Blubeard's Castle* and *Beauty and the Beast* (2002), which miniaturise stage sets or furniture, to draw the reader into a receptive space where all is not always as it at first seems. Trant's career as an artist has encompassed several forms, of which artists' books are the most recent mode. With artists' books, Trant is able to combine considerable research resources and material form in a flexible and involving medium. Based in Lewes with Peter Chasseaud, Trant's *Parvenu Press* continues to express Trant's ongoing interest in the artists' book form.

### 3.1 The Space of Making

When an artist expresses their work using books as work in the 'space of the book' they are using a spatial, rather than a temporal metaphor to discuss their relations with the book as 'the place of their making'. Some literary critics have picked out the use of a similar metaphor in their area (in the 'two-dimensional spaces' of structuralist conception of the novel, for example). And these critics find this an overly limited conception of what happens, because reading really is not an unfolding in space so much as it is an unfolding in time, to create a sense of space. It is primarily an experience in time to create (or even narrate) a discourse that we habitually style as spatial<sup>85</sup>. Here is Frank Kermode:

the experiences reserved for permanent meaning, carried out of the flux of time, surely do not make a pattern in space; they punctuate that order of time, free of contingency, in which only the ur-novel wholly exists...

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<sup>85</sup> Jaynes insists on a view of *conscious* cognitive apperception as spatial. "...of course there is no left and right in time. There is only before and after, and these do not have any spatial properties whatever – except by analogue. You cannot, absolutely cannot think of time except by spatialising it. Consciousness is always a spatialisation in which the diachronic is turned into the synchronic..." (Jaynes, 1982 [1976] p. 60) This portrays the 'habit of the spatial' as a necessity of introspective perception, rather than as just a literary habit.

Forms in space, we should remember, have more temporality than ... supposed, since we have to read them in sequence before we know what they are, and the relations between them. Forms in time have an almost negligible spatial aspect (the size of the book). Their interrelations had much better be studied by reference to our usual ways of relating past, present and future... than by the substitution of a counterfeit spatial for the temporal mode.

(Kermode, 1966 p. 178)

So, if it is more apposite to see the book in time rather than in space, how do we approach it? And what does it mean to say, instead of a 'space of making', a 'time of making'? The substitution 'of a counterfeit spatial for the temporal mode' Kermode spots in (typically) structuralist concepts of the novel is reasonably easy to reverse in this metaphor. It is a flip between terms already given a degree of consonance through a metaphor so familiar as to be almost undetectable, and metaphor, as we understand, lends each of its terms a little of the meaning of the corresponding other. The 'space of making' is given meaning by the subject who *is* making. Reflexivity, that prospect (in the sense of view) of being, is at any instant a glimpse of the self in the time of reflection. What gives form, persistence, to this series of glimpses, is of course, time,

and, Ricoeur tells us, our sense of self is above all a narrated sense. It is a sense that creates itself in time through this cascade of glimpses. It is a life-story, after all, made into a life-discourse by our frequent bouts of reflective introspection. Likewise, the *place* of making is apprehended through the story (or rather the discourse) of making. Assembling the space, whether in actuality (through vision), or in metaphor (through introspective vision), takes *time*.<sup>86</sup>

But I am going to leave space be for now, because it simply concords more with what I feel as a practitioner myself, and is more consonant with the narrative language of my participants. A later metaphor, ‘two lives’ will be explored in section 3.9, and with it, I will be looking at how this metaphor takes the relationship book artists’ have with their practice in a different direction that acknowledges the role of time in its production more explicitly. It accompanies and overlays this current metaphor of *space* as a metaphor of the *time* of production.

Returning to Kermode, one interesting view of his criticism, for me, is that his observation pits a spatialising view of work-as-form against an

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<sup>86</sup> Similarly, for critics like Brooks, (whose view of the process of reading resembles Kermode’s), the experience of reading is temporal before it is spatial, and the two-dimensionally plotted langue-and-parole structure of structuralism implicitly needs to be experienced in an additional dimension of time if it is to be experienced at all. The philosopher Ricoeur agrees, and launches his *Time and Narrative* (Ricoeur, 1984 [1983]) (and ensuing volumes) to look more deeply at the different sorts of time involved. And we find just such an explanation of the experience of the book in Carrión: “A book is a sequence of spaces. Each of these spaces is perceived at a different moment - a book is also a sequence of moments.” (Carrión, 1987 [1975] p. 31)

interpretive view of work-as-time. This would appear to parallel the approaches I have taken in chapters 2 and 3 respectively. Chapter 2 sets out a formal structure, whereas the present chapter sets out a series of possibilities (metaphors, in fact) that must be worked through to create form. It proposes, instead of the object, the practice. But, as with literary criticism, the two approaches are of course indispensable to one another.

In fact reflection that does take on both approaches is what we see when the artist takes on an analogy and lives it into being. Working 'as' a poet, 'in' a book, 'into' the materials, they take on the pre-existence of a definition, of a boundary. In their practice they live through a relationship we can describe as hermeneutic, reworking the coordinates of rules, forms and definitions through their configuration in the practice. But without coordinates to start from (that is, a prefiguration of form and of identity), or a lexicon with which to report, there could be no field to rework: nothing to reconfigure.

Let us see now how the metaphor of space allows artists a way to configure a relationship of material and practice<sup>87</sup>:

I do trust the book form...I'm sure it's the thing that it's held ...

it's something that you put things into, so you're putting it into

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<sup>87</sup> References to interview excerpts in Chapter 3 are given in the form *File Name: Time quotation begins*, thus "Helen Douglas 1: 38.48". Filenames for the audio files correspond to the artists' names, and the organisation of the written transcripts (i.e. Appendix A) follows the same structure.

the book, so it's quite a safe place... I trust that, I trust its relationship to the hands. ... Upstairs in that little room [where Douglas composes book layouts] I really trust that little room, being able to work in it and put things on the floor... it's something about that room is contained...and... there's not an awful lot on display – because I don't think books are like that, they're not things that are out on display... you open them, or else you close them... I don't put things up on the wall, I lay them out on a sheet of paper, and then I put them all away again...so something in me... doesn't want it out all the time, either. And that – for me – the book works really well, because it's there, or it can be put away.

Helen Douglas 1: 38.48

And:

Opening a book is a step into something, and you don't know what is going to happen... it is a space; a single page is a space...

Yeah, I don't think my approach is that [books] are a space to make things within, that doesn't resonate for me, but they are a space to explore things – I think there's a difference there...

When I said 'a space to explore' actually I meant myself...

Sometimes the very act of taking an idea and just trying out a few layouts or whatever will actually prove that the idea isn't

that interesting... because it doesn't find any dimensions once it's put into a form... maybe the form that you choose tests the idea in a sense, as well as the idea... dictating what the form might be as well.

Julie Johnstone 1: 26.03

Space in these two sets of quotations is both literal and figurative. Douglas's small studio is a space which she uses for laying out books in an almost ritual manner. For her, the space in which the book is created is a protected, trusted space, where she can work with materials to find out what they have to tell her and how she can work with them. She relates the trust she feels for this space "I really trust that little room" to the analogous trust she feels for the book form itself, "you're putting it into the book form... it's quite a safe place." The place where the physical poetics of her books is achieved is a real place *and* a metaphorical one: the small studio, and the 'safe place' of the figurative book. In both senses, this book/space offers a place for the possibilities her gathering of material has assembled, to be expressed. Douglas has spoken elsewhere of the 'place of her making'<sup>88</sup>. It becomes apparent in this quote that the space Douglas means is one with a trusted boundary, and one which exists both in real space- in the form of a room, and in

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<sup>88</sup> See section 2.4.5

the (physical) formal and (affective) metaphorical boundaries of the book. Other artists too, are interested in the boundaries that books offer, but use less explicitly spatial metaphors to express it: for further material on the subject, please refer to 3.5 *Containing and containment*.

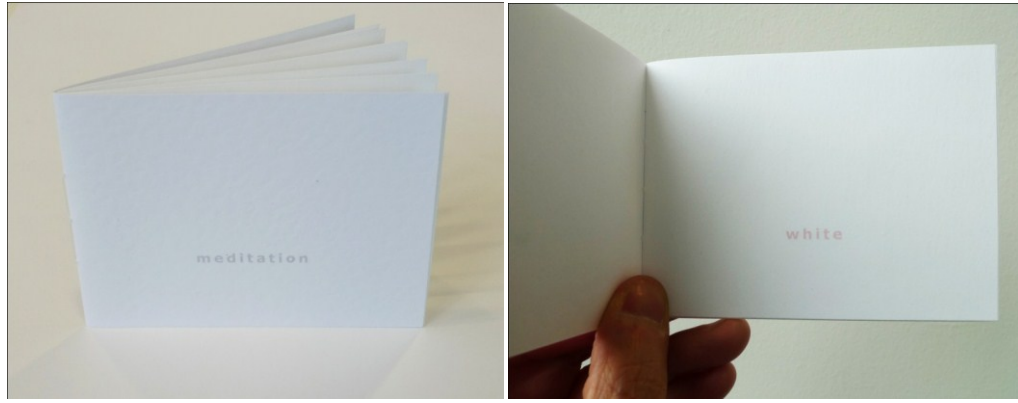
I have noted elsewhere<sup>89</sup> in these studies the tension that exists between the ideas of the 'safe', but nonetheless 'enclosed' aspects of making books that are expressed in the idea of the artists' books 'ghetto'. But this trusted space is not a cell whose boundaries the artist never ventures out from. It is a reflective space within which other ventures are projected. Douglas herself will help to illuminate this aspect of how the dark enclosure of the ghetto is pierced by other discourses and modes of practice, as we proceed to some of the other metaphors of practice below.

Julie Johnstone contrasts with Douglas in terms of how she views the book as a reflective space. (See an example of Johnstone's work in Figs. 30-31). For Douglas, the 'trusted' place is manifestly a kind of 'home' for reflection. Johnstone, who describes herself as '...work[ing] with words in a visual way', makes a point of distinguishing books as a 'space to explore things', rather than 'a space to make things within'.

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<sup>89</sup> See 2.2.1





Figures 30, 31: These examples illustrate Johnstone's characteristically minimal approach, moving towards a mindfulness of form and material. *Meditation* (2006) and *Seeing Things* (2008)

The exploration may fail, or may point elsewhere. She maintains a strategic reserve, in that unlike some of the artists I encountered in my research, she does not feel that books are the necessary outcome of her practice<sup>90</sup>.

Whereas there is an implicit trust in Douglas' approach to the book as the 'space of her making', Johnstone's 'space to explore' is much more cautious, reserving the possibility of withdrawing towards the original, conceptual impulse.

This contrast offers a perspective on the work done within the metaphorical book space. There are degrees of tension between the 'trusted' and 'experimental' qualities that this metaphorical space endows book practice with, aptly characterised as 'the book ghetto'. But there is no simple way of correlating 'trust of the book' with an

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<sup>90</sup> This may also be contrasted with the position of 'having to be a book' adopted by Susan Johanknecht in section 3.7.4

unwillingness or inability to engage with other material. Nor does treating the book with a more distanced engagement necessarily imply that the artist will be doing interesting things elsewhere. My contention is that books offer ways for artists to engage with numerous issues, processes and types of production, *because* they offer some security to the artist who wishes to do so. Section 3.5 *Containing and Containment* offers several further views on this.

One way to recast the metaphor away from the 'ghetto' relationship is suggested in part by Helen Douglas' 'trust of the room'. If we pun 'room' as 'camera', viewing books as a space of projection, we have another way to view the book as something which certainly focuses and protects its subject, but which is inherently portable, and impinges its situated identity upon its context in ways as flexible as that of other approaches to subjects. The book-as-camera shares some of the same connotations of protection, but is explicitly connected with looking and presenting encounters with the world outside itself. If it is a ghetto, it can be a movable and outward-looking one.

### 3.2 The Material Narrative

Partly because of their implicit narrative structure, and partly because of their ability to contain other media, books are often seen by artists as allowing them to work with narrative. This can take the form of traditional narrative constructions, or it can serve as a means to present work as research or as performance – within the implicitly narrative form of the book. In the examples which follow, we return to Helen Douglas, to see how the material in her books reflects a creative narrative that takes place *outside* the books, one that involves her in moving through the landscape, looking, photographing and expressing her relationship to places and objects through the movement of her gaze. In another, we will look at the work of Reassemble (John Say and Sheena Vallely) whose work includes no text and no deliberate organisation of narrative form, but which nevertheless records the engagement they have with various materials, and which, in a sense, tells the “story” of that engagement.

In these examples we will see the presentation of this material take on a transformation through being presented as a book. By being created as a book, the material contained inside takes on aspects of the book’s identity, and necessarily takes on a role vis-à-vis the book’s *promise of reading*. This aspect of production, in particular the artists’ relationship to

their readership, again through the book, is the topic of 3.8 Making-reading.

What I used to be was out with my camera... just allowing one image to lead me to the next. I think it was really being in the camera ... That thing of letting the camera lead me...

Helen Douglas 1: 27.40

And:

AE- [In the studio] are you being led by material?

HD- Yes... that's exactly... I'll look at my photographs, and suddenly there's one that really gives me something. It's very like the movement<sup>91</sup>, where you can be doing the movement, and then suddenly there's a flow of energy in it, and it's the same, looking at a photograph... suddenly there's one that you think – there's a quality in there, that's what I want to put out and into this book, and I want to draw that out.

Helen Douglas 1: 49.50

In *Unravelling the Ripple*, Douglas' view moves across the surface of a seashore. It records a movement across a landscape. Rather than

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<sup>91</sup> I.e. Authentic Movement. Refer to Helen Douglas 1, approx. 30.06 for Douglas' exposition on the importance of expression through physical movement, recapitulated here in book form.

'telling a story', it unravels one that is in a sense already there. (Figs. 32-35, on following pages).

HD- This wasn't actually getting closer; it was just that, these were not broken down as much as the sand...

AE- So you're following what really happened?

HD- Absolutely... like you get bigger grades of pebbles... you get the really little ones... then bigger...

AE- In a funny sort of way, that's a story that's already there

HD- It is, but that's actually what I'm saying – I'm just an eye, in that way... I think the best of my books are about, just about looking, and allowing what's there to lead me, and trusting in that...

Helen Douglas 1: 57.08



Figures 32, 33, 34, 35: Douglas' *Unravelling the Ripple* (2001) tracks across the sorted pebbles of the littoral

Douglas' outdoors observation, 'letting the camera take her', transcribes her physical experience in the landscape as a series of images, which, when reorganised in book form, become a record of details of the landscape and Douglas' journey through it. This is particularly apparent in *Unravelling the Ripple*, but this procedure also occurs in others of Douglas' own work and is redolent of the spatial and material 'puns' of her work with Weproductions. The material tells its story through what happens to it, or through the way that the narrative gaze interacts with it (e.g. framing, zooming-in, panning-across etc). Such work does not rely heavily on a symbolic poetics to carry the force of its narrative: "I think the best of my books are about, just about

looking, and allowing what's there to lead me, and trusting in that".

Rather, such interpolations are incidental to the experience of spaces, as in the interposition of stained glass and embroidery motifs into the near-continuous textures of *Illiers Combray* (2004). This work with its reference to Proust's fictional Combray, in fact alludes to how the 'fabric' of a landscape itself can be so invested with significance that no interventions are visible, simply because they are so closely-spaced as to form one seemingly-continuous surface. (Figs. 36-37)





Figures 36, 37 : These two views of Douglas' *Illiers Combray* (2004) show how the artist has interwoven different spaces and materials to produce a continuous surface of attentive detail.

This approach, which deliberately gives everything in the field of vision significance, is one way towards a narrative told by the materials themselves. *Reassemble* (John Say & Sheena Vallely) take another route.

John Say- ... I think ' randomness' would be ...[appropriate] purely in the terms of... from the starting point of finding an object that we think we can take back to the studio and work on, is a random event. And we follow that through to the print stage, and to the actual folding of the book – there is this play on randomness.

*Reassemble* 1: 24.34





Figure 38 :Image from one of Reassemble's (John Say and Sheena Vallely) Mono books. Each of these unique books is a new encounter with materials.

Reassemble document their process as one of finding “random” materials outside the studio. Bits of detritus, found textures, debris, form the seed for a process-based engagement (E.g. Fig 38) that layers many encounters with the object and which is always attentive to the various media the work takes place in. Thus, for example, screenprint will gradually build up expression, and the book, including the journey towards completion ‘lets the process speak for itself’.

It is the choice to use books that has made this approach possible. Perhaps it seems to go against the grain that using books has helped Reassemble distance themselves from an intentionally narrative engagement, but this is nevertheless the case: “Actually the work speaks

for itself... it develops on its own in a way... sometimes I feel like I don't have... a handle on it." Before starting to make books, Say says, "[it] was very much me having to have this idea, and having to get that idea down as a finished piece of work."

John Say- It just struck me actually, that it feels at times that because we set up these strategies to get work going, that actually the work speaks for itself and it develops on its own in a way... sometimes I feel like I don't have... a handle on it, and I'll just let that thing go – that imagery work its way through... that process to inform however the imagery is going to turn out, so in some respects it's actually the work – is performing – it's got a life of its own.

AE- ... the material itself that's doing it –

JS- That's certainly – through working with the notion of artists' books, that's something that's informed me, whereas work that maybe I was producing before I started making books was very much me ... having to have this idea, and having to get that idea down as a finished piece of work, and not really letting either the process or the final piece speak for itself – it was very much I was dictating how the work would look.

Reassemble 1: 29.00

In this quasi-performative practice, books are instrumental in creating the opportunity to enact a different means of working, employing a formal strategy of relating to found materials, and depending upon the formal and media capabilities of the book to hold and orchestrate the investigation as a structure. (Indeed, as a *narrative of investigation*, see also *Metaphor 4- Investigation* for a very different example of this). When the artist seizes that opportunity to work in a different way, to *be* a book maker, with all that that supplies and supports, they are not just taking advantage of the techniques thus made available, but also the identity afforded by the adoption of that new role, and thus perspectives from which to reflect and act out of.

### 3.3 Personae and Roles

John Bently offers some insight firstly into how artists use books to bring together roles they want to adopt and, secondly, use the opportunity books offer to create unique outlooks that they can use to explore subjects.

Bently points out two aspects of the ways in which he has found artists books to be a way to combine roles. He talks about how his “whole life has been a struggle to kind of integrate all these [roles] into the one thing, and in a way that’s what books are.”, but also points out how his attitude towards this has changed somewhat over the years. At first, books are a revelation, a solution to a problem:

Before I went to art school... I still wanted to be a poet and...  
at art school I was struggling all the time to keep the text  
integrated with the imagery, so I started making work which  
was visual that... included words...

John Bently 1: 5.10

And:

The book thing... in a way is... living two different lives...  
you’ve got like literary / visual and it was given to me at

school, and also on foundation... that these things were separate, but... I tried to find ways to disprove that, that's all really.

John Bently 1: 8.22

Latterly, though, the layers of identity that have built up seem troubling:

It's very difficult to say what you are. I still have enormous difficulty with that... I don't want to say that I'm a poet... and I don't particularly like performance art... so I would never like to be considered in that bag... I think that my whole life has been a struggle to kind of integrate all these things into the one thing, and in a way that's what books are.

John Bently 1: 29.16

And:

...Twenty years ago I started trying to say that I was "an artist of the book, I'm a book artist, that is what I'm doing"... I don't find that comfortable now... I wouldn't say that now... because it sounds like a bit of a ghetto. It's like "I'm a textile artist"... so I find it very difficult... when people say to me

“what do you do?” I would generally say, “I’m an artist”...

rather than a poet or writer... I would say I’m a visual artist.

