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**Typographic Collages. An Archaeology of the Fugitive:
Retrievals from a Disobedient Archive**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Bath Spa University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Art, Film and Media

August 2026

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Abstract

This practice-based PhD submission consists of a series of artworks (typographic collages) I have constructed from artefacts selected from my own extensive disobedient archive: an unruly collection deliberately designed to embrace disorder, resist conventional taxonomy and alert us to the indistinct. Alongside the practical work is this thesis, which constitutes an analysis of the elusive qualities of things, in particular that which is occluded in an object - the *chimeric*. It proposes an attunement to *dingewollen*, or ‘thing-ness’, acknowledging the potential of objects to act as symbiotic participants in the creative process.

Collected through a series of expeditions to potential sites of retrieval across many countries, cultures, and time periods, the archive focuses on printed ephemera produced during the lifespan of commercial letterpress printing, between approximately 1820 and 1960, focusing on single-use objects of little or no value: the detritus of past commercial transactions and the trajectories of personal lives.

The research explores the idea of absence as a form of presence, inviting an entanglement with the unseen and a receptiveness to the consonance of materials and their disparate histories. This is both carried out and evidenced through ‘reconstituted artefacts’ (see: a lexicon, p.18), practical work that I have created using unconventional printmaking techniques, including the use of fugitive materials, such as heat-sensitive inks and light-reactive

chemicals. The collages exist simultaneously as physical objects and imagined constructs, transcending their materiality to evoke a hauntedness, shaped as much by what is visible as what is imagined - by the traces, shadows, and after-images that linger in memory and perception. The fragmentary is investigated for its ability to signify more than the complete, particularly in the case of letterforms and words.

The majority of work from the history of collage-making is composed of materials that were readily at hand. The series of typographic collages presented here is distinctly different, composed of material drawn from sources across the globe and subject to an acute forensic analysis of their contexts, meanings and histories, inviting a receptiveness to that which lies outside the margins of perception and comprehension.

Acknowledgements: a personal note

During this project, my progress was interrupted by a serious illness from which I have now thankfully recovered. Whilst thinking deeply about the recalcitrant nature of matter, it was unwelcome to find that, ironically, my body was behaving as the most disobedient element of all. However, I survived to complete what I set out to do. Consequently, when I thank the following people for their support it means far more than the usual gestures of appreciation. It really was the case that I could not have done it without them. So, thank you firstly to my immediate family: my partner Kate Loveday and my son Arthur for their love and support, and to my tutors at Bath Spa University, Robert Luzar and Andrea Medjesi-Jones, who patiently waited for my recovery and guided me steadily towards a conclusion.

Aside from this personal difficulty, I have been assisted, whilst travelling to gather material, by chance meetings with strangers who have been generous with their time and frequently offered hospitality when none was sought. It has been affirming to find that across many different cultures and economic circumstances, there lies an enduring kindness. And lastly, to those unknown individuals that inhabit the collages in the traces of their lives and personal documents - to these people too, I owe a debt of gratitude.

Ethics Statement

This study completed Bath Spa University's Stage 1 ethics self-assessment process (application reference: 180326NP) on 18 March 2026. Following researcher self-assessment and supervisor review, the project was deemed not to require Stage 2 ethical review under the University's research ethics procedures. Should you have any concerns regarding the ethical conduct of this study, please contact the Research Support Office at Bath Spa University. researchsupportoffice@bathspa.ac.uk

Data Statement

No new datasets were created during the study.

Copyright Statement

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Nick Pride August 2026

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Introduction

This practice-based PhD submission comprises two complementary elements: a series of artworks¹ I term typographic collages which I have made from printed ephemera I have collected, plus elements that I have printed and produced, alongside a thesis written specifically with a practical and a philosophical intention: rigorous scrutiny of unconventional methods of production rooted in collage and print, and the proposition of an acute attunement to that which lies beyond the visual field - a method of being with the indistinct. By exploring how the collages are made, through my own acts of making, I sought to identify some of the invisible processes that characterise artistic production. Central to this project is an understanding of the methods of constructing the typographic collages, and an awareness of the hidden qualities within the collection, gathered from across the world and belonging to a specific kind of printed ephemera that were nearly always discarded after use, and are now largely obsolete.

The thesis investigates the recalcitrant tendency of matter to indisciplin, the notion of absence as presence, and the aggregate, conglomerate, and crystalline behaviours of artefacts in congregation. It seeks to challenge the interpretive sovereignty and preconceptions that define archives, and invites an

¹ The practical work consists of eleven completed collages and a body of supplementary experimental pieces. These are illustrated throughout the thesis and in summary in Appendix A, page 261.

attentiveness to the overlooked in the processes of production and in the finished artworks.

Practice based studio research

I research and evaluate innovative and traditional printmaking technologies, specifically those inducing impermanence in inks and substrates, with a focus on their efficacy in alerting us to the mutability of all physical substance, employing fugitive inks, dyes and processes. Through initiating acts of ordering and dis-ordering, proposition and consolidation, the aim is to reveal the etherial resonance of artefacts suspended in a historical, cultural and political lattice.

Research outputs

The completed typographic collages, and the artefacts from which they are composed, are examined in terms of their origins, contemporary presence, and future destinations. They are apprehended at a specific moment of aggregation in their trajectory towards dissolution. They stand as retrievals from obscurity.

Methodology

The methodology I propose is an overarching archaeological and geological metaphor of cultural and temporal stratification.² Thus inviting a forensic excavation of the residue of past technological

² In titling this thesis, *Typographic Collages. An Archaeology of the Fugitive: Retrievals from a Disobedient Archive* I introduce a methodology of stratification, indicating that which lies hidden beneath the surface can be revealed through excavation in both practical and philosophical contexts. My investigation focuses on what lies buried in an artefact's history and material composition.

and material cultures. This method implies a sense of uncovering the unknown, that which lies beneath the normal plane of understanding, exposing possibilities usually occluded by the surface of things. It offers an attentive form of extraction, alert to lodes of value and significance - a sifting of the sediment, waste heaps and tailings of history. I focus on the thin seam where human experience imprints distinctly upon the object, revealing its resistance and compliance in the encounter.

A note on the writing form

The thesis is framed in an empathetic writing form, proposing a reconsideration of the value of the experiential, of introspection, interior states of mind and body, the anecdotal and the autobiographical as forms of structural analysis. It employs a duo-tone stratigraphic writing structure with substantial footnotes (termed here *subtexts*) accredited with equivalent significance to the main body of writing. Throughout the text are illustrations of contexts, details and finished work, proposed as a further layering of information.

Thesis structure

The thesis is structured in six sections, each deals with a specific aspect of the research, whilst linking the whole project of thinking, making and completion.

- Section 1 A Disobedient Archive
- Section 2 Sous la Pavés, la Plage
- Section 3 An Expedition in the Ruins of Saigon
- Section 4 The Disorder of Things
- Section 5 A Typology of Language
- Section 6 Being and Things

Research questions and investigation

Informing the thesis is a set of fundamental investigations enmeshed in the surface of each completed collage: These research questions, and the relevant sections within the thesis are summarised here.

Section 1 A Disobedient Archive focuses on the question of how can printed ephemera, particularly that produced by historical letterpress processes, be retrieved from a range of different sources and assembled into a collection from which to work? I propose a methodology and a set of criteria for selection, based on specific material and aesthetic characteristics of the material I collect (see collages 3 and 4 pp.58 & 103). This section examines how the collection can be structured in such a way to allow for intentional disordering in the methods of archiving, leading to innovative methods of retrieval when assembling the collages. I propose the notion of the disobedient archive - an *anarchive* - as an embodiment of the unruly tendency of artefacts to defy convenient categorisation, and assess the utility of this methodology in making the practical work.

Section 2, Sous les Pavés, la Plage (Beneath the Cobblestones, the Beach), situates the work within a historical framework of printing technology, typeface design, and contemporary art practice. I propose the idea of archaeological expedition to collect ephemera, particularly in the urban environment of the street, the *agora* and the margins of commercial activity (see collages 5 and 6 pp.105 & 137). I examine which methods are conducive to collecting this material and how best to plan for a beneficial result. I propose a methodology of excavation and retrieval, and contrast the aesthetic qualities of subcultural and marginal letterforms with the authority of the public notice.

In Section 3 An Expedition in the Ruins of Saigon I further investigate how artefacts embody their histories, and what aesthetic and ethical issues arise when they are collected, archived and brought into use as components of a visual composition. In particular I investigate the use of confidential documentation within the collages, and question the ethical issues involved in the appropriation of personal material in the context of my artwork (see collage 9 p.129). I question the specific ethical issues that arise in appropriating personal documentation for use in the artworks, and how the traces of individual lives haunt the objects that remain. I consider contemporary artworks resulting from conflict and catastrophe as acts of commemoration and healing, and question how my work is located within these contexts.

I propose how, alongside a specific manner of creative repurposing of printed ephemera, an autobiographical and anecdotal methodology³ can inform the process of collecting materials from which to work. Further, I propose an auto-ethnographic stance to accumulation, seeking to balance subjectivity with a form of privileging the objects that I find. I attempt to contextualise the ephemera obtained within a postcolonial critique of extraction and conquest. In this approach, I investigate how the process of visiting sites directly connected to conflict, and collecting material from them, can be deciphered in terms of my artistic practice.

Section 4 The Disorder of Things investigates more fully the tendency of objects to instability, disorganisation and disorder, and how these characteristics facilitate innovative compositions. I question the notion of inanimate objects possessing a form of ‘vitality’ or ‘agency’ and examine whether these qualities, such as they may be said to exist, can be harnessed in the act of creativity. I explore the critical theories of New Materialism in the context of the resistance of objects and artefacts to settle easily into their categories, and investigate how this characteristic may be used to advantage in making the collages. I propose how the fragmentary, particularly in congregations within the collages, reveals something more than the complete, and how remnants appear haunted by their histories (see collages 1, 2 and 10 pp.24, 55 &

³ I discuss more fully in the section how I have come to rely on the almost universal kindness of strangers in directing me during my days roaming the city and its streets. In these situations, anecdotal evidence proves more reliable than any other form of guidance.

198). I investigate the concept of the spectral and chimeric in relation to the discarded artefacts that I retrieve and how this potential can be integrated into the compositions. Moreover, I ask what fugitive qualities can be revealed under specific experiential circumstances. I explore what is *not* apparent in the visual field and further question how artefacts inhabit an obscure quality of *thingness*, and how this may be utilised creatively. My focus is both on their physical characteristics and attributes but also reaches for their more elusive qualities as active components of the collages, the imperceptible trace, what I term *dingewollen*.⁴ I question whether we are as much in partnership with our materials as imposing our direction upon them, particularly in collage-making as the individual items come to us infused with their previous usage and history.

In Section 5 A Typology of Language I provide an historical overview of letterforms and graphemes,⁵ tracing the evolution of written language and types of letterforms from the earliest civilisations to now redundant modern industrial typesetting processes. I examine the inclusion of words and word fragments within my own collages, and distinguish how different kinds of letterforms resonate within the visual field. I question how the

⁴ I am aware of the association of Vitalism with forms of contemporary popularism and its historical roots in early 20th-century Fascism. My particular concern in this thesis is better described by my term *dingewollen*, a coinage acknowledging Alois Riegl's notion of *kunstwollen*, discussed in detail in Section 6 - Being and Things, and indicating an occluded force of *thing-will* or *thing-striving*. I relate this to both the inherent characteristics of the material but also its elusive metaphysical chimeric qualities.

⁵ A grapheme is a letter, or several letters, that represent a sound in speech, known as a phoneme. The relationships between graphemes and phonemes are called grapheme-phoneme correspondences or GPCs, and are the foundation of written and printed text.

work is located in recent text and type-based art practice, and how letterforms exhibit particular visual and sonic characteristics. I analyse how certain words, word fragments, acronyms and codes resonate with a distinct poetic significance beyond their obvious meaning. I also evidence how these can become active components in the visual field of my compositions. These elements populate all of the collages, but are particularly evident in collages 7 and 8 (pp.139 & 173).

I propose that letterforms produce a subliminal acoustic affect within the viewer, modulated through the design and legibility of the typeface and language, and question how comprehension operates when only a small part of the word is visible. I relate this to the manner in which these ‘signs for sounds’⁶ operate as components in my typographic collages. The concept of the poetic, fragmentary and indicative are explored through the theories of Benjamin, Foucault, and Mallarmé, and the utility of the remnant in promoting possibilities of subjective interpretation is examined.

Section 6 Being and Things discusses findings and discoveries from the philosophical and methodological research and presents a methodology for a way of being-in-the-studio during the process of composition: to hold in balance the many considerations interrogated in sections 1-5. I detail an analysis of the optimal

⁶ ‘Letters are signs for sounds’ is the introductory sentence to chapter 2 of *An Essay On Typography*, Eric Gill’s opinionated manifesto of 1931. Judged by today’s standards, much of Gill’s private life would be subject to criminal prosecution, as revealed in Fiona McCarthy’s 1989 biography. However, his typographic, print and sculptural legacy remains unchallenged.

conditions for making the work, how it proceeds concerning wider sense of being-in-the-world and is conditional on specific factors. I propose an ontology of the studio, whereby the ‘successful’ process of assembling a collage depends on a set of critical, physical, metabolic and mental conditions alongside an attunement to the legacies of the materials used. These creative procedures require an interior state of concentrated thought and action whilst acknowledging the coalition between the artist’s intentions and the components themselves. I further question the nature of the decisive stages of finalisation⁷ and alertness to the works becoming complete (see again collage 9 and collages 10 and 11 pp.198 & 199).

A significant contribution that aligns with my own position is Michel Foucault’s exploration of the idea of the incorporeal in *Theatrum Philosophicum*⁸ in which he recalls the Epicurean idea of *simulacra* - the filmy sheaths that are shed from more substantial matter, and are the primary stimuli to our senses - ‘wisps of fog’ - an immanence, that which alerts us to the ‘outside’. I situate my research into ‘thingness’ in a continuum of Vitalism from Baruch Spinoza via Henri Bergson and Bruno Latour, to Bill Brown.

⁷ Walter Benjamin’s fragmentary style of writing often defies a satisfying sense of reaching the end. Karen Embry proposes that his texts are ‘never quite finished; that he purposefully mobilises his final sentences to disrupt the sense of closure, of compartmentalisation, offering instead an openness; the ever-now.’ From *Late Sentences, Last Words: How Benjamin’s Texts End* Symposium vol. 65 no.1 (2011).

⁸ The essay appeared first in *Critique* 282 (1970), Pages 885 - 908. In Section 6: *Being and Things* (p.200) I explore the idea of the *Chimera* (or phantasm) in the illusionary sense, an ‘incorporeal materiality’ - being a product of imagination existing alongside the physical object, in my case intrinsic to the collages I have created.

I specifically acknowledge Jane Bennett,⁹ recognising her contribution to the New Materialism and her call for a politics which advocates for our entanglement with non-human matter.

Here I am reaching for a greater understanding and recognition of ‘thing-power’ and ‘a vitality intrinsic to materiality’ (Bennett).¹⁰ I explore how artefacts transcend their definition as objects of use and become active partners in the composition of the collages, retaining their residual energies through my determinations. My research encompasses the notion of the what I may term *chimeric collage*, an illusionary overlay of the physical object, inscribed in memory and imagination, the invisible potentially more resonant than the real.

* * *

⁹ Bennett advocates a greater attention to “detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling a full range of the non-human powers circulating around and within human bodies... they call for attentiveness or even ‘respect’.” From the preface to *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010).

