

A metaphoric interpretation of the impermanence of the book

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The Passing

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impermanence of the book

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Attestation of authorship

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Karol Wilczynska

October 2011

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Signature

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Date

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Abstract

This thesis contemplates a debate. In the 1990s and the early years of this century, a number of theorists, Kernan (1990), Birkerts (2006) and Young (2007) (building on Max Nordau's fears expressed in 1895), argued that literature was dying and we were witnessing the death not only of the book but also of reading and then 'integrity' of meaning. In response, this project engages the materiality of the printed book to creatively mourn its perceived passing.

In this regard, the thesis considers the passing of the book as an obituary, eulogy, requiem and memorial. However, in doing this, the materiality of the printed book is renominated as an articulate mode of metaphoric expression. Rhetorically, its relevance is reasserted, not as bereavement but as an acknowledgement that the tactility of the book as an evolutionary phenomenon, can engage in unique ways with the construction and communication of meaning. The book's impermanence is also its evolution.

*"I assure you I had
no sooner returned
to Rome than I
renewed my intimacy
with my old friends,
my books."*

Marcus Tullius Cicero, 46BC

Introduction

Arguably, assertions surrounding the death of the book seem implausible considering there are still thousands of books published each year. However, there is an interesting body of work written about the death of books (Kernan, 1990; Kurzweil, 1992; Showalter, 1995; Birkerts, 2006; Young, 2007) and also the future of reading. (Levy, 2007; Darnton, 2009). Much of this material considers perceived losses of integrity due to both changes in the material/physical structure of 'books' and the decline of book sales.

Description of the project

This project is a creative inquiry formatted as a metaphoric argument. The body of research in the thesis is formatted as four unique artworks and these form the core of the inquiry. Because these 'texts' are the site of the research, this exegesis functions as a contextualising and explanatory document.

*"Most books belong
to the house and
street only, and
in the fields their
leaves feel very thin.
They are bare and
obvious, and have
no halo nor haze
about them."*

Henry David Thoreau, 1849

Metaphorical forms

In discussing the ‘passing’ of the book as an indication of impermanence, the research draws upon four funerary constructs.

The first is the obituary. Basically this is a classified notice (normally in a newspaper) recording the death of an individual.

The second is a eulogy. This is a spoken narration of the life of a person who has died.

The third is a requiem. This is a musical setting of a Mass for departed souls delivered either as a consecrated or public performance.

Finally the thesis considers the metaphor of the memorial. This is normally a permanent, fixed artefact that serves to focus memory.

Structure

Although the thesis, as a practice-led inquiry, is defined by these funerary considerations, its exegesis employs a different structure. This is because the exegesis serves to contextualise and explain the work, rather than to extend creative considerations within it. Therefore, this document is divided into three chapters.

The first chapter presents a review of relevant knowledge pertaining to the inquiry. In this regard, it considers writing on the impermanence of literature/the book and certain technical bodies of knowledge that have been significant to the research.

The second chapter outlines the heuristic inquiry that underpins the explication of the project. Douglass and Moustakas (1985) offer a discussion of the phenomenon and role of immersion in heuristic research. In response, I map the design of the project as a diagram that explores relationships between internal [tacit] and external processes. These are explained in five phases of inquiry and processing.

The concluding chapter offers a discussion of the critical ideas in the project. It considers theories surrounding the decay of literature and materiality, and briefly reflects on anxieties surrounding these. The chapter then discusses metaphor before offering a critical and technical commentary on the four artworks.

Chapter 1 — A review of contextual knowledge

This chapter offers an overview of knowledge relating to the inquiry. It is divided into two sections. The first reviews literature relating to anxieties surrounding the demise of the physical book (and, by extension, the demise of the integrity of literature). The second section reviews knowledge relating to the bodily nature of the book. In this regard, it considers historical perspectives, contemporary foundry type artists, archived books and technical texts significant to the inquiry.

*“Books are not
absolutely dead
things, but doe
contain a potencie
of life in them to
be as active as that
soule was whose
progeny they are”*

John Milton, 1644

1.1 *Discourse relating to the impermanence of the book*

In 1895, Max Nordau released his influential treatise *Degeneration*. The text helped fuel rising anxieties of the *fin de siècle* regarding the feminising and decay of literature and the potential demise of the book. He predicted, “Art and poetry will become pure atavisms and will no longer be cultivated except by the most emotional part of humanity, by women, by the mad, perhaps even by children” (p. 543). Nordau worried that literature was becoming increasingly cultivated by emotion rather than by intellect and the book

was decaying into a degenerative form of “hysterical vanity”. He predicted that, by the end of the 20th century, literature would no longer exist.

Showalter (1995) suggests that Nordau’s anxieties existed in the context of rising concerns over social, moral and political change at the end of the 19th century. Citing a range of periodicals of the time with titles like *The Decay of Literary Taste* and *Literary Degenerates*, she illustrates an increasingly held belief that British literature at this time “was in a state of decline because of the levelling effects of female and working class readers” (p. 2).

Almost a century after Nordau’s *Degeneration* book, theorists continued to express anxieties surrounding the integrity and cultural durability of books. Kernan (1990) suggested that the romantic modernist literature that flourished between the 18th and 20th centuries was dying. He argued that the invasion of technology had compromised the ability of people to read. The introduction of media forms like television, computer databases, word processors and the VCR, had compromised the authority of the printed word.

Kurzweil, in *The Future of Libraries Part 2: The End of Books* (1992b), argued that the book would become obsolete. He considered that anxieties regarding its demise were a natural, although predictable, consequence of over 200 years of overlapping technological ‘upgrades’.

In the 1994 edition of Birkerts’ influential work, *The Gutenberg Elegies* (2006), contributed significantly to discussions surrounding the emotional resonance of the corporeality of the book. Tracking a narrative of his life as a reader, from childhood through college, he lamented a perceived disappearance of the reader. He saw this ‘independent reader’ as a phenomenon under threat from an emerging generation that was saturated with visual material. He saw this generation as having little concern with either the corporeality of the book or the integrity and value of literary ‘classics’.

Like Birkerts, Kernan expressed concerns in *The Death of Literature* (1990) about the expressed concerns about the impact of technological change on the future of literature (again, especially on the ‘classics’). Moreover, Kernan foresaw the ‘disappearance’ of the reader. Although he argued that computers, television, advertising, mass media and printing costs

were contributing factors to the demise of literature, he also blamed its ‘disintegration’ on the writing, attitudes and actions of certain feminist, Marxist and post-structuralist theorists. He saw books as artefacts destined for the ‘oblivion of the shredder’, because they were being ‘killed’ by the wrong readers reading the wrong books by the wrong writers, while the wrong professors from the wrong places taught ‘politically correct books’ that he argued were not literature.