John Bently 1: 29.40

Bently alludes here to the metaphor of the ‘ghetto’ that is discussed elsewhere<sup>92</sup>. Its relevance to him here seems to be in reaction to the constriction he feels the label ‘book artist’ signifies. Why should this be so? Is the label more proscriptive now than it was twenty years ago? Or is it that the corresponding label of ‘visual artist’ might now be said to embrace books sufficiently so that it is now to be preferred? The concept of the ‘ghetto’ in book art coincides roughly with (a resurgence of) books’ regular occurrence as part of the repertoire of artists who are successful in the wider field of fine art, so we might correlate that with a move towards preferring to be identified with the wider field which nevertheless contains and condones book art as part of the scope of its recognised practices. This adds complexity to the ‘ghetto’ issue, as accomplished artists like Bently nevertheless cleave fairly closely to books as their main form of expression, whilst other such, for example Susan Johanknecht, are unequivocal about the book being the only way in which the work they want to do *could* be addressed. Identifying as a ‘visual artist’ does not, then, *necessarily* mean that one must work across

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<sup>92</sup> See section 2.2.1

a very much wider scope than before, while, importantly, the manner in which books allow the artist to identify with still other roles remains intact, notwithstanding books' location to the wider field. Sometimes identifying as a book artist is just a matter of touching base with a community, as in the case of Tracey Bush:

...There's quite a lot... going on that makes you feel that you're actually part of something, whereas working as an artist, it's quite tough... it's very isolated...

The fixed point every year... is doing the London Artists' Books fair... you see everybody... it gives continuity, whereas the majority of what I do varies from month to month ... The whole book fair – it's not necessarily a financial necessity to do it... more having that feeling that you're part of something.

Tracey Bush 1: 19.30

(An example of Bush's work is given in Fig. 39)

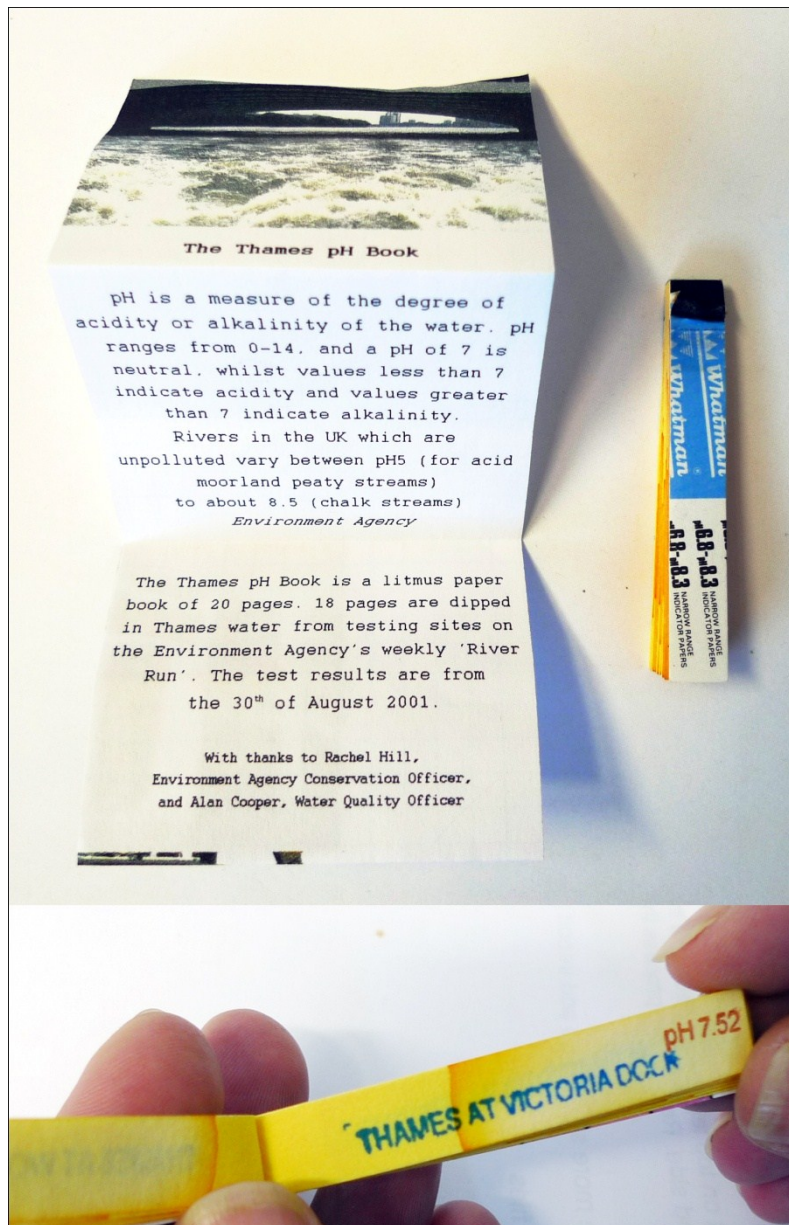


Figure 39: Tracey Bush's *The Thames pH Book* is also an example of an artist undertaking an investigative mode of working. See section 3.4 *Investigation*

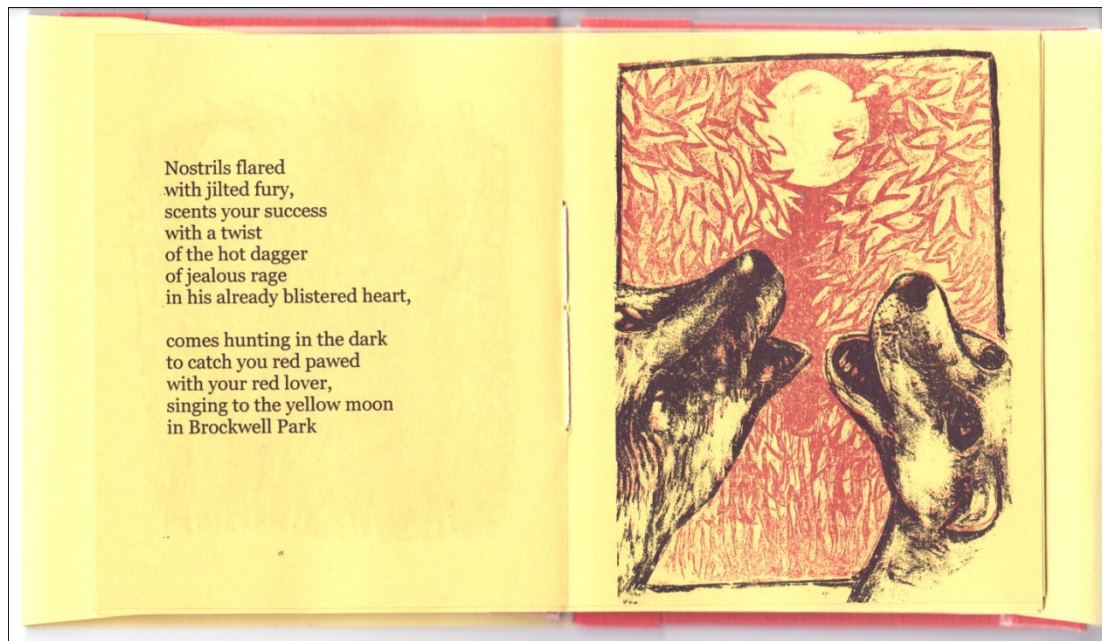
Books also, of course enable one to manufacture points of view with which to explore issues, as with the fictional persona Bently created for his book *Yellow Moon in Brockwell Park* (2005) (Figs. 40-41):



People find this very uncomfortable, they've said to me "there's something vaguely racist about it"... hang on a minute- just fucking read it! ... When I perform it, it's read from the point of view of [a racist character]... So you become that character. People feel uncomfortable.

John Bently 1: 22.47





Figures 40, 41: Bently's *Yellow Moon in Brockwell Park* (2005)

Books' narrative dimension allows one to create character much as one could in a play or for film. Although this is commonplace enough, in artists' books it brings this capability within reach of 2D visual artists. Though the creation of character in novels and films is utterly accepted, it still strikes a revelatory chord with book artists. We've seen this already:

The book thing... in a way is... living two different lives...

John Bently 1: 8.22

And:

AE- ...It sounds a little bit like those two worlds coming together... [so that there are] other ways to be creative that you can bring together with books?

JB- I think so... If I was writing this now, I'd exaggerate and say it was a great epiphany... But I suppose it was much more gradual, really.

John Bently 1: 10.03

Viewed from the perspective of artists' books as part of the wider field of visual art, it seems worthwhile highlighting this capability as one which would allow artists the strategic capability to "be other people", while at the same time retaining the various physical cues of the individual book, most strikingly its physical proximity, intimacy and physical isolation from other media and other books. It is capable of fantasy, but it is always a private performance, except in the sense that it is part of a shared commonwealth of reading. These two factors, viz. the metaphorising affect of 'being other people' and the formal effects of containment, material production, etc. are explored across the other metaphors below, in particular metaphors 5 (Containing and Containment) and 8 (Making Reading).

Some of Bently's readers' distress with the racist character in *Yellow Moon* (2005) may have to do with Bently's requiring his readers to take on that role, making them uncomfortable. Books have an important relationship with empathy. Fiction especially affects our cognitive

capabilities in this regard. Artists' books allow artists to inhabit roles with empathy, but they also open the door to the fictional use of characters in relation to the audience- to require the audience to inhabit the work with empathy. Such fictional empathy is commonplace in fiction writing, film and in comic books. Artists' books sometimes leverage this ability in the cause of an art work, either explicitly, or through the 'promise of reading' whereby the symbolic book implies that such an investment by the reader would be worthwhile. This is examined in more depth through section 3.9 *Two Lives*.

Helen Douglas, whose practice has been of interest as we explored the use of the spatial metaphor and the material narrative in previous sections, is worth quoting again in relation to her conception of roles within her practice:

... There definitely are different roles, there's first of all the "out with the camera" gathering, and being in a way the "dreamer" as well, that's really... important, just allowing that unconscious... world to well up with the photography and everything...you know you're into some kind of deep world, gathering.

And then there's the thing of putting it together... the practicality comes in...and then you start having to become

much more of a designer ... which is a completely different quality to, say, being out with the camera, or dreaming up things ... and then there's this kind ... homing in and becoming like a designer, and I hate being called a designer, but there's an aspect of that that one is using one's design skills.

Helen Douglas 1: 6.16

Most striking to me in Douglas' enunciation of roles in her practice is the movement backwards and forwards between states of structured planning and intimate conversation with the material. This directly echoes models I have presented in sections above<sup>93</sup> of practice being directed both by strategic goals and through tactical metis. We have (arguably) a fairly rich, if volatile, vocabulary to describe aspects of artists' books in terms of definitions of technique and form (*techne*), but little enough to describe its special conditions of relating to materials, roles and the intimate *situation* of the book. One of the reasons I have taken such elaborate pains to stake out ways of seeing practice, is that our adherence to describing form prevents us from describing much that is valuable (and sometimes, perhaps, unique) within the practice of

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<sup>93</sup> See in particular sections 1.2 and 3.0.1 and following. Section 2.2.2 *Critical Necessities: Clarity and Flexibility* pursues similar themes from a critical/theoretical outlook.

artists' books. Since I think that this is worth exploring, I value Douglas' description of her practice highly.

### 3.4 Investigation

Investigation, with its connotations of scientific and technical study, seems certainly to be allied more to a technical than a metaphorical practice. To a certain extent this is so. The methodologies associated with investigation are certainly procedural, and the type of knowledge it produces depends more on such procedures' testing of theory (or, better, examination of the correspondence of analogy with the subject). This distinguishes it from poetic, metaphorical practice, which depends upon analogy as a structure within which to produce entirely new juxtapositions through metaphor. Creation, rather than testing.

Things are never quite what they appear to be with such figures of speech, as I warned earlier<sup>94</sup>, and any good investigation will have its moments of metaphor when analogical models somehow, unexpectedly, fuse to create new insight.<sup>95</sup>

Investigation in artists' practice is informed by a particularly lively blend of strategy and tactic: of foresight and responsiveness. In a sense it is closer to alchemy than science. Peter Chasseaud refers to his practice in laboratory terms:

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<sup>94</sup> See Section 3.0.2

<sup>95</sup> Draaisma's *Metaphors of Memory* (Draaisma, 2000 [1995]) examines the *heuristic yield* of metaphor in science.

I don't deliberately work in certain ways. Some of those things are experimental and I may discard them, but at least I want to do them. So the whole thing is a big laboratory, really, I can pour things in and see what happens. It might explode, or it might actually gel into something workable.

Peter Chasseaud 1: 40.00

And:

Sometimes the fact that it goes 'bang' is quite interesting and you can use that. And you get shock juxtapositions, things that perhaps you didn't intend, but you realise in some way [are] working against each other or could be working with each other.

Peter Chasseaud 2: 8.06

Sometimes investigation – of an area, a landscape or cityscape, as in Chasseaud's practice, or in that of Jane Hyslop, becomes a way of focussing down that is akin to the metaphor of containment:

I suppose I got the urge to contain the landscape in a certain way... one of the major ones was the *Wild Plants Collected in Midlothian*, it was done across a year ... The book does it better because instead of having January as one drawing and February as another drawing, you have a concertina so that January and February meld together...



Jane Hyslop 1: 8.20

(An example of Hyslop's work is Fig.42).

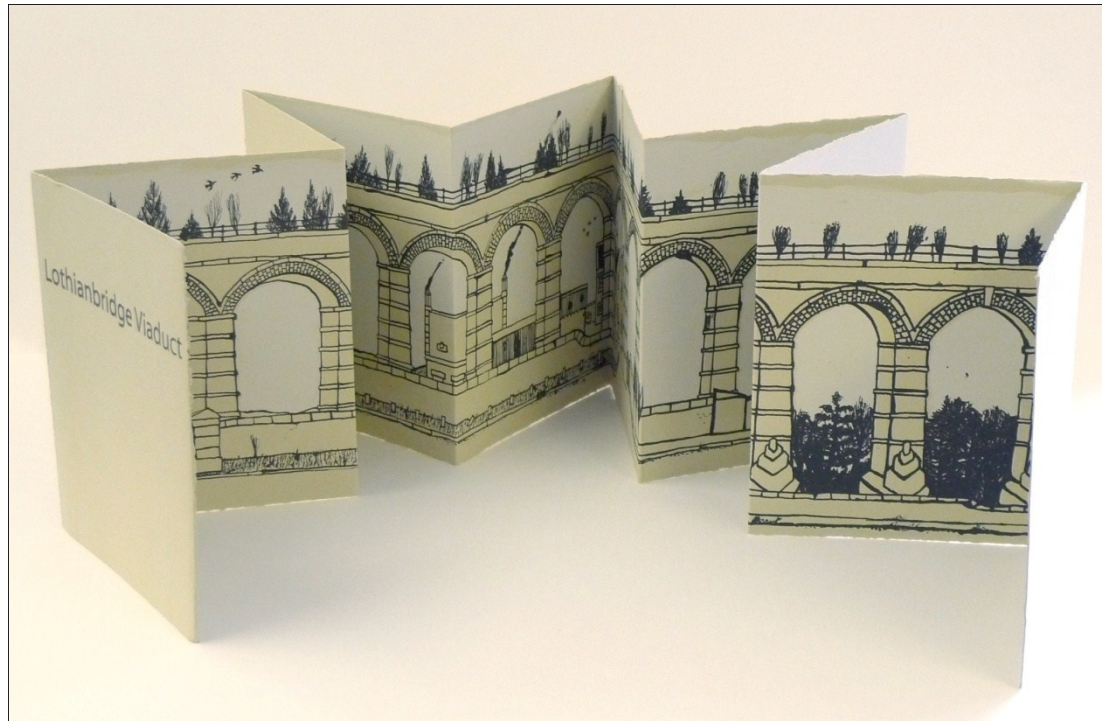


Figure 42: Also part of the Midlothian landscape. Hyslop's simple concertina *Lothianbridge Viaduct*, (2004) uses the narrative stretch of the viaduct to notate the trees growing along it.

Similarly, Tracey Bush's *The Thames pH Book* (2001), (Figure 39) combines a focus of form and place. The book is literally a book of pH analysis strips, stamped with the sites of analysis. Bush transforms a scientific tool into a quasi-narrative form through a simple identification of sample sites, and by shifting the identity of the material from ordinary scientific data to art. The interface between 'narrative' and 'sample' is interesting here, since Bush does not produce narratives as such in her

work, instead allowing the reader to construe them. (Her books *of British Butterflies* and *River Stairs* both collect the particular, allowing us to order their significance as we will.) This construal of material data by the reader is also seen in David Faithfull's work.

Faithfull's practice pursues an investigative methodology as part of his work. This metaphorises his practice through roles, as with some of the examples above<sup>96</sup>, allowing him to take on an investigative identity to carry out his work. There are several aspects of Faithfull's strategic and formal goals that are carried out through this methodology, and which are made possible because of the book form.

[I was at college, doing] a mixture of ... visual communications, graphics degree... it's bookbinding, it's letterpress, it's mixed typewriter and...weird things, and it's pretty crude, but there was a kind of scientific hypothesis, different experiments... I was asking questions about things...

David Faithfull 1: 17.25

...It was the idea of asking these hypotheses...questioning values... and playfulness as well... but an idea of enquiring...

David Faithfull 1:18.21

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<sup>96</sup> See Section 3.3

Faithfull has developed these ideas into a distinctive 'palindromic' strategy, used in books like *Tide/Edit* and *East Looking West/West Looking East*, (1999) (Figs. 43-44) whose structures recapitulate the methodology of looking he employs in his relations to the landscape. In this he literally 'looks twice' at the subject:

I didn't like the way landscape was depicted, you go to galleries and you see one person's view of a landscape, and that's it. The idea of this palindrome in the landscape was to get ... opposing views on the landscape so that you would see it from your view, and then you would walk into that landscape and draw, with your back to where you were drawing from initially [I'm sure DF means facing the spot you were drawing from initially] ... you encapsulate a hill in the middle, and so the hill is structurally in the book. Is on one side looking East... and then you can switch the book over and it's looking West on the other.

AE- The same place.

DF- Exactly the same place... On one side is the personal, subjective text, and on the other side is the objective rational text

...communicating the idea of being surrounded in this landscape – how can you do it? You can't...[without the mechanics of the book]

David Faithfull 1: 1.01.00

Faithfull's outline of his practice depends upon the physical operations of the books to perform its poetics and recapitulate his methodology. The opposite sides of a concertina-folded sheet contain images that represent the same place from different viewpoints. The thickness of the paper itself separates two views and "contains" the sum of these two views of the landscape. Whatever correspondences the two drawings have will be visible: for example, a mirror-image of the horizon line on one side would be present on the other- 'on the other side of the hill'. The viewer can reconstruct this relationship, comparing two models of the landscape to produce a third in their own understanding.





Figures 43, 44: David Faithfull, *West Looking East/East Looking West*, (1999). The two sides of the concertina are printed so that key points in the topography line up through the paper.

The construction of a book like , *West/West Looking East* ,(1999) presupposes a booklike relationship to its viewers: that they will handle it, that they will see both sides, that they will make the connections, “through” the paper as it were, and move from one representation of the landscape to the other, via whatever points of comparison make most sense. Metaphor is a common enough trope in fiction, but here we can see it functioning visually as part of an investigation. Faithfull constructs analogies of the two views - as drawings - and offers them as parallel (mirrored) models of the landscape. The book construction makes their correspondences physically concrete, and invites the viewer to transfix those correspondences through metaphor, as they identify one drawing with the other to produce a greater (or ‘more objective’) sum. I have

mentioned the ‘promise of the book’<sup>97</sup> in relation to viewers’ investment in empathising with figurative characters. Here the promise is part of the system of cues that persuades the reader that further investigation is warranted and worthwhile.

Faithfull’s appropriation of an investigative methodology is interesting because it involves the reader so much in its meaning. More than simply presenting scientific paraphernalia or exhibiting the results of an experiment, Faithfull uses the book to invite the reader to participate in analysing the data. He is able to do this, partly because of the physical support that the book lends to such actions, as exemplified in *East Looking West/West Looking East*, (1999), but also because of the way viewers encounter books. The promise books hold out, is that the work they ask us to do is worthwhile. We read mystery novels to perform just such work, and artists’ books can borrow this promise for a while, to encourage readers to participate more fully in the construction of the book experience.