¹⁰ In setting the parameters of this research, I remain within the language of ontology rather than theology, consciously avoiding concepts of the absolute, as in being in the presence of that which we cannot know. I situate my research in a secular tradition, avoiding consideration of the divine.

A Lexicon

Below is a list of terms and descriptions that inform my methodological structure. In compiling these I allow for some stretching or modification of conventional usage for my own ends.

Anarchive: a collection of artefacts assembled as a resource from which to make the collages that possesses an unruly and unconventional taxonomy, and a tendency to recalcitrance.¹

Archaeology: a conceptual framework of layering and stratification from which information or meaning can be extracted through excavation.

Artefact: An object made by humans, typically of cultural or historical interest. Also includes objects I have made myself.

Chimeric: something shadowy or illusory, yearned for but out of reach. A state desired but elusive.

Collage: the bringing together of visual elements to form a complete artwork, generally adhered to a background or substrate.

Collection: Artefacts, objects and things that have been gathered and brought together in the studio from purchases, finds, gifts and produced using conventional and unconventional printmaking processes. They are preserved in drawers using the protocols of the archive, but are subjected to deliberate disordering. Also, the activity of gathering material from which to work.

Composition: used here as the time spent actively bringing together visual elements on the surface of the collage.

¹ From the Latin *recalcitrant*, to kick out, originally as in an animal kicking out with its heels, something to be very careful about; a wildness or wilfulness. I introduced this term more fully in Section 4: *The Disorder of Things* (p.138).

Consonance: used as a way of describing disparate elements coming together in a dynamic and harmonic form.

Disobedient: as in not settling readily into the order of things, with a tendency to be both wilful and disruptive.

Elements: constituent parts of a composition and also the base physical components of matter.

Enchantment: employed here to indicate a deep attraction and engagement, to become entangled and captivated.

Expedition: journeys to source artefact and materials for inclusion in the collages, sometimes local but also reaching across the globe, and characterised by unknownness and discovery.

Fugitive: fugitive pigments exhibit an impermanence, darkening, fading or otherwise changing over time through exposure to light, temperature or humidity. The word fugitive also implies a slipperiness in interpretation, something hard to hold onto, capture or grasp, an escape from constraint.

Graphophonic: My neologism formed from *graphic* and *phonic* describing a resonance of visual graphics with auditory cues.

Kairotic: used here to denote a significant moment, whilst acknowledging its more common usage as indicating ‘timeliness’ or ‘opportune’, and distinguished from the flow of Chronos, or regulated chronological time.

Lesezeichen: small interventions made by inserting material in the form of unconventional bookmarks in archives and collections.

Materials: forms of matter that have been modified or processed for specific uses. Also used in the singular to describe the collection from which the collages are made.

Matter: anything that possesses mass and occupies space existing in various states, both visible and invisible.

Retrievals: acknowledging a sense of rescue from precarity, a process of gleaning from that which is left over.

Things:² being anything that exists, either physical or abstract, and thus distinguished from *Objects*: a material thing that can be seen and touched.³ Much of content of the archive, being detritus from previously useful objects, has ‘broken down’ (Brown) and is thus rendered useless, being of little conventional use or monetary value.

Typographic: derived from printed ephemera containing complete or incomplete letter forms. Also, including type I have printed myself using the letterpress process and other techniques.

Spectrality: related here specifically to the idea that the past is still with us and the future is not simply unborn, that artefacts contain haunting of their previous lives and are expectant of their trajectories in the future.

Subtexts and Duotone: relating to the type layout of this thesis whereby footnotes assume a similar importance to the main text allowing for fuller explanations (excavations) as the main narrative proceeds.

Duotone refers to a printing process with two colours of equal significance producing an enhanced effect from a simple black-and-white image. The two colours often overprint each other to create a third colour.

* * *

² Bill Brown offers this perception of things and objects: ‘As they circulate through our lives, we look *through* objects to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture - above all, what they disclose about us, but we only catch a glimpse of things. From *Thing Theory*, *Critical Inquiry* vol. 28 no.1 pp. 1-23 (2001).

³ Rikke Hansen suggests this distinction in her essay *Things v Objects*, *Art Monthly* (2008) ‘While a thing suggests a series of relations to the world, the term ‘object’ implies the performative amputation of such relationally.’ She quotes Bill Brown: ‘Things get in the way; they either have too much presence or too little’.

Section 1

A Disobedient Archive

In this section: I describe how the collection is formed into an anarchive and how material is identified and acquired for making into typographic collages, acknowledging the political, social, ethical and economic considerations of appropriation and ownership. A range of strategies for identifying suitable material and locations is examined, and the precarious nature of ephemera is examined. I detail a series of small interventions in established archives, a form of bookmarking that leave a trace for future researchers. The use of thermochromic ink and its behaviours is introduced alongside an initial consideration of the insubstantial qualities objects exhibit in defying their classification.

In addition, I explore how the conventions of archival storage and ordering can be disrupted in order to produce an unruly collection conducive to creative practice. I question what the aesthetic and material criteria are for selecting suitable items, and how printed ephemera and other material within the collection retain and reveal their residual histories.



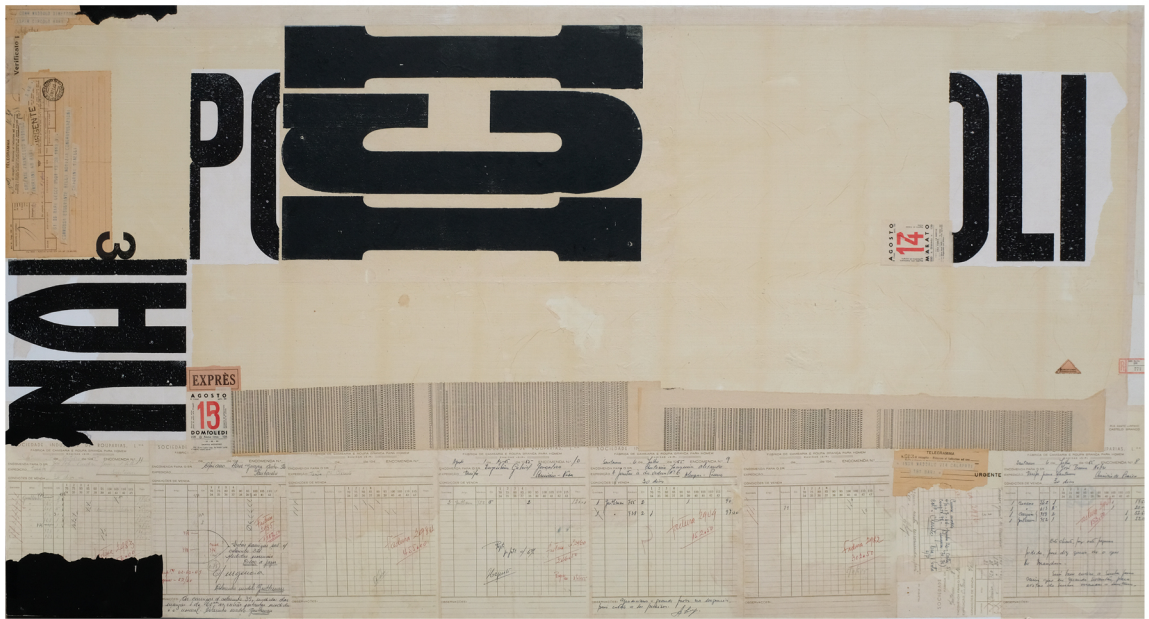
1.01 a b



1.01 c d e f

1.01 Part of the collection which includes printed ephemera within an archive, organised in a deliberately disobedient structure - an Anarchive (1.01 a c d e f). 1.01 b shows a selection prior to assembling a collage.

I introduce the notion of how fugitive materials that change under certain conditions can be used to creative effect in the collages, and what may be perceived at the margins of material presence.



Collage 1: ICI 147 x 80cm

Letterpress ephemera including a sequence of receipts from a Spanish clothing company, large woodtype printed from the collection at Tipoteca, Cornuda, Italy, typesheets made by proofing metal fonts in the format they arrive from the manufacturers to check the characters are viable, fragments from an Italian telegram, a sticker attached to mail exhorting speed; *EXPRES*, Italian calendar leaves and small inclusions from pre-war German documents. The collage includes rubberstamp overprinting, including an authorising stamp *Verificato*.



1.02 a



1.02 b



1.02 c d



1.02 Files, folders and posters acquired for their distinct typographic and material characteristics. 1.02 a are from post-revolutionary Leningrad, 1.02 b from Vietnam during the American War, 1.02 c from pre-World War II Germany and 1.02 d from Soviet era Hungary.

Forming and (dis)ordering the collection: an Anarchive

The disobedient archive I have assembled for this research project is a physical resource from which material can be repurposed and reimagined to construct what I have termed typographic collages.¹ I consider the archive as disobedient in that it conforms to no conventional taxonomy or structure, and retains a disorderly and disruptive quality. It has the potential to interfere with conventional modes of knowledge production, confounding attempts at ordering and retrieval, and producing a deliberate sense of dislocation - a derangement (fig. 1.01). Rather than a resource amenable to logical investigation, it is consciously designed to be unruly, fugitive and unknowable.² Conventionally, archives are predicated on the notion of preservation, the many protocols of storage and retrieval specifically designed to arrest the decay of cultural memory through loss or degradation of artefacts and records.³ They organise historical records to facilitate their use by future researchers, using analogue and digital retrieval methods to access material.⁴ By calling it a *disobedient* archive, I acknowledge the universal impulse to ultimate

¹ Typographic collage is proposed as a defining term for the work, as a substantial amount of the material used is derived from printed matter. Etymologically, the definition also acknowledges *typo* - an error in typesetting and the Greek *graphē* - writing or drawing.

² This is discussed in detail in Section 4: *The Disorder of Things* (p.138).

³ The National Archive as an instrument of state control and record has its origins in 7thc. BCE Nineveh. Modern equivalents in Western Europe include the *Archives Nationales de France*, founded in 1790, followed by The Public Record Office in England in 1838. Life became increasingly lived in the shadow of the archive following the establishment of these institutions. From *Archive* by Mike Featherstone (2006).

⁴ In the *Biblioteca Querini Stampalia* in Venice, retrievals are still made using a handwritten card index which stands in its own cabinet, some eight meters long and containing tens of thousands of entries. You are forced to work slowly.



1.03 a



1.03 b c



1.03 d

1.03: Telegrams, *carnets de voyages*, personnel files, receipts and tickets retrieved from markets in Rome, Saigon, Budapest and Berlin, (1.03 a b c). Printing from historical woodtype in the studio. (1.03 d)

dissolution and, in certain cases, deliberately encourages it: an active entropy.

The majority of the material I have collected is of a specific kind, produced by commercially obsolete reprographic production technologies associated with letterpress, engraving, lithography and other planographic, intaglio and relief print processes,⁵ nearly always discarded as having no value (fig. 1.02).

The methods and strategies for production and acquisition include expeditions to likely sources (see fig. 1.04), utilising traditional printmaking processes in non-conventional ways⁶ and investigating the mutability of specific materials as an active creative element within the artwork - a contradiction to the normative considerations of permanence and durability associated with archival protocols.

Working directly, yet unconventionally, with and from this archive, becomes a process characterised both by carefully refined selection criteria and a concurrent cycle of discovery and loss. It is designed to be incomprehensible in size and complexity, ordered according to fluid structures of retrieval - some items readily to

⁵ These include rubber stamp, stencil (including *pochoir*), calligraphic mark-making and paper finishing techniques of folding, stitching, binding and perforating.

⁶ In traditional lithography, the process produces wrong-reading results, necessitating the artist to work in mirror image on the stone for reproduction - this also applies to letterforms. Following the invention of offset lithography incorporating a rubber blanket, prints could be made 'right reading' as the image is transferred from the plate to the offset and thence to paper. I have utilised a process based on paper-plate lithography using the offset stage to produce right-reading typographic images from laser copies.



1.04 *a b c*



1.04 *d e f*



1.04 *g h*



1.04 *i j k*

1.04 Acquiring printed ephemera at flea markets in Istanbul, Bruxelles, Ho Chi Min City, (*a b c*), Athens, (*d e f*), St Petersburg and Riley, Massachusetts (*g h*), Shanghai, Moscow and Siracusa, Sicily (*i j k*). Unsorted boxes and crates of ephemera are especially sought after; dealers who specialise in house and office clearances need to dispose of volume rapidly, the items often sold cheaply as job lots.

hand, organised into incompatible groupings, some not accessed for significant periods of time. The archive, like many, has grown to a size⁷ where it cannot be encompassed by memory, only imagination. Some items appear lost for good and are remembered only as what may be termed hauntings.⁸

Material residues, retrievals from obsolete technologies

Because of the global transition to digital communication, there remains a vast (but diminishing and fragile) body of historical printed material no longer of any use value (and frequently no exchange value) - in some cases it is literally, rubbish. These items were designed mainly for single usage or enduring records of commercial transactions and certification, including papers relating to the contract of citizen and state,⁹ of vital importance to the bearer. As an instrument of control, for providing a legal record of the exchange of goods and services, to advertise an event, or as a primary method of communication between people over distance, these kinds of printed or written paper artefacts are nearly always discarded or overlooked once their intended

⁷ The collection contains over 10,000 individual items, primarily of letterpress printed ephemera, produced between the early 19th and the mid-20th century. across several cultural contexts.

⁸ I know from photographs of provisional layouts for collage that some items were there to be used in the finished piece, but the items appear lost, or are occluded under subsequent layers: an archaeology of loss.

⁹ To 'hold papers' legitimises citizenship in the Nation State; to be *Sans Papiers* is to be stateless. The independent traveller is frequently challenged by those in authority with 'Papers Please!' During several expeditions to Iran, an essential visa extension (a small stamped piece of paper) was my sole legitimisation of admittance.



1.05 a b c



1.05 d e



1.05 f

1.05 Boxes of papers in Exmouth Market, London, (a) at Todd Farm Flea in Massachusetts (b) Lecce in Puglia (c), Malvern Flea in England (d), at the *mercato sporco* market in Taranto, Italy, (e) and the vast Leipzig *flohmarkt*. (f)

purpose has been discharged.¹⁰ Posters and handbills for one-off events such as property auctions lie for generations in the back rooms of *notaires* offices, tickets and old bills form a substratum in desk drawers and in the pockets of old coats (the breast pocket of men's suits is a good place to look), and once-important documents sit quietly in boxes, in the attics of deceased or departed relatives. As long-standing businesses close or are relocated, whole rooms of once essential files are thrown out (fig. 1.03 & 1.04 pp.27 & 29).

The stratum which is of particular interest to me does not lie deep in time - a generation or three, inhabiting a past just beyond the collective memory of the living.¹¹ Much of the material that I seek is mundane in function, resulting from a very different commercial and economic landscape to that of today, with a multitude of small businesses trading on a modest scale¹² within very specialised markets, generating paper records of transactions which were assiduously filed - what may be seen as an archive of the evidentiary.