In 1993, Howard Bloch and Carla Hesse suggested that our beliefs and anxieties over the loss of the book could not “be detached from a fear of loss of bodily integrity” (p. 4). They argued that computer technology, the visual display screen and the electronic library evoked a sense of terminality. These visions of the death of the book were dystopian images of a futuristic reading experience without intimate pleasures, either intellectual or physical. It is this intimacy, they suggested (especially in relation to the paperback), that we associate with secret fantasies and illusions of privacy, familiarity and control.

Although Bloch and Hesse elevated the tactility and intimacy of the book, writers like Young (2007) have suggested that the book may be advantaged by its metamorphosis into electronic environments. He argues that as the

written word is released into a fluid medium on the Internet, it is no longer constrained by the limitations of the printed page.

Young’s position is developed by Levy (2007) who praised the introduction of eBooks and the Kindle eBook reader. He saw technological advances as agents for the enhancement of reading and the Kindle eBook reader as a media form that is able to emulate the experience of reading a ‘real’ book object. He argued that technology may in fact improve upon certain traditional corporeal experiences. In this regard, he discussed improvements in colour and tactile sensitivity unparalleled in print-based books.

In 2009, Darnton extended Young’s optimism. Discussing the relationship between Google and the future of the book, he saw the digital mastering of old classics,¹ as a means of committing to the public domain, books and other literature that might not traditionally have been easily accessible. He suggested that, although there are still collections of rare books available for viewing in specially ventilated, humidity-controlled, dust-free environments, these environments in themselves (because of their physicality) put the rare objects in danger.

¹ Now freely available for eReaders on sites such as Project Gutenberg, The British Library book-scanning project and Google Books.

Finally, Showalter (1995), Sterry (2007) and Brooks (2011) have argued that the book is not dying and is not under threat. Showalter (like Young, 2007) believes that books are simply undergoing a metamorphosis. She sees the book and its social contexts (libraries) as broadening in form as they respond to change. She argues that the old technology of the printed book is not collapsing in on itself and that ‘fearmongers’ are exaggerating its demise. To illustrate her argument, she draws useful parallels between anxieties surrounding the perceived decay of literature at the close of the 19th century and anxieties expressed regarding the negative impact of digital environments on literature in the closing years of the 20th century.

Her views are close to my own. She believes that reports of a literary apocalypse are exaggerated. She states “Books and reading are not in danger, not even the works of the notorious *Dead White European Male*. Only the high priesthood of literature is in danger and it is its own worst enemy” (p. 2).

These arguments aside, printed books are perishable. They are material texts, perceptibly damaged by the ravages of time. Digital processes have replaced the printing press as means of production. Metal type has

become a plethora of digital fonts, downloadable from an array of sites. The tactility and corporeality of production has diminished so, as Doggett (2008) notes, letterpress is now almost entirely the bastion of Book Artists who produce limited-edition volumes for select and limited consumption.

1.2 Knowledge relating to print and the corporeal nature of the book

Outside of the corpus of material dealing with arguments over the ‘Death of the Book’, there is another body of knowledge that impacts on this thesis. This relates to the physicality and technical aspects of book production and letterpress use. This knowledge has been instrumental in the development of the physical works that constitute the creative component of the project.

1.3 Historical perspectives

In terms of a historical narrative of print and its relationship to the book in New Zealand, Binney (2005) discusses the first attempts to print (in 1815) the grammar and alphabet of the Māori. While this text is of interest in terms of context, McKay, Andersen and Mills’s (1940) *A History of*

Printing in New Zealand 1830–1940, offers in-depth analysis of historical shifts in technology and design in New Zealand book design up until 1940. Their analysis is extended by Griffith, Harvey and Maslen (1997) in *Book & Print in New Zealand. A Guide to Print Culture in Aotearoa*. Their work is useful in explaining why hand printing went into decline as government printers opted to import faster, machine-operated presses.

1.3.1 Contemporary foundry type artists

Griffith, Harvey and Maslen (1997) offer a useful account of a number of private presses in operation in New Zealand between the mid-1930s and today. Tara McLeod runs his contemporary publishing business Pear Tree Press, John Denny as the name Puriri Press and Alan Loney formally of Holloway Press (now Electio Editions Melbourne, Australia). All of these designers have used foundry type imported into the country during the 1800s and early 1900s (or type formed from matrices of entire font families, made on imported Intertype or Linotype machines²) or modern polymer plates. In general, the printed items produced by these presses are limited to short stories, poetry books, pamphlets, posters and invitations that might be broadly termed ‘ephemera’.

² There are only a few of these machines working in New Zealand today and one needing to be restored at the Museum of Transport and Technology in Auckland (MOTAT).

1.3.2 The book as an object

A significant body of work relating to the corporeality of the book has influenced the development and articulation of this thesis. Although the creative work is essentially a subjective response to the tactility, perishability and evolution of the artefact, a number of writers have been instrumental to considerations within the project.

Brody (1999) suggests that printed books may be understood as memory spaces similar to those encapsulated by classical theatre. He also suggests that the consumption of a book’s sensory experiences occurs in the process of reading. During this process, he suggests one restructures knowledge. The book, he argues, is a totem that cannot be replaced by any new book form (most specifically, any realised as a digital artefact).

Jacob (2002) suggests that books transfer meaning in unique ways. A book, he argues, is community oriented because it holds the memory of a group. A book is not just a body of content but also the process of its construction and dissemination. A book, he suggests, helps us to contemplate life. Its weight, size, and texture constitute a material existence in the present.

This materiality reaches beyond the moment of its manufacture and becomes intimately present in the immediate experience of the reader.

1.4 Influential books [tactility]

Normally a review of knowledge is concerned with written or visual texts. However, in a thesis like this, certain texts contain sensory ‘knowledge’ because the researcher engages with them in intimate and tactile ways. Accordingly, I will briefly discuss three significant books that helped me to understand the physical and sensory nature of the book’s perishability, preservation and impermanence.³

Rossdhu’s *Book of Hours* (1475) is a handwritten manuscript classified as a prayer book.⁴ The book was recovered with new endpapers added in the 1800s. At this point, it was cropped from its original size and pages were lost.

³ In my research, I investigated a number of archived books because they had accumulated a life. I was interested in their tactility and structure: the way a page sounded as it was turned and how it felt as it creaked beneath my fingers. I sought the smell of a binding, the lyricism of a surface and the fragility of paper that had been weakened and eroded by time. I visited public and private collections including the Special Collections held at The University of Auckland Library, and the Sir George Grey Special Collections held at the Auckland Central City Library. These collections held items dating back to the 12th century.

⁴ The work was produced in the Netherlands and was owned by Elizabeth Dunbar, Countess of Moray at Rossdhu in Scotland.