Artists making books know this, perhaps unconsciously, and exploit the promises books make, all the time. See Section 3.8 *Making Reading*, for more on this. Construal by the reader, the interpretation of material

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<sup>97</sup> In particular see Section 2.4.4; also Sections 3.2 and 3.3

styled as data, is just one metaphor for what artists get readers to do with books. Making-reading develops this relationship further.

### 3.5 Containing and Containment

By identifying the two notions of ‘containing’ and ‘containment’ I mean to create a distinction based on the strategic and metaphorical aspects of practice as outlined above.

The relevance of making this distinction lies in the confusion<sup>98</sup> that there often is between books’ capacity to hold physical stuff, address different media, and erect covers around the whole, which I see as books containing, and what I would call books’ containment. Containment lies less in the formal capabilities and virtuosities of books’ ability to contain, and lies instead in what those things come to mean to the artist (or indeed to the reader – see Metaphor 8 *Making Reading*).

Thus *containing* contains the material and formal ‘stuff’ that gives rise to effects, and *containment* describes the affect of what books can contain, towards artists practice.

Let me illustrate *containing*:

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<sup>98</sup> Our terminology often comes up against such confusions. Such elisions end up skewing our understanding of what artists’ books are. Tendentiously, I would say that we usually favour formal definition over terms that allow us to explore what practice means, finishing up with us wondering why our vocabulary fails to describe practice.



[Say] you've got a room full of 20 paintings... in one artists' book you've got... it could be hundreds of... images... More like a video, but a video that the viewer can... pace themselves through... pause... and choose the tempo themselves... so it does give you incredible flexibility to project ideas in a much more dense way...

David Faithfull 1: 6.33

And here is Peter Chasseaud:

... A lot of the projects I work on are projects which I approach in several media simultaneously. And one of the great things about the book form is that you can actually combine several of those media into one object, which it sort of encapsulates the whole thing as it were, ... in the book you've got, obviously, physicality of paper and binding materials and anything else that you've incorporated into the book. But you can also incorporate text, which is important to me, ... Photographic images, ... I can use printmaking, ... hand painting on them as well ... So there's something about the book form that is actually very enabling. And at the same time it contains – like this sort of canister that you can pour all this stuff into and it hangs together within that, like a matrix if you will. ... And you can unfold it. I like the way it opens and it unfolds and it exposes and it conceals.

Peter Chasseaud 1: 17.45

(See Fig. 45, on following page, for an example of Chasseaud's work)

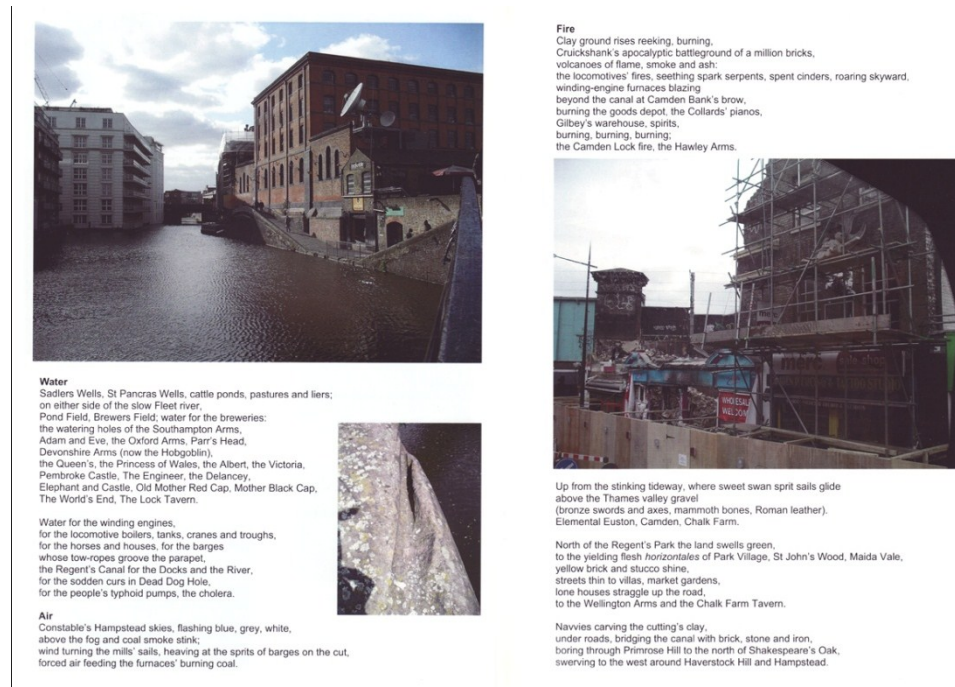


Figure 45: A spread from Peter Chasseaud's *The Euston Arch* (Altazimuth Press, 2008)

Similarly, Tracey Bush comments on books' ability to become an anchor point for practice to coalesce around:

...if I know there's going to be a book element, I almost don't worry how diverse the other things are, because I think, well, the book's going to bring it together"

Tracey Bush 1: 9.25

These quotations serve to show some of the complexity of the simple act of containing. It is at once an opportunity to concatenate resources for the eventual viewer, and a way to work in an intuitive, combinatorial, almost alchemical way with the materials. (Chasseaud employs the metaphor of a 'laboratory' to describe his working). Both relate this material, formal act, to the affect of *containment*.

Let us now turn to artists' perceptions of that aspect. In fact we have already encountered Helen Douglas' comment:

It's something about that room is contained...and... there's not an awful lot on display – because I don't think books are like that, they're not things that are out on display... you open them, or else you close them... I don't put things up on the wall, I lay them out on a sheet of paper, and then I put them all away again...so something in me... doesn't want it out all the time, either. And that – for me – the book works really well, because it's there, or it can be put away.

Helen Douglas 1: 38.56

Here are John Say [JS] and Sheena Vallely [SV] of Reassemble:

SV- ...we have to allocate certain times for each process... there isn't enough space really. But also head space –... we have to be in one mode... for a couple of weeks.

JS- That's a good one, 'cause I do feel that, that I have to say  
'I've got two weeks of print mode and then two weeks of  
sound mode' and it's like I have to tidy away the imagery...

SV- Also... they're natural progressions... we'll exhaust one  
process and... you really want to go on, making full use of the  
next process... as a result of getting so far with one, and then  
wanting to continue that expression and development...

AE- Isn't it great that you can?

JS- Yeah – which again goes back to why the artists' book  
format is such a fantastic way of allowing you to do that... if I  
was a painter, I just think I'd be nuts by now... because of just  
that day after day... working with the same medium.

Reassemble 1, 41.00

These two quotations capture something of the way in which books  
allow artists to put either a subject or a particular approach to one side  
for a while. This containment is made possible by the books' formal  
capabilities (i.e. books' *containing*). Containment can be of great  
benefit. Here is Lucy May Schofield on containment in her practice:

It does feel like the way that my work and what I'm making  
does feel quite holistic... it does all fold in... I sometimes think  
"God, stop working on these themes"...

But with books I think it makes... it creates these subheadings – it's like a filing cabinet and... I think it's a way of compartmentalising certain elements of a theme so it's "Well, it's covered in that, that element's covered in that " so it's almost like a librarian's ... way of classification.

Lucy May Schofield 1: 27.43

One can hear in this something of a sense of relief, almost, that parts of the project are taken care of safely by the containment of the book, allowing Schofield the security to attend to present matters more closely.<sup>99</sup> This sense of security has a creative yield. The temporary boundaries set by a book on 'internal' practice are accompanied by the material boundaries of its containing structure. Here Jane Hyslop talks about what working with books seems to do for her students:

[Organising a planned book (letter press, etc) is useful for the students], because rather than being able to be so free and open – in a way that's frightening & it's too difficult. They actually have to face up to "Right, I need a certain number of pages" or "How many pages can I have" or "How am I going to put this together"... "Where's the beginning and where's the

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<sup>99</sup> Additionally, this desire for closure has resonances we can recognise in the desire that informs narrative: a desire for an ending. See (Brooks, 1992), (Kermode, 1966)

end”? It does help them [students] discover, “Ah- that’s what I’m trying to do. That’s what I’m all about.”

Jane Hyslop 1: 3.06

(The demands of the physical form open up the shelter, ‘stell’, or temporary construction of the book., with interesting poetic trade-offs. See Fig 46 to see how Christine Tacq uses the book form to interrogate the structure of a poem.)



Fig 46: Here Christine Tacq’s treatment of the *Corpus Christie Carol*, with its characteristic structure of clause-within-clause, is echoed by the structure of the book itself. Tacq’s use of torn holes in the pages cleverly allow glimpses ‘through the poem’ towards its denouement.

The definition of these two terms of *containing* and *containment* is difficult, because they relate to parts or aspect of a process of creativity that is always in motion. But I have insisted on creating a way to see containment rather than just containing, because I think it is important for book artists. We don't get that through describing books, (which tells us what they contain) but from talking to artists (which can tell us what that meant). Creativity, though, is a flux of material and affect that often makes trying to define such distinctions difficult.

My interviews also contain a number of responses addressing a general relationship towards boundaries and structure. These reflect a stance towards boundaries that informs artists' use of containment, understood as a strategy: that is, containment, which is a metaphorical, tactical relationship to situations that affects the artist, is 'packaged' as a strategy, and relied upon:

From the making perspective there's a lot of concerns that go into what the boundaries are going to be; sizes and depths and everything else. And it... does free up... what I can say and how I can say it... It's like the constraints of... Oulipo or any sort of writing that has constraints... and [you] make it work within that particular bound framework; it's that sort of thing

that's kind of limiting for some... but... for me it's been quite liberating.

Tate Shaw 1: 13.40

...We need structures all the time... to bounce off in a way... You can't have unbounded non-structure – it's terribly boring. Structure is much more interesting. It's just always that interesting double-bounce-y thing one has to do all the time of bouncing off the structure, but criticising the structure the whole time, that push-pull thing, is really interesting.

Carolyn Trant 5: 2.20

Both quotations allude to the slight ambivalence towards limits these artists have. They lead up to another ambivalence, or tension, that I have mentioned several times before- that of the 'ghetto' of artists' books, and the relationship of security and isolation.

I have alluded above<sup>100</sup> to the idea that the '*camera*' of the book is one into which other ideas are projected, through 'punctures' in the trusted boundaries of the medium. The structure that books have, both in terms of their containing and containment, permits the artist the means by which they can project a view of the world into their practice. The

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<sup>100</sup> Section 3.1



book allows a place to visualise a relationship to the world at large. This in itself is not remarkably different from other structured identities that carry a presuppositional framework out into the world in order to look at it: it is in fact a universal trait – we call a ‘point of view’. What books have done, however, is echoed once again in the collapse of terminologies I have spoken about earlier, when for example, I pulled apart the different aspects of books containing and containment, or (for another) book-structure and books’ structuring traits. As noted, these take some ‘unsticking’ because we tend to collapse them as if the similar-sounding terms all mean the same thing. Books tend to reify the artists’ ‘point of view’ as an *object*: “the book”. If we view the field of books critically as the field of these objects, then we are complicit in the same collapsing of the meaning of artists’ books. The meaning of the book is not solely the book object. To reverse-engineer the book we need to enter into the point of view the book made possible, and this calls for a fluency in the creative affect, (rather than formal effects) of books. To dwell in books as a ghetto is a choice, but it is one that perpetuates the idea that books are a class of objects, rather than a tool for artists’ creative engagement with the world. It is a choice made by artists, theorists, and their audiences alike.

### 3.6 Leaking / slowing down

Many participants alluded to the effect books have on their audience of slowing down the reader's hasty consumption of media to a more contemplative pace, or to the phenomenon of 'leaking', describing books' slow engagement with their owners over time as the reader returns to the book several times, experiencing it again and again.

A few examples will serve to illustrate this interest:

I think that they take... quite a few looks. I think that you need to spend a bit of time. And I expect people to do that.

John Bently 2, 8.30

...when I pick up a book... I expect it to take a long time... that's what I expect, and I expect people to kind of... plod their way through it.

John Bently 2, 10.58

I've always been interested in the reading process, particularly in slowing down the reading process so each individual word becomes more resonant... [In] a lot of the works it's a broader thing to do with perception, but perception for me is a really important thing in the reading process ...

Many participants responded volubly to my questions about slowing reading down or making a reading experience. While not surprising in a group of artists who chose to make work using books, it is nevertheless interesting because it represents another opportunity to diversify the meaning of the book. Such an intention towards reading requires the artist to imagine the reader and their reading experience empathetically; the artist uses a range of technical and poetic techniques to fulfill this imaginative reach towards the other. This emphasises that the book is not just an object, it is an object for *reading by others*. Though all artwork is made for an audience, the intimate connection book artists seem to feel with their readers comes across especially strongly<sup>101</sup>. Aspects of this (imaginative) bond between the artist and their imagined reader will reoccur in sections on ‘making reading’, and I will discuss some of the poetic tactics being employed in the same section (3.8).

One unusual example was the response of Tate Shaw, who opens the experience up more widely to the environment the reader finds themselves in at the time of reading. (He goes on later to counterpoise the idea of the book as an unchanging factor in this equation). Other

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<sup>101</sup> See also Tate Shaw on touching the book and Lucy May Schofield on her sense of duty towards the reader in 3.8 *Making Reading*.

artists are certainly aware of this (see their responses regarding the effects of a particular environment: the Book Fair), and artists such as Julie Johnstone and Susan Johanknecht have spoken about the reading experience they are creating in perceptual terms. However, Shaw considers the idea of a kind of “reading-in-the-world”:

...I think about... understanding the poetry of reading a book where it's so much tied up with your body and the experience of it. There's extra perception too... whether you read in [light or dark surroundings]. It's hard in a way to talk about a lot of artists' books production in a readerly kind of way, because we don't just carry [artists'] books out and read them in the park... or on planes... I know it gets talked about, but I don't think it actually gets done that much...

Tate Shaw 1, 21.00

Shaw seems as concerned with situation of the book as the reader, and he entertains the idea that the book is not getting out as much as the artist might imagine. Nevertheless, if the artist can create a lastingly worthwhile work, it will remain available.

I'm trying [to make a] commentary on daily life and trying to affect the daily life for the reader... it's coming just from physical, everyday experiences... it's just about super-simple things that can come through... I really do find that the book is

about this sort of simplicity... and about [the] permanence of simplicity, if you will, when you're dealing with paper instead of digital poetics or performative kinds of work... even art installations or painting installs where the light is going to be different... Every time it gets read, I hope it connects in the same way; it gets made, if you will.

...

The stuff I'm trying to do is to give you a reason to go back to these books... more than once... For myself as well...

Tate Shaw 1, 30.00

The book is here the unchanging point of an equation where reader and environment are changeable. Other artists certainly gave thought to what their books' role was to be- in one example something akin to 'duty' towards their readers was apparent. (The intensity of Lucy May Schofield's wish to reach out to – and make a difference to – her readers is quite clear in some of the quotations I have used in section 3.8, for example), and an interest in books' usefulness and fate is by no means unusual.

This raised questions of what the reader's experience was supposed to be. Was the book to change in its relationship to the viewer over time? To deepen? To reflect the changing identity of the reader with new

reflections? The idea of 'leaking', where the book continues to be present, gradually, over a period of time, evokes a long relationship with the reader. Shaw's take on this is perhaps unusual because he is fairly explicit that he doesn't see the book changing, but being constant. Of course, the physical book *does not* literally change (other than through the wear and tear of materials), so Shaw's point is based in an obviously true fact. However, we have all had the experience of rereading something and having a different experience because we bring something new to the reading ourselves, and it would seem that this is a more common viewpoint. The fact that Shaw has taken the trouble to vary explicitly from this is telling, both in terms of his own work, which often deals with issues of change, constancy and the vulnerability of human relationships (in contrast, perhaps, to the 'simple permanence' of the book), and in terms of the assumptions people generally make about reading. Shaw brings something true to light: it's not the book that changes, it's the reader.

...it's fixed storage... it's nice to be able to go back and know that you've changed when it has more or less stayed the same...

Tate Shaw 1, 35.51

The appeal of 'leaking', and the continued relationship it implies with the book depends, really, on the things Shaw actually says: that the book has got to stay there, to be there for you, and it has to have sufficient depth to be worth coming back to, to reply to the new reading you can offer.

Here are some other artists on the subject of 'leaking':

...if you're interested in the experience people take away from...seeing something... it does take a lot of time... the ownership thing is very important... they live with it and it speaks to them...the point is with artists' books, that if you're talking about a lot of people seeing your work... getting that more general experience... rich experience.

Carolyn Trant 4, 12.00

What I think books do is I think they leak information over quite a long period in history, and I think, if you make something that is possibly still going to be there in 100 years' time, it will have leaked an idea. That's what I'm interested in with books, not instant mass communication, 'cause we've got the Internet now... that's been removed...

John Bently 2, 17.45

There is a kind of hope embodied in these statements that the books they make will continue to be valued by their readers a long time from now. ‘Slowing down reading’ speaks to the same ambitious enterprise: to make work that is worthwhile reading slowly, and even more, that is worth reading again. If this is true of many of the book artists I spoke to, contrary values are also embodied in efforts to create fast, ‘disposable’ work like ‘zines.’<sup>102</sup>

The physical media of books is cited several times as part of the ways in which the experience is built up. The time it takes to turn the pages, the volition involved, and the intimate relationship the book builds up with its viewer through being ‘created’ in a tactile process is also mentioned:

There’s a whole different experience if you’re holding it  
and you open it... that whole side of books is *important*,  
that whole, how you can slow down the experience of  
the words by how you create the book...?

Julie Johnstone 1, 5.51

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<sup>102</sup> I will reflect a little more in this other direction in section 3.6.1 *Types of Contact*- “reaching deeply, reaching widely” .



... the very fact that people have to slow down and turn the page, the fact that that has an effect on them physically, I think it does actually slow people down, [we] live in this frantic sort of age...

Carolyn Trant 1, 3.40

Book artists seem to prize the time that their readers spend looking at the books. John Bently gives an example of a specific tactic he has used to keep the reader's attention centred in the work. He makes the viewer work to find the limits of what can be understood, pushing them deeper into the book's (sometimes difficult) embrace:

I did this book... and I made it so that the text... got bigger in the book until it became illegible... there are various points in the book where it becomes totally illegible, unless you... spend hours... working it out...

[replying to subscriber]

..."wherever you get to when you can't read it, I don't want you to read any more than that" The story disappears.

John Bently 2, 11.33

This is a particularly literal example of the artist using a form of visual poetics, i.e. deliberately altering the legibility of the text, in order to control the viewer's experience. Bently also makes this into a kind of

narrative technique, because the legibility is altered gradually, spread by spread, so that the narrative, and not simply the page moves in and out of legibility.(Figs 47-49)



Figures 47-49: This consecutive sequence from John Bently's *The Rainbow Makers* (2002) manipulates our reading speed through legibility.

In contrast to these efforts, a striking tension became apparent, between artists' wishes that the book could provide a more intimate, reflective experience, and the busy fairs at which they are often sold.

My ideal book would be one where you could look at it at a book fair and you could immediately get what it was going to be about – where it communicated straight away... it has to be at a bookfair, doesn't it, it has to be quite fast?... But ... you'd see it and you'd know there was something about it, to come back and get more deeply involved – a book at a bookfair needs to do that to be really successful, but if you took it home there'd be enough for a lifetime, so it would unfold.

Christine Tacq 1, 42.41

They're not good in that respect, for me... it is the instant hit, and I think that's a problem with that fair [LAB] in particular...I think there's a lot more books which are about... kind of... instant hit...