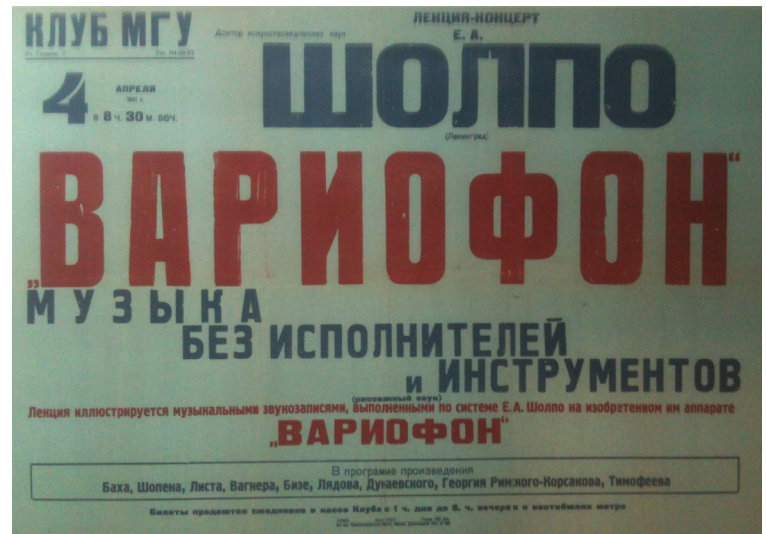
¹⁰ 'The minor transient documents of everyday life' was Maurice Rickards's term for printed ephemera, acknowledging its lack of perceived value. In a few rare cases, collections of 'nothing too humble' (John Bagford's maxim for his collection of 'scraps' in the late 17th century) have been preserved. John Johnson's Sanctuary of Printing in early 20th-century Oxford comprises over 1.5 million items of ephemera. From Maurice Rickard's *The Encyclopaedia of Ephemera* (2000).

¹¹ The timescale of the project roughly corresponds to the lifespan of commercial letterpress printing using wood type - from the 1820s to the 1960s, when it largely fell into disuse due to emerging reprographic technologies of offset lithography and photocopying.

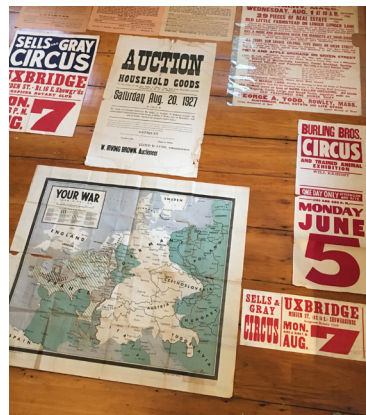
¹² This detritus of pre-digital commerce is characterised by the kind of printed material used by shopkeepers and small business owners, sitting over ledgers in back rooms lit by dim bulbs, totting up weekly accounts and paying their bills, occasionally commissioning a poster or advertisement to promote their goods.



1.06 a b c



1.06 d e



1.06 f g h

1.06 Examples of letterpress printed ephemera obtained from auctions, specialist booksellers and dealers in posters and printed documents, and markets. These are from Lisbon (1.06 a b c), Leningrad (d e), and Brimfield, Massachusetts. (f g h)

These objects are what British writer Dame Hilary Mantel (1952-2022) calls

‘The record of what is left on the record... it’s what’s left in the sieve when the centuries have run through it - a few stones, scraps of writing, scraps of cloth. It is no more the past than a birth certificate is a birth, or a script is a performance, or a map is a journey.’¹³

The small-town jobbing printers, whose job it was to produce these artefacts, have long ceased to be commercially viable. Where one or two remain in business, it is generally through a stubborn adherence to tradition, rather than profit. Occasionally, these valuable (to me) highly localised resources become available as those businesses close for the last time, or an abandoned workshop is cleared out.

Sometimes the material comprises official papers, sufficient time having elapsed for the material to be discarded (or more often the individuals are long since dead and forgotten). In the archive are surveillance files on citizens from the Italian *Fascismo* years,¹⁴ papers from an abandoned Iraqi embassy, (used in collage 6), a

¹³ This is from Hilary Mantel’s 2017 BBC Reith lecture, ‘The Day is for Living’, exploring the complicated relationship between history, fact and fiction. She continues ‘Evidence is always partial. Facts are not truth, though they are part of it - information is not knowledge. And history is not the past - it’s the method we have evolved of organising our ignorance of the past.’ Transcript available at https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2017/reith_2017_hilary_mantel_lecture1.pdf.

¹⁴ Fascism under Mussolini lasted from 1922 to 1943, and collapsed in 1945 with the Allied victory in Europe.

desperate collection of correspondence from a family in Saigon¹⁵ relating to emigration in the closing days of the American occupation (see collage 9), DDR era¹⁶ *universi*, ledgers recording contributions to a convent in Lecce (a 19thc. version of Gutenberg's Indulgences),¹⁷ fragile folders of French *Adjudication Définitives* (auction sales resulting from bankruptcy or the dispersal of a deceased person's estate) detailing the sale of *Pièces de Terre, Maisons, et Les Immeubles* (plots of land, houses, and buildings), and much else (fig. 1.05 & 1.06 pp.31 & 33).

The particular material that holds a deep and sustained interest for me originates with the explosion of print production and its attendant typographic developments at the beginning of the rapidly industrialising 19thc. across Europe, Asia and the Far East. This type of print production ends in the second half of the 20thc., when many of the functions of the printed artefact were replaced by their digital equivalents, or entirely superseded by technological developments. (Nobody now finds it necessary to glue a label to their luggage.) This project is primarily concerned with text-based ephemera that is '*a faithful mirror of its time: it*

¹⁵ This material is discussed more extensively in Section 3: *An Expedition in the Ruins of Saigon*.

¹⁶ The *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* refers to East Germany's existence as a socialist state from 1949 to 1989.

¹⁷ Gutenberg printed indulgences, a form of promissory note paid to forgive sins, as early as 1452, at the request of Cardinal Nicholas of Kues, known also as Cusanus. The famous Bible produced no profit for Gutenberg personally, but the day-to-day work of printing items such as the indulgences provided a living. For more see: David Morris's *The Man Behind the Bible: Johannes Gutenberg's Life of Adventure and Art*, Library of Congress Blog Post, 2023.

*combines elements of social history, nostalgia*¹⁸ *and aesthetics.*' Each artefact encodes within its material characteristics, design of layout and letterform, and its means of production, a record of a culture at particular moments of political and societal significance. The *anarchive* is both a residue¹⁹ of cultural activity and a storehouse of individual and collective experience, constructed to provide the raw materials from which new artefacts can be produced - the typographic collages.

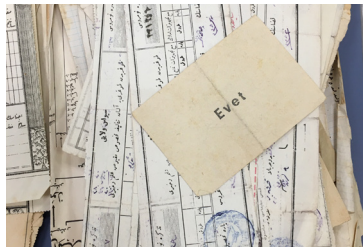
Acquisition: Strategies for identifying materials and locations

Below I will examine how this material becomes available, and in certain cases, can be acquired. The nature of ephemera (Rickard's *printed throwaways*) is precarious, and during this research project, I have identified four main methods of accumulation.

Firstly, in the life cycle of a printed artefact, between its origin and its ultimate destruction there are characteristic moments of transition, when these objects (often quite literally) come to light. These moments frequently correspond to periods characterised by

¹⁸ Although what Maurice Rickard in *The Public Notice* (1973) is alluding to is the conventional meaning of nostalgia as a pleasant feeling tinged with sadness for things that happened in the past, archives also can be sites of reconciliation and healing (or at least containing) the scars of past events. They can be seen to be more associated with the root Greek ἄλγος (*álgos*), meaning 'pain' or 'ache'.

¹⁹ Raymond Williams's epochal analysis of cultural evolution distinguishes between the residual past, the dominant present, and the emergent future whilst acknowledging their inextricable tripartite interaction. From *Marxism and Literature* (1977).



1.07 a b c



1.07 d e



1.07 f

1.07 A cinema poster from Istanbul, Turkish receipts and cheques (*a b c*), an old Moscow phone directories and a schoolbook (*d e*), and French 1950s cinema lobby posters letterpress printed in a range of bold condensed sans serif typefaces. (*f*)

catastrophe, (Walter Benjamin's *einer Gefahr aufblitz*)²⁰ on a macro and micro scale, from the collapse of a regime through armed conflict (that abandoned embassy), the end of a commercial enterprise due to changing market forces, to the death of a family member. Printed artefacts that existed as instruments of state control become instantly disempowered, a company's records are no longer needed, an individual's papers have no more currency. The collection contains, among much else, material from Nazi Germany, Greece during its economic collapse, the newly established socialist DDR, pre- and post-revolutionary Russia, unused account books from Tehran when the capital of Persia, documents from the disasters of central Europe, transatlantic one-way tickets from the Southern Italian Diaspora, files from long extinct businesses, and personal records of individuals from across the Northern Hemisphere. They inhabit the archive as spectres in their long-abandoned identity papers, fingerprints, marriage and death certificates, in their passport photographs and family albums, at once startlingly present and forever inaccessible. The archive becomes a record of catastrophe, displacements, closures, and departures, alongside the mundane bureaucracy of business. Pivotal moments in the lives of individuals are marked by bundles

²⁰ Although more often translated as a flash of 'danger', a more useful interpretation here would be 'peril'. From *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (*Theses on the Concept of History*), written (probably) during 1940 in Vichy France. The essay itself, like its author, had its own perilous journey. Benjamin mailed a copy of the manuscript in German to Hannah Arendt, who then passed it to Theodore Adorno in New York. Although specifically not intended for publication, a French translation appeared in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1947, seven years after Benjamin committed suicide in Northern Spain on his way to exile in the United States. Arendt included an English version in *Illuminations*, published in 1968. For more, see Jason Dawsey's *Even the Dead Won't Be Safe: Walter Benjamin's Final Journey* The National WW2 Museum, New Orleans, 2020. <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/walter-benjamin>.

of telegrams and letters, communicating congratulations, condolences, unexpected arrivals and hasty embarkations.

I have found from long experience that one of the most beneficial locations to yield results are street markets, where second-hand goods of low value are sold in brief assemblies of traders and customers. These temporary markets, many with legal statutes dating back over centuries allowing free trade in specific locations and between certain hours, exist throughout the world providing a means of support for those on very low levels of income. These are the *marché aux puces*, *mercati sporci*, *the mercado de ladrones*,²¹ the car boot, garage or yard sale. Often located at the margins, geographically, legally and sociologically, printed material can often be retrieved. I have undertaken expeditions during the course of this research to flea markets in the UK, Istanbul, Brussels, Paris, Berlin, Leipzig, Prague, Budapest, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Etkaterinberg, Madrid, Lisbon, Rome, Napoli, Syracuse, Tehran, Yazd, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Shanghai, Ho Chi Minh City, Pune, Gdansk, New York and Rowley and Brimfield, Massachusetts, among others. (fig 1.07)

However, paper material is not routinely salvaged and brought to market by those who make their living by house clearances, factory dispersals and business closures, having little potential resale value. Boxes of printed items seldom make it past the

²¹ The names themselves signify the ignoble nature of these markets, associated with fleas, dirt and thieves. In Istanbul, I encountered men with small carts who collected unwanted items and sold them directly to people on the street, announcing their arrival with melodic cries. I managed to buy some old documents in this way.

dumpster, consequently what tends to appear in the market are items the dealer perceives to have some historical significance, or relate to specialised collectors markets such as stamps, postcards, banknotes and military documents. I have established a set of criteria for initial selection at street markets which include: printed paper of a particular period, age and colour, objects that are letterpress-printed using unusual or significant typefaces, forms relating to the exchange of goods and records of transactions (ledgers, account books, blocks of *fattura*, bills and receipts), official documents (identity papers, workbooks, transit papers, files), announcements and publicity using only type (posters, handbills, notices), and single-use printed objects of little or no value (tickets, wrappers, labels).²²

I frequently have the feeling that I am the only person prepared to buy this material, and during its brief trajectory from backroom or attic to bin I have developed strategies of interception. I research cities where well-established markets of a good size can be found, and where there is a strong likelihood of primary source material being available. Due to the liminal nature of these markets, and their position outside of orthodox (and sometimes legal) trading standards they inhabit a particular space in an urban culture. The artefacts I am seeking only appear, mushroom

²² Occasionally, I will purchase other more valuable items of ephemera, particularly old letterpress posters with unfamiliar typefaces. These are absorbed into the archive not as materials for inclusion as collage items, but as reference material from which letterforms can be produced by reprographic processes. This section of the archive is the most orderly, with the posters categorised by country of origin. There are examples from Brazil, Russia, Germany, France, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, Spain, China, Yugoslavia, Mexico and others.

like, under certain economic and societal situations, particularly in moments of political, cultural, and economic transition.²³

In the *agorá agorón* (the scavenger's market) on the outskirts of Athens 2020, due in no small part to the collapse of the economy, huge amounts of files, records, books and documents were heaped in piles next to the cabinets and storage boxes that had contained them. This furniture had been brought to market for sale, their contents being quickly evaluated for anything of possible value, and then discarded to be picked over. I asked a young man who had cleared a lawyer's office of hundreds of files how much he would accept for half a dozen or so, as he added to a growing pile at his feet from boxes he was emptying. An enormous price was cautiously stated, when I pointed out he was throwing the material away he generously dropped his offer, the files suspended in his hands between their decades-long storage and the muddy floor of the market (their *Gefahr aufblitz*, see footnote 20) became worth €20. I bought them.

At the end of flea markets when the stalls are packing up and traders are discarding what they have not managed to sell, paper artefacts transition from objects of some small potential worth to the jetsam of a marginally profitable morning. This material now becomes free to anybody who bothers to pick it up, and a whole

²³ In the regular Saturday market at Am Corp Mall in Kuala Lumpur, I bought handfuls of pre-war German ephemera, remnants of a large collection assembled by a Malaysian relative before emigration in the 1950s. These dislocated items were sold cheaply, overlooked by the local stamp and postcard collectors.

lower level of ‘customer’ is now involved in these gleanings, just ahead of the garbage truck - the scavenger. This can be an advantageous but risky moment, as rights of possession become fluid - you have to be quick.

The second method of accumulation is closely related to the specialised collectors mentioned above, but not what is traditionally sought by these customers. This material is the subsidiary article of no specific interest,²⁴ as in the *brocante* market in Ostuni, Italy, a chest of 1930s election flyers letterpress printed made to be over-pasted on the pictorial posters (that had been sold to the person before me), was not considered to be of any importance. These objects may have some value, but this is open to question, and an expression of interest summons other traders to evaluate afresh the item in contention, and myself as a potential customer. These evaluations can go either way, and the items hover between being ‘very rare historical documents’ or something of no value that the trader is surprised to find somebody willing to buy it at all. Specialist dealers in documents have albums of carefully catalogued material²⁵ and will be keen to discuss the individual merits of any item of interest, however mundane. Some material for the archive has been acquired from these kinds of stalls,

²⁴ Established online markets for ephemera of some value - visited by stamp collectors, postcard and banknote enthusiasts, and experts in rare books, maps and prints - have evolved an internationally recognised convention of taxonomy to navigate the hundreds and thousands of entries available from a single seller. The category I am interested in, nearly always the last entry on the list, is ‘unclassified’ nested within ‘old paper’.

²⁵ These taxonomies have their own fascination; well-thumbed directories and catalogues are continuously referenced. Coins, banknotes, postcards and stamps have encyclopaedic reference books.