There was also at this time evidence of annotated marginalia, although now not intact. The text is written on vellum, with black-and-red ink. It is richly illuminated and burnished in gold and blue. Much of the main text has survived and this includes richly decorated pages. I was moved by the durability of its materials. The pages were stiff yet translucent with the evidence of past use. The pores of the vellum had collected the evidence of touch. When I turned the pages, they creaked with stiffness.

Brant’s *The Shyp of Folyes of the Worlds* (1509) is a work published by Richarde Pynson in London. Using the original translated text from Latin, the work describes mankind’s folly.⁵ The book features beautifully prepared woodblocks, letterpress type and rhyming stanzas. In the publication, there are uniform borders that are reused and the layout is largely consistent in its application. Interestingly in this edition, the initials have not been inscribed and the book contains substitute capital letters as placeholders. These ‘placeholders’ would have been replaced in subsequent editions by characters in the available typeface or hand-drawn. There is evidence of indentation of the type on these pages. The paper is comparatively thick and pale ochre in colour (due to discolouration over time).

⁵ The text is set in Latin and English (presumably for those readers less fluent in the classical languages). Translated by Alexander Barclay, thus the work is commonly known as Barclay’s *Ship of Fools*.

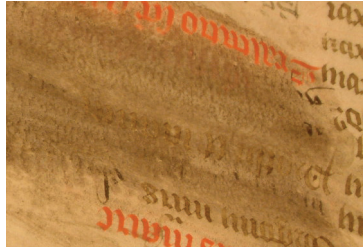


Figure 1:1 Vellum pages with black-and-red ink handwritten text. Rossdhu’s Book of Hours (1475) contains marginalia. Many of its pages have become completely translucent with age and use.

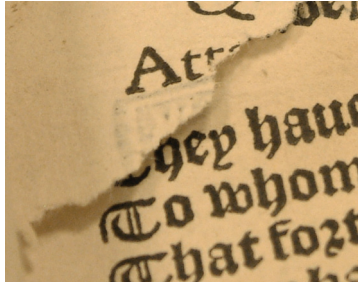


Figure 1:2 Barclay's Ship of Fools (1509) showing signs of distress through use.

When I held this book, I felt as though I was holding a metamorphosis that had begun when the ink first touched its pages. The work was never complete and, across time, this lack of completeness has been preserved. It caused me to ponder the book as an incomplete artefact. I understood that books might be seen as emergent objects in a state of evolution, not just across time but also in themselves. This idea was influential in my design of the requiem.

Finally, this project was significantly influenced by the beautifully crafted typefaces and book design of William Morris (Kelmscott Press 1892).

The Nature of Gothic: A Chapter of the Stones of Venice (1819-1900) by John Ruskin has a cover of pure white vellum, stitched with gold thread. The vellum has the appearance of pearl. The inside pages are of handmade cotton stock with deckle edge.⁶ The text is printed in Morris's 'Golden Type'. It features elaborate wood block illustrations and was an attempt to produce a beautifully crafted book at a time when mass production had reduced handcrafted print to a curiosity. The significance of the work was that it helped to revive hand printing across Europe. For my study, I am

⁶ This is in reference to medieval paper manufacture.



Figure 1:3 Side elevation of Morris's edition of John Ruskin's *The Nature of Gothic: A Chapter of the Stones of Venice* (1819-1900).

interested in the artefact's unique design and ordered ratio (that references illuminated manuscript production). Offsetting this sense of uniformity are the marks of the craftsman's hand. These include subtle printing errors and ink smudging that became a design feature in my eulogy artwork.

1.5 *Technical bodies of knowledge*

Finally, the research has also been informed by a small number of technical texts. Two of these are older books and two deal with recovered knowledge.

Cockerell's (1901), *Bookbinding, and the Care of Books: A handbook for amateurs bookbinders and librarians*, offers an influential chapter entitled 'Injurious influences to which books are subjected'. In this, the author offers an insightful analysis and documentation of physical forces contributing to the decay and disintegration of books. While some of his observations are products of their time (and of the technologies in use in the period), his clarification of issues like the decay of binding, the influences of light, how to rid a library of mould, seasonal times for airing and steps to eradicate bookworms, are particularly useful to my eulogistic considerations of materiality because it calls into account the life of books and the care required to retain their structure and to preserve their continued existence. Excerpts from this book we see leaking out into the artworks presented in the exhibition accompanying this exegesis.

Simon's (1968) *Introduction to Printing: The Craft of Letterpress*, was originally designed for apprentices. However, as I reconstructed the letterpress used to produce this thesis and sought to recover information surrounding its repair and use, the manual became invaluable. Used in conjunction with advice from the compositor and Monotype/Linotype/Intertype engineer Stephen Healey and Terry Foster, a Linotype operator and printer, I was able to reconstruct a technology, and also understand print principles and processes, that I would later renegotiate in my artwork.

A third text, d'Arcy Hughes and Vernon-Morris's (2008), *Print Making, traditional and contemporary techniques*, offers a commentary on a variety of print methods including letterpress and woodcut techniques. The book was useful for its descriptions (and examples) of blind embossing techniques, woodblock printing and the strategic manipulation of ink colours.

Finally, Rivers's (2010) *Reinventing Letterpress* offered the research access to a variety of inspirational works by contemporary practitioners. Drawing on international examples of creative practice, it helped me to contextualise not only my own practice, but also any argument I might make relating to the significance of the book as a printed and manually crafted artefact.

Conclusion

This is a practice-led thesis. Its review of knowledge is therefore relatively diverse. This is because it is concerned both with ideas and with processes. Significant theories and information relating to the design of the creative works have been discussed and the next chapter describes the methodology employed in the explication of the project.

Chapter 2 — Methodology

The methodological approach to this thesis is concerned with elevating personal responses to the tactility and meaning of the book. In researching such a project, I am concerned with self-reflection, intuitive response, sensuality, production, evaluation and refinement. I am also concerned with the strategic use of tacit knowledge. Because of these features of the research, heuristics as a system of inquiry offers a useful framework.

*“Books are the
treasured wealth
of the world and
the fit inheritance
of generations
and nations.”*
David Thoreau, 1854

Heuristics

2.1 Definition

Heuristics is a qualitative research approach that a number of theorists have suggested is useful for a creative production thesis in art and design. Scrivener (2000) says that designers in practice-led theses often employ heuristic inquiries and Wood (2000) also notes that because heuristics is aligned with ‘discovery’ and experience-oriented practices, it is a useful approach for such researchers. Dineen and Collins (2005) suggest heuristic inquiries demand a challenging synthesis of cognitive,

creative and motivational abilities and Ings (2011) suggests that these are activated through a process of intelligent, informal questioning that utilises sophisticated levels of informed subjectivity and tacit knowing.