John Bently 2, 9.41

...Book fairs I really struggle with, because it's a table, and people are stood up, and they're looking at your work if they've got the time and all these books are on the tabletop vying for attention and they can get lost and get neglected... Some stands are always busy... you don't have to look hard, or try hard to figure out what's going on there... and it's the quieter ones... the ones that take a little bit more viewing, more looking time that I fear get lost.

Lucy May Schofield 1, 10.25

What to do about this unsatisfactory situation? Would it be possible to create a better sort of space? One more conducive to reading? Several artists offered their experiences of this:

... an opportunity to show at... a bigger venue, like the Origin show, or in a window... that kind of makes more sense with

what I'm doing because it's creating more of a space [so] that people can engage with the work.

Lucy May Schofield 2, 13.00

...This exhibition [The Falcon Bride] is sort of an antidote to our arts trail where people rush round... it's trying to say 'slow down, the idea is to take your time'. Ideas change you. It's quite a good idea making a comfortable space...

Carolyn Trant 1, 4.10

The experience of trying to engineer the space seems to launch artists into other considerations about their audience too. What happens if we trust them with the books? What kind of relationship are we setting up? David Faithfull and Lucy May Schofield offer some perspectives here:

I had that exhibition *Inkubator* ... this exhibition was to give the audience the opportunity to handle books... in an atmosphere that was welcoming... very limited security, so the trust was on them.

David Faithfull 1, 9.40

...I like... not being in a gallery setting. I find that quite an uncomfortable place to be a lot of times, as a viewer... or if I'm exhibiting ... By creating an... installation or a room set, it's making people just stop that little bit longer... in complete contrast to the kind of digital age where everything is so instant... I'm really aware that people have this very... short attention span.

Lucy May Schofield 1 7.21

### *3.6.1 Types of contact – “reaching deeply, reaching widely”*

With the artists I spoke to, time spent looking at the book was seen as an important component in viewers' experience. Further, the link that artists felt with their readers was seen as being deepened or intensified through viewers' more thorough examination of the work. This contrasts the “highly-distributed” multiple. That this tendency exists is clear from the resurgence of 'zine fairs. However, the contrast is not a simple dichotomy. Valuing a more intense connection with the reader does not preclude an appreciation for a wider, faster distribution network, nor does participation at the “zine end” of artists' publishing necessarily mean that the work is primarily intended to be “fast, cheap and

consumable". Indeed, it is the balances that artists cunningly strike between these variables that makes the marketplace interesting. One never really knows exactly what to expect.

One can, however, easily characterise 'zines and the like as 'faster' in terms of their weighting towards highly-distributable, cheap forms, and artists' books as generally, slower and deeper. We should beware of stereotyping, however.

Additionally, the intentions we ascribed to these polarities in such labels as 'democratic multiple', tend to break down in the face of changes in the material production and context of the books being produced. 'Zines now, although they make use of desktop publishing and photocopiers, do not partake of the fastest possible form of democratic publishing: namely digital publishing and distribution. Nor do artists' books always adhere to any kind of rule about material or distribution profile. We cannot describe these tropes in terms of materials or distributive tactics with any solidity; we have to turn towards the desires that inform the artists' relationship to their audience, to reach out deeply or to reach out widely. These strategies employ tactics that shift the balance of individual books through the spectrum from 'zine to tome, from street-corner to library: but they share that common goal, to reach out.

The intentions implicit in ‘slowing down reading’ or ‘leaking’ are directed towards a relationship with the reader. The book form offers a powerful conduit to the audience, typified as the ‘shared world of reading’ or ‘making reading’. The strategic, formal methods of slowing down reading serve the desire to reach the other, and to this extent, they serve a metaphorical function, to allow the book to *be* an interaction with the audience. That is, books do not literally allow the author to speak to or contact a reader: such contact, though highly familiar and pervasive, is metaphorical, and is made possible by books. The section on ‘making reading’ will deal more with the artists’ awareness of their readers, and how they make the imaginative leap towards them through the book.

The literary theorist Suzanne Keen, (whose writings regarding empathy I will turn to again in section 3.9), proposes several strategies of empathy employed by literary authors. She theorises:

that *bounded strategic empathy* operates within an in-group, stemming from experiences of mutuality... *Ambassadorial strategic empathy* addresses chosen others with the aim of cultivating their empathy for the in-group, often to a specific end. *Broadcast strategic empathy* calls upon every reader to feel with members of a group, by emphasising common

vulnerabilities and hopes through universalising  
representations.

(Keen, 2006 p. 215)

It would be interesting, though beyond the scope of the current study, to pursue some of the interplay of publishing strategies in these terms. Such terms connect tactics in the shape of form and means, with strategies in the shape of desires and ends. They place the act of publishing at the centre of a circuit whose polarities are created by the balance artists seek between desires and means.



### 3.7 Poem as Book

As elsewhere in this study, we find an ambiguity of usage in the idea of 'book as poem'. One way of presenting this ambiguity is as a tension between metaphorical and strategic meanings. Strategically, 'book as poem' implies the strategic intention of analysing the book in poetic terms. Metaphorically, it implies the artist in the role of poet (the metaphor would read "the artist *is* a poet"), deploying the tactical means of the poet. These meanings respectively refer to 'the formal poetics of the artists' book' and 'taking the role of the poet to create an artist's book". I will survey both aspects below.

#### 3.7.1 Poetic form and artists' books

Poetic form is a huge subject. Lewis Turco's *New Book of Forms*, (Turco, 1986) lists nearly 1000 discrete terms of art in its index. We clearly cannot cover the ground in such a compendious manner here. I mean to offer only a few examples including a formal practice I think is important to artists' books, that of the *visual chiasma*.

In artists' books we require a flexible poetics that can describe how artists deal with visual, textual and material streams. Our analyses of

artists' books are always strewn with our observations on how image sits with typography, text with material; how images echo and reply, and so on. The 'package' of such commentary implies a poetics that we could formulate, if we chose to: terms of reference that would allow comparison.<sup>103</sup> Exemplars of poetic forms do not create a canon: different examples are interchangeable. Furthermore, poetics here are still the means to an end rooted in the artists' desire to create books. They cannot tell us everything about a book.

#### 3.7.1.1 Poetic Voice

The 'voice' of poetry describes the nature of the narrating voice in terms of who it is that is speaking (as opposed to syntax or diction, which contribute information that contextualises that person). Turco, describing the voice in poetry, enumerates three possibilities:

*The Egopoetic Voice*: the voice is that of the poet, telling the story from inside his or her own experience. It is an exclusive viewpoint.

*The Narrative Voice*: includes a narrator (who may or may not be the poet, or a character from the narrative), telling about one or more

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<sup>103</sup> If this sounds familiar to the construction of canonical references in terms of books, remember that poetics describes not works of art but the means by which they are made. We can give exemplars of the form, but these are to a greater or lesser degree, formal effects excerpted from the whole, with which we are not concerned, (except in terms of formal structure, analogous to 'verse structure').

characters external to the narrator. This form encourages identification on the part of the reader with the characters, and allows the reader to consider the angle of reflection of the narrative: i.e., that which is implicit in *how* it is told, which reflects on the author or the character of the narrator.

*The Dramatic Voice*: is told from *within* the experience of a character in the story. Both the author and the reader must enter fully into the experiences of the character, feeling as they feel and seeing as they see.

These are familiar techniques from written poetry and fiction, and authors are free to blend these techniques, shifting from one to another over the course of the story<sup>104</sup>. Part of what artists take on when they take on the role of writer/author/poet is the chance to deploy techniques like this in the same way, shifting viewpoints, eliciting empathy, creating context and angles of approach. However, the addition of visual and material streams adds further possibility. If a writer can shift between voices using words, an artist can do so using imagery, too. An artist's book may or may not use language (and may or may not express its meaning clearly, as we will see), but it can still use the form of the book to frame the implication of narrative (this is 'the promise of reading' – the

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<sup>104</sup> This indeed, is a hallmark of the *role* of the author, one that artists themselves reflect on in section 3.3 *Personae and Roles*

symbol of the book promises that reading is contained therein). Whether the artist chooses to elaborate that promise through some sort of narrative form is up to them. The possibility is there, however, for visual paralleling of the techniques of voice and viewpoint that animate written narrative.

Much of the time, artists' books go further than this, streaming text and imagery and material form simultaneously. Images echo, reply, contradict, and joke with text. They can foreshadow elements of the narrative, create leitmotifs for characters, offer a coherent counterpoint to the textual theme, or create a choral effect. Visual style can parallel, too, the syntax and diction of characters, to create different visual character voices (or create inflection within the same character). Consider also the numerous forms of text-as-image that occur, when the visual form of text is taken up and pushed to the point that it constitutes a form of visual as well as written expression, in examples ranging from *Tristram Shandy* (Sterne, 2003 [1759-67]) through concrete poetry<sup>105</sup> to *Liberature* (Bazarnik, et al., 2005).

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<sup>105</sup> (Drucker, 1998), especially section IV *Visual Poetics*, for material on the means of concrete poetry.

### *3.7.2 Poetic voice, allegory and metaphor*

What is happening when artists juxtapose these streams in harmony or at odds with one another? What do readers do with them?

Here, again, we see the operation of metaphor, now in the form of allegory. When an artist offers parallel streams of information on the theme of the book which sway in and out of harmony with one another, they are constructing an allegorical relationship between the streams. One thing comments on another. Turco defines written allegory as “speak[ing] about one thing in terms of another... The heart of allegory is metaphor. An allegory is a story told on two levels simultaneously.” (Turco, 1986 p. 48) In the merge-and-divergence of the terms of visual and textual streams, there is a mixture of sometimes-coherence-sometimes-metaphorical-expansion that the reader participates in, and, in the words of Tate Shaw, “puzzles out”.

There is work involved in this reading. The meaning of a metaphor may not be obvious, or it may not emerge until the work is finished. We may not be dealing with something whose meaning we can work out from the terms of the metaphor (in which case we are dealing with what Turco (1986 p. 50) dubs ‘unanchored abstraction’ : a prerogative of poets and artists alike to get the viewer to do the work of supplying meaning).

Books, happily, are frequently rewarding of the effort we spend on them as readers.

### 3.7.3 Visual Chiasma

When one stream crosses another, but their relationship is not strictly literal, not 'strictly illustrative', as we would say, visually, artists are often using a form I have called 'visual chiasma' after the verbal form of the chiasma. Ordinarily, (written) poetic chiasmata involve a crossing of voices or subjects. For example:

"I walked the earth, *she trod the soil.*

*She found her way,* I gained my mark."

As an ideational tactic it features the terms of reference of two schemas in direct correspondence to one another. (Note that the italicised and plain text above are in different voices.) To comprehend the full meaning of the relation between the two schemas, the reader has to pick apart and compare the different parts of the phrases. By forcing their comparison through crossing, comparison and contrast between the schema of the two points of view is encouraged, and the

reader is prompted towards a reading that would provide a comprehensive synthesis of the schema. This would be an overarching poetic scheme that made sense of the two different voices *because of* the disruption that the chiasma brings to the discrete schema that the voices themselves possess. The chiasma *forces* a deeper reading so as to make sense of the crossed schema. It is similar to the use of metaphor in this 'exchanging', except that it makes (visually) explicit the crossing-over-and-back from one schema to another, as part of how the reader figures out the syntax of the piece: like a puzzle that makes us think about the relationship of the pieces it's made of. When we see work in an artist's book that is clearly in two different voices, and we ask ourselves "What are they saying to one another?", we are working with chiasma to cross the voices and produce the meaning.(See Fig. 50 for an example in practice).

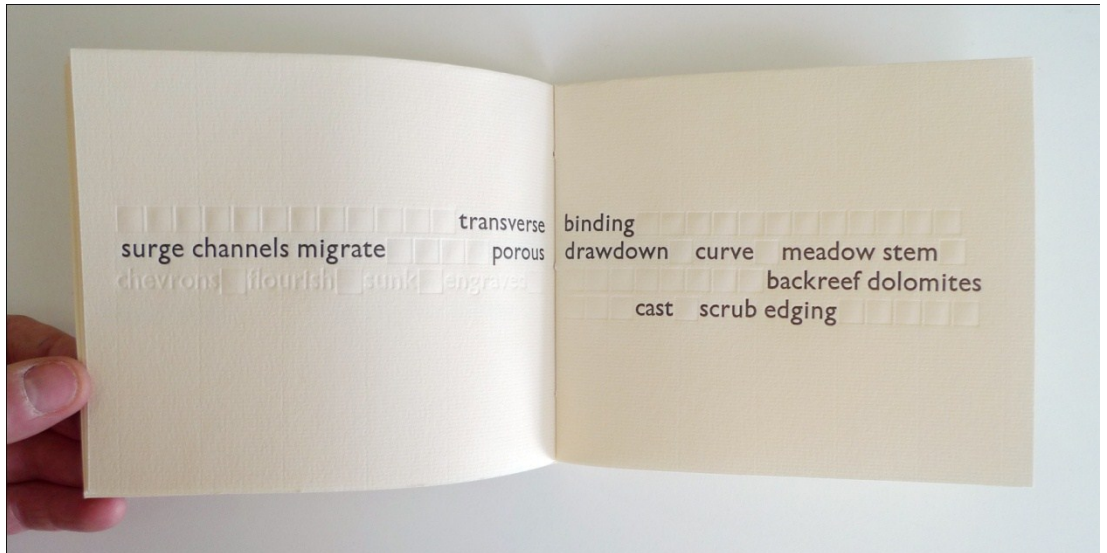


Figure 50: Johanknecht's use of contrapuntal inked and blind-embossed voices in *Subtext Localities* (2007) encourages a textual chiasma, and develops, with the blind-embossed empty (deleted) matrix in which they lie, (and the gutter they lie across) a relationship to the material fabric and visual form of the book.

When, as artists, we place visual material in conjunction with textual material, a simplified version of the choice we make would be – do we try to show the subject clearly and unambiguously, or do we take up the chance to work a visual counterpoint to the text that is clearly different but related to the subject and syntax of the written text as a whole?<sup>106</sup> The first choice attempts a type of visual simile for the text; the second constructs a scheme that we could analyse as a visual

<sup>106</sup> In fact, this represents an opportunity to create metaphor. The tenor term suggested by (for example) the text, is to be paired with another term in the visual stream. We thus have an opportunity to make this a 'vehicle term' in order to produce a metaphorical interaction between the streams. The term *visual chiasma* reflects how this interaction between tonic and vehicle is made literally visible. But the terms of metaphor – tenor and vehicle – are another of those grammatical figures of speech that tends to break down when presented in another form. Which is the tonic and vehicle in a relationship of image and text, or between two images? *Visual chiasma* allows us to keep the interaction and step away from the grammar.



chiasma. The first choice is a kind of strictly-illustrative practice that attempts to mirror the text without entering into it; the second is more deeply involved. In its changed echoes of the text it reflects a deeper engagement than a superficial reading, because it has to create structures that will counterpoise the text meaningfully. To pull meaning out of text and image, the reader flips back and forth between them.

We see this practice frequently in artists' books (and in more interesting illustrator's work). With specific regard to textual relation, we see it in *livres d'artiste*, where the visual structures and material forms take up a dialogue with a more-or-less fixed text. In artists' books the artist is usually the author of all of the content and the chiasma may even be taken up between several *visual* streams. As with the text example above, we might be able to perceive this crossing as a juxtaposition of discrete forms: as a sequence of intercut images; or as a collage of elements. We might encounter it in ways that exploit visual language to show the different schema interpenetrating one another, as in a crossfade or an intermingling of marks and patterns. There are other spatial concepts that visual juxtaposition makes possible. The chiasma may not be taken up within the book itself, but may relate to another work, or to the context in which the work is perceived.

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A useful discussion of the 'epistemological status of metaphor' may be found in (Draaisma, 2000 [1995] pp. 10-17).

The salient point of the chiasma is that the reader must do the empathetic work of metaphor (“one thing as another”) to cross the streams of meaning and create the sense of the work.

### 3.7.4 Metaphorising practice: *“The artist is a poet”*

We have seen some of the ways in which thinking about work as poetry allows artists to achieve effects. What about the affect of being a poet?

I asked the artist Susan Johanknecht how she would characterise her working practice. What metaphor would she use to describe it? Was it a journey, a collection, a place?

I’ve been dealing with it more as ‘book as poem’... seeing the book as a poem in itself.

Susan Johanknecht 1, 1.51

It’s almost – not so much the ideas as metaphors, sitting there waiting for... the right time in my life to connect all the different elements together, and they become the metaphor that’s appropriate to go with.

Susan Johanknecht 1, 2.47

This describes a practice that sees the book as the place where there is an opportunity for material to slowly come into the alignments of metaphor. When the right time comes, and Johanknecht has the ‘right

metaphor', the book supports this alignment, because it supports the poetic practice of creating metaphor in this way. We find echoes of Johanknecht in the Keatsian idea of 'negative capability' (Keats, 2002 [1817] p. 41) – holding the mental potential of metaphorical material in reserve until it finds its proper correspondence, or of Eliot's theory of the 'objective correlative'<sup>107</sup>, the object whose mere presentation evokes exact connotations the poet need not name (the pursuit of which leads the poet intuitively towards truths the object can reveal. Johanknecht describes books as a place where these constellations of meaning have room and time to arrange themselves, and insists that she could not work without them:

... I've talked about that in the past sometimes – of fragments, different fragments that become the whole of books – could be visual material, textual material, the structure of the book materials, again, they're very important. They're all of those different elements, different fragments coming together and having to be the book and not existing in any other form.

Susan Johanknecht 1, 5.48

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<sup>107</sup> See e.g. (di Pasquale, 1968) Eliot's term is discussed in the context of Coleridge's (Kant-like) synthesis of a 'framework of objectivity' and poetry. Coleridge's view that reflection must engender belief in an object corresponding to it maps interestingly onto Eliot's idea that there are objective forms which can evoke particular emotions. The question of the origins of Eliot's term supports a small academic industry in itself.

...books are what I do, it's become so integrated with me and my thought and my making and who I am, that I would never make something that's not a book. Even if it was a print on the wall I would see it as a part of the series that was the book.

Susan Johankecht 1, 19.00

In these assertions of *having to be* a book, there is an echo of the book as the 'right place' that we examined through the book as a space<sup>108</sup>. There is the same sense of trust, the same sense of suspended judgement, of the ability of create from a point of safe containment. I have elsewhere alluded to this as 'temporary construction'<sup>109</sup>, and discussed problems with the idea of the artist's book as a 'ghetto'. Here it resurfaces as part of the privileges of the role of poet.

... there's a containedness about the book which again makes it different that material that might be up on the Internet, and... once you choose a metaphor that you're going to be working with and that starts to gather different things around it you start to spend more and more time on it... puzzling it out. The book has a timescale... you know when it's ready to... be put into production and then it has an end, it has a finish, and

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<sup>108</sup> Section 3.1 *The Space of Making*

<sup>109</sup> Section 2.4.5 *Mediating Relations/ Metaphorising Practice*

I think that's what someone like Lyotard in his philosophy might be critical of the book because it's... it has finish, it's not open... that containedness is different from a lot of postmodern thought.

Susan Johanknecht 1, 20.50

Johanknecht raises a point in passing relating to the security of the book and how it helps her work: that its apparent 'containedness' is perhaps problematic to some.

Its containedness is the boundary of plot – the boundary that allows the effects of narrative and poetry to have power, and it is always a temporary construction, always really part of the same big circuit that all of reading belongs to. It is also the boundary of its physical structure.<sup>110</sup> Roles, as we have seen, offer pathways towards possibilities, and the possibility of being a poet working in books offers possibilities to Johanknecht.

The construction of the book allows us to create a *temporary* frame to pursue complex ideas – which we couldn't even attempt without a certain degree of infrastructural assumptions, presuppositions, and even physical structures to aid narrative, reader interaction, etc. It is precisely

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<sup>110</sup> The reader should see the section on containing and containment (3.5) for more on this, but I mention it here because Johanknecht brings it up in the context of seeing the book as poem, and herself as poet.

because I can close the book project that my practice can remain open, and it is this flexibility that allows the materials of poetry to come together.<sup>111</sup>

Contrasting with Johanknecht is the work of Julie Johnstone. Johnstone's work can predominantly be described as minimalist and word-based, favouring brief statements or words in carefully controlled and considered relationship to the page in terms of colour, placement and material.