1.08 a b



1.08 c



1.08 d



1.08 e



1.08 f

1.08 Printing from type collections in *Tipoteca Italiana*, Cornuda and *Scuola Internazionale di Grafica*, Venice, Italy, (a b e) *Museum für Druckkunst*, Leipzig, Germany and *Institut Teknologi*, Bandung, Indonesia (c). A long closed printshop in Melfi, Southern Italy, often a rich source of material after protracted negotiations with the family of the deceased owner. (f)

however in the rarefied atmosphere of the specialist collector job lots of material and bargains are rare, the artefacts ascending towards preservation and scrutiny for particular historical or aesthetic significance, with an attendant rise in price.²⁶

The third method is by undertaking research visits to established collections, archives and museums. Within several printing museums, for instance in Leipzig at the *Museum für Druckkunst*, and at the *Scuola Internazionale di Grafica* in Venice and at *Tipoteca Italiana* in Cornuda,²⁷ it has been possible to work with the collection, printing directly from historical wood and metal type. This generates artefacts that are new but have the visual characteristics of artefacts produced at the time the typeface was in most use. It has also been possible to lasercut new type by photographing type specimen books and other printed materials held in museums. These new/old objects form a useful category within the archive as they allow variations, reproductions and facsimile versions of artefacts that would otherwise be inaccessible or too expensive to buy (fig. 1.08 p.43).

²⁶ Specialist auction houses are increasingly a source of acquisitions due to travel restrictions arising from the 2020 pandemic (COVID-19). Online auctions are searchable by specific criteria, although not yet to the level of specific typefaces, enabling wide-ranging international coverage. Although a crowded market, the strategy is to search out unusual locations, which has led to bidding at Albanian and Eastern European philately auctions and sourcing material from the Far East, in particular Japan. An example is the long-established Darabanth Auction House in Budapest. The lots I bid on are very seldom contested.

²⁷ I have also worked with type collections in the German University, Cairo and the *Institut Teknologi*, Bandung, Indonesia.

Disobdient and generative archival methods

An accompanying activity of working within archives (from which no material can be taken away other than the researchers notes, and frequently accompanied by a protracted negotiation over photography) is a clandestine process of interventions or inclusions into the body of the collection. With due consideration for the archival considerations of valuable books I have introduced small printed messages to be found by future researchers. The starting point of these actions is the phenomenon well known to those who renovate old buildings - the note from past workers that you discover as you tear the fabric of the building apart. Various written on cardboard door-hinge packers, hidden in boxed-in cavities,²⁸ and in unseen or seldom visited places such as behind plaster cornices or scratched into the leadwork of inaccessible roofs you may find a note from a century or more past, a worker's name or salutation scribbled with a carpenter's pencil on a scrap of cigarette packet, and generally wishing you well, as the task of renovation continues down through the generations. I have come across several of these in my time, and always carefully replaced them, adding my own message to be discovered long after I have ceased to exist.

In the rarefied atmosphere of the archive, where access depends entirely on agreeing to a set of rules and protocols, the

²⁸ American photographer Taryn Simon's project for the Fondation Louis Vuitton in 2014 *A Polite Fiction* included such messages: 'underneath layers of cement and drywall in the Fondation Louis Vuitton is a message in green permanent marker on concrete: *Oubliez la terre. Elle ne vaut pas le coup ... à moins que vous soyez là pour me sauver.* (Forget the earth. It's not worth it... unless you're here to save me). From Taryn Simon's website *A Polite Fiction* 2014.

interventionist act of addition carries a special poignance.

Working in the *Fondazione Biblioteca Querini Stampalia* in Venice on a temporarily readers ticket I retrieved several incunabula²⁹ from storage. I could see from the records that some of these volumes had not been requested for fifty or more years, and from that evidence may not be opened again in my lifetime. They were returned to storage with small inclusions printed on archival tissue paper and folded between the pages. Book restorers are familiar with extraneous material that lies between the pages and cover boards of books, carbon-datable flower seeds being common, as they frequently fall from vases of flowers on to the pages of books that are open on the table below. My modest inserts (which I term *Lesezeichen*) join these accidental and discarded bookmarks of past readers (fig. 1.09 p.45).

The artist Annabel Dover has assembled a collection of accidental and deliberate *Lesezeichen* that have been found in books donated to Oxfam shops over the last twenty years by asking volunteers to set aside whatever they find in the books and record the title and author from which they came. Recently, she has established an Instagram account³⁰ for anyone to contribute a find, and long-forgotten bookmarks in the form of photographs, hotel receipts, luggage labels and letters come once more into view, temptingly

²⁹ An incunabulum is a book printed in the earliest years of typography from its invention in the 1430s to the end of the 15th century. About 22,000 incunabula reside in European archives.

³⁰ The Instagram account is @billets_doux_, inactive since 2021.

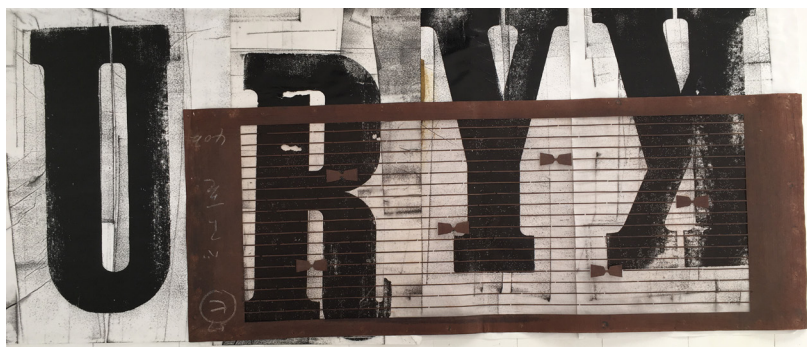
suggesting imaginary circumstances and histories of the book's owner.³¹

The ephemerist and author John Lewis started his extensive collection (now in the Bodleian library in Oxford) by purchasing an album dating from 1820 compiled by a Dr. Lodge, sometime librarian to the University library at Cambridge. Included in this collection is an indulgence printed by printer and publisher, Thierry Martens in Antwerp in 1497. As a librarian, Lodge's opportunities for removing extraneous packings whilst repairing broken bindings of early books were extensive, and the indulgence was retrieved from a vellum-bound volume 'doing duty for the pasteboards' which had yet to be invented.³² Many millions of fugitive items lie dormant, like cave-dwelling blindfish, lost between the bindings and pages of little used books in libraries across the world.

Finally, there is the production of entirely original printed matter (and the overworking of existing objects) by using processes within creative printmaking workshops and the production studios of specialist printers. Much of the restrictive nature of typesetting can be circumvented by working digitally, outputting compositions to one or more reprographic processes, specifically laser-cut relief

³¹ These include a receipt from Claridges restaurant for lunch for two, found in *The Sea, The Sea* by Iris Murdoch, a typed apology to a Mr George Cox of Erskin Street, Leicester 'for any remark which may have been made by me..which may have been capable of construction as a reflection upon you or your business' found in *Our Man in Havana*, and a Savoy Grill Room menu found in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

³² From the preface to *Printed Ephemera* (1962) by John Lewis. Old books may undergo several re-bindings in their long histories, the bookbinder utilising whatever discarded material is to be found. Following the Reformation, manuscripts from the dissolution of the monasteries were repurposed as binding and packing material in the burgeoning print trade of Protestant Britain.



1.10 a



1.10 b c



1.10 d



1.10 e

1.10 New typographic material produced by gum Arabic treated digital prints rolled up with letterpress ink and offset onto the surface of the collage (a d), details of thermochromic pigment screenprinted onto the collage surface (b c), and fugitive *kakishibu* (persimmon tannin dye) relief printed images on Japanese paper. (e)

printing, gum Arabic printing (a form of planographic offset printing associated with lithography) and screen printing. This manner of direct production allows detailed consideration of the nature and behaviour of materials, processes and results. A comprehensive knowledge of most printmaking processes informs a method of working unconstrained by traditional criteria and has given rise to a series of experimental works exploring fugitive chemicals, thermochromic inks and unusually constructed papers (fig. 1.10 p.49).

This poses a contradiction to the normative function of printed artefacts - to be a permanent evidential record, and to inform the reader readily of the information they convey. By printing with inks that fade and reappear, and deliberately introducing materials that deteriorate visually over time, I aim to accentuate the instability and impermanence of the material realm.

One of the principles of Modernist design was for the mechanism of delivery to diminish to its most minimal register, even to the point of invisibility, providing as little obstruction as possible between message and reception.³³ The typographic collages are made in contrast to this minimalist aesthetic, containing arrangements of type that declare their presence rather than recede into the surface. Working almost exclusively with type, representing whole or fragments of words in a variety of

³³ Louis Sullivan's original quote describing a Modernist aesthetic of clarity was 'Form ever follows function', first appearing in *The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered* (1896). Mies van der Rohe's more emphatic exultation to simplicity was 'No Noodles!' From *Working Theses* 1923.

languages, allows for an orchestration of the flow and interruption in the process of apprehension - the encounter between our cognitive apparatus and the series of small shapes that stand for sounds that represent meaning - that are, in fact, language.³⁴

Insubstantiality and the fragmentary: Fugitives in the Anarchive

In addition, I have investigated the ability of thermochromic and traditional inks to be printed on extremely thin paper,³⁵ some weighing less than 2gsm, at which weight the paper can float in thermal convection currents. I examined how this category of printed objects behave in contrast to the permanence of the definitive printed document, and the finality of a completed composition. In this phase of research, I have produced material that may not be components of a larger collage, but which are designed to be directly handled. The viewer experiences the temporal effects of appearance and disappearance of text and image on paper that is so thin as to be almost not there, producing encounters that are extremely delicate and fragile, and are designed to enable a very few, or even a single, handling of the artwork (fig. 1.10 p.49).

³⁴ The internal debate within structural linguistics differentiates between Noam Chomsky's notion of internalised language and the externalised real-world, real-time, socially contextualised phenomena of expression disassociated from predetermined human biological traits. For further reading see: Ludlow, P. *I Language and E Language* International Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics (2025).

³⁵ Papermaker Gangolf Ulbricht in his Berlin *Werkstatt für Papier* produces the world's thinnest gossamer tissue at 1.5gsm. These are restoration tissues made from Japanese *mitsumata* and *kozo* (mulberry) bast fibres. I have also been working with a *Tengujo Kashmir* 6gsm tissue from Japan.

I propose that this category of objects reveals in their insubstantial nature a particular kind of ‘thingness’ that may be perceived at the boundaries of material presence.³⁶ These objects have the potential to become the most disobedient within the archive, refusing to be definitely *something*, not yielding themselves easily to comprehension, either by their lack of legibility, or the particular conditions under which they can be encountered. By exhibiting a characteristic of unknowableness, these objects provoke a direct challenge to how we comprehend the world. It appears to me that these things move towards becoming spectral, immaterial, existing more in the realm of what they are not than what they manifestly are. This *no-thingness*, which is explored in more detail in Section 6: *Being and Things*, (p.200) includes a consideration of absence *as* data, found in perforated loom cards, pre-digital mainframe computer punchcards and the stencil graffiti of the contemporary urban landscape. Examples of these are used in collages 2, 6 and 9 (pp.55, 137 & 129).

In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), Jane Bennett reminds us of Adorno’s concept of non-identity and the ‘discomfiting (sic) sense of the inadequacy of representation’. She continues ‘When practiced correctly, negative dialectics will render the static buzz of non-identity into a powerful reminder that

³⁶ Aerogel is currently the world’s lightest solid, with over 99.8% of its structure comprising air. Advances in cosmology now determine that space consists of approximately 27% dark matter and 68% dark energy, which contains virtual particles that continually form and disappear. Visible matter comprises the remaining 5%. From NASA’s website <https://science.nasa.gov/dark-matter/>. John Latham’s figure *0-1-1-0*, which expresses the structure of time and events, will be examined further in Section 6: *Being and Things* (p.200).

‘objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder’ and thus that life will always exceed our knowledge and control.’³⁷

Type, letterforms and text exhibit a specific characteristic distinct from other visual stimuli, in that our inherent ability to complete patterns from fragments means that we cannot *not* read words or attempt to formulate meaning from partial letterforms or incomplete fragments. I incorporate words that have ambiguous, fluid or multiple meanings that evade ‘knowledge and control’ and acknowledge their ‘remainders’ (Bennett). Blocks of text or complete words in recognisable languages seldom transform into a symbolic register, remaining rooted in their original form. However, fragments of words, texts in unfamiliar or indecipherable language retain their quality as objects in themselves rather than a vehicle of meaning.

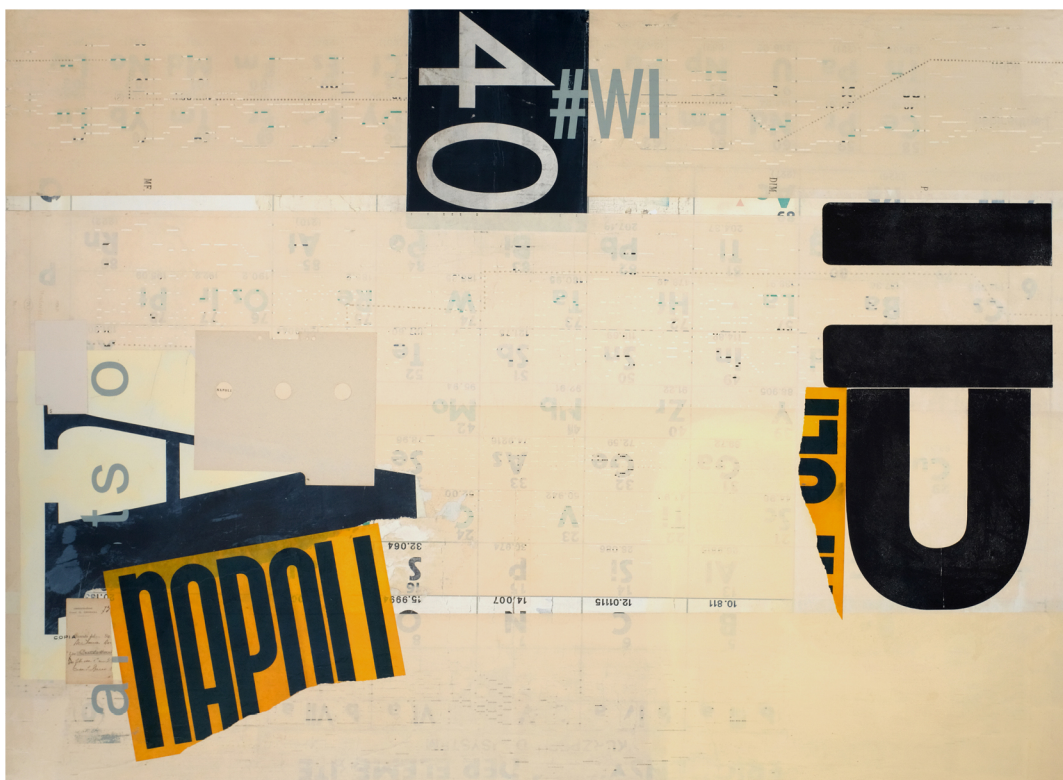
Complete words persist in their role as situated information, and stubbornly resist becoming meaningless, attached as they are to emotions, feelings and affects in the reader. To counter this tendency, their recognisable forms are subjected to alteration by overprinting, tearing, partial occlusion and the use of impermanent or unstable pigments. The aim is to produce forms that are of type but not typical. The collages are inhabited by words that are not words, including fragments of words from other languages which may appear to be legible but elude final understanding. These

³⁷ From *Vibrant Matter* (2010) Chapter 1 *The Force of Things, Thing Power IV: Walking, Talking Minerals* p.14.

scraps stand as ciphers in part to ‘mitigate(ing) the violence done by conceptualisation and the suffering imposed by the quest to know and control all things’.³⁸ These diaphanous objects are not absolutely any one thing, or represent what they appear to be.³⁹

³⁸ Bennett reminds us that Romand Coles offers a sustained interpretation of Adorno as an ethical theorist: negative dialectics is a ‘morality of thinking’ that can foster generosity toward others and the nonidentical in oneself. From *Rethinking Generosity: Critical Theory and the Politics of Caritas* (1997).