Heuristics is often useful for creative inquiries because it suggests an approach that does not presuppose either formulas or pre-existing rules. Heuristic inquiries, Douglass and Moustakas (1985) suggest, involve a search for the discovery of meaning and essence in significant human experience. In practice-led research, such inquiries involve searching to find out or discover.⁷

A heuristic inquiry involves a disciplined yet intuitive scrutiny of material or processes. Its emphasis is on connection and the relationship of ‘things’ and processes. Through this, heuristics leads the researcher to understand essential meaning through personal engagement.

Essentially then, a heuristic inquiry is one where a researcher draws a question into themselves and develops it through a series of intuitive experiments and refinements.

⁷ The word heuristics comes from the Greek *heuretikos* meaning inventive or *heuriskein* meaning to find.

2.2 *Heuristics and immersion*

Central to a heuristic inquiry is a process of immersion. Immersion is a state where one works with questions and data in an internal process. In this situation, the researcher is in parallel self-dialogue with the emerging thesis. When I draw the question into myself, I am asking (from inside) what the book is about. In doing this, I remove it from its status as an artefact and consider it as an idea. By drawing the idea of the book (as a perishable but enduring phenomenon) inside, I am equating it with my own perishable but enduring nature. Thus, I am exploring links between my tacit understanding of life and death and my understanding of the book.

Douglass and Moustakas (1985) describe the immersive process in a heuristic inquiry as involving “a search from the internal frame of reference because (one) must stay in touch with the most innumerable perceptions and awareness that are purely (one’s) own, without the interference of restrictions of judgements” (p. 47). Accordingly, an inner dialogue and sensory reflection occurs during an immersive phase. One ‘feels out’ and re-evaluates the parameters and nature of the question[s] one is asking.

2.2.1 Immersion and tacit knowing

In an immersive phase, I generally solve problems by imagining, sensing, questioning and connecting. In this process, I am not thinking consciously [explicitly] about what I am doing. In other words, I deal with a kind of knowing that is more intuitive than it is calculated. Polanyi (1983) describes this as tacit knowing and describes it when he says, “we can know more than we can tell” (p. 4). He suggests, with tacit thought, one diagnoses and retains a clear record each time one engages with an environment. He argues we know more in practice than we do through intellectual means. This, he suggests, is especially evident when interpreting the use of tools, the sense of touch, the smell of things and the sounds they make. This experience and knowing, he suggests, is cumulative.

The tacit process I would argue is not isolated, it is dialogic. In other words, when I make, what I make is in discussion with me during the process of its design and manufacture. By this I mean I sense my way forward and what I make (physically) talks back to me. Thus my internal self speaks outward, through processes of tacit decision-making into the physical expression of my ideas.

2.2.2 Research design

Now that the concept of immersion in a heuristic inquiry is established, it is useful to explain how it operates inside the project’s research design. Broadly speaking, the immersive phase exists as a counterpart to an external environment. Designing oscillates between external stimuli and internal processes of reflection and connection. This can usefully be described diagrammatically.

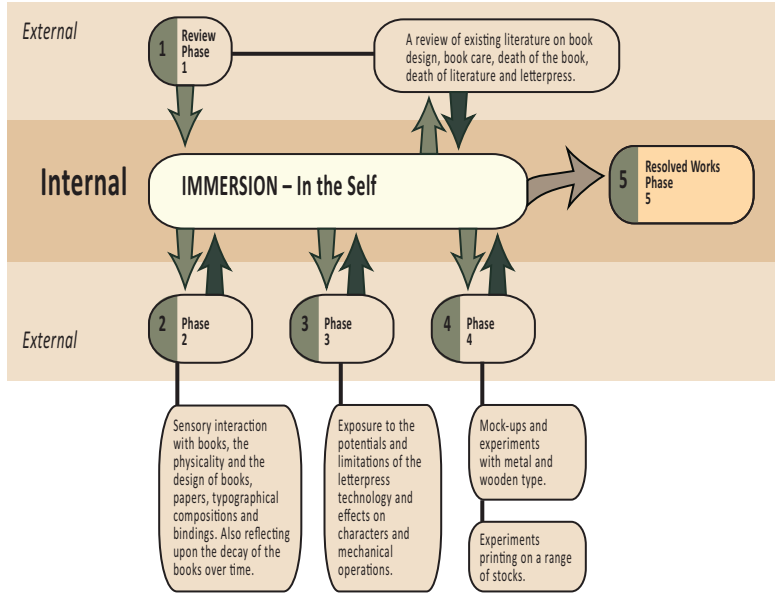


Figure 2:1 Diagrammatic rendering of the relationships between the internal and external processes of the heuristic inquiry.

In the diagram, research may be described in phases that appear to move the project's question forward. The diagram shows how external processes and inquiries feed into an immersive process that produces resolved works. The process of externalising is neither linear, cyclic nor chronological. As I advance with the work, I often revisit phases to refresh, reconsider or review ideas. In this way, subtle changes are introduced to the process that might not have been initially considered. The mid-grey and dark-grey arrows that extend from IMMERSION – IN THE SELF (Phase 1, Phase 2, Phase 3 and Phase 4) are frequently traversed before final works are resolved in Phase 5.

Phase 1

In the process of reviewing knowledge, I consulted a diverse range of texts dealing with the demise of literature and the death of the book. In conjunction, I also consulted a number of technical texts that informed me of either the care and structure of books, or the use of letterpress. A substantial number of these texts were out of print (which adds to the argument that books are under threat) and needed to be accessed through Project Gutenberg⁸ or AbeBooks⁹.

⁸ Project Gutenberg is a significant online literary project that offers over 36,000 free eBooks to download www.gutenberg.org

⁹ AbeBooks is an online market place for new, used, rare and out-of-print books www.abebooks.com

Phase 2

In this phase, I explored through a physical analysis and sensory contemplation a number of texts ranging from manuscripts to music. As part of this, I sought out a range of books dating back to the 12th century. This process took me to the Special Collections at The University of Auckland Library, to the Sir George Grey Special Collections held at the Auckland Central City Library¹⁰ (and to other books stored in their basement archives). In addition, I accessed an 1852 Māori Bible at Puke Ariki, Taranaki Research Centre.

As an extension of this, I also visited the Auckland Central City Library bindery, where I was able to discuss issues of repair and conservation, and engage with books that had been marked as in a critical condition.¹¹ In addition, on a visit to New Plymouth, I sorted out materials and advice from members of the Taranaki Aviation Transport and Technology Museum (TATATM).¹²

¹⁰ These conversations were with Georgia Prince (Special Collections Head Officer), Ian Snowden (Special Collections archivist), Doreen Walden (library tours) and Tony Owen (head binder), at the Auckland Central City Library. I also had discussions with Jo Birks from the Special Collections at The University of Auckland Library.

¹¹ These books were removed from public display. They included books that were torn, weakened, falling apart or physically compromised because of mould, use or water damage. These books were housed in an atmospherically controlled environment.