Whereas Johanknecht definitely brings a sort of mechanism of metaphor and combination of ideas and materials into juxtaposition through the book, Johnstone is involved in the pursuit of language towards a resting place in books and similar objects. This is a more typically poet-like way of working: one that focuses on language itself, using the book as a support rather than an integral, necessary heartland of the practice.

...Primarily I will... start with a phrase or a word that I'm interested in exploring, and at the back of my mind always

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<sup>111</sup> I recognise in this artists' books practice something of what Coleridge describes as 'poetic faith' in his famous comments on the 'willing suspension of disbelief'. Coleridge undertakes in his poetry, "to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith." The artist and the reader, have a similar faith, a similar suspension of judgement in relation to the *promise of reading*. (This might also explain why some people are perturbed by the effrontery of book sculptures and book objects, etc that they feel confutes their faith). (Coleridge, 1907 [1817] pp. 5, Vol. II)

will be the ... potential to use a book or a card to express it in some way... I might think whether there's any potential there to create something to hold the word.... But the first thing I would normally think about is 'could it be on paper'?... I have done things on badges [etc] ... there are different ways...

Julie Johnstone 1, 0.10

When I'm working with my own works... then I'm not sure what I am... [a poet, an artist, an editor?]

I think I normally say that I work with words in a visual way.

Julie Johnstone 1, 34.30

Though one seems more poet-like than the other, both Johanknecht and Johnstone are pursuing the work of poetry in the book: the variation between them echoing the variance of the pursuit of poetry. Perhaps Johnstone's phrase, "something to hold the word" can expand to hold the poetic way of thinking: those relationships of language and of idea and material that aim to explore the human experience. Both respond to the way that the book serves to enhance language and offer it new dimensions of operation through just such formal poetics as I have touched on above.



### 3.8 Making reading

‘Making-reading’<sup>112</sup> is an attempt to describe an activity that lies closely alongside the desires that prompt artists to make books. Making-reading ties together the creativity felt on the part of the artist with the experiences that readers have. Making-reading is not only writing and printing and otherwise making the book, it is making the book *for others*.

Making-reading comes about *through* the book, *through* the mechanics and poetics of the book, but that is not what it is. What it *is*, is an affect towards creativity that pulls together the position of the artist’s role in society with the role we perceive books as having. Descriptions of why artists make books tend to concentrate on the material effects books make available to artists, boosting their creativity in that way, but it generally has not acknowledged the important, indeed core concern that informs artist’s work with books: that books are made *for their readers*. I found this time and again to be at the centre of a process that took artists along sometimes difficult routes to deliver the contact artists keenly desired with their audience. (That said, for every difficulty books throw up, there are compensations). The desire for contact that ‘powers’

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<sup>112</sup> I hope that my reader will accept ‘reading’ here as shorthand for the encounter audiences have with artists’ books. I will approach some of the symbolic (or perhaps only habitual) functions of *literal* reading in a few pages’ time, which I hope will help position the generalised shorthand of ‘reading’ *vis-à-vis* its literal counterpart.

making-reading, produces ways of working and other ramifications that affect everything from artists' books means of production and distribution, to the character of book fairs, to the efforts book artists make towards face to face contact. At heart there is a drive towards contact with readers that will often cause the maker of artists' books to enter into a tension between market and gift economies. Such a tension is found throughout artists' practice<sup>113</sup>, but it is marked by a particular consciousness of producing 'special' circuits of exchange through books, for example, through bookfairs or the one-to-one appointments with library collectors<sup>114</sup>. Our anecdotal experience is that books seldom fiscally recover the resources artists put into them. Making-reading almost always takes the form of a *gift* to some degree. This can be an act charged with emotion:

I feel like they need more ... I don't ever want anyone to feel short changed, so I'll go above and beyond the call of duty, to sell something, or to talk... I'll spend 20 minutes talking to someone who's bought something for £5 ... It's really important to me, ... to have engagement with people ... that have taken the time. I mean, time is so valuable to people, ... I feel like they need something more than a book, they need

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<sup>113</sup> See (Hyde, 2006)

<sup>114</sup> See (Bodman, 2007)

some more words, or they need a conversation, or they need  
... for me to listen to their story, actually... When I've shown at  
*Origin*... I've been given recipes, and poems... really lovely  
exchanges, or stories that I've taken away...

Lucy May Schofield 1: 45.47

Research into *literal* reading implicates the reading of fiction as a way of experiencing the world of others, creating artificial ways of being that allow us to empathise with the events and tribulations of characters<sup>115</sup>. Neuropsychology research indicates that our brains respond to media (including writing) in ways physiologically similar to real-life experiences<sup>116</sup>, allowing us to feel real emotions, real empathy, for events and people who may never have existed. We can certainly learn things from fiction, considering the various themes, problems and subjects that authors bring to their work. It has even been theorised that reading fiction, and the empathetic work it accustoms us to, can help to make us better citizens<sup>117</sup>. Whether this is true or not, we certainly experience fiction as a way to enter into the worlds of others, and many

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<sup>115</sup> Proponents of this view include Martha Nussbaum and Wayne C. Booth. See (Booth, 1988) and (Nussbaum, 1995).

<sup>116</sup> See (Keen, 2006) The section *How is Empathy Studied?* features a useful survey of such research.

<sup>117</sup> See (Nussbaum, 1995), and my section 3.9.1 *The metaphorical imagination and the circuit of reading*. I submit that there is a link between such effects in ordinary reading and in the reading symbolically proffered by artists' books

of us have had experiences that may that have caused us to see the world a little differently afterwards. Our other, non-fiction reading, is again a source of information about the world, and we can use it as a way to understand things we would not otherwise. We could characterise our different readings as ‘experiencing’ fiction and ‘understanding’ non-fiction, though both (indeed, everything in our phenomenological awareness) arguably enter consciousness through a ‘lexicon of metaphor’.<sup>118</sup>

That reading can help us to ‘put in touch’ separate individuals or different sections of society is not a new idea. George Eliot, reviewing an early German sociological study or social criticism, notes in 1856 that;

... The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. ...a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves... Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. (Eliot, 1856)

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<sup>118</sup> See (Mignot, 2004) Mignot’s summary of metaphorisation as the relationship of metaphor and consciousness presents this case. I adopt some of these mechanisms with important reservations, discussed throughout 3.9 *“Two Lives” Being and Metaphor*

My point is that we are accustomed to seeing books as not merely objects, but as windows into a mass of experience and understanding, including social understanding. In fiction in particular, books come to represent contact with characters and with authors: with other *people*, in fact.

The book as a symbol comes to represent not only knowledge, but also contact with others. It represents not just discourse, but empathy. This is reflected in Eliot's comments, which can be read as allowing contact for the artist with the reader or (as she intended) for the reader with the characters: the book is a circuit that channels contact in both directions.

None of this is universal or literal, but it is certainly true that books come to mean something more than what they objectively are, and in my interviews I was frequently to encounter artists who felt powerfully that their books gave their readers contact with the artist and vice versa.

I have elsewhere mentioned the idea of 'the promise of reading', which posits that the object presented as a book always promises reading, whether it *can* be read or not. Our encounter with it as readers is predicated on its fulfilling or denying the reading it promises<sup>119</sup>. This is

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<sup>119</sup> This is partly why *Blood on Paper* (see 2.1.2) turned out to be in some ways a frustrating exhibition – not really because of the choice of items, but because of the reading we were so clearly *not* getting to do, a concern that artists address in their wishes to create reading environments as discussed in section 3.6

always the case, and it is one direction we can come from to try to say what it means to make a book. (We cannot really do so by talking about materials). To make a book is to make something that promises reading, even if I, the artist, mean to cheat the reader of that promise to make some other point.

In making artworks that appeal to this promise of reading, artists are working with the symbolic book. (Invoking the possibility of 'book' promises the reading experience even when the artist subverts it). But the book symbolises more than this sole aspect of reading. As I said above, it represents not just discourse, but also empathy. When artists work with the book, I believe they are also working with or towards this promise of empathy, and that this is the real meaning of making-reading.<sup>120</sup> It is a reaching out towards the other through the means, but also through the *meaning* of the book. Whatever neuropsychology research eventually has to say about the science of reading and its relationship to the social, there really *is* a shared world of reading that all books are symbolically part of. Participating in or otherwise relating to this is an important feature in artists' work with books. The research I conducted among book artists illuminated some of the concerns they felt about reaching into this shared world and making-reading for their audience. However,

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<sup>120</sup> Of course, one of the ways of 'working with' is to be critical of our uncritical acceptance of the promise of reading. One reaction is to work with a critical suspicion towards this.

it is not unlikely that one could find a book artist professing not to care what their readers made of the books they produced. To present one's work as a book, though, is to place it within the purview of this shared world, so the work's reception would always be affected by its status relative to the symbolic book.

For myself, I would take some convincing that a book artist who specifically rejected the relationship to the audience was not maintaining a reactionary position or clothing the relationship in some other terms. Books presuppose readers, and that is a big part of why they get made. (See also Fig. 51)



Figure 51: The people in the image above are taking part in a gathering initiated by the text of Jonathan Monk's Meeting #13, which reads "A la Tour Eiffel, le 13 Octobre 2008 a midi". The instruction doesn't specifically exhort the reader to be there, nor does Monk state that he will be present. The event is up to the readers to produce. The above picture records the shared world of their reading, made real

The contact that books give us (as readers) with others has been created for us by artists, authors, poets, etc, who *wanted* that contact. That was their desire. Compare these words of Walt Whitman's with the excerpt from my interview with Tate Shaw that follows it;

This [the poem] is the touch of my lips to yours... this is the murmur of yearning. (Whitman, 1986 [1855] p. 41)

Whitman offers *himself* as part of what he offers the reader. In another place he asserts;

Camerado, this is no book,  
Who touches this touches a man  
(Whitman, 2008 [1892])

The connection is intimate and clearly tactile, but – however passionately - offered without insistence. The activity is always under the reader's control. *Intimate and tactile* are qualities often heard associated with books. Perhaps it is because they are the qualities that dispose the book towards our connection with one another through them that this is so.



Here is Tate Shaw on his book *Ordinary Curtains*, (2006), (Fig. 52).



Figure 52: Tate Shaw, *Ordinary Curtains*, (2006). (Page spread and detail at right). Here the artist makes literal the expression of contact by including images of fingerprints on the page.

...so there was definitely this kind of “post-read” (that’s kind of a clunky term)... something that I’d made... editing down in a certain way to present it to the reader... I would imagine that the reader was...[I was] reaching out to touch the reader through the book. Literal fingerprints....when I first started in wanting ...to touch, out to them, it’s palpable through the pages. If you’ve got *Ordinary Curtains* there in front of you, there’s this one section of greasy fingerprints... on the page... quite literally attempting to say ‘you and I are touching in this... same way’

Tate Shaw 1, 8.21

A somewhat different example is offered by Lucy May Schofield. Offering this level of contact and commitment to the reader can be exhausting (Figs 53-54):

I think the more I've made, the more hopeful I've been, of letting them have their own existence. I think in the beginning they were really so personal... and I didn't edit much at all so everything was really raw and I used to describe being at bookfairs as being... you're just exhausted afterwards because it had been like you'd exhibited your heart on a table...

I've tried to ... have less ownership of them when they go out there... when people read them, they instantly have... their own perceptions, they have new characters and... then they own it, and it's gone from me.

Lucy May Schofield 1 19.00



Figures 53-54: Lucy May Schofield's *Forty Two*, (2007) is described on her website ([www.lucymayschofield.co.uk](http://www.lucymayschofield.co.uk)) as: "A picture and some words for each of the 42 days and nights spent observing the seasonal change, capturing the contemplation of hibernation in the Scottish Borders. A book of metamorphosis and desire"  
This intimate diary offers a level of contact with her audience that is affecting and intense.

Here are John Bently, and Carolyn Trant on their respective readers:

I think in the things that I make there always is [the reading that books imply]... it's important that you do have a sense of an audience... because otherwise, it wouldn't matter.

John Bently 2, 26.00

And:

Surely it's more important to have a real sense of connection with very few people who really.. if you're doing this sort of work it's got to be very personal really

Carolyn Trant 5, 5.40

The sense of an offering to the reader is important, carrying with it a sense of connection through the book. It can often be characterised as being to a certain extent a gift of the artist's time and resources and feeling. One of the characteristics that people mention in relation to books is that the smaller world of books means that there is often an opportunity to share moments of exchange with the audience. This sense of personal exchange has been of importance to Lucy May Schofield.

(See also Fig. 55):

LMS- That exchange – I think it's just about impact... it's such a basic requirement that I have that it just needs to have had...

you want to know in some way that what you've done might have had an impact on someone, you know, in relationships that you build and friendships that you have... It's that validation that you're here for a reason... you've done something good for somebody, so I think that's what the books try to do...

I don't think they're really alive without an audience... I don't think they exist unless [they have one].

Lucy May Schofield 1, 17.52

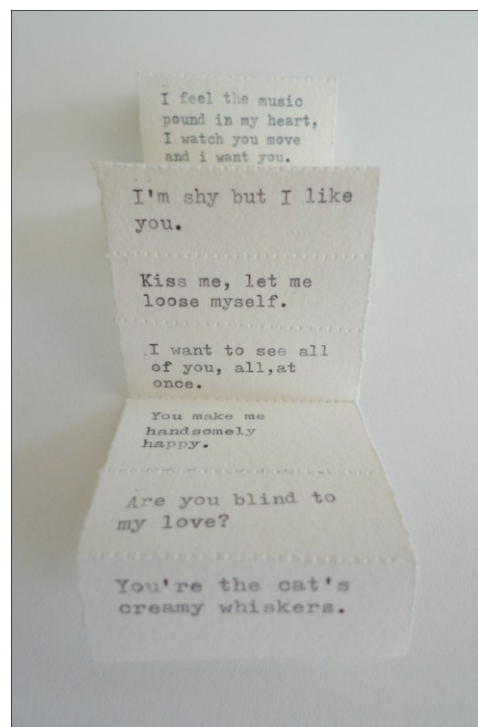


Figure 55: Schofield's perforated love notes were originally created "from a frustration of being too shy to articulate how I felt, I began writing my feelings down and using this method as my communication to the world". (Schofield, 2007). Now such notes are among the items Schofield offers her audience as something they can use and take part in themselves.

Making-reading, as well as being about offering something to the reader, involves the artist in an attempt to model the reader's reactions, to anticipate their reading and to make for them a process through the book. This of course employs the methods and techniques of narrative, etc. (See sections 2.4.2 and 3.7). In the current section, however, it is the empathetic link with the imagined reader that is important. I found that artists would sometimes have recourse to the metaphor of a 'puzzle' or 'complexity' to describe the sense in which they were preparing the ground for the other. (And in which they are perhaps preparing a certain tension or foregrounding of the task of reading). Of course, to a certain extent we can take "puzzle" literally, but the subtle interleaving of image and storyline in for instance, Tate Shaw's *Ordinary Curtains*, (2006), though puzzling, is not literally a puzzle.

I just love the work of making... the code... I've got all these bits and... there's such a love for figuring out how they're all going to work together... the idea that you can put them all [in] place and you're creating this complex, complete description of something... it almost comes across, I think, as parts that... then have to be put together...

Tate Shaw 1, 38.07

Shaw here is clearly imagining the work the other has to do. In fact, he offers this work as *part of the value* of his book:

...many people've said to me 'I just don't understand what's happening, but I'm trying to'...and I think that's... the goal. [There is] this constant awareness of that... of that sort of consciousness... I go back to... movement of books, and turning pages, and what it means to... turn pages and actually be an active participant in a work...

Tate Shaw 1, 39.16

The active participation Shaw wants to offer is something that advocates of reading hold up as one of reading's hallmarks. The effort required to 'make reading happen' means it is seldom to be viewed as a passive experience. (A work like *Ordinary Curtains*, (2006), requires more than the usual readerly impetus in this regard.) Although the procedure of a linear narrative seems to isolate a single reading pathway through the narrative, reader's experience is always to be seen as something instigated by the reader, and to a certain degree *created* by the reader as they bring the resources of their own 'lexicon of metaphor'<sup>121</sup> to bear on the development and empathetic implementation of the story. I have noted above that books as a symbol

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<sup>121</sup> See footnote 118 (Jaynes is the original source, but I will introduce his usage at a later stage.)

always promise this empathy, this work, this contact, even when they do not actually contain it. In Shaw's case, they do. (We may also view as 'valuable distancing' what we might otherwise see as 'difficulty understanding')<sup>122</sup>

David Faithfull noted of his readers:

...there's a narrative which has a predetermined sequence that you are expecting the viewer to move through... but beyond that, they've got a tempo of their own. They can move backwards, forwards...

David Faithfull 1, 50.01

Readers make their own way through the sequence and can work out their own means of interpretation. Faithfull's work frequently employs a landscape motif, and though his books take on a series of 'views' through this imagined space, the reader is expected to construct the space more completely. Here Faithfull sets out his 'palindromic' method:

The idea of this palindrome in the landscape was to get this opposing views on the landscape ... and you get a much more kind of objective overview of it.

David Faithfull 1, 1.01.00

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<sup>122</sup> See 3.9.3 *Triple Mimesis and Making Strange*



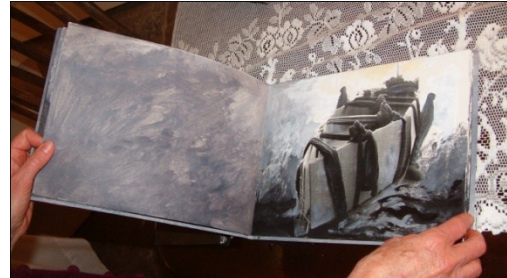
This 'objective overview' is never shown: it must be created by the reader.

For the book artist, constructing an experience for the reader, which is one that the reader actively constructs, and which brings the reader by stages, closer to the goal of contact, is sometimes the goal. The work the reader has to do towards this echoes the work the artist put in to making it: there is a kind of exchange of labour. Here Carolyn Trant notes the work she has prepared for viewers of her 'room-sized-book' /installation *The Falcon Bride*, (2007), (Figs. 56-59)

...that sense of revelation which in a way you stage-manage...  
actually managing time as well as space in which you're  
actually controlling to a certain extent – you can't  
absolutely... I'm sitting here ...observing the way people look,  
where they go first, how they move around the room, what  
their eye's drawn to, how long they spend, and also the idea  
of not explaining much at the beginning, even when people  
ask me. Seeing how they can actually slow down. Having to  
use more of themselves to fathom out what's going on and  
then they always thank me afterwards, saying, "I'm glad you  
didn't tell me in the beginning, because now I'm beginning to  
feel it", and then they're talking about feeling it, rather than

knowing it, so it's this whole thing that you get with the book...

Carolyn Trant 1, 6.20



Figures 56, 57, 58, 59: These views of Carolyn Trant's *The Falcon Bride* (2007) as installed at the Star Gallery in Lewes in September 2007 show how the concept of the room-sized-book expanded to include sculptural objects, the dispersal of pages across the available space, and a sensitivity to the environment the material was shown in.

For Trant, the work that she did was echoed back to her by her readers:

AE- Do readers of your work participate through rhythm?

C Tr- In a way that's linking them into my world... they're almost imitating me... I think that's why they say at the end of [*The Falcon Bride*] that they do understand what I mean,

whereas they didn't at the beginning. It's almost as if having  
'danced the dance' that they understand more what it's about.

Carolyn Trant 1, 39.00

We are reminded here of the importance of movement and, specifically, of dance, as a metaphor in Helen Douglas' practice (see footnote 91). The metaphorical space in which this movement-towards-creation takes place, for both artist and reader, is the book.