³⁹ Michel Foucault explores the idea of the ‘outside’ as a space of resistance, lying beyond established structures and codes of knowledge and power, and can facilitate new ways of thinking. The fragmentary nature of these artefacts points to the realm of the unknowable. These concepts were explored in more detail in Gilles Deleuze’s lecture on Foucault (Lecture 20) *Subjectification* in 1986, two years after Foucault died of AIDS <https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/lecture/lecture-20/>.



Collage 2: NAPOLI 161 x 119cm

The background is formed of an 19thc. German Periodic Table of Elements over-pasted with punched Victorian pianola rolls. Letterpress characters include a very large two part uppcase U normally assembled on the press. The NAPOLI label is characteristic of a range of typefaces used in early 20thc. Italian typesetting and reproduces a luggage label I was unable to obtain. The number 40 is part of a London bus blind which was screenprinted in reverse, using black ink on a white linen roll.

Also included are screen printed letters, fragments of ephemera and rubber stamping.

Section 2

Sous les Pavés, la Plage

In this section: The public space of the street is examined as a site of social, official, commercial and artistic visual expression in relation to personal and collective experience. An historical overview of printing technology and new letterforms is considered in terms of suitability and relevance to accelerated industrialised urbanism. I provide a commentary on contemporary art practice relevant to this project, locating the collection in the technology and aesthetics of their time. A consideration of the specificity of time relating to the self and in the typographic collages concludes the section.

My research questions why particular historical and contemporary typefaces and letterforms are appropriate for inclusion in the typographic collages. I examine how these typefaces were originally designed and produced and are now reproduced by contemporary printmaking processes. I investigate how complete and incomplete words, once removed from their familiar context, behave in the typographic collages, in terms of their aesthetic and literal characteristics. I consider the repurposing of artefacts as elements in the creative process and question how my work is located in contemporary artistic practice.



2.01 a b



2.01 c



2.01 d



2.01 e



2.01 f

2.01 Sign for another long-closed printshop in Naples (a), flyposting in Southern Italy protesting the corrupt commune in Taranto, some of which I removed from the door (b). Graffiti stencilling in Hanoi (c), and a heavily tagged utilities box in Berlin (d). Graffiti in Madrid (e). In Paris in the 1950's the photographer Brassai observed that 'a word inscribed by hand in huge letters has an impact that no poster can possibly have. Imbued with the emotion and anger of the gesture that made it, it holds forth, barring the way forward'. (From his 1961 photobook *Graffiti*). A painted sign in the *Reichsbahnkunker* Friedrichstrasse, Berlin, later a technoclub and now the Sammlung Boros art collection (f).

I document fieldwork; research visits to museums, archives and private collections and investigate how they may be used to produce source material by direct interaction, such as printing from type in the collections.



Collage 3: M8 90 x 60cm

Screen printed elements are printed onto a background of letterpress ink and gum Arabic printed characters. This collage, and its companion EO below, include letterforms from an Italian election poster announcing a candidates speech in the 1930s using an Art Deco type face which prefigured the Fascismo aesthetic of the Mussolini years. The block printed aircraft is part of a WW2 identification kit issued to anti aircraft gunners (my father was one), it is letterpress printed in battleship grey ink. The 8th Avenue fragment is from a Manhattan subway car destination blind. Also included are fragments of mail and stickers including PASTE HERE.



2.02 a



2.02 b c



2.02 d

2.02 The declamatory surfaces of the street: Remnants of a broadside project by Andrew Morrison, 2016. (2.01 a)

The *Brigade de Shoe Black*, City Hall Park, New York c.1865 photographed by E and T Anthony (b) stand ready for work in front of a huge wall of fly-posted advertisements.

A wall of posters in Paris during the Marshall Plan post-war reconstruction of Europe (c).

Men waiting outside the Salvation Army Hostel in Blackfriars, London, 1903. From *People of the Abyss* by Jack London. (d)

The street as a site of personal, collective and social experience

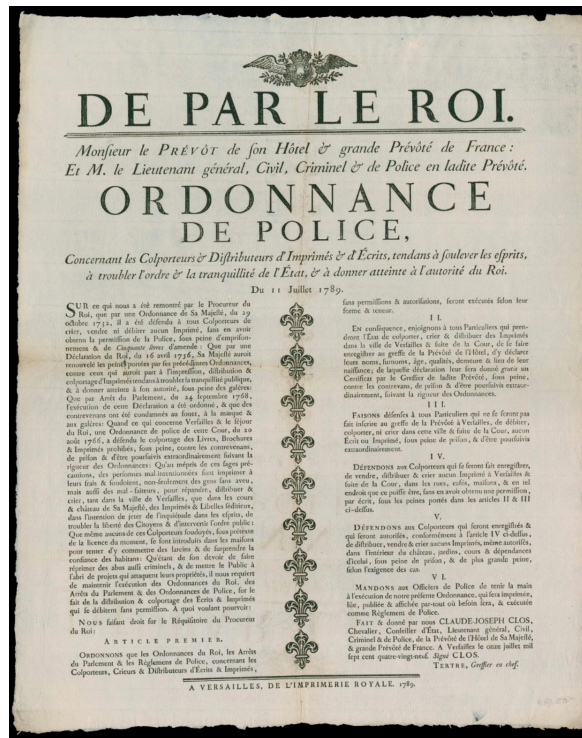
From the earliest settlements the street has been identified as a place of expression¹ and expectation of the unfamiliar. It is a space of the encounter, of the chance meeting, the unfamiliar and the novel. It is a situation encountered on your way to somewhere else, not so much a destination as something to be experienced in a state of transition, (unless, as has been the case throughout history, you are unfortunate enough to have to make the street your home.) In anthropological terms, liminality² holds a quality of ambiguity and disorientation, an experience of previous states being left behind, and of a future yet to emerge. We can interpret the street, (with its myriad comings and goings, its determinations and possibilities), as a place of unfolding, characterised by the feeling of just being on the verge of something - a threshold.

The urban space is also an arena of declamation;³ alongside the vocal exhortations of traders and hawkers, and the quieter entreaties of charity workers and salespeople, walls and surfaces have long been populated by a clamour of visual messages (fig. 2.01 & 2.02, pp. 57 & 59). The street affords a degree of

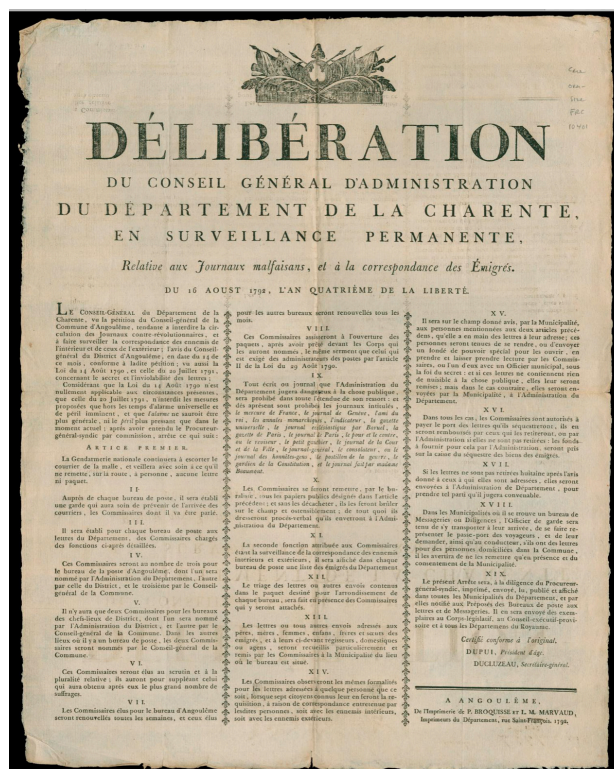
¹ The Ancient Graffiti Project records that much of the earliest known graffiti found in public spaces (in Roman Pompeii and Herculaneum) comprises insults, protests and boasts. From the study organised by Washington and Lee University and accessible at ancientgraffiti.org

² From the Latin word *limen*, meaning threshold, and introduced into the field of anthropology by Arnold Van Gennep in his work *Les Rites de Passage* (1909).

³ The 'right' of vocal expression is enshrined in legal statutes from the rules governing the *Agora* in ancient Greek city states, for example *Isegoria* (freedom of speech) and *Parrhesia* (the right to frank or uninhibited speech), through the First Amendment of the American Constitution in 1791, to the questionable social media regulations of contemporary times. From *The Rules of Public speaking in Ancient Greece* <https://studyinggreece.edu.gr/7-rules-of-public-speaking-in-ancient-athens/>



2.03 a



2.03 b

2.03 Two oppositional political ideologies during the French revolution - royalist and revolutionary - share the same typography and design:

French broadside: *De Par le Roi* (On behalf of the King). A police ordinance banning the distribution of printed materials (also shouting and crying out in the streets of Versailles).

11th July 1789, three days before the storming of the Bastille. (a)

Délibération: 16th August 1792, announcing a law against newspapers and correspondence considered harmful to the revolutionary state. The broadside uses a similar typeface and layout, including a replacement for the Royal crest. Charente, France. (b) From the extensive collection of broadsides held at Newberry Library, Chicago.

anonymity both in the expression and consumption of visual signs. As we are not observed as closely as in most socialised environments it is possible to act and behave outside of conventions. It can be a space of liberation, subversion and satire.⁴ Existing between the public and the private, it is a space in which to both merge into the crowd and be more closely observed than in the privacy of one's home. Bentham's⁵ panoptic eye increasingly invades the public space - although that very concept is under process of erosion through the transfer of ownership of public squares, parks and streets to private corporations.⁶ The street also becomes the stage for conflict between the masses and the authorities, the assumed right of assembly escalating into entrenchments, barricades and arrests.⁷ In addition streets are populated by markets, often sited on ancient *rialti* and commons which preserve historical rights for merchants to trade in a specific location.

⁴ Nancy Adajania, in challenging Chantelle Mouffe's concept of agonism, (a political theory emphasising that constructive conflict, rather than consensus is essential to healthy democracy) discusses *the marketplace that is also a meeting place, a shifting weave of textures of thought, opinion, ideas and convictions; a non-hierarchical space of exchange where thought is multiplied and extended by distribution rather than imparted from a fixed source of authority*. The *agora* of the classical Greek city-state was also, etymologically, the 'open space', where *merchants, sailors, soldiers, artists, writers, priests, oracles, and madmen congregated and could voice themselves*. From *Public Art? Activating the Agoratic Condition*, 48°C Public Art Ecology Festival, Delhi, December (2008).

⁵ Jeremy Bentham's ideas for a panoptic state were founded on his ambitions for complete accountability. The much-reproduced prison drawings (which were never built) disguise his concept that all levels of government should be open to scrutiny, something yet to be achieved in any nation state. From *Plan of Houses of Inspection* (1791) UCL Archive, Bentham Papers 119/121 https://www.jstor.org/content/oa_chapter_edited/j.ctt1g69xrh.46.

⁶ Amy Balkin's *Public Smog* (2004 - ongoing) delineates public parks hovering over California and Europe in unfixed public airspace claimed through legal, financial and political activities. She declares the parks open. Accessible at amybalkin.com/work-1/public-smog

⁷ Extinction Rebellion's tactics include the time-honoured technique of non-violent direct action. Those activists who plan for trial and detention are known as the arrestables, and stand in a tradition of urban revolt, including the Paris commune and the events of May '68.

Consequent on these activities is the impulse to declaration and to make messages take a more permanent form. From the most temporary chalk signs (until very recently door-to-door salesman would chalk pavements with coded signs, similar to North American hobo signs, to indicate likely sites for a sale or proven to be a waste of time)⁸ to inscribed text literally set in stone, the street accretes layers of paper posters, painted and scribbled graffiti, advertisements and promotions, and the more enduring signage of commercial promotion and civic regulation.⁹ In typographic terms the street resonates with a multitude of visual messages across a range of registers; only a small amount of these can be absorbed and comprehended, the dissonant subcultural voice often the most distinct.

The French notice *Défense d’Afficher* (still visible in Paris stencilled onto ancient walls), their tenuous authority backed by a *Loi du 29 Juillet 1881* (Law of The Freedom of The Press), vainly attempts to hold the space exclusively for communications of the state. On the eve of revolution in 1789 the royal government at Versailles issued a broadside to be pasted up in the turbulent streets banning the production and sale of pamphlets and posters, a printed

⁸ A survivor of this tradition is the ‘burglar sign’, which can still be seen occasionally - a series of circles indicating a wealthy potential target.

⁹ Jacques Rancière demonstrates how aesthetics can be used as a critical tool in the formulation of emancipatory politics, by focusing on its ability to disrupt established orders and reconfigure the ‘distribution of the sensible’. This disruption enables excluded voices and perspectives to emerge, fostering new forms of collective subjectivity and action. Aesthetics can create a political space where equality can be enacted dynamically, reshaping sensory and symbolic frameworks to challenge the dominant and promote an emancipatory politics. From *History, Politics and Aesthetics* (2009).

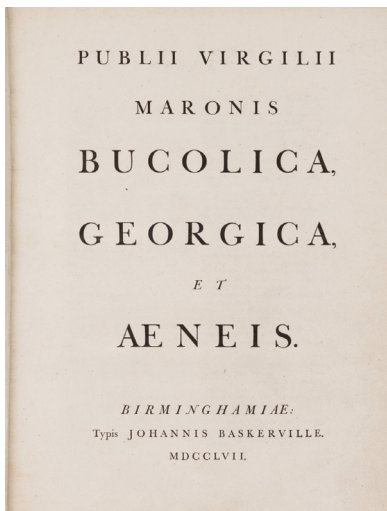
artefact prohibiting printed artefacts (fig. 2.03 p.61). I hold several examples of these official posters in the collection. We see its opposite three years later in the broadside issued by the revolutionary *Délibération du Conseil Général d'Administration* in Charente, declaring a law against newspapers and correspondence considered harmful to the new revolutionary assembly. The surfaces of the street (and of the papers, pages and posters - Rancière's *interfaces*) have long been contested spaces.

Both posters (although from different sides of the revolutionary divide) employ the same humanist serif typefaces, rooted in the classical certainties of harmonic geometric proportion, characterising balance and order in their design. These humanist typefaces were informed in Enlightenment intellectual circles by excavations at Rome and Pompeii, ancient artefacts bearing classical inscriptions were exhibited in the newly established museums. (Examples are used in collages 5, 7 and 8.) The new typefaces embodied the Neoclassical virtues of public service and personal sacrifice, and coded within its system of visual oppositions: extremes of thick vertical strokes and wafer-thin serifs. Here lay the aspirations of a more democratic society and a rejection of royal privilege. In addition, by breaking the visual legacy of the monastic scribes' Carolingian minuscule¹⁰ letterforms inherent in Gothic and Blackletter typefaces, the new

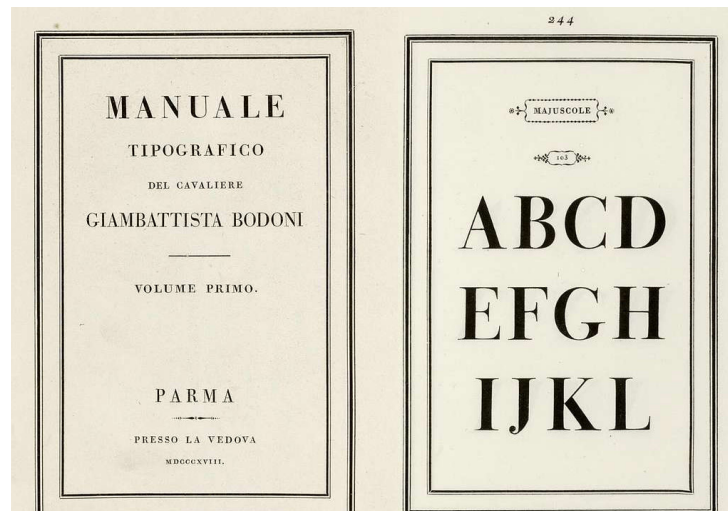
¹⁰ Carolingian minuscule was a clear and manageable form of writing that was established by the educational reforms of the Emperor Charlemagne in the latter part of the 8th and early 9th centuries and adopted as a unifying script by the scribes of the early medieval period.