¹² Specifically, TATATM member Terry Foster, who produces type for New Zealand designers. He informed me of processes for working with Intertype, Linotype and Ludlow casting machines that are still in operation at the museum.



Figure 2:2 Māori Bible found on the shelf at Puke Ariki, Taranaki Research Centre, New Plymouth, showing great wear.



Figure 2:3 TATATM volunteer Terry Foster preparing slugs of lead type on an Intertype casting machine.

At this time, I also discussed letterpress printing and worked as a volunteer¹³ at the Museum of Transport and Technology (MOTAT) in Auckland.

In a non-literary consideration, I also attended a concert performance of Mozart's *Requiem in D minor*.¹⁴ This was done so I might sense correlations between what I heard and recent engagements with the mortality of books. This performance was influential in the design of the artwork, Requiem. Thus when discussing the types of inquiry made in Phase 2, I am talking about data (as experience) that I could pull inside myself in the pursuit of fruitful connection.

Phase 3

Phase 3 involved more technological inquiries, specifically those relating to the letterpress environment. In this phase, I constructed and experimented with equipment, materials and processes. I 'built' and restored facilities and began exploring their potentials.

At AUT University, I accessed a Korrex proofing press and a Farley hand galley/proof press. Available fonts included: Universe Medium 12 to

¹³ Graham Judd from MOTAT had a deep working knowledge of letterpress printing machines. He also runs his own printing business in Auckland.
¹⁴ Performed by the Auckland Choral Society singers and the Pipers Sinfonia at the Auckland Town Hall in July 2011.



Figure 2:4 Laser-cut 3mm MDF board ready to use as a debossing effect.

24pt and Times (a small collection of roman, italic bold) 12 to 24pt. In addition, there were setting sticks, furniture, quoins, spacing, galley trays and a number of chases. My visit to Taranaki yielded more type, and I was able to obtain additional material from members of TATATM, the Association of Book Crafts New Zealand Inc. (ABC) and Association of Handcraft Printers New Zealand (AHP).

I also conducted experiments with MDF board¹⁵ in an attempt to create type-high letters. In conjunction with this, I experimented with different inks (oil and water based) and examined their potentials when applied to lead and wood surfaces.



Figure 2:6 Individual sheets.

¹⁵ Medium-density fibreboard.

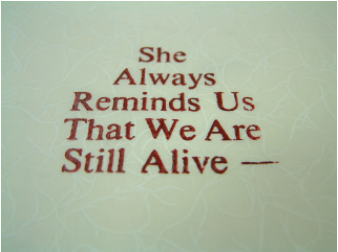


Figure 2:7 Patterned tracing papers.



Figure 2:5 The result of the debossing effect.



Figure 2:8 Butter paper sections stitched together.

Phase 4

This was a more advanced phase of making and evaluating through the production of mock-ups. In this phase, I experimented with substrate, deboss¹⁶ and colour. I tested the potentials of handmade papers in different sheet sizes (A1–A4) and foreign materials such as skeleton leaves, cottons, hair, grass and stains.

Phase 5

This is the final phase where I evaluated and refined ideas. Here I reflected on relationships in whole works rather than on individual experiments involved in their construction. Evaluations were concerned with continuity and the ability of the design to articulate nominated concepts in the thesis.

Conclusion

Practice-led inquiries in graphic design are not always easy to massage into existing methodological frameworks. Partly this is because some such inquiries are closely related to the idiosyncratic nature of the researcher and the high levels of discovery in work that is largely subjective.

¹⁶ Deboss is an area of an image that is pressed into a substrate.

Although a number of writers have offered methods for systemising or analysing the use of heuristics in research (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985; Kleining and Witt, 2000; Sela-Smith, 2002; Ings, 2011), I have sought with this chapter to describe and theoretically contextualise a research design that truly describes my approach to the inquiry. The veracity and integrity of the design and its application are evidenced in my relating it back to specific experiments conducted during the inquiry.

Having now considered the design of the project, it is useful to discuss significant ideas contributing to its critical framework .

Chapter 3 — Critical ideas and commentary

Introduction

In discussing the critical ideas underpinning this practice-led inquiry, I will briefly discuss my position in relation to notions of the impermanent nature of the book. The chapter then leads into a critically informed commentary on each of the works.

3.1 The decay of literature and materiality

In H. G. Wells’ novel *The Time Machine* (1898), the protagonist, while searching for technologies that might help him avoid capture by the Morlocks, stumbles upon a Palace of Green Porcelain. Inside this strange building, a remnant of a bygone age, he journeys through a series of galleries that at first remind him of military chapels hung with decaying flags. But these rooms, Wells describes as the remnants of a library where literature and the physicality of books had decayed and were turning to dust. He describes the “brown and charred rags” that hang from the walls as “the decaying vestiges of books” (p. 131).

*“It was for them
dead, like a burnt-
out match, an old
railway ticket, or
yesterday’s paper;
they had already
used it.”*

C. S. Lewis, 1961

He notes, “They had long since dropped to pieces, and every semblance of print had left them. But here and there were warped boards and cracked metallic clasps that told the tale well enough” (Wells, 1898). The time traveller wonders about the impact of such decay on personal achievement especially that of a literary man. He notes “the thing that struck me with keenest force was the enormous waste of labour to which this sombre wilderness of rotting paper testified” (p. 131).

H. G. Wells’s graphic recounting of a decayed library as a signifier of lost culture and identity may be likened to anxieties surrounding the Death of the Book.

3.2 *Death and anxiety*

Brooks (2011), Sterry (2007) and Showalter (1995) have argued that the book is not dying. H. G. Wells’s dystopic visions of literature and culture falling into decay, and all evidence of print disappearing, the authors suggest, form part of a “modern fear about the passing of the printed book by its technological successor, the digital book” (Brooks, 2011, para.1). Brooks suggests this anxiety or “apocalyptic archetype [is] found in the

collective unconscious rather than [being] a fulfilment of prophesy from dystopian literature” (Brooks, 2011, para.1). He points out that books are often treated as contraband in novels like *Brave New World* (Huxley, 1932), *1984* (Orwell, 1949), *Fahrenheit 451* (Bradbury, 1953) and *The Telling* (Le Guin, 2000). In these texts “books are outlawed with the express purpose of population control by restricting access to history” (ibid.). Drawing on this idea, Showalter (1995) suggests that the book is more than its physical nature, it may also represent notions of integrity, permanence and authority.

Although these writers form part of a distinctive discussion around the metamorphosis of the book,¹⁷ this thesis is more concerned with the nature of the book’s physical demise, and the books potential as an object to articulate the nature of its own impermanence. In this exegesis, I suggest that the book’s impermanence is both physical and cultural. By physical I refer to its material nature. It weakens, foxes,¹⁸ tears, cracks and stains due to use, materials and poor storage.