The tension between public and private in this space is also of interest. The 'commonwealth of reading', is something which is in its full sense a consensual property, a 'public field' each instance of which is always created privately, by the reader. This 'leveraging' of a private experience towards public meaning is one of the central concerns of publishing- or at any rate of authorship. This public/private detail of the more general urge towards making contact that I have been writing about, is taken up by Lucy May Schofield, who suggests a reason why books, rather than paintings or some other exhibited form, might represent an expressive mode for artists who want to work on this boundary of public and private:

AE- I think we're quite interested in... games ... I think we like  
to set up conventions so that we can present little worlds...

LMS- It is absolutely that, yeah. I think it's about control of that as well, you know. I find it... interesting that the sort of people that make artists' books... it's a complete generalisation, but they are often softly-spoken, quiet, contained people... It's kind of a ... particular type of artist I think that... make books, and I really enjoy that kind of world where you're communicating... in quite a secret way... It's a whispering, isn't it? It's not kind of a loudspeaker...

Lucy May Schofield 1, 23.30

The exposure that Schofield risks in her work poises private reflection on the edge of public knowledge. Her readers are given the gift of this contact, along with the material transaction (often approaching gift status) of the book. The gift nature of the exposure is emphasised by Schofield's placing the responsibility for its onward transmission completely (and literally) in the hands of her reader.

...I think that's what appeals to me so much... You can really command someone's attention for a limited time and speak to them one to one. It's so cathartic to do, especially... with the themes that I sort of explore... it's like someone telling you a secret I suppose, and you're responsible for passing that on or keeping it to yourself.

Lucy May Schofield 1, 25.12

### 3.9 “Two Lives” (being and metaphor)

#### 3.9.1 *The metaphorical imagination and the circuit of reading*

Martha Nussbaum’s *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (1995), is a study of ways in which ‘the literary imagination is part of public rationality’. As such, she examines how the empathy we come to feel in novels can be of help to us when we try to understand the predicaments of others in real life.

When Nussbaum presents her argument that fiction can be an important aid in preparing us to deal justly with others, she asks us to *transfer* experience in the use of empathy from the novel to real life. The practice that we get in “seeing one thing *as* another and seeing one thing *in* another” in the novel, she argues, is transferrable to real life. This is the metaphorical imagination, at work in us as we read, and as we try to imagine the world of others. When we imagine one thing as another, or invest the collection of marks that literally constitute a fictional character, with some of the feelings and challenges of a human being, we undertake a task that, Nussbaum argues, offers excellent opportunity for imagining oneself as another. It is an excellent grounding in empathy. Note, here, that we are asked to transfer the operation of the metaphorical imagination between the realms of fiction and life, but that the insight we receive (as well as the skills in imagining that we refine

through practice), is nevertheless seen to be *really* of value. When we “approach reason by way of fancy” as Dickens puts it, *truth* benefits.<sup>123</sup>

Nussbaum’s argument for the ethical effects of fiction engendering a kind of ethical affect in its readers is of interest to us in our view of artists’ books, because Nussbaum describes how books offer a uniquely enabled site for the metaphorical imagination (because of the extended capability and constructive containment of the plot of the book). The effect Nussbaum describes gives us a background in why books might come to be *associated with* empathy, because it describes how we are accustomed to taking what we have imaginatively learned from books and applying it to our most delicate dealings with others, since in fiction we encounter others all the time. And Nussbaum frames this in an ethical field: if we can imagine the challenges of others we should be able to use this to create a fairer world. Such is an aspiration of the shared world of reading.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> In Section 3.9.3, I will note another view of this transference of imagination that posits the gap between narrative and reality as a benefit rather than a hurdle.

<sup>124</sup> Though, as Richard Kearney, after Ricoeur, points out, there is a “need for a hermeneutics of critical suspicion” to accompany our trust in the power of narrative, since it is “not always on the side of the angels”. (Kearney, 2002 p. 83) Narrative can make us see others and open up our experience of society, but it can also create distortion and trade on our fears. Although I share a more optimistic view of story’s empowerment of human empathy, we should never forget that story can also be used to *lie* about human nature. However, the supposed value of ‘literary’ empathy is scrutinised in depth in (Keen, 2007) and a critique of critical suspicion is offered by (Miall, 2000)

Artists' books use the book symbolically, regardless of its appearance, in order to play with what I have called<sup>125</sup> the promise of reading, and to give the artist access to the roles books make possible, and to give both artist and reader access to the shared world of reading. These are all aspects of the metaphorical imagination – that imagination which sees one thing in another, one thing as another, including the self.

The metaphorical imagination allows us to see ourselves as other *things*, enabling an operational objectification of the self<sup>126</sup> that allows us to imagine ourselves as part of a social field. In an echo of the distance between story and reality, it provides us with the distance – the 'gap' – to see ourselves in different roles. (See Fig. 60 for an example of personae being clearly combined in a single book).



Figure 60: Bently's *Three Songs and a Camper Van: Van Zine* (2006) represents one of many crossovers between Bently's musical and visual practices. The book, in the form of a kind of fanzine, also includes a CD of his music.

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<sup>125</sup> See Section 2.4.4

<sup>126</sup> I.e. the Meadian "me", of which more in Section 3.9.2

The metaphorical imagination allows us to make-reading,<sup>127</sup> because it allows us to imagine the other for whom it is intended. And the metaphorical imagination is responsible in large part for the existence of the shared world of reading.

Although we cannot always say that artists' books share *any* of the same features as fiction, e.g. The presence of character, narrative voice, etc. Artists' books are nevertheless *always books*, not in some materially-definable sense, but in the senses I have offered: they promise (and may subsequently deny) reading, including reading in the sense of viewing; they are objects made for those who read, who view them. This is simply to state the logical correlation of their identity as books. But it is meaningful to state this, because their claim to be books must always necessarily claim also the symbolic connotation of books, and cardinal amongst those connotations is empathy. Because artists' books identify themselves as books, they also identify themselves with the metaphorical imagination, invoking in The Book what is still probably its most important symbol: this imagination, the meaning and the promise of it, infuses artists' books conception, creation and consumption:

If books create a 'circuit' of reading (as Darnton notes, and I repeat in 2.1.2.2), it is the metaphorical imagination that both creates the

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<sup>127</sup> See Section 3.8 *Making Reading*



‘electrical potential’ of yearning for contact with others, and opens up the ‘switches’ that allow the current of empathy to pass through.

Empathy is both the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ of this circuit:

We create books for others, whom we are able to picture as people like ourselves, because of the metaphorical imagination.

We adopt various roles within books, because they can materially and poetically contain that activity – but we do it also to enlarge our sense of being *more than one thing, more than one self*. This is a sense of creative freedom that is, again, assisted and made possible by the metaphorical imagination.<sup>128</sup>

We make-reading for others because we see them as critical to the value of the book, indeed, they are often its only real purpose. When this feeling of contact with others is strong, it comes about through the metaphorical imagination that allows “touching the page” to mean “touching the other”. Opening up to this imagined other, we make gifts of ourselves through books. When we publish, we publish out of this desire, surmounting all sorts of negatives to do so, delighting in all the ways that print or digital technology give us *to reach others*. When our books are read, readers have come upon an object that wears the definition of ‘book’. They arrive primed for reading. We have thought of

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<sup>128</sup> See also the section 3.9.2 *I and Me*

this and we mean to encourage and serve it, perhaps in novel and unexpected ways; *or* we mean to offer difficulties in its path designed to make our readers think about what they're doing. (To elicit a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' towards the power of the book, perhaps). In both cases, we work with the *expected* reading, and the reader's metaphorical imagination arrives at the outset primed by the symbol of the book.

There *may* be visual or textual metaphor in the book's content, and this, of course is part of the reader's experience, but such content is not necessary in order to invoke the sensitivity of the metaphorical imagination, which has already been awoken by the symbol of the book.<sup>129</sup>

Thus (and otherwise), the metaphorical imagination pervades the world of the book.

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<sup>129</sup> Analogously, even if *Hard Times* did not offer a subtext about the metaphorical imagination, it would still call on us to use it to understand the book.

the *idea* the POET the craft the *imagination*  
the WORDS the EDITOR the publisher the TYPESETTER the  
letters the *typeface* the margins the  
s p a c i n g the *p o e m*  
the page the Design the PAPER the *leaves*  
the l a y o u t the proofreader the *endpapers*  
the COVER the printer the BOOK the *bookseller*  
the LIBRARY the *READER* the *idea*

Figure 61: Postcard flyer for *By Leaves We Live*, Scottish National Poetry Library, 2008

The above postcard for an artist's book fair at the National Poetry Library of Scotland (Fig. 61) offers a depiction of the circuit of reading: this also illuminates the scope of the metaphorical imagination in this setting.

We can look at the scale of this circuit and feel a little complacency about its wide spread, its egalitarian embrace of so many participants, and its implied conversation in the ongoing circuit of ideas. But it also describes a certain in-group (albeit a very large one), and gives me a way to introduce a note from Suzanne Keen, whose *Empathy and the Novel* (Keen, 2007) surveys the enthusiasm of those who seek the link between

literature and empathy in a critical light. Keen does not dispute that there are powerful stories to be told about the effects of literature on our minds, individually and socially, but she would have us be more careful about the claims we make in this field:

Surveying the existing research on the consequences of reading, I find the case for altruism stemming from novel reading inconclusive at best ... There is no question, however, that readers feel empathy with, (and sympathy for) fictional characters and other aspects of fictional worlds.

(Keen, 2007 p. vii)

There is no *inevitability* in the links we make between literature and the development of altruism, and it is more likely that such effects – though elicited *through* literature, through books – are nevertheless products of a wider circumstance.

If empathetic reading experiences start a chain reaction leading to mature sympathy and altruistic behaviour, as many believe, then discovering the narrative techniques involved matters... If novels do extend readers' sense of shared humanity beyond the predictable limitations, then the narrative techniques involved in such an accomplishment should be especially prized.

(Keen, 2007 p. x)

Techniques are of consequence, but they are not the whole story, as Keen's book shows. In this inclusion of more-to-it, were we are once again looking at a widening of theory from a concern with formal elements ('which techniques create empathy?') towards the extrinsic situation that it is part of ('What is it like to feel empathy? Where, when, does it happen? To whom?').

That Keen is correct in this does not mean that the *belief* in the power of books we have seen simply goes away. Authors and readers believe that books make contact, and sometimes have some sort of effect on us. The operation that the book carries out in this regard is not a formal operation, but a metaphorical one. "The book is a means of eliciting empathy" is a metaphor that the book is part of, but it is not the whole story. The *social construction of the book*<sup>130</sup> goes beyond what the book formally is, to what it means, because the significance of form is embedded completely in the social.

### 3.9.2 "I and Me"

Underlying and informing our ability to get a purchase on other's realities through our imagination is our ability to project some part of

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<sup>130</sup> See John R. Searle on social constructions: (Searle, 1995). I would associate the formation of such constructions partly with the coduction advanced by Booth as explicatory of the formation of social values from media. (Booth, 1988 p. 76)

ourselves as the other. We are, in a sense, positing ourselves as the tenor term of a metaphor whose vehicle is the other<sup>131</sup>.

Such a metaphorical relation also allows us to see ourselves in different roles. In the section above, I touched on the “Meadian me” that enabled this kind of metaphorising of the self- an ability to see oneself as *another self*. I will outline this in further detail below. However, I must make a small detour to deal with my choice to use Mead’s ideas as a reference point

Much of what I have explored as ‘the shared world of reading’ and ‘the symbolic book’<sup>132</sup> comes out of a weakly social constructionist viewpoint, in that my research has sought to locate these appeals to a shared reality of reading and the book as social constructions – realities which exist because we consensually agree that they do. (It is a ‘weakly’ constructionist viewpoint because I do not intend to pursue the “idea of”

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<sup>131</sup> The metaphor would read “I am the other”

<sup>132</sup> Susan Johanknecht’s essay *The Symbolic Book: A Travelogue* (2003) assays the seemingly inexhaustible adaptability of the book-as-symbol. What the Book *means* seems to transcend its familiar media, even as the codex appears everywhere as the Book’s shorthand for itself. Johanknecht wonders, “as the cultural arena of knowledge shifts to ongoing information sited on the computer, whether a new visual symbol will be needed for what are now called ‘domains of content’? The examples I found suggest not... the symbol of the book [can] incorporate loss, nostalgia, and change as eloquently in the twenty-first century as it did in the sixteenth.” As I read today in 2010 of a computer reviewer’s experience that “the fact that you’re using an iPad falls away”, one sees technology that begins to approach the book in transparency, but I do not see it abandoning the symbolic book, which seems as strong as ever.

reality itself as a social construction<sup>133</sup>, which I think tends to narrow our conception of such constructions to the kind of ‘prison house of language’ structuralism that I believe metaphor helps us to point ‘outside of ’ towards reality.) These sit alongside a concern with the ‘ethical’ destination of making-reading: i.e. other, ontologically *real* people. Whilst my pursuit of metaphor as a kind of operative structure will often elide literal and figurative truths as metaphor combines material across different realms of experience, there is no question of extending this to the structuralist extreme and making of reality a “self regarding play of signifiers”.<sup>134</sup> My use of Meadian terms is intended as part of a hermeneutics of metaphor that includes such structures as intermediary mechanisms of a more complex whole. What of Mead’s pragmatism? Doesn’t it, too, elide categories like ‘literal’ and ‘figurative’, if the truth that emerges is satisfactory? It does: but it would include the categories of reality/solipsism as fair game. Like Mead, I would view the metaphorisation of self as part of a kind of ‘game’ of social signification,

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<sup>133</sup> My position follows Searle: “It seems that there are no institutional facts without brute [ontological] facts” (Searle, 1995 p. 34) and: “All institutional facts are... ontologically subjective, even though in general they are epistemologically objective...” (Searle, 1995 p. 63) Although much of culture is constructed, it is at bottom based on some real *thing*, be it electrons or land. Although we could try to interrogate reality itself as a construction, we are unlikely to get to its ontological basis, instead encountering its epistemological faces: i.e. the *social* reality Searle expounds.

<sup>134</sup> (Kearney, 2002 p. 133). I will refer in section 3.9.3 to Ricoeur’s theory of the ‘circle of triple mimesis’ to establish a position with regards to metaphorisation’s relationship to reality.

and one that creatively establishes certain realities as social constructions; but I would see these in rooted in an ultimately physical reality where there is an imperative to pursue ethical absolutes, rather than pragmatic solutions alone.

What does Mead mean by 'the I and the Me', (see (Mead, 1934)) and what is its significance to artists' books? Mead views mind as emergent from the social. That is to say, not located in a transcendent realm, nor based solely in the neurological apparatus from which it arises, but emerging through interaction with the social – thus through language of all sorts. Mead discusses the "I" as the interior sense of self as a separate identity, which arises out of the "me", which is situated in and interacts with the social. The 'I' is always 'set up' by the 'me', which is initially anterior to any sense of self, providing it with its location relative to the field of social signifiers. The 'I' can of course reflect on the 'me' as an object, but is always prefigured (to employ a term, typical of (Ricoeur, 1984 [1983])) by the identity procured for it by the 'me'. For Mead, the continuous reflection between the I and the Me is constituent of mind. Though predicated in the situation of the Me, the I is not an automaton, but is involved in an ongoing creative reflexivity between subjective and objective selves.



I identify this reflexivity as a precursor to the work of the metaphorical imagination, as evidenced in artists' discussions of their identity as 'two lives' and in their relationship to roles. Further, I will argue that it is the *strangeness* of metaphor that creates the distancing necessary to objectify the self (to influence the 'me' towards new roles), or to 'self' the other (to create work with a sense of the other, to 'make-reading', for example).<sup>135</sup> I will return to this distancing, this metaphorical gap, in locating this work relative to the real world in my discussion of Ricoeur's circle of triple mimesis. Returning to Mead for the moment though, let us pick out the analogy/identity of the metaphoric imagination and the play of I/Me.

For Mead, the relationship between the I and the Me operates in a way we might see as cyclical or hermeneutic: the Me locates the self in a shared reality (i.e. including, even arising out of others and our experience relative to them). The I reflects this, constituting a sense of interior, personal selfhood, and is the sense of self that initiates our efforts towards action in the world, however humble these may be. But the sense of the I that reflects on what the Me is and has done, can arise only out of the Me. As Mead puts it,

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<sup>135</sup> Interestingly, similar effects are identified by Keen as disposing readers towards emotional response: "...paratexts cuing readers to understand a work as fictional unleash their emotional responsiveness, in spite of fiction's historical mimicry of non-fictional, testimonial forms." (Keen, 2006 p. 220)

One attains self-consciousness only as he takes, or finds himself stimulated to take, the attitude of the other... When a self does appear it always involves an experience of the other; there could not be an experience of self simply by itself... when taking the attitude of the other becomes an essential part in his behaviour – then the individual appears in his own experience as a self; and until this happens he does not appear as a self.

(Mead, 1934 pp. 194-195)

The stream of reflection between the social, exterior *Me* and the interior *I*, is constitutive of mind. This view of mind, as based on the *interplay* of states of being symbolically constituted as opposite might inspire us towards a deconstructed view of mind that queries these “opposites”, as Paul De Man does in his deconstruction of metaphor.<sup>136</sup>

The relationships taken up in artistic practice, between different senses of the self may be seen to parallel these Meadian terms as follows:

My existing identity as an artist has been prefigured by my relations with others, figured as the various fields of artistic endeavour with which I identify, (for good or ill). My agency as an artist, (the ‘I’ of our analogy) arises, to paraphrase Mead, only as one takes, or finds oneself stimulated to take, the attitude of the other. I define myself over against others. This

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<sup>136</sup> (De Man, 1973) See below.

process is one by which I forge new identities, new roles for myself as or in other things. Seeing one thing *as* another, seeing one thing *in* another, is the work of the metaphorical imagination, and this objectification of myself achieves a reflective distance that is one of the features of the metaphorical imagination. When I repeat this process, taking what we might style the hermeneutic of practice towards a role-making turn, I increase the strangeness of the 'I' so constituted. Taking on a new, an 'other' role, multiplies the self and increases my distance from this objectified being. I have a new kind of freedom, made possible by the ease with which I can enter into myself as other. When an artist tells me that they see their practice as enfolding 'two lives', these lives are increasing the perspectives from which the artist can perceive their work.

One further detour I must make in my use of metaphor is to address Paul De Man's deconstruction of the primacy of metaphor in the coupling of metaphor and metonymy in fiction. Where we prize the subject who can activate the meaning of metaphor, we tend not to value the grammatically-composed and available (i.e. formally-extant without an interpreting subject) metonym. De Man shows how this polarity creates a false difference between the two, and offers practical demonstrations of metonym and metaphor working together to produce the text.

De Man's deconstruction of the primacy of metaphor as valorised by the sufficient, interpretant subject, points out that the interpretation of metaphor always takes place in grammatical ground. Thus form and interpretation, intrinsic and extrinsic criticism, though traditionally polarised, are shown to be part of the same dynamic of reading. I don't dispute this, but a hermeneutics of the creativity of artists' books needs, at the moment at least, to enunciate the metaphorical component of reading and making-reading, rather than its more familiar formal, grammatical component. To view it another way, Ricoeur's *circle of triple mimesis* (itself a metaphorising process) locates reader, text and refigured reader in a circle or circuit that (characteristically of a hermeneutic conception) repeats itself. The metaphorical component of reading is thus always already emplotted – always already part of a wider syntagmic grammar than that of the written word alone; one capable of including the formal, the grammatical, the 'merely adjacent'. This is the syntax of time itself: I have been, I am, I will become. De Man's deconstruction destabilises the given values of this hermeneutics. The 'wonder' of interpretation, versus the 'mere adjacency' of metonymy, of grammar, is seen to be based on a false difference, and De Man upsets this. He himself does not claim to do more: "I don't expect to dislodge this age-old model" (De Man, 1973 p. 28).