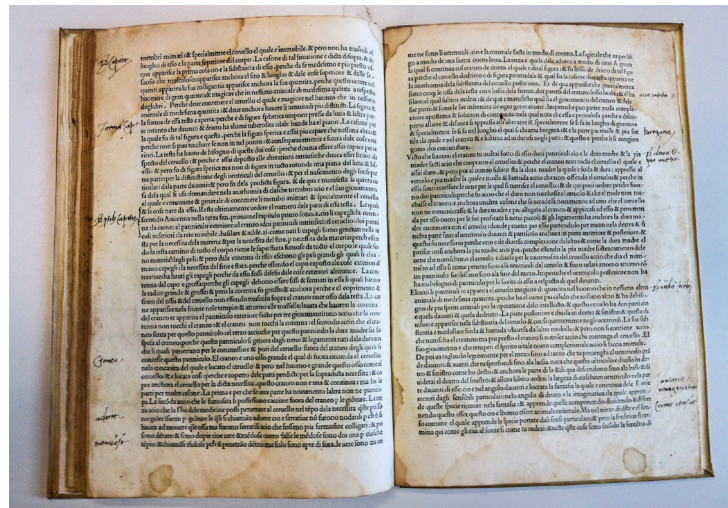
2.04 a



2.04 b c



2.04 d



2.04 A 42 line Gutenberg Bible, printed in Mainz, Germany, 1455. Rubrication (the practice of adding red ink emphases) was initially achieved by printing in a second colour, but abandoned at an unknown date in favour of leaving gaps for scribes to illuminate by hand. (a) For more, see *Rubrication: Articulation Not Decoration*, Smith, M. *The Bodleian Conveyor* (2009).

Publii Virgilii Maronis Bucolica, Georgica, et Aeneis printed by John Baskerville, Birmingham, England on the new wove paper 1757. (b)

Two pages from Giambattista Bodoni's *Manuale Tipografico* printed in Parma in 1788. (c)

Pages from *Miracoli della Vergeni Maria*, Leonard Achates, Vicenza 1475, a 15th century Incunabulum in the *Biblioteca Querini Stampalia*, Venice. (d)

‘Moderne’¹¹ forms indicated the primacy of the secular over religious orthodoxy. The delicate refinement of these typefaces, and in particular the difficulties of printing hairline serifs¹² required (as did the printing of Johannes Genssfleische’s - known as Gutenberg - *Vulgate* Bible in Mainz over 300 years previously) that paper manufacturing technology had to be significantly advanced. Specifically, the fragility of each individual letterform carrying its minute piece of type-metal meant it was particularly vulnerable to breaking or displacement, both in the smaller point sizes and the larger display capitals.

Printing presses during this time were hand-operated wooden presses with movable type locked into a galley, inked by hand, the paper placed on top, and an impression taken in a single downward pressure stroke once the galley is slid into position. Too much pressure and the type is irreparably damaged, too little and the impression is too light to be read. A new kind of paper was required to convey the full delicacy of the design to view.¹³

¹¹ The first *Moderne* typeface is attributed to Firmin Didot, the son of François-Ambroise Didot and first appeared in 1784, soon to be followed by the archetypal *Didones* from Bodoni. From *A Brief History of Type: Part 4* (2008) accessible at ilovetypography.com

¹² These technical difficulties extend to the production of zinc stencils, still to be bought in Paris in their original Neoclassical humanist typefaces. The very thin serifs stubbornly resist the action of *pochoir*.

¹³ In letterpress printing terminology, the perfect judgement of pressure to convey ink to paper without leaving any discernible de-bossing of the type into the paper is known as the ‘kiss’.

Paper manufacture until this time utilised laid paper moulds¹⁴ resulting in a lightly textured surface bearing an impression of the wires (or chains) in the frame through which the fibres drain once removed from the vat. This paper was quite substantial, composed of relatively coarse fibres and equivalent in today's terms to around 120gsm at its thinnest, but frequently much thicker, needing substantial pressure on the press.

A new aesthetic sensibility for Enlightenment ideals

Advances pioneered in England by James Whatman, paper supplier to John Baskerville¹⁵ for the production of his edition of Virgil in 1757¹⁶ modified existing paper-making moulds from the traditional grid of wires to an interwoven arrangement allowing a more even distribution of the paper fibres in the process of throwing and couching¹⁷ - this results in smoother wove (*velin*) paper with no laid lines (indicating uneven fibre distribution) when held up to a light. These smoother papers allowed the reduction of pressure during printing and ensured successful impressions from the delicate hair serifs. The lighter paper weight

¹⁴ These moulds employ a lattice of vertical and horizontal wires which hold the fibres as the mould is pulled up out of the vat, using a gesture known as 'throwing the wave' to distribute the wet pulp evenly.

¹⁵ Baskerville, the typeface chosen for this thesis was designed by John Baskerville, English writing master, stonecutter, type founder and printer in the 1750s. The punches from which the type was then cast were cut by John Handy. In my view, it is unsurpassed in legibility and elegance.

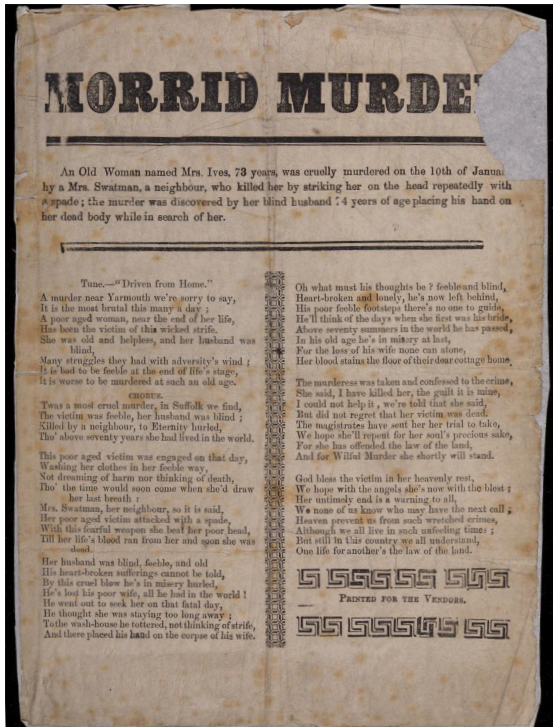
¹⁶ Baskerville's first edition of Virgil exhibits very widely spaced characters in its typesetting and is printed on the extremely smooth surface of the newly developed wove paper. A slim volume. A copy is held at Princeton University Library Graphics Arts collection.

¹⁷ From the French *se coucher* - to put to bed, as the newly formed sheets are transferred onto felt supports to be pressed and dried.

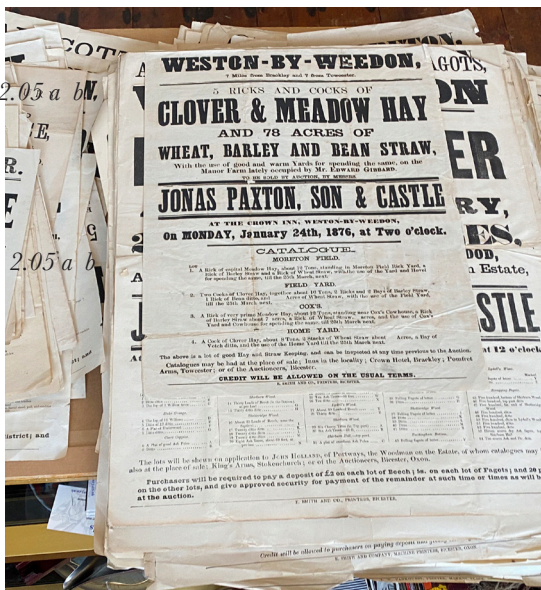
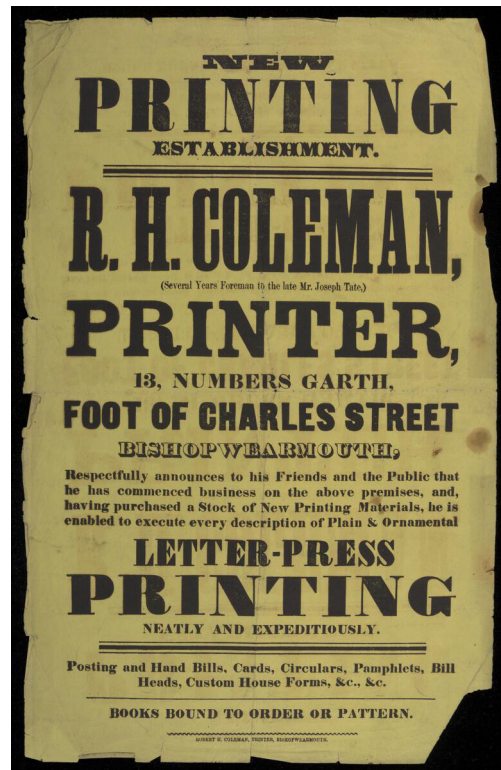
resulted in books becoming much slimmer volumes which felt smooth and luxurious to the touch. It was the paper-making equivalent of fine silk, in contrast to coarse linen (fig. 2.04).

So aesthetically pleasing and distinctly *Moderne* were the type designs of Pierre-Simon Fournier and Firmin and Pierre Didot in France, that these beautiful typefaces were adopted by the *Imprimerie National* (The National Printing House) under François-Ambroise (Firmin Didot's father) as the house typeface of preference for the French state. A century earlier Louis XIV had assembled a group of leading mathematicians and philosophers to produce an exclusive typeface for the *Imprimerie Royale*: The King's Roman. Using a system of construction based on a grid of 64 squares further subdivided into over 2000, the committee attempted to produce a design based on Reason alone. These early experiments with neoclassical typeface design, and a form of national visual identity, directly informed Fournier and Didot in the development of their republican typefaces. Their contribution was to recognise that a rigid mathematical system requires adjustment and aesthetic refinement in order to produce a harmonic relationship between the positive and negative shapes of the letter forms on the page, logic and maths being insufficient.¹⁸

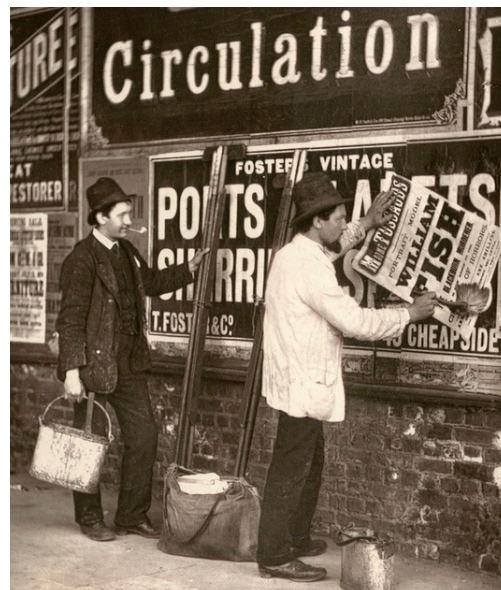
¹⁸ A comprehensive history of these aesthetic considerations (and much else) can be found in *Printing Types: Their History, Forms and Use; A Study in Survivals, Chapter XIX: 19thc. 'Classical' Types. Bodoni and the Didots* by Daniel Berkley Updike (1922). Updike's two-volume study provided one of the first systematic historical analysis of typeface development and established the subject as a serious academic discipline.



2.05 a b



2.05 c d



2.05 A report in verse of a *Horrid Murder* of a Mrs. Ives by her neighbour Mrs. Swatman, printed in Great Yarmouth in 1876. Accounts of sensational events - executions, trials and murders were a popular line of business for jobbing printers. (a) One such printer announces the opening of his establishment in 1860. (b)

A selection of 19thc. broadsides acquired from a house clearance. These posters would have been printed on cast-iron presses using a variety of letterpress type and pasted on walls and fences. I have many of these in the collection, and damaged fragments are incorporated in several collages as annotated in their illustrations. (c)

Bill Posters at work in London 1873. 'A certain knack is required in pasting a bill on a rough board, so that it shall spread out smoothly and be easily read by every pedestrian...the 'ladder men...earn much higher wages, and the advertising contractors are generally glad to give them regular employment.' From the photographer John Thompson's *Street Life in London* 1877. The insightful text was written by radical journalist Adolphe Smith. (d)

The idea of a perfect and appropriate typeface, an aspiration of kings and republicans alike, was further developed by Giambattista Bodoni in *Stamperia Reale* in Parma, where he became director at age twenty-eight in 1768, under the patronage of the Duke of Parma. Bodoni set out to surpass his French counterparts, recording that the ideal typeface needs not only ‘uniformity of design, sharpness and neatness, and good taste’ but also, and more importantly, it needs ‘*fascino*.’¹⁹ Under the Duke’s patronage he was allowed complete freedom to design and print books regardless of time considerations or cost, an enviable position and one on which his considerable achievements rest. The *Manuale Tipografico* (Manual of Typography), containing over two hundred and ninety-one Roman and Italic typefaces along with samples of Russian and Greek fonts, was published in 1788, with a second expanded edition published by his widow in 1818, five years after Bodoni’s death. His inventory of type is regarded today as the pinnacle of typographic achievement, and many of the original designs are still in use in letterpress book production, mastheads²⁰ and as digital fonts. Sometimes criticised for the conspicuous ‘presence’ of the letterform on the page, and the tendency in the smaller type sizes for the thick and thin strokes to produce a distracting optical effect known as dazzle, Bodoni maintained the role of the typeface was not to recede from view

¹⁹ This could be translated simply as *charm*, but the Italian word contains the implication of holding attention, as in *fascination*. The quote is from the preface to the second edition of the *Manuale Tipografico* of 1818.

²⁰ Vogue’s masthead is set in Bodoni Roman, Calvin Klein, Gucci and Elizabeth Arden all utilise its letterforms to convey high-worth brand values.

(something we see developed more fully in early 20th century Modernist sans serif typeface design) but to establish a detached and controlled sophisticated elegance - a typographic *Bella Figura*.²¹ In his 2012 book *Graphic Design Before Graphic Designers* (p.60), David Jury notes that:

‘Bodoni’s types are self-consciously virtuoso statements: arranged with generous inter-character and inter-lined spaces, all set within wide margins and often with little or no decoration... the intention of such displays was to elicit a sense of awe in the viewer through typography alone’.