¹⁷ These writers include Nordau (1895); Kernan (1990), Kurzweil (1992a, 1992b), Bloch and Hesse (1993), Showalter (1995), Birkerts (2006), Levy (2007), Sterry (2007), Young (2007), Darnton (2009) and Brooks (2011).

¹⁸ Foxing is a term for mildew. The term is an amalgam of (F)errous (Ox)ide. Ferrous Oxide is the iron that is attracted to the chemical wood pulp in paper. The chemicals are activated by humidity.

However, the book's impermanence may also be seen as cultural. With the proliferation of digital book forms, the corporeal (physical) experience of reading has changed and with this has gone a certain tactile intimacy. I would argue that along with this loss has been a gradual repositioning of the value of the book as a cultural object.

3.3 *Metaphor*

In this project, I use funerary metaphors as a means of artistically considering the nature of impermanence in books. Carrington (1991, p. 112) defines a metaphor as “a rhetorical figure in which a term is used to designate something other than its literal meaning”. Thus a metaphor¹⁹ may “call to mind the resemblances among different things” (ibid.). In this project, I interpret funerary terms as considerations of impermanence and, through this, create physical metaphors expressed as objects. I compare human death and the book. In considering the physical decay of the book, I allude to the closing rituals of human life.

All four artworks may be conceived of as (and indeed make direct reference to) books, through materials, form or print processes but they are more

¹⁹ A metaphor is normally a literary figure of speech that uses a tangible thing to represent something less tangible.

than this. They are encapsulated statements. As metaphors, they draw relationships between the book and its impermanence. Woven subtly beneath their physical forms is a certain grief that is both affectionate and tactile.

The exhibited outcomes as metaphoric reflections on impermanence are framed as funerary constructs: the obituary, eulogy, requiem and memorial. We see them as reflections upon life and death and on corporeality and impermanence. This may be likened to the description of impermanent material objects in Tacita Dean's *Kodak* (2006). Marx, (2008, p. 70) suggests that the objects in the film “serve as a requiem to a vanishing form”.

Thus the metaphor of mourning evidenced in my work offers a reverence often not accounted in the rhetoric of theorists. In these works, impermanence is the core of both physical form²⁰ and meaning.

It is useful now to discuss each funerary construct and how the physical metaphor has been designed as an expression of it.

²⁰ Even the memorial work, being mild steel, will one day corrode into rust and the lead decay due to oxidation over time.

3.4 Considerations of the Work

Obituary

Funerary form

An obituary is normally a paid listing as a classified advertisement in a newspaper. It generally contains details of the deceased person and information relating to their approaching funeral service. The word obituary comes from the Latin *obitus* meaning ‘departure, going to meet, or an encounter’. In this regard, the term is euphemistic. It testifies to a death. It is often prepared as a biographical sketch by parties (like a funeral director) who do not know the deceased. An obituary is not published until an official authority has announced the death. It is often relatively brief and, being a temporary public notice, it is physically and socially impermanent.

Newsprint

Because of the obituary’s normal location in daily periodicals, my design utilises newsprint as its primary material. Newsprint also signifies impermanence and this idea is central to my design. Townend (2011, p.1) notes that newsprint is made up entirely of mechanical pulp. This makes it

vulnerable to deterioration. Bukovský 2000) suggests that the irradiating of newsprint by modified sunlight results in very high levels of degradation. This causes yellowing, increased acidity and a loss of mechanical qualities. He notes however, that even when de-acidification processes are applied to the paper, deterioration will still occur because it increases “certain processes which result in a greater amount of water extractable degradation products and in lower folding endurance” (p. 55). Bukovský’s study showed that sunlight exposure (as little as 15–30 days) causes rapid degradation. This weakens the cellulose fibre and reduces water content. This is why, if newsprint is not kept dry and stored out of natural light, it becomes brittle, slowly discolours and is increasingly prone to tearing.

The design

The obituary book unravels as a reel of newsprint across the floor where it is trodden on and damaged.²¹ Projected from the reel of newsprint is a diminutive, immaculately hand-set obituary. Its design draws attention to the obituary’s small but singular significance.

Traditionally, people cut these notices out of newspapers and filed them away. They are part of the public press but also subtracted from it so they

²¹ Newsprint traditionally has very low ‘end use’ status. It is used for protecting tables from spills of food, wrapping cheap goods and starting fires.

became part of the personal records of individuals. Thus, in my design, the discrete artefact sits on the work between its origin and its end use. While the reel is an anonymous blank, the singular value of the obituary is elevated.

Typographically, the work is set in 6 point (pt) *Consort light* (serif) and *Lining Gothic 544* (sans serif)²² on a narrow measure of 8ems (33mm). In reference to design conventions for such notices in newspapers circa 1901,²³ the main body text is justified to both edges, except the final line. The heading is in capitals and centred. The text uses one serif typeface, although the capitals are sans serif, as there are no capital with serif currently available in 6pt.²⁴ This is not an inconsistent problem of missing characters especially at this size.

In New Zealand in 1901, many small printers had limited foundry fonts available. Accordingly, it was not unusual to see headings or main texts composed from a mixture of sans serif and serif type.²⁵

22 Typeface names acquired from Terry Foster in New Plymouth, 22 October 2011 (pers. communication).

23 I have used conventions from this period for the artwork because this is the date of the publication from which I have taken the body copy.

24 This decision has been affected by the nature of redundancy. In New Zealand, most of these smaller point size letters have been melted down or sold for scrap. In contemporary newspapers, such as The New Zealand Herald, obituaries are now set in 8pt News Gothic, a condensed face on 10pt leading. Through the 1900s–1960s, classifieds were printed in smaller sizes. It is this convention that is referenced in my artwork.

25 There was only a limited use of italic text at the time. This was again related to limited fonts imported into the country.

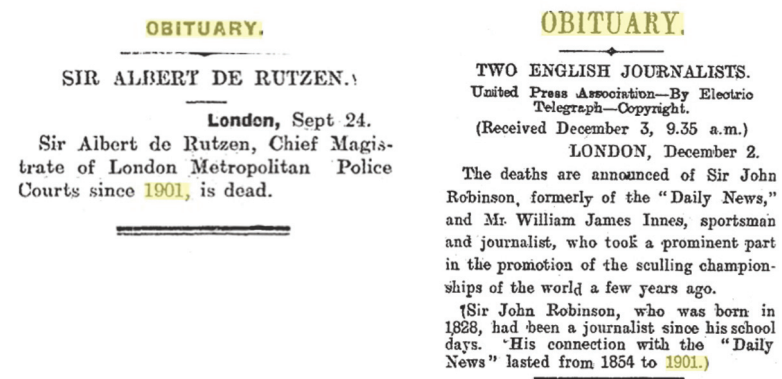


Figure 3:1 (Left) Obituary from The Colonist, Volume LV, Issue 13828, 27 September 1913, p. 5. Sourced www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz

Figure 3:2 (Right) Obituary from The Star, Issue 7876, 3 December 1903, p. 3²⁶ These obituaries, are set using different embellishments. The obituary from The Colonist uses a 'French Rule'.²⁷ The text is terminated with a 'double line rule'. Conversely, the embellishment in The Star obituary is an 'ornate border'. It is made of composite elements (a line with a detail set in the middle).²⁸ Sourced www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz

In my design, the words OBITUARY and BOOK are set in 6pt Roman *Lining Gothic 544* on 8pt leading.