My research has in its turn tended to look more closely at the work of metaphor that De Man himself characterises, quoting Proust: “the metaphor is linked to its proper meaning by, says Proust ‘the necessary link that leads to perfect synthesis’” (De Man, 1973 p. 31). Such a link is contrived and achieved by the reader, through metaphor, and it is the same metaphorical imagination that we have seen at work in the production of empathy. Perhaps we valorise the subject who is sufficient to parse metaphor, because they are the same subject who is sufficient to feel empathy, rather than following the orders of grammar. One does not dispute that this valorisation is the case,(or always deserved) rather that it may sometimes be the right thing to do.

Ricoeur offers us “two selves”, too. *Idem* and *ipse* describe two aspects of self, meaning, respectively, my unchanging self, and my identity as self-same. (Ricoeur, 1994 [1990]) For Ricoeur, *idem* lets us see a pile of photographs taken of us over the course of years as *idem* – all of *me*, of me all the way through. *Ipse* lets me see that self as mutable. And in fact, for Ricoeur, the mutable self that is nevertheless ‘still me’ is more to the fore when we consider ourselves through the emplotted processes of our life story. We observe ourselves *changing*, mostly, since what we tell the story for is to survey and enact change: but we change someone who stays the same person. There is always some basis for us

to view the *ipse* in terms of the *idem*. These two selves are not identical with Mead's I and Me. However the mode of transference between them *is* the same. Ricoeur might have been narrating the dialogue between "Me" and "I" in describing the hermeneutics of emplotment: it captures the same prefiguration, configuration and refiguration that our social milieu, reflection and action can be taken for. It issues the same ethical challenge: we are part of a real world in which we may act. And they both derive their energy from the ways in which we see ourselves in others, ourselves in other selves, our future in our past, and create action out of empathy, with ourselves and with others, which is to say: from the metaphorical imagination.

### *3.9.3 Triple Mimesis and Making Strange.*

Ricoeur sees the narrative process as one of 'prefiguration', 'configuration' and 'refiguration'. (Ricoeur, 1984 [1983]) Ricoeur discusses these in terms of plotted narrative, but I will transpose them here to 'the story of practice' so that their applicability to our situation is clearer.

In Ricoeur's understanding of prefiguration (Mimesis 1), mimesis has to match up to our sense of the possible. It is the necessary situation of what we find comprehensible, made possible by who we already are.

We will be able to parse the narrative, or in our example, the unfolding of the work, based on our experience and skills.<sup>137</sup>

It opens up the first of several gaps that allow a certain flexibility to be part of this play: we are able to work with the material, but we never fully comprehend it: we are always working with a lexicon of previous encounters. Our experiences of reality are not composed of the wholecloth of phenomenological experience, but are rather composed themselves of previously-coined metaphor. As Jaynes puts it

Subjective conscious mind is an analogue of what is called the real world. It is built up with a vocabulary or lexical field whose terms are all metaphors or analogues of behaviour in the physical world. Its reality is of the same order as mathematics. It allows us to shortcut behavioural processes and arrive at more adequate decisions. Like mathematics, it is an operator rather than a thing or repository. And it is intimately bound up with volition and decision.

(Jaynes, 1982 [1976] p. 55)<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> ("The composition of the plot is grounded in a preunderstanding of the world in action, its meaningful structures, [etc]" according to Ricoeur. (1984 [1983] p. 54)

<sup>138</sup> Though useful, this points towards a usage of 'metaphorisation' from constructionist theory, denoting just such a relationship of consciousness and reality, mediated through metaphor. This usage does not engage with metaphor's poetic redescription of reality, the way it (as living metaphor) continually points towards a reengagement with the real. (Though perhaps it does not preclude it as one of its possible "operations") I intend, with Ricoeur, that metaphor be viewed as a sensitizing estrangement rather than a structuralist net. Metaphor is more than a vocabulary.

This lexical field is the prefigured understanding we bring to our practice. Whilst certain of our abilities to deal with language are innate, they only help us to create operators that work on the mediated world, they are not a prefiguration of the world itself- though, importantly, they *are* capable of reacting to it.

Configuration (Mimesis 2) is for Ricoeur the stage of the plot itself. It opens up the space of 'as if', allowing the transformation of the text/materials through metaphor at the rhetorical and semantic levels (i.e. in words and statements). We can see this in 'the story of practice' as well, through the adoption of differing voices and roles to achieve new points of view in relation to the material or situation<sup>139</sup>. It is also the stage at which making-reading takes place, the stage where we can work 'as if' we were making *for* someone, because the space of the plot here extends beyond the scope of a single book, towards the shared, socially-constructed world of reading. The 'seeing in' 'seeing as' work of metaphor is present not only at the level of the individual book, but works across this construction through the work's designation as book.

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<sup>139</sup> Nola Farman's treatment of *The Humours of the Artists' [sic] Book* (2007) relates artists' books' resources such as wit and melancholy as part of an overview of artists' books in terms of the Galenic humours. Artists find ways of assembling material in new ways that set up an detournement that the viewer must work to understand or 'rebalance' (as if of humours). Humour is analysed as a situation of tension whose resolution creates new meanings. This is similar to the work undertaken in metaphor and emplotment. Such detournement would also appear to be a way of foregrounding content, with effects on readers' involvement and perhaps empathetic affect.(See Miall, 1979)



The book artist, in making-reading, tunnels into the experience of the imagined reader; imagining their experience in a way analogous to the other roles and ways of being that the emplotment of books allows. What is happening for the reader at this stage? What is the artist making for the reader? They are making *work*:

I have written in Section 3.7.3 about the poetic form of the visual chiasma – a form of visual metaphor, and its prevalence in artists' books. It is a way of forcing the reader to do work across several 'realms' of communication: visual, textile, tactile, across the span of the book as a statement, etc. The work the artist prepares in this way is important, because it is its difficulty that makes it valuable:

Metaphor creates the possibility of new meaning by posing an enigma between its terms. The metaphor is 'that part of language which invites us to do hermeneutics'. (Simms, 2003 p. 73) Which is to say, its value lies in the fact that we have to work it out for ourselves, and its meaning comes out of this work and what we make of it, regardless of the author's explicit intention. Thus it introduces another gap: what we get out of it 'belongs to us'. Miall also believes that the work of metaphor is implicated in slowing down and foregrounding reading, encouraging empathetic response. (Miall 1979) We might also see this as our work in 'balancing the humours' after Farman (2007)

Metaphor makes us do work between the various tensions of metaphor (topic and vehicle; figurative and literal; is / is not. This last is implicit in the copula of the "is" and its working-out. For example, Achilles both *is* and *is not* a lion, just as a book artist *is* and *is not* a poet. For Ricoeur, metaphor "preserves the 'is not' within the 'is'". (Ricoeur, 1977 [1975] p. 249). It is up to us to resolve these tensions. Old, 'dead', metaphors no longer need this work - they have become clichés – but where the metaphor is new it still requires effort on the part of the reader, and the less adjacent (less metonymic) the metaphor, the more work needs doing to resolve the metaphor. This can actually enhance the truth of metaphor: it is a kind of making strange, revivifying the power of the language we use to say it in. To get anything out of narrative, we have to "believe in it" (though we know it to be the facture of an author), but this belief has both an emotional drawing-in effect, and presupposes an informed suspicion of the narrative. This is the tension of the figurative and literal, and it takes us deeper into our identification with the figured beings we find in fiction, and requires us to call off our suspicion of the narrative for the while (it is a 'willing suspension of disbelief' (Coleridge, 1907 [1817] p. 5). Narrative *can* create a false empathy, relate to a false reality: myths can create more mischief than historical fact, it may be argued. (Suzanne Keen, as part of her thorough caution in making claims

for empathy in fiction, surveys a range of objections to empathy as “weaken[ing] humans and [making] them vulnerable to others’ cruellest manipulations” (Keen, 2007 p. 131) and as possibly “occlud[ing] the other’s true feelings by imposing Western ideas about what ought to be felt.” (Keen, 2007 p. 141) But I would note that such problems tend to rest on cliché, on metaphor that does not require work; on stories that are soporific rather than challenging. The ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’ I have touched upon above (which challenges narrative’s overarching hold upon the reader), is part of what gives a good metaphor its complexity, its *bite*, but it need not nullify the narrative’s power to express new truth. In any case, the interpreter who is attentive enough to parse the connotative meanings of new metaphor may be harder to persuade towards closure for good or ill.

For readers and makers alike, there is an effect in work or practice rich in metaphor, of making-strange.<sup>140</sup> When each new turn, each new term, may represent the coupling-point of a new metaphor, our whole surroundings are activated. Everything becomes potentialised as the possible completion of a circuit of new meaning.

David Miall has written about the effects he sees as empirically present in texts we call ‘literary’ , and he presents ‘foregrounding’ as one

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<sup>140</sup> Viktor Schklovsky’s essay *Art as Technique* presents formalist ideas of distanciation in 1917. See (Schklovsky, 1965 [1917])

of the effects he wants to try to be particular about. One of the ways literary foregrounding is achieved is through the decentring effects of metaphor and character. Here is Miall on the effects of dehabituating through such foregrounding:

“Through literary reading we dehabituate, that is, we are enabled to contemplate alternative models for being in the world. Such reading prepares us for being more adaptable: it is an “offline” way of experimenting with emotions or experiences that might have dangerous or unpleasant consequences in the real world...”

(Miall, 2000 p. 150)

Quoting Birkerts (2006 (1995) p. 78), Miall notes that, while reading

often draws us to view the world from the protagonist’s perspective, that character *is not us...* ; thus, in addition to the close interest evoked by our reading, we may also experience a decentring... As Birkerts puts it, during such reading the self is “suspended in the medium of language, the particles of the identity wavering in the magnetic current of another’s expression” (Birkerts 78); and, he adds later, “Our awareness, our sense of life, gets filtered into the character, where it becomes strangely detached from us” (Birkerts 93)... Perhaps

our interests are reflected at some deeper, transmuted level during reading." *Necessity*, 53.

(Miall, 2000 p. 53) [Emphasis added].

In Miall's *Metaphor as a thought process* (1979), he sets out the defamiliarisation provoked by metaphor, and likens its effect on intellection to the paradigm switch explored by Kuhn:

[In metaphor] the transfer of connotations to the subject defamiliarises it ... At the moment of the metaphor's apprehension both the old, and the strange, and the new, are simultaneously present – what we see is thought in the process of transformation."

(Miall 1979 pp. 26-27)

Going on to relate this to Kuhn's concept of the paradigm-switch:

"Kuhn emphasizes that only the appearance of a new theory, promising to make better sense of the observations and experimental findings, allows the previous, inadequate theory, to be relinquished. Herein lies the interest of Kuhn's discussions for the understanding of thought in metaphor: the "revolution" that takes place does so *entirely within thought*... Comparison with nature acts as a test for the theory, but

cannot determine it ... the new paradigm, or a glimpse of it...

emerges all at once, "sometimes in the middle of the night, in

the mind of a man deeply immersed in crisis". The

connotations of the modifier in a metaphor effect a similar

cognitive switch in our view of the subject."

(Metaphor as a Thought-Process, 1979 p. 27) [Emphasis

added]

Surely the areas Miall suggests as worth exploring in literature are equally of interest for artists' books?

When we adopt roles, (as artists we may sometimes style these as 'strategies') or see the world through a character's eyes, the world is made new. We see potentialities that we did not see before, we can see stories, possibilities, arcing out ahead of us in new ways, because in offering our reflection new connotations for the self, we have made a metaphor of ourselves.

When we use Mead's formation of the self, the me/I stand in relation to one another in an analogous way. The hermeneutic of resolving the self is worked out across the same terms as a metaphor (with the possibility of a simplicity, a lack of variation, greater metonymy or indeed unchangingness reserved as an unlikely possibility). Taking these tensions as a tactic towards the strategy of making strange the self, the adoption of a role can be sufficiently alien to initiate an

estrangement. When I think of myself as "poet" or "painter" or both, I initiate that metaphorical space of tension between what is and what is not: part of my subsequent practice is informed by this tension. Similarly I can create a tension between more 'calculated' or more 'visionary' ways of working (relating, of course, to the values I have assigned to strategy and tactic). Here David Faithfull comments:

It's an interesting reflection on the way contemporary art goes... if you calculate it you know that you've got to be objective and impersonal and do things that have some kind of resonance... [and] part of you wants to be that kind of Blake... kind of visionary. ... I'm never quite sure exactly, where I'm going or what I want to do with it – at one stage I'll play with one and kind of develop the other.

David Faithfull 1: 25.32

Faithfull's characterisation of 'play' and 'develop' captures the potential for the tactics of play to be 'developed' as strategies, and vice-versa. We see one thing as another.

In this fruitful tension, the materials and situations that are part of the process of making are metaphorically-potentialised. Acting out of the freedom and elasticity of metaphor towards materials, the book artist works with materials as part of the ongoing hermeneutic of her/his practice. One defines one's practice by making books, and books

themselves are metaphorical at the rhetorical level, at the semantic level, and at the level of heuristic yield in the linked heuristics of practice and consumption – i.e. for myself and for others. We have reviewed the effects on readers claimed by Nussbaum (see 2.6.2): equally important are those effects made available to makers: to make for other minds, to speak with other voices, to become what the book makes possible.

It is this reintegration of what the text has made possible that Ricoeur refers to as ‘refiguration’, (Mimesis<sub>3</sub>). (Ricoeur, 1984 [1983] p. 71) The *idem* self has been reworked by the *ipse* self. The narrative has opened up the world to the power of metaphor, to find new empathy, new fits for the real, new ways of understanding what is and what has passed and what will come. In working through this as readers or as makers, we come to a new understanding of ourselves and the world around us. When we use new roles to work in different ways, it gives us the space to see ourselves anew. The book gives us a space to create this view.

#### 3.9.4 *The Analogue Space*

Julian Jaynes’ *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Jaynes, 1982 [1976]) is a book about the development of the relationship between two parts of what we now recognise as our conscious mind. Because I want to find ways of explaining what books



do for practice through what they offer in affect as well as effect, I am attracted to the cognitive models James proposes to explain consciousness.<sup>141</sup>

This relation of an 'I' and an 'analogue I' superficially resembles the 'I and Me' of Mead, or the *Ipse* and *Idem* selves we find in Ricoeur. We are unable to show that any of these reflective pairs are the *same* as another pair, but we may wish to see if there are elements that bear linking, in the manner that Mead's proposition fitted into a more general hermeneutic that Ricoeur's ideas of the self support. What is the case with the 'I' and 'analogue I' that Jaynes proposes, and what are the benefits of this identification?

With Jaynes' theory, the location of the 'analogue I' in what Jaynes refers to as the 'metaphored mind-space' (Jaynes, 1982 [1976] p. 55) is explicitly *spatial*, and bears a striking resemblance to artists' accounts of operating in the metaphorical space of the book.<sup>142</sup> Jaynes even proposes this metaphored space as a narrative space, in which

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<sup>141</sup> Briefly, Jaynes posits a relationship between 'I' and an 'analogue I'. (Jaynes, 1982 [1976] p. 55) This *replaces* a bicameral relationship between 'I' and the voice of my guiding god (in fact a cognitive feature of the bicameral mind, arising from the now-silent right hemisphere). Whatever we make of Jaynes' concept of the bicameral mind, his 'reflexive' view of consciousness (as a dialogue between the 'I' and 'analogue I') – his view of consciousness *as a process* is useful. I personally find the theory of bicameralism attractive, if on the fringes of the plausible, and Jaynes' efforts towards a history of its breakdown break the ground of the subject but are overly simplified and probably too Euro-centric.

<sup>142</sup> See Section 3.1

metaphorical, introspected 'space' I watch the 'analogue I' take different pathways towards different consequences<sup>143</sup>. Thus I figure out what to do by thinking about myself in the future. This should remind us of the time of emplotment that is Ricoeur's *Mimesis* 2. That is, there is a time of narrative through which I can reflect on what is going to happen to me in real time *if* I take certain actions. Jaynes emphasises the importance of this analogue's action:

Of what transcending importance is this analogue we have of ourselves in our metaphored mind-space, the very thing with which we narratise out solutions to problems of personal action, and see where we are going and who we are!

Jaynes 1976: 417

Notice that the analogue 'I' operates in an analogue space and an analogue time: these opportunities are also present as a 'package' in the spacetime of the book as an *analogue of introspection*.

Here is an extended quote from Lucy May Schofield on her relationship with this:

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<sup>143</sup> See (Jaynes, 1982 [1976] p. 63). Mignot's theory develops a relationship to this in Mead-ian terms: (Mignot, 2004 p. 459). A similar effect is observed by Miall in his critique of the hermeneutics of suspicion, whereby the reader is invited by the text to place their lives 'under the aegis of suspicion' (Miall, 2000 p. 45) – or under the aegis of *interpretation*, as I might put it. This means to participate in the text as an analogue of the self, as an opportunity for reflection.

LMS – ... Even though a lot of the work's drawn from personal experience, I feel like I can rewrite the endings and have a voice in them. ... I've always sort of thought of books as kind of confessionals ... I suppose it's not changing the story, it's just putting your point of view on them ...

AE – Do you find out more about your point of view by doing them?

LMS – Yeah. I feel like I'm in a different head space when I write. I feel like I'm in a different place when I make them as well ... if I read an old sketchbook ... or ... I read some of these entries [from *42*, (2007)] ... sometimes it's sort of an out-of-body experience, and I can't recall writing it, I can't recall even the feelings I had when I wrote it. It's this instant response to the world ... and then it becomes a book, almost without any editing. There's no kind of transition ... from my head to the book. [In the sense that there is no intervention in the transition - AE] ... And it's always been like that, so they become my other self, I suppose. ... Without them being self-conscious.

Lucy May Schofield 1: 1.03.10

I as a maker inhabit the book through various roles and applications of the book as a medium including its function as the symbolic book and as narrative. This is likewise true for readers, whose analogue selves are abetted by the structures and imaginative content prepared for their imaginative and creative participation.

That the book is an extension of consciousness through media is a claim unremarkable to readers of McLuhan<sup>144</sup>, but it seems strange to think of when stated thus: faced with a book *our consciousness is altered*. It's worth noting, while touching on McLuhan, that the changes in the identity of the book in the face of the advances of new media, and the linked changes in the book's effect on consciousness as a result, have not really weakened the symbolic book. Books may lose, or have lost, much of the duty to carry the everyday communication of cultural discourse they once had. (And this is, anyway, arguable.) But their symbolic role, as symbols of this communication and the social reality engendered thereby, has not shown any sign of weakening yet. If anything, we see it as blessing and authorising other media under its symbolic aegis (even while it gives up material ground). The symbolic book contains, rather than being contained by the 'e-book', for example,

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<sup>144</sup> E.g. : "...the typographic explosion extended the minds and voices of men to reconstitute the human dialogue on a world scale." (McLuhan, 2001 [1964] p. 185)

to which we would be offering no faint praise if we were to refer to it as 'still a book'.

Jaynes' 'analogue I' offers another way of understanding the investment we make as readers, and as makers who use the book as a means of working through an analogue of introspection. We might see all art as such an analogue: a space within which to descry forms. The 'analogue of introspection' and the formalist, literal reality of marks on a surface (to speak only of visual art), are linked by metaphor. Perspective, for example, is the tactic that enacts a metaphor something like 'this plane is a space, is vision'. Narrative allows metaphor to expand to enact more of its possibility as analogy of the world, and crucially allows the metaphor to expound itself across time. A picture can allow us to make a metaphor of vision, but a book can expound a metaphor of mind, because it *bespeaks* the extension in time of narrative, even when it does not literally produce such a narrative.