By the beginning of the 19thc. the first edition of the *Manuale* had been widely circulated, and Bodoni’s influence on the new display faces for larger formats of printed material such as posters and multiple-sheet broadsides²² was significant. Although his typefaces were primarily designed for setting text and title pages in bookwork, expanding opportunities for visual promotion in the newly industrialised city street required dramatic typefaces that would attract, and hold, the attention of the passerby. Bodoni’s types became an important intermediate step in scale from the page to the walls of the street, informing an innovative ultra-bold known

²¹ A more appropriate translation from the common *beautiful figure* is the literal: proper decorum.

²² A broadside, also called a broadsheet, is a printed sheet of paper for posting advertisements and announcements in public spaces, the earliest dating from the 16th century. Most broadsides range from foolscap (13 x 16") to over five feet in length. Initially printed only in black ink, later versions in the 19thc. used two or more colours. From The Library of Congress <https://www.loc.gov/collections/broadsides-and-other-printed-ephemera/articles-and-essays/introduction-to-printed-ephemera-collection/the-popularity-of-broadsides/>

appropriately as fat-face, considered the first advertising type.²³ The first appearance of fat-faces is generally accredited to Robert Thorn of the Fann Street typefoundry, London, in 1803. These bold letter forms were followed by ‘Egyptian’ slab serifs and Gothic san serifs, then ‘Tuscans’, ‘Italians’ and ‘Grecians.’ (Examples of these typefaces can be found in collages 1 and 2 pp.24 & 55.)

The proliferation of print and literacy in the 19thc.

The early years of the nineteenth century saw an increasingly rapid population spread across Europe (the population of Britain and many European cities doubled between 1800 and 1850). The gathering pace of the industrial revolution led to economic growth on an unprecedented scale. In working and middle-class societies the cost of living decreased dramatically, resulting in many families having a surplus of income once the pressing needs of housing and food had been met. For a few coins ordinary people could buy cheaply produced images and stories,²⁴ illustrating sensational events of the day: gruesome murders and the subsequent execution of the perpetrators were particularly popular²⁵ (fig. 2.05 p.69).

²³ Fat faces are characterised by an emphasised difference between vertical and horizontal strokes and unbracketed hairline serifs. The first example of a sans-serif typeface appearing in a specimen book is William Caslon’s catalogue of 1816, inserted as a single line of this innovative design.

²⁴ The beginning of the 19thc. saw the introduction of state-organised education through Mechanics Institutes, technical adult education establishments often funded by local industrialists in the expectation of a better educated and therefore more profitable workforce, and the growth of working-class Literary and Philosophical Societies. From *The Origin of Mechanics’ Institutes* by Thomas Kelly (1952) University of Liverpool.

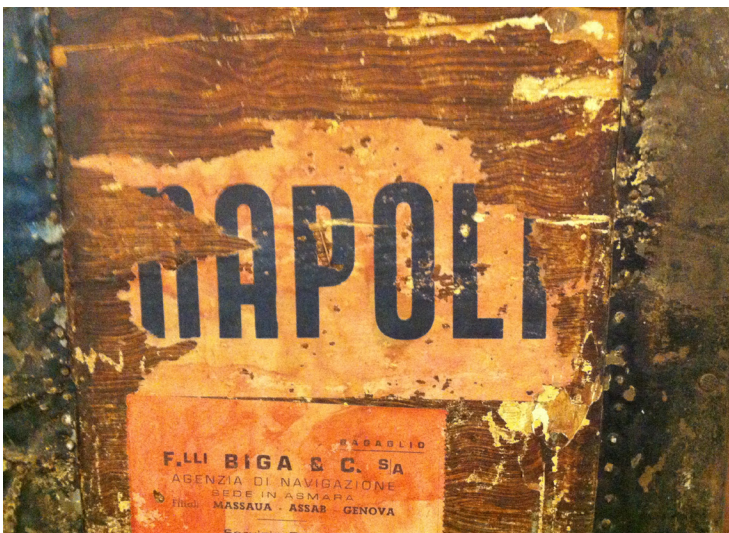
²⁵ Myrna Schkolne, author of *People, Passions, Pastimes, and Pleasures, Staffordshire Figures 1810 to 1835* (2006) notes in an interview with Collectors Weekly in 2013 that ‘It wasn’t until 1810 that inexpensive prints showing everyday things became widely available... broadsides on penny strips of newspaper depicting events of the day were often made from cheap woodcut engravings and sold on street corners.’



2.06 a b c d e f



2.06 g



2.06 h

2.06 Pages from the *Xylografia Italiana* specimen books held at *Tipoteca*, Cornuda. (a-f)

A blackletter sign from a printers in Berlin cautioning awareness of a slippery floor. (g)

A steamer trunk destination label from Southern Italy, reproduced in woodtype in NAPOLI collage no. 2. (h)

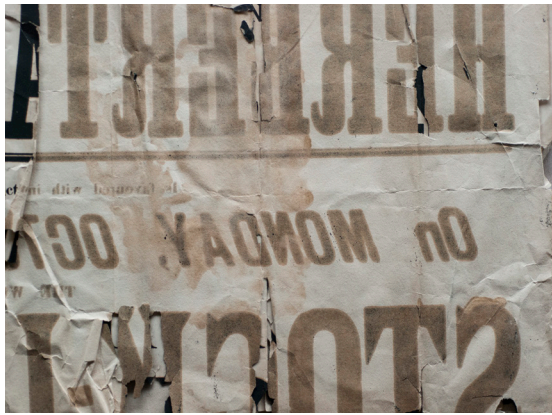
The semi-legitimate trade of the bill poster, disseminator of the jobbing printers' daily output, plastered the streets with broadsides, competing to declaim their message at maximum typographic volume. Posters headlined in the new powerfully arresting display fonts and bold Egyptians,²⁶ ('a tremendous blackness'²⁷ apparent in the new Grotesque sans serif faces) advertised goods for sale by auction, religious and political rallies, excursions to the countryside and coast, sporting events, bear fights and wrestling, among other distractions. At this time in England, and in much of Europe, there was little or no legislation restricting the placing of bills in cities, towns or villages and bill stickers²⁸ contested their territories daily, over-pasting their rivals as rapidly as they could. The economy of attention had begun.

Small jobbing printers were able to purchase the newly invented iron hand press such as that invented by Charles Stanhope around 1800. Stronger than wooden presses, easier to work through their compound lever action, and far more accurate due to the cast-iron bed, these presses became the mainstay of the trade.

²⁶ Egyptian slab serif is characterised by weighty and convergent serifs on solid letterforms designed to produce maximum black ink on the page, and dramatic negative counters within letterforms. Named Egyptian (or Antique) in type specimen books, this typeface is often found on the same posters as Fat-Face display fonts. It was named Egyptian as the designs first appeared during Nelson's defeat of Napoleon's army in Egypt - the Rosetta Stone passing into British hands following the siege of Alexandria in August 1801.

²⁷ From Jeffrey Dowding, *An Introduction to The History of Printing Types* (1998), quoted by David Jury in *Graphic Design Before Graphic Designers* (2012).

²⁸ We can trace the lineage of the bill sticker from these early Victorian workers to the character of Antonio Ricci in Vittorio De Sica's 1948 social realist film *Ladri di Biciclette*, and to the nocturnal fly posters employed by clubs and bars across the world. I have several of these in the collection.



2.07 a b



2.07 c



2.07 d



2.07 e

2.07 Evidence of the long term action of traditional oil-based inks on low grade paper, showing bleed through and corrosion due to brittleness in printed areas. The resulting illegibility is used to advantage in the work. (a b and e)

An ingenious letterpress print allowing the bleed-through to become part of the message, achieved by printing reversed type on the verso. From *Graphics RCA: Fifty Years* 2014. (c)

Pages from Caslon and Co. type specimen catalogue of 1832. The 45 line Egyptian slab serif shown on the recto page is described as an Antique compressed, Antique and Egyptian being interchangeable classifications at this point. The verso page shows the ink bleed through from the sample letters printed on the other side of the sheet. From David Jury's *Graphic Design before Graphic Designers* 2012. (d)

The introduction of the Albion press, designed and manufactured in London by Richard Whitaker Cope around 1820, simplified the mechanism to a single toggled lever. The action of printing becoming, essentially, an extension of the printer's arm. In America, where the unregulated advertising industry was covering the sides of whole buildings²⁹ with huge hoardings, the larger Columbian press,³⁰ lavishly decorated and with an American eagle atop, followed Cope's English press around thirteen years later. The eagle, picked out in gold and holding Jove's thunderbolts in his talons, acts as a counterweight to the platen and ascends as the lever is pulled to make the impression. These unpowered presses were relatively simple to maintain and repair, required no external power source other than the printer, and are still much sought-after today. They are still to be found in daily use in printshops across the world and affectionately maintained. A good example of a super-royal Colombian Press will print a 29x20 inch³¹ forme of wood and metal letterpress type evenly. They were the engines of production and, in conjunction with the new typefaces, characterised the graphic form of the street.

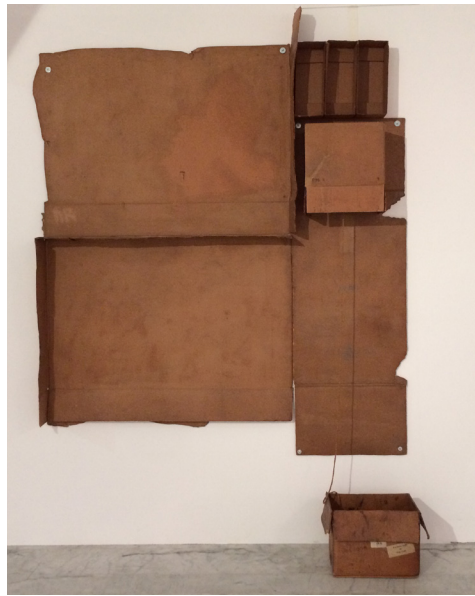
²⁹ Wm H Page & Co.'s (of Connecticut) largest wood type was more than 10 feet tall and 7 feet wide. Each letter took nine tiled wooden blocks to compose and would have been visible from some distance, allowing for placement on the increasingly tall buildings of the era.

³⁰ The Columbian press was invented by George Clymer in 1813. In 1818, he relocated his business back to England, presses were exported all over Europe and later across the world. From The International Printing Museum, Carson, California accessible at printmuseum.org/columbian-press

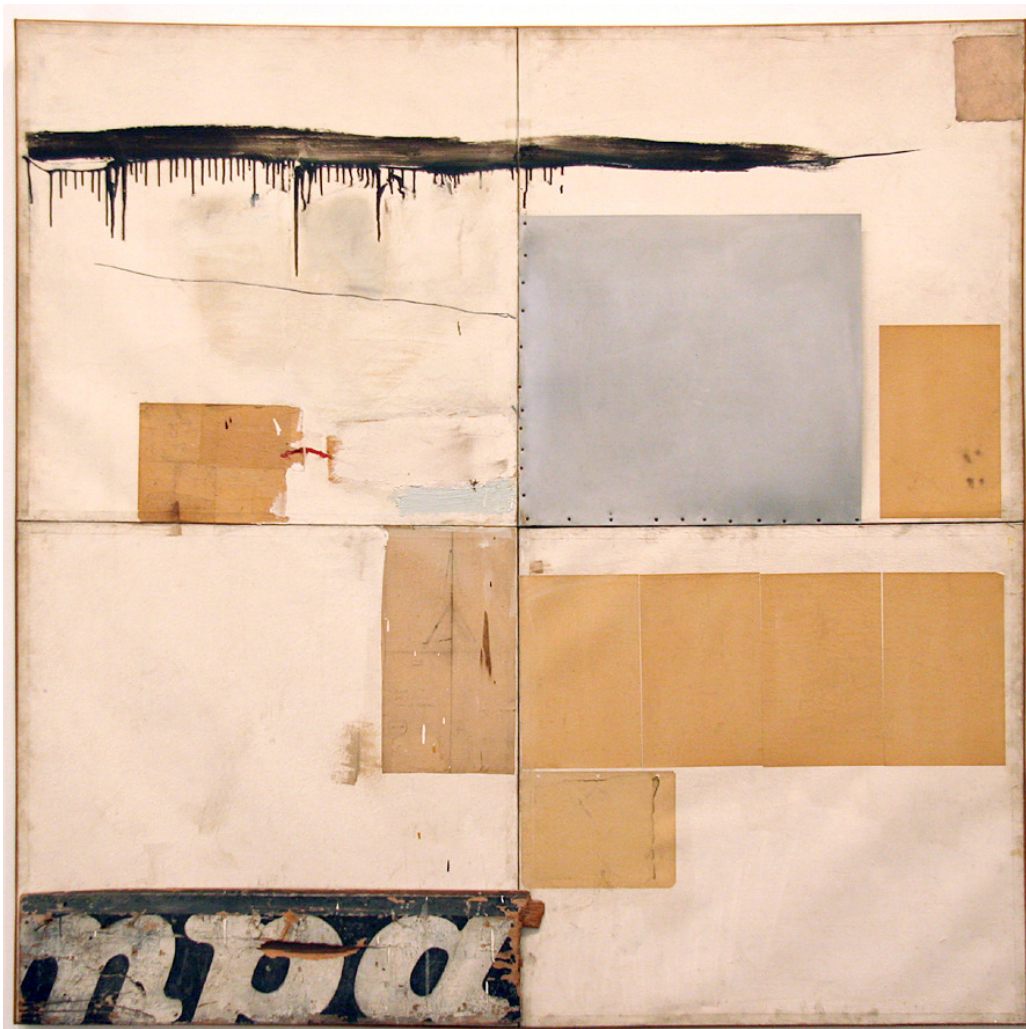
³¹ English uncut printing paper sizes reveal a wealth of extraordinary classifications: The Royal sheet mentioned above is 19 x 24", followed in size by Imperial, Elephant, Double Elephant, Atlas, Columbia, and Antiquarian at a sizeable 31 x 53".



2.09 a



2.09 b



2.09 c

2.08 Joseph Beuys and student assistants perform the street action *Ausfegen*, Karl Marx Platz, Berlin, May 1st, 1972. (a)

Robert Rauschenberg, 1/2 Gals./AAPCO (Cardboard) 1971. (b)

Robert Rauschenberg, K24976S 1956. (c)

A significant proportion of the material from 19thc. and early 20th-century sources collected in the anarchive would have been printed on these presses. I print from original woodletter type on antique Albion and Colombian presses whenever I can gain access to these reliable machines, often directly onto the collaged surface, utilising the characteristic type deboss that variations in pressure can produce. (See collages 1, 2, 7 & 8.)

Much jobbing printing was produced using a hierarchy of emphasis utilising display fonts of woodtype in the larger sizes, with lines of smaller body text set in metal.³² Type was ordered from specimen books displaying examples of the new fashionable fonts alongside traditional antique or transitional typefaces. These specimen books are now collectors' items in their own right and rarely found for sale. The few copies I have encountered are in museums and print libraries or private collections. I have photographed several hundred pages from the collection in *Tipoteca Italiana, Cornuda*, Italy (fig. 2.06 and 2.07 pp.73 & 75).

³² Metal type proved very difficult to manufacture in the sizes appropriate to broadsides and posters. Sandcasting produced a concave surface on the large letter forms, which was very difficult to print, and traditional punch-and-matrix methods could produce type only up to about 72pt. The founder of the industrial woodtype industry was Darius Wells of New York, who invented the lateral router following scalable patterns (to create intricate, repeating, or curved shapes), eventually using a pantograph (a later invention introduced by William Leavenworth of Massachusetts in about 1834).