The text used for the obituary book is taken from Cockerell's *Bookbinding and the Care of Books: A handbook for Amateurs, Bookbinders & Librarians* (1901). The body text describes the process of decay in a physical book when it is not cared for.

26 Images from the National Library of New Zealand www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz

27 An ornamental line that tapers from the middle to the outer edge.

28 Terms offered by Ken Foster in Putaruru, 19 October 2011 (pers. communication).

This text (like the summary of a life) is an excerpt. It captures something of the essence of the book but is a judicious and relatively impersonal edit. From an available 22 chapters, the excerpt becomes a ‘posting’ of an idea. It gives us certain content but is stripped of its context.

The excerpt is small (Figure 3:3). Its scale is similar to that of obituaries appearing in New Zealand newspapers in 1901 but placed against the volume of a reel of paper, it feels both insignificant and, upon close inspection, precious. This refers to the way in which an obituary is irrelevant to the majority of readers but deeply significant to a small minority. The design is subtle and restrained overall. A quiet noble piece that is indicative of obituary layouts of the time. The tone of the writing is informative and respectful though distant.

Eulogy

Funerary form

The eulogy is a form of biographical narrative that documents significant events in the life of a deceased individual. The word comes from the classical Greek word *eulogia*, meaning ‘good words’. A eulogy is normally

29 The final body copy was taken from Cockerell (1901), p.291–306. The section refers to the “Injurious Influences to which Books are Subjected”.

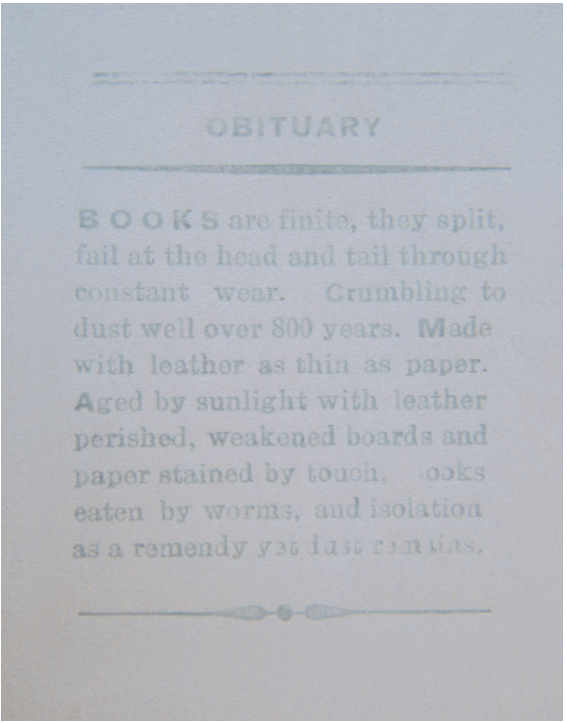


Figure 3:3 (Opposite) An early proof and lead type in a chase. The artwork (measuring 33mm x 46mm) is an experiment with a word count that was too long (10 lines). In 1901, the content was much shorter.²⁹ The layout also shows early considerations of type, kerning, leading and rule placement.

a speech or extensive orated body of praise. Normally, the eulogy is composed by someone with an intimate knowledge of the deceased. However, in a eulogy, not all is remembered. Conceptually it may be understood as a collection of narratives drawn from a life about which much has been forgotten. Thus a eulogy, while appearing whole, is generally selective and uneven.

The design

The design for this work gives reference to idealisation and loss. The artefact is beautiful to hold but, upon examination, we notice that pieces of it are missing. The pages are pale and semi-translucent.³⁰ They suggest layers of time and experience. In places, the text is smudged and illegible; moments of lucid recollection are erased but others stand out in sharp relief and some text is confused due to words overlapping.

The tactile and intimate recollection

As a eulogy is an intimate and subjective account, the design of this work is discreet in scale. It folds out in one's hands in a manner that suggests both intimacy and fragility. It is warm and graceful. It wraps around one's clasp

³⁰ In this regard, they are like the skin when one is near death.

as a eulogy wraps memories lovingly around the accounting of a life. Upon examination, we discover that the spine, though stitched, has overlapping threads. There is disorder and unknowingness at the opening and closing of the book. There is no resolution before or after the accounted life, only imagination and belief.

As a eulogy is an accounting of what has been experienced in a continuum, for which there is no concrete prologue or epilogue; the covers of the book are missing. Thus, physically, the tape and thread that tie the signatures together (as chapters) in a life, are exposed. The internal pages do not attempt to accommodate any numerical symbol in written form. The structural visage loosely connects 50 signatures representing its 500-year lifespan as an object. In this metaphor, I expose the perishability of the corporeal life.

However, the bookwork has a chronological form. Like the recounted life (eulogy), it moves forward but there are stories that have faded from recollection... the life whispers as much with space as it does with information.

Concept

Brody (1999) argues that, in a digital environment, we experience a form of 'disconnect' between the object, the reader and the book's original form. There are no shelves for books to sit on, only a vast space of constantly changing links. He sees the digital book in a state of constant alteration with users accessing duplicates, sometimes intact or abbreviated, without censure or authorisation. In response, my eulogy is physical.

It pays homage to the intimate tactility of books. It envelops the grasp and suggests a close physical relationship between the body and what is read (see Figure 3:4). Excerpts from Cockerell's (1901) text are printed in a chronology of information but large sections are missing, fading or smudged.

Cockerell's book is now out of print. Its story continues to fade with each disappearance of an edition from the original print run. Its story is in a state of disintegration.

Figure 3:4 (Opposite) An early experiment (80mm x 75mm x 60mm (d)) demonstrating exploration with ideas of translucence and intimacy.



Requiem

Funerary form

A requiem (from the Latin meaning ‘rest after labour’ or repose) is either a Mass for the dead in the Roman Catholic Church or a musical setting of this Mass. The music normally uses the specific formula of the Roman Missal. Kramer (2006) suggests that a requiem is a transfiguration of the state of one thing into another. She suggests that this shift is from the material to the spiritual. The requiem is frequently celebrated in the context of a funeral. It may be understood as the translation of a life into sound and rhythm. It presents the celebration and mourning of an idea using a distinct chronological form.