### 3.10 The Metaphor of the Camera

When I outlined the metaphor of artists' books as cameras in sections 3.1 and 3.5, I was identifying a way to see what artists' books do for artistic practice (The fact that I used a metaphor to do so was probably inevitable, but not strictly relevant at this point). We can now invest that metaphor with a reading that picks up how artists' books produce a metaphored space of practice: one that offers a counter-reading of books' enclosure, over against the metaphor of the artist's-book-as-ghetto. The camera is the space that we situate relative to the real world. It is dark inside for a reason: everything within is highly sensitised. But we have made it that way not in order to keep it dark, but to expose it to new situations. An exegesis: we create books as structures to focus our sensibilities in new ways and in new situations. *Specifically* as books, they symbolise the realm of metaphoric potential: "everything within is highly-sensitised"; this is the promise of reading that book artists relate to. They heighten our attention by promising reading. They also focus the maker's response, not through a lens, but through the apertures created by voices, by character, by the metaphored self, and their readers in turn project outwards through their own versions of these same apertures.

A Jaynes-ean take on this is to use the etymology of the camera [obscura] as a *dark room* to echo the separate spaces the breakdown of whose controlled separation, Jaynes claims, results in consciousness. (I.e. the breakdown of *bicameralism*.)<sup>145</sup> At any rate, we can allow that Jayne's 'analogue I' is present in our reflections of ourselves.<sup>146</sup> Breaking down the barriers between the literal and the metaphorical are what make reflection (consulting the 'analogue I'), and thus (for Jaynes at least), consciousness, possible. (In Ricoeur's terms a very similar sort of reflection is important to our humanity<sup>147</sup>). It is possible to see books as an analogue of introspection that *enables* such reflection for the many reasons I have given over these pages, rather than as a ghetto that precludes contact, nor as a typology of forms whose action is considered outside what critical perception may concern itself with. No one has really taken either of these other views as a holistic outline of the field. (Neither is what I propose to be taken as complete), Nor should we confuse an interest in exploring certain views (book as ghetto, critic as cataloguer) as absolute, when their authors would never recognise such an absolutism in their own experience or intended effect. But we persist

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<sup>145</sup> See 3.9.4 *The Analogue Space*

<sup>146</sup> My purpose is not to promote bicameralism as somehow appropriate to the case, nor merely to offer a punning connection, but to apply what Jaynes learns from his theory and apply it to books.

<sup>147</sup> For time to be *human* time it must be *narrated* time, in the sense of the unfolding of the threefold mimesis: "...time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode," (Ricoeur, 1984 [1983] p. 52)

in reading artists' books towards reification as a class of objects, or as a form of practice in danger of divorcing itself from the mainstream of artistic discourse, from the world at large.<sup>148</sup> We can read too far into these ideas towards a zero-sum identity of the book, shutting out possibilities, towards a stable identity, which does not capture its vivacity, flexibility or the ways in which it aids creation and reflection as an analogue of introspection, (as the space of the book). No one, making or reading books, really takes these absolute lines of identity, least of all artists, as I hope I have shown. They are always far more flexible, far more reflective, far more present to the world and to themselves, through the book.

### 3.11 The Object to be Read

There are two questions about the book this flexibility and reflection are important for: *Why?* And *What?* I have shown that *why* has to do with more than available media effects, to include an influential affect towards the other through reading and the promise of reading, as we have seen in depth in my sections 3.8 *Making Reading* and in section 3.9 *Two Lives (Being and Metaphor)*. When I began this research, I had hoped to sidestep the question of what an artist's book *is*, entirely. My

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<sup>148</sup> This fear itself we can read as a warning against a concentric limiting-down of artists' books' identity.



strategy was to offer a different topic, by concentrating instead on how it engendered and enabled practice. And that is how I proceeded. But in doing so, the questions of *why* and *what* have intermingled. What a book is has its genesis in *why* it is – and I have already offered my definition of the book as *an object to be read*.<sup>149</sup> As so many before have done, I have left the denotation of “book” to the artist. It is the artist’s prerogative to invoke ‘book’ in their practice, (and the reader’s prerogative to scoff at such denotation, if they wish). But I *have* asked what that denotation means. It is not the denotation of a physical object, but of the various symbolic functions and promises of the book, offered here as the promise of reading, the shared world of reading, the analogue of introspection, and the various metaphors of the book that feature in the section headings for 3.1- 3.9. Here we must turn again to my assertion that what this thesis offers is parallel, a supplement to material practice and formal criticism. This parallel view of what is intrinsic to the extrinsic– i.e. what is internal to the practice of the artist who makes the book – cannot mean anything without the book itself, and the formal means to create meaning that books access. Nor would we be able to

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<sup>149</sup> “an object for reading by others” – see Section 3.9

traverse the idea of the history of the book<sup>150</sup> without the always-provisional field of books' typology.

In section 2.2.2 I argue for the need for clarity *and* flexibility, and I have looked to a supplementary field of book-art-practice to offer a dimension of manoeuvrability to our critical methodology. This degree of space has to come from within: from within practice, from within makers, from within readers. At the risk of gnomic pronouncement, we can only see out from within: yet this is true. To discuss what artists' books mean we need that degree of attention to the introspective origins of the intention extrospected as artists' books. To discuss books in performative terms at all means creating a basis on which to view them as strategies reached through tactics. (The strategy is the end, the tactics the means). Such means are always going to be partly composed of that which is 'intrinsic to the extrinsic'; inside the artist. I have asked artists to discuss the affect as well as the effect of their work in books, asking them to engage with me in a discussion of what it means to them to be able to use books to get where they want to go. And I have found that something that books do for these artists is to open their practice up to metaphor, not only through the effects of figures of speech or formal poetics of image and text; but also through the affect of roles, of the fictional affect

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<sup>150</sup> An idea that is itself a form of introspection that creates an analogue identity.

of character, of the sympathetic affect of making-reading. This comes about through some of the features intrinsic to books that have great significance to culture in general: their narrative content, and the relation they bear to our abilities to bear witness to history, to those absent others whose story we carry on, and to those inexistent others whose stories nevertheless allow us a field of empathy whose stretch is boundless because it is metaphorical – namely imaginary characters, imagined readers, and imagined authors. These features rely upon our ability to imagine ourselves and others, which are the origins of both consciousness and empathy. Such features are most obviously present in the novel, but, importantly, they are always implied in the denotation of ‘book’; they are always a feature of the symbolic book. Artists’ books share the denotation, and thus the symbolic connotation. My research confirmed my suspicion that book artists used *books* because they were deeply concerned with these cognitive features, i.e. the way in which books are deeply linked to the metaphorical imagination. This was difficult to see, because we say the same thing when we say “we like books”.

The concern that artists feel towards reaching the other through their books, and the sense of participation readers feel in taking part in the circuit of reading, are accompanied by a hope of success. The

reaching-through that artists undertake does not inevitably result in contact: empathy is never guaranteed<sup>151</sup>, and, as Keen reminds us<sup>152</sup>, there is no failsafe technique to follow either. But the hope *is* there, and it *is* important. What I uncover when I uncover the metaphors that inform and underly this hope, is not a formal uncovering. I have not shown *how it is done*, but rather *that it is done*. Remember that these operations take place as and through metaphors: ‘the place of making’, ‘making-reading’ for the inexistent other, ‘the promise of reading, ‘two lives’, some of which are metaphors themselves, correspond to a hope that is acted out in the metaphorical space of the book through a whole range of techniques and forms. Similar to Keen’s admonitions on the

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<sup>151</sup> (Keen, 2006 p. 214)

<sup>152</sup> “The link between feeling with fictional characters and acting on behalf of real people... has yet to be substantiated either through empirical research into the effects of reading or through analysis of demonstrable causal relationships between novel reading as a cultural phenomenon and historical changes in societies in which novel reading flourishes” (Keen, 2007 p. 146)

Note that this does not dispute the empathy we feel, just the case that is brought to say that this *causes* action. Yet the shared world of reading is so widely shared and so affectively-charged that we feel it *must* have such effects. Keen shows that this link is actually obscure, (and possibly inexistent), but she acknowledges “a still unsubstantiated, but prevalent *belief* in a link between fiction reading and the cultivation of the empathetic imagination.” (Keen, 2007 p. 124) I propose that the effects of literary empathy may be diffuse and subject to flaws in inductive reasoning, yet they form part of a wider social immersion and sense of collective ethics. Books are always part of a circuit. To be part of this does not connote any *necessity*, rather a participation in the discourse of the ethical. Breaking through from diffuse ‘feeling-for’ into action is a dream we see in the democratic multiple, and in ‘activist’ publishing entities, e.g. *Booklyn*. They, if anyone, know the difficulties involved in connecting the metaphorical feeling of literary connectedness to action. Keen herself notes the importance of social circles and social contact with peers in creating altruistic effects in the pages following the quotation above. Elsewhere she cites Wayne Booth’s concept of *coduction*. Booth: “...we do not first come to know our judgement and then offer our proofs; we change our knowledge, as we encounter, in the responses of other readers to our claims, further evidence.” (Booth, 1988 p. 76)

connection of empathy and literature, I submit that there is no simple formal way to explain these operations: they are always embedded in the social environment in which they happen. As metaphors, they are always to be interpreted, rather than simply indicated: they are always hermeneutic. But we can characterise some of the artists' hopes, concerns, and ways of imagining, even if only to show that they exist.

## 4 Evaluations and Conclusions

My purpose in this thesis has been to examine the place of metaphor in artists' books' practice on several levels:

On the poetic level, my exposition of the visual chiasma as a typical formal effect in artists' books presents its links to vocality, roles in practice and modes of presenting the temporary construction of the book. Linking the formal aspects of how artists' books achieve effects (of which the visual chiasma is but one example), to aspects of practice *achievable through* artists' books emphasises and revivifies the dialogue between object and practice, intrinsic and extrinsic, that has been the source of friction in many of the views of the contemporary artists' books field I present in Chapter 2.

On the level of practice, metaphor is taken out of its formal role (in textual and visual "grammars") to offer explanatory mechanisms approaching understanding of artist's book practice. (Instead of metaphors of text and image, we investigate metaphors of, for example, the 'other self' of working with the book.) The advantage of metaphor as a basis here is that it does not offer any certainty of specification, but offers vivid modelling of the tensions artists making books very often work between. The sections of Chapter 3 approach a variety of such metaphors. This is used as a means of presenting the research I have

undertaken with a number of important practitioners in the artist's book field (largely in the U.K.) Threading through these interviews using these metaphors yields a new and hopefully valuable critical view of artists' books from the perspective of practice. This 'narrative of practice' has always been present in artists' lives. It has been my task to use metaphor as a means to articulate this narrative across individuals in a critical manner, as well as offering interviews that open up a language of internal practice rather than (for example) querying technique and meaning. Again, the advantage of a metaphorical basis is that it can aptly present the manner of artists' balancing of the tensions of practice, allowing us a means of comparison that resists reduction to a typological or otherwise reductive structure. This is partly because casting these narratives in terms of metaphor portrays them as working tensions, rather than as circumscribed objects. And it is partly because this metaphorical basis values the narrative of practice as much as it does its material output (I would as a matter of personal preference, still argue for a material practice of some kind as a *sine qua non* of the artist's book, however.) But an appreciation of the heuristic yield in terms of the affect of artists' books (i.e. appreciating what the book does for 'internal' practice) does not proscribe appreciation for its formal effects, too. I am not advocating a dematerialisation of the book, though I understand that

tendency, and acknowledge the usefulness of a 'critical vector' that moves towards a perspective of performance rather than objects. But I do not see that as offering a comprehensive structure to the field any more than some sort of formal essentialism of the book object. I have instead sought a dialogue that expands through contact with these differing terms through metaphor.

I do not seek to *construct* an identity for artists' books through these metaphors. I present a view in Chapter 2 that the 'book artist' identity itself, (and thus "artists' books") are actually a kind of strategic fiction based around other practices' collision with the book and its propensities and possibilities as object and as social construction. This is a restless dialogue we would do well to acknowledge as a zone always under construction, rather than trying to analyse it towards some structured end.<sup>153</sup> The resemblance this tension has to metaphor itself leads to the third level on which I have discussed metaphor in artists' books:

As a method of working with the critical tensions artists' books present, metaphor proves to be extremely useful, as the examples and

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<sup>153</sup> We return once more to Johanna Drucker's description of the field as a 'zone of activity' (Drucker, 2004 p. 1). What is this 'field' except the traces of the collisions between books and the forms which artists have brought to the book? This, indeed, Drucker herself shows in *The Century of Artists' Books*. That we return to this does not signify a retreat, or an intention to reduce our criticism to an undifferentiated relativism. I am trying to show how this field *works*. (And I find metaphor the best way of approaching this). That there is 'something there' has been implicit but untouched in our constructions of what we think the field is. (We have previously, sensibly enough, been poring over objects for the most part). The 'inside story', as it were, has in fact much to offer.



possibilities I have provided in Chapter 3 show. The texts I have brought to 'mine into' this approach-via-metaphor are those I thought most useful, but they are only the beginnings of approaches that the narrative of practice thus exposed opens up. Analogies of the self, of space, of time, constitute interesting fields of study in themselves as applied to how artists' practice intersects with the 'space', the 'time' and the 'self' made possible by the book. I have made a case to show that valuing this narrative of practice alongside material practice and examining it by way of metaphor, produces exciting ways of seeing the artist's book from numerous intersecting viewpoints. Amongst these are the fields of book history, of the ethics of reading, of the psychology and social importance of reading, etc. As we approach the 'analogue of introspection' I discuss towards the end of Chapter 3, the artist's book even begins, surprisingly, to seem a possible field of study for consciousness research! Perhaps not all of these avenues for further research might repay our attention equally, but it seems to me exciting that the interpretive method I propose offers points of intersection with these varied disciplines. When approached at the level of the material practice alone, artists' books' dialogue with these fields is less strong than when we allow the analogies artists have with the intentions of authors, poets and publishers to be part of the dialogue. Indeed, I would presume that the

opportunities such roles offer for a wider *dialogue* parallel their functional aspect of providing poetry, writing, and publishing as part of the artists' palette.

Additionally, because the narrative of practice, 'speaking through' the critical lexicon of metaphor incorporates the artists' desires for the reader's experience, we can begin also to imagine an erotics of the artists' book (see also footnote 48) that expands outward from the limited formalism the simple sensuous appreciation of the object entails. An erotics properly entails an intention *and* an appreciation, and we can show this is present by attending to artists' practice: but we need to create a way to understand artists' view of the other.

Constructions such as 'the promise of reading' and 'making-reading', which I elaborate in Chapter 3, accomplish this. One could further pursue the view thus opened up<sup>154</sup> into the topic of 'an erotics of the artist's book. This is but one of several possibilities. As I note elsewhere in this chapter, my interaction with the model of practice proposed by these metaphors allows me to interrogate them using a range of external

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<sup>154</sup> We might thus also revisit Darnton's 'Circuit of Reading' (2002), which one might additionally view through Bourdieu's structures conferring legitimacy and power – i.e. *practice*, *habitus* and *field*. (See (Jenkins, 2002) on Bourdieu). An *Erotics of the History of the Book* would present significant challenges but would allow us to connect together the various desires of the Circuit of Reading and map the relations of legitimacy thus proposed.

theoretical tools. Perhaps the most useful feature of these metaphorical constructions is their readiness to be interpreted in such varied ways.

I have been able to use metaphor as a method for capturing working tensions rather than fixed descriptions in this research. Canons change. They are as subject to forces of critical fashion (or a more dignified 'shift in epistemological perspective' if one prefers), as are the objects they seek to describe. The approach I offer here does not really offer an alternative to the structures we must have to push against: but it does offer a parallel track to inform that structure when it gets stuck, as it frequently does. Two such problems I approached in the introduction to this research: that of the 'ghetto' of artists' books, and of the fear of a lack of definition. My approach to these has been explored in the text already, and notably in sections 3.10 and 3.11. There, I review how attending to the metaphors artists work through to enrich their practice – often possible specifically *because* of the presence of the book in the mix – allows us not only to kickstart intractable problems about what the book is or is supposed to be, but also to revisit the possibilities and problems of the form in a new light by offering an alternative metaphor – revisiting the terms of the book-as-ghetto, as the book-as-camera, in this example.

## 4.1 Towards the Artist's Book

Chapter 4 has been a chapter of conclusions and signposts towards areas the research opens up for further study. Beyond the empirical contributions to knowledge that my field research has offered via the interview materials I have presented in support of Chapter 3, the bulk of the thesis' contribution to understanding, must be said to come about through the new interpretational approaches I offer through metaphor (surveyed above).

What the thesis offers in terms of connections and possibilities for rereading the Book Art field's history as a history of hybrid practice is, I think, a significant part of its contribution to knowledge. I propose metaphor here, as a useful figure for understanding the action of the various terms, dichotomies and other relations operating in the material poetics, practice, and cognitive affect, for artists and audiences of the artist's book. I do so because metaphor seems to provide a construction that, for the duration of a page, or a sentence, a narrative, or an hour in the studio or the discursive 'plot' of a career, holds its terms closely enough to provide some critical points on which to focus – whilst at the same time assuring us that our reflection will resolve out a model of a tension, rather than a structure whose stability offers understanding quite

different to the playful activity of practice itself. Metaphor can remain steady enough to mean something, but flexible enough to surprise us.

I have sought theoretical support for this view in the thesis, reading into artists' discussions of their practice using tools, theories, ways of thinking from other disciplines. Though I found these to be approaches that yielded, for me, interesting results, I would not be surprised to see other techniques applied. One feels slightly differently about the appearance of the metaphors themselves, e.g., 'book as poem', 'two lives'. These were present in my own preunderstanding of the artist's book process, to be sure, but their presence in other artists' narratives of their practice bespeaks a significance that I have offered a view of that others may care to explore in different ways. I think other research may benefit from the heuristic yield of a discussion of the metaphors of artists' books' practice to illuminate their own particular concerns (For instance, one might investigate 'What does it mean 'to publish'?'; 'Is there a vulnerability, an exposure, in authoring artists' books?'; 'What would an erotics of the history of the artist's book look like?', and so on, from this perspective).

It may be that in articulating practice in this way, I am returning to a view of the field that we have already seen in Drucker's characterisation of the field as a 'zone of activity' (2004 p. 1). But ``I have added to that

characterisation, a view of how this 'activity' *works* from the inside, that supplements the existing richly-illustrated view of it from the outside. And its parallel nature offers us a manoeuvring space, a line from which to dialogue with the form that can allow us to say a number of things that seem to be universal to the social construction of the book, and the use made of it by artists. (As well as implying the significance of the whole field's immersion in the society it serves and interacts with – a 'history of the artist's book' in the bibliographic 'book history' sense). The 'object to be read', 'the promise of reading', the 'analogue of introspection', all come out of a view of what books do, informing what we glean from how they look and are made. Relations to these ideas, in one way or another, are common to all book artists, I argue, and offer us a commonality that, as soon as it 'hits the atmosphere' of material creation, spreads and diverges into the multitudinous forms we have so much trouble pulling together. But those common ways of relating to the book are still there, and we can start from them, reading into the book, wherever we happen to find it.

The core metaphors of the "space of the book" and "two lives" bracket the syntagmic consistency of the imagined space and the vivifying metaphorical praxis of inhabiting the space through various analogues of the self between them. This place of the book, and this way

of being in the book, pervade book art practice in a way not properly taken account of, (since previously we have largely been attending to the important matter of the books themselves). But the bearing this account has on how we see artists' books contributes to our understanding because, in the 'metaphor of the camera', (or however we choose to subsequently characterise book art practice), we see a practice that, far from being a ghetto (or prison-house) of semantic and practical exclusion, is distinctly more alive, connected and flexible, than we might have hoped.

The research presented here contributes to our knowledge of the artist's book not only the empirical material from my interviews, but presents a new understanding of what the living artist's book – much like the living metaphor – can do for our practice. This parallel scheme for understanding artists' books by understanding artists' books' practice helps open the field towards interaction with other critical disciplines in ways analogous to the field's success in interacting with other practical disciplines, and it deploys metaphor as a means of capturing the shifting meaning of what the book means, by opening up a way to describe what the book makes possible. It thus presents, supplementary to thematic structure, a field of strategic possibilities.





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