Wells published his first specimen book in 1828, outlining the advantages of both economy and scale. The biggest and most successful American woodtype business was the Hamilton Manufacturing Company, founded in 1880 at Two Rivers on Lake Michigan (now Hamilton Wood Type Museum). Widespread use of manufactured woodtype is evident in Europe by the 1840s. More at <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/making-wood-type-then-and-now> by Thomas Gravemaker (2023).

In the larger type sizes³³ the pages of specimen books carry only a few characters to demonstrate the design; these apparently random choices of letters often result in poignant words or part-words. I have made scans from specimen books, digitally reworked and outputted these designs for lasercutting, the strange lexicographic accidents preserved in the final printing. (See collages 7 and 8.) Printed generally on the recto or right-hand page, the thin paper reveals a bleedthrough of the oil-based ink in a soft brown on the verso, reversing the text to the original wrong-reading of the parent type. This staining-through is a quality of the action of ink on paper that I have incorporated into the production of the collages. The print appearing as a wrong-reading after-glow rather than the original impression.

The rich legacy of these early 19thc. print technologies form a significant proportion of artefacts within the archive, the assertive typefaces and direct processes utilised for their visual impact and historical resonance.

Locating the research within contemporary artistic discourse

The typographic collages I produce are located in the tradition of artists appropriating materials found in the contested space of the street. I acknowledge the influence of works such as Joseph Beuys' *Ausfegen* (1972). His bright red broom sweeping Berlin's Karl Marx

³³ Wood type is measured in lines: one line is equivalent to 12 points: commonly used for standard text, equaling 1 pica. 12-point text is considered a standard size for readability in documents, with 72 points equaling exactly 1 inch. The system invented by Fournier, later modified to one point equaling 0.0138889 inches.

Platz clean of (many Turkish) cigarette ends, papers and cans left by participants of the May Day Parade, a task usually allocated to the *Gastarbeiter*. The rubbish was collected by Beuys and two of his students in plastic bags bearing the colours of the Organisation for Direct Democracy,³⁴ taken to the René Block Gallery, then placed by the artist along with the broom in a glass display case. I am alert to the transformative process of a discarded scrap to privileged object in its re-presentation as an artwork: the detritus of the street transitions through the political actions of the artist into an art object preserved in a vitrine (fig. 2.08 p.77).

When Robert Rauschenberg reconsidered Abstraction in New York's Bowery area in the early 1950s, forced partly by lack of funds, he took to roaming the streets and collecting what could be found. The objects in the six foot square, K24976S (1956); some pages of paper (American quarto - which does not adhere to the European DIN 476 system of A paper sizes), a broken piece from a painted wooden sign, a piece of nearly square metal, overlaid in places with flat paint and loose brush marks, supported on four nearly square canvases - are simultaneously components of a grid of colours and marks, and yet still the objects they always were, (although the paper has yellowed significantly over time).

The impermanent qualities of many found objects that are incorporated into collages and assemblages, mean radical changes

³⁴ Beuys founded the *Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (Organisation for Direct Democracy Through Referendum) in 1971 in Düsseldorf, aiming to transform society into a social sculpture through creative peaceful action. From the text to *Joseph Beuys: Boxkampf für die direkte Demokratie* (2017) exhibition at Waddington Custot accessible at www.waddingtoncustot.com/exhibitions/110/



2.10 a



2.10 b



2.10 c



2.10 d

2.09 Les Affichistes; collages from appropriated posters torn from billboards.

François Dufrêne *Matra Bakony Wald* 1961. (a)

Jacques Villeglé *Libération-Thorez* 1964. (b)

Mimmo Rotella *Come un Arazzo* 1962. (c)

Raymond Haines *Affiches lacérées sur tôle découpée* 1977. (d)

in colour, particularly in low grade paper, and result in the artwork developing its own chromatic atrophy through time, disassociated from the original aesthetic decisions of the artist.³⁵ As mentioned above in my research (see p.51), I have introduced printed elements using thermochromic inks that respond to variations in temperature, producing an intentional impermanence to the collage surface.³⁶ These are examples of artefacts possessing their own trajectories of change.

In common with my own methods, retrievals from the poster-covered surfaces of cities have been made by artists working in the arena of politicised action, subverting value and ownership. Mimmo Rotella's '*double décollages*' and *retro d'affiches* (displaying the reverse side of posters appropriated from walls, and still bearing traces of brick-dust and glue) was a practice deliberately distanced from the prewar territory of the ready-made, the psycho-geographic *détournements* of the *Letterist International* and Situationists,³⁷ and of the prevailing lyrical-abstract painting.

Les Affichistes, as the group including Raymond Hains, Jacques Villeglé, and Françoise Dufrêne and Wolf Vostell came to be

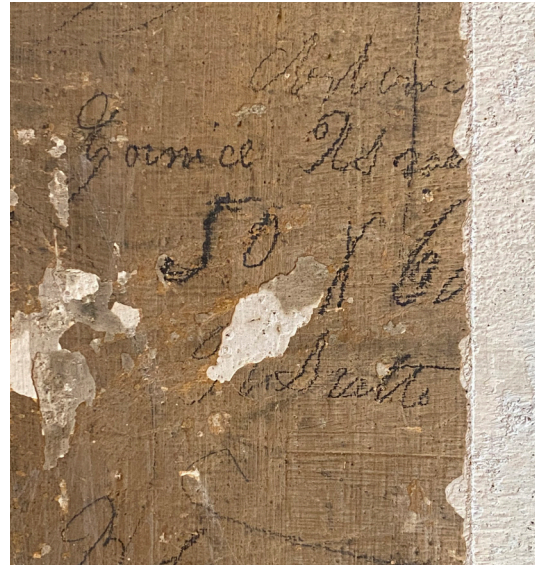
³⁵ This holds true from Braque and Picassos' proto-Cubist collages from 1913, the fragments of *Le Figaro* and *La Quotidienne* newspapers would have originally been white, to Anselm Kiefer's lead books slowly oxidising to white. It is a quality I deliberately incorporate in the collages.

³⁶ See Section 6: *Being and Things* p.200, for a more detailed analysis of this research.

³⁷ The *Letterist International* (1952-1957), a Paris based collective of artists and cultural theorists proposed a radical anti-capitalist view of society combining Marxist theories with Surrealist aesthetics and behaviours. Several members, including Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem, went onto form *Situationists International* (1957-1972). From The Getty Research Institute, accessible at www.getty.edu/research/special_collections/notable/situationists.html



2.10 a b



2.10 c



2.10 d e



2.10 Klara Lidén *Untitled (Poster Paintings)* 2008 Boros Collection, Berlin. (a) A small section of the wall in the *piano nobile* at Palazzo Fortuny in Venice. (b)

Ghost posters in Naples after removal by pressure-washing by the city authorities. (c)

The emblem of the National Socialist Tax Authority in war time Spandau is obscured by a English railway luggage sticker printed on very similar stock. The swastika and its overlay are part of collage no. 7: *3OE*, and although obscured it can be accessed as the label is not fully adhered. (d e)

known, entered the radically politicised streets of Paris and Rome in the 1960s to formulate a new concept of the artwork that ‘was made by all, not by one.’³⁸ The notion of the participatory is a key element within my project findings: the methodology (presented in Section 6 *Being and Things*, p.200) proposes a form of symbiosis in creating collages, whereby the material I am using is afforded as much agency as my actions in creating the finished composition.

Later in his career Rotella developed a series of collages known as ‘zeros’ or ‘blanks’, using the reverse of unused posters to cover most, if not all, of the torn surfaces beneath.³⁹ In this work he prefigures Klara Lidén over-pasting thick slabs of posters taken from the streets of Berlin with the unprinted reverse side of posters, the *Untitled (Poster Painting)* series. The blank⁴⁰ sheet appears to negate, even to silence the noise beneath, defusing its commercial, cultural and visual force. The act appears political, a restraint, if not a cancellation, of its capitalist charge, and an act

³⁸ *Ach Alma Manetro*, drawing its name from words visible in the torn fragments of the posters of which this work is made, was the founding work of *Les Affichistes*, made by Villeglé and Hains in February 1949. The quote above is from their manifesto. For more on *Les Affichistes* see *Authorial Intervention: The Work of Jaques Villeglé* by Tom McDonough in Artforum, March 2009

³⁹ Piero Mazoni’s *Achrome* series, commenced in 1958 after visiting Yves Klein’s *Época Blu* in Milan in 1957, also includes some very reduced surfaces. Giving the appearance of having been painted white, the works are in fact colourless, comprised of cut-out squares of canvas dipped in kaolin and adhered to the backing. A minimalist example is the gridded *Achrome* of 1959.

⁴⁰ In several of the collages, some printed objects are pasted face down, as a deliberate act of negation. These include swastikas, certain place names and postage stamps. This occlusion of content is discussed in more detail in Section 6: *Being and Things* (p.200).

of visual erasure within the act of addition⁴¹ (fig. 2.09 and 2.10 pp.81 & 83).

The typographic collages 4: HTA and 5: 38 (pp.103 &105) contain fragments of an Italian *manifesto* from 1941: regulations governing food distribution in an attempt to address wartime shortages in the city of Bari. The typeface of the *Ministero Della Agricoltura* obediently reflecting the aesthetics of the ruling *Fascismo Italiano* government.⁴² Collage 38 also contains fragments of an early 19thc. auction poster printed with Fat Face and slab serif type.

A valuable resource in attempts to identify the genealogy of these typefaces, and their location in political and social movements, is Luc Devroye's archive,⁴³ containing over 90,000 entries describing type design and designers, as well as the history and evolution of typefaces from pre-digital to contemporary fonts. This online resource, freely offered without charge or obligation, has been

⁴¹ *Les Décollagistes* sought an aesthetic reformulation to counter the abstract experimentation that characterised the School of Paris in the early 1950s and 60s. Alongside the *Nouveaux Réalistes*, they invoked a new realism of sensibility, denouncing the dominant consumer culture and utilising the ready-made to reflect on the quotidian. Abstraction was challenged through an appropriation of the real and an acknowledgement of Adorno's direct approach to the *Kulturindustrie*.

⁴² This typeface is probably Rapallo, produced by *Tipografia Girasole* in Milan in the 1930s. Although, many type foundries made their own versions of well-known typefaces from established producers with minor variations, thus evading copyright. It is frequently the case that, in trays of type labelled as one style, individual characters from several different foundries are mixed together, therefore several variations can be set in one line. This makes precise identification very difficult and it is easier to group typefaces into broad families distinguished by shared characteristics. This typeface can be classified as belonging to a neo-classical *Fascismo* family.

⁴³ Luc Devroye's unconventional archive is (sometimes) accessible at luc.devroye.org. Digital archiving as a method of preservation produces its own technological challenges due to the relatively short lifespan of much digital media. In addition, digital images have no conventional physical form, their material substance being strings of computer code on remote servers.

nearly forty years in construction. It contains, in Devroye's cautious introduction, many 'errors, misprints and omissions', making it even more intriguing to navigate. The archive offers accreditations to be simultaneously trusted and questioned, exhibiting a similar disobedience to the anarchive.⁴⁴

Whoever anonymously sprayed *Sous les pavés, la plage* (Bernard Cousin and Bernard Fritsch's Marxist-Situationist slogan,⁴⁵ coined in the furnace of the Paris strikes and riots of May 1968), was keen to allow the passerby to see through the immediate conflict; to perceive a utopian form of freedom represented by the natural world, a *chimera* just out of reach. The phrase also physically alters our viewpoint, bringing into focus the cobbled surface of the street and the very structures that constrain and control our behaviours. Similarly, screen-printed posters, produced in the occupied printmaking workshops of the École des Beaux-Arts by production lines of student-workers on rolls of unused newsprint that were delivered by striking journalists in solidarity with *la lutte* (the strike), were similarly visionary in their messages. Alongside invocation to persistence with the struggle and denunciations of the oppressive tendencies of the authorities are more cautionary and cynical messages: '*Une Jeunesse Que L' Avenir Inquiète Trop*

⁴⁴ Devroye is a Belgian computer scientist and mathematician, currently a professor at McGill University in Canada. He was influential in developing the founding principles of the early Internet - that all information should be freely available to all - principles now largely lost, discussed further in *Hello World* by Hannah Fry (2018).

⁴⁵ Kristin Ross in *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (2002) highlights the combination of workers' struggle with intellectual contestation. The experience of unifying equality in the organising structures of the protest was recognised and valued.



2.11 a b



2.11 c

2.11 Overprinted tear sheets from a letterpress printer in Buenos Aires, used to clean the rollers after printing and to proof up new posters before running the press at full speed. I was able to obtain a large quantity of these. A good example of words receding into illegibility whilst remaining indicative of meaning. (a b)

An exhibition of letterpress posters in my studio accompanying the printers Wazegoose in Stroud, March 2024. Collage no.11: CHROMA uses the Italian Art Deco letterforms from the large banner at top right. (c)

*Souvent*⁴⁶ and '*La Beauté est dans la Rue*' are two examples. Again, there are several examples of the *atelier populaire* posters in the collection.

As Slavoj Žižek⁴⁷ reminds us, the apparently unassailable logic of political decisions has become depoliticised, presented as natural conclusions, there being 'no alternative' - a condition that makes fertile ground for populist figures, who offer a 'common' sense solution to the seemingly intractable nature of the situation. Žižek alerts us to the reality that these (mis) representations are not inevitabilities, that the law itself is essentially a binding set of complicities, thus open to transgression, (which it can be said to invite). The beach can be glimpsed through the fissures of State control.

The street, public square and the marketplace, proscribed by Chantal Mouffe, as 'agonistic', can be envisaged as a site of ongoing conflict, with competing hegemonic power structures engaged in constant struggle. Mouffe, following Rancière, proposes that critical art practices can intervene in in these unreconcilable processes, subverting the dominant power structures in order to allow the possibility of respectful difference, and consequently the illumination of that which is obscured by

⁴⁶ Above the image of a bandaged head is the slogan *A Youth Disturbed Too Often by the Future*.

⁴⁷ Žižek quotes Jacques Lacan's provocation to the students in 1968 as revolutionaries, 'You are hysterics who demand a new master. You will get one'. From 'Democracy Is The Enemy' *London Review of Books* blog, October 2011. In *The Ambiguous Legacy of 68* (2008), he proposes that post-modernism's 'permissiveness' was the hidden domination that society inherited, alongside a populist notion of 'liberty'. From www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2011/october/democracy-is-the-enemy

the violence⁴⁸ of capitalism. She argues for a form of never-ending contention, articulating the space of agonistic (and antagonistic) democratic politics as one where consensus does not ever emerge, in contrast to the liberal model of rational consensus, and one where different hegemonic models confront each other without the possibility of final reconciliation.⁴⁹ These processes, both the forces of political and social struggle and the intentional artistic intervention, result in the production of transient material, often printed, stencilled or graffitied, which can be recorded and memorialised,⁵⁰ and in some cases, as here, retrieved before they are lost.⁵¹ These objects are not fixed in time - their meaning and value unreliable, restless and resistant to the authority of the archive.⁵² These typographic remnants stand as historical witnesses to conflicts, state control, radical dissent, and the mundane hum of bureaucratic intervention in every day life.

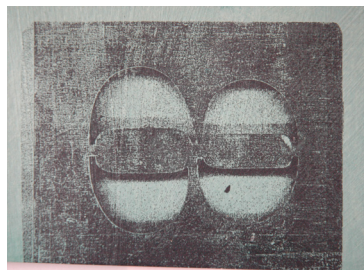