The design

My requiem is a conscious reflection on Mozart’s *Requiem in D minor* (1791). This work is significant to the nature of the thesis because it was left unfinished at the composer’s death.³¹ Thus, like the debates surrounding the future of the physical book, the finite answer is unresolved.

³¹ A completed version by Süßmayr was eventually delivered to Count Franz von Walsegg, but this was constructed largely from notes and imagined extensions.

Like Mozart’s requiem, the book is laid out in formal sections (signatures). Its structure contains deliberately repeated elements in eight parts that reference the requiem’s formal divisions: the Introitus, Kyrie, Sequentia, Offertorium, Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei and Communio.

A feature of the requiem is that it revisits elements of itself. In my work, we encounter text in Latin that repeats and subtly changes eight times. Our first encounter is sparse. It contains only the word ‘Requiem’. Like the Introitus, this leads us into the body of the work. The book has a beginning, a middle and an end although there are blank pages near its conclusion that refer to the ‘unfinished’ nature of Mozart’s work.

As we progress, words become lighter; we feel the echo of their passing. We lose our grasp on the physical substance of written meaning in a manner that references Bloch and Hesse’s (1993) suggestion that anxieties over the loss of the book are an expression of our “fear of loss of bodily integrity” (p. 4). The printed pages increasingly suggest this loss. We ‘encounter’ undocumented space.

The requiem is an example of Jacob's (2002) observation that physical books transfer meaning in unique ways. He suggests a book is not simply a body of content but also a process of its construction and dissemination. The requiem book's physicality helps us to contemplate life. Its weight, size, space, absence and presence constitute a material existence in the present. This materiality, Jacob argues, reaches beyond the moment of the book's manufacture. It becomes intimately present in the immediate experience of the reader.

Physical structure

The artwork operates as a transformation. It is encountered in parts but is understood as an unfolding whole. The structure of the book is unbound (in reference to early musical manuscripts) so it can be folded out into a single text. It is placed on a floating shelf, at eye level. This placement is poetic, to suggest a sense of 'hearing' what we see. It is viewed as a stationary performance.

The text is printed using a Korrex letterpress proofing press and shows clear evidence of physical impression. Each page is treated as a space into which sound (as type) is placed. The type is small and distinctively leaded



Figure 3:5 (Above and opposite) An early proof and lead type in a chase of pages 2–3. The artwork (190mm x 150mm) is an experiment with ink colouring on the 300gsm coaster board.



(again in reference to the substantial spaces between bars in a requiem manuscript score). All English text set³² in the work is set in 10pt *Baskerville Roman*. This is the typeface used in Cockerell's 1901 publication.³³ All Latin text is set in 12pt *Aster Light Italic*.

Memorial

Funerary form

The final work in the exhibition is a memorial. The word memorial comes from the Latin *memoralis*, meaning 'belonging to memory'. A memorial is normally an object that serves as a focus for the memory of something. In this regard, it preserves the recollection of a person, event or thing. Memorials are often associated with writing or building in stone. They have a sense of reverence and substance. Often their materiality is used as a metaphor for permanence. The memorial illustrates Brody's (1999) belief that books constitute – establish mentally and emotionally – for humans 'memory spaces'. In these spaces, we consume sensory experiences that help us to structure and restructure meaning.

³² Lead type set as slugs on the Intertype and Linotype machines at TATATM by Terry Foster, September and October 2011.

³³ The requiem body copy was taken from Cockerell (1901), pp.18–33 and pp.291–306. It says, "binding of leaves of a book are to keep them together in their proper order, and to protect them..." .



Figure 3:6 An initial mock-up of the metal chase. The work's final dimensions are 180mm x 240mm x 70mm (d). The text locked in the chase is taken from the final line of Cockerell's book (p. 306) "Part of the interest of any old book is its individual history, which can be gathered from the binding, bookplates, marginal notes, names of former owner. & [c.] and anything that [tends to] obliterate these signs is to be deplored."

Design

This final work refers to both the creation and the memory of books. It is made of the materials and artefacts that once created books. It refers to a life passed by reconstituting and ‘heroising’ elements of its creation.

The artefacts of letterpress printing, the lead type and metal chases, are ‘locked’ into a memorial. The use of metal refers to the comparative permanence of bronze but the work is made of lead, brass and steel. It will eventually mark; the lead will oxidise and the steel will rust. It will decay but the memorial suggests for a time, a sense of permanence (in the way that early books represented a suggested, permanent repository of cultural knowledge).

The memorial, with its reversed type, is encased in chases that suggest covers. We see here not the nature of the book but the evocation of the permanence of the book. The investment of time, craft and lost integrity that was bemoaned by H. G. Wells, is translated and suspended for a time into weight and solidity (see Figure 3:6).

Figure 3:7 (Opposite) The type is hand set using Mercury 18pt, with two brass rules, one at the top and one beneath the baseline.



Conclusion

And so we ‘close the pages’ on this thesis. This thesis will appear in the academic world as both a physical book and a digital file. As such, it exists between worlds and, at the same time, in both. Young (2007) suggests that physical books are a collection of moments linked, sewn or glued into one artefact. It is this idea, and the corporeality accompanying it, that has been central to the thesis.

*“Books are not
forever; they are
fragile, they break,
they fade.”*

Sherman Young, 2007

While new digital book forms may not become works of art like those of William Caxton, Aldus Manutius and in his later life William Morris,³⁴ I do not believe they are devoid of potential. This thesis has not been a refuting of their value. Instead, I have been concerned with a distinctive, generic, tactile, paper artefact that reacts to time, both in its physical structure and in the intrusions of readers upon its surfaces. The physical book metamorphoses both physically and conceptually.

³⁴ In their time publishing books these 3 individuals contributed books as a craft; Caxton recognised as the first English printer in England 1477, with Manutius selecting Venice Italy 1490 as his centre to create exquestic works , and Morris founded Kelmscott Press in London England 1891.

My creative responses to this state are not literal. As metaphoric reflections, they constitute a form of abstract honouring. The works are sensitive and subtle. Researching, contextualising and designing them has involved many hours. What is represented in this exegesis is an edited narrative of physical journeys, late nights, repaired machinery, frustration, discovery and elation. It is a scholarly, technical and creative inquiry. It is in the intersection of these arenas that the thesis has been brought into being.

Edward P. Morgan (1963 p. 4) said, “A book is the only place in which you can examine a fragile thought without breaking it, or explore an explosive idea without fear it will go off in your face... It is one of the few havens remaining where a man’s mind can get both provocation and privacy.”

Provocation and privacy suggest a unique state. Whether you are reading this on a computer screen or as a cradled paper artefact, its provocations are the same. It is the ideas that count.

That is why this thesis pays homage, not only to the physical book, but also to the book as an idea.

Karol Wilczynska

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The Passing

A metaphoric interpretation of the
impermanence of the book

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Thesis Composed using:
Apple MacBook Pro 15" Laptop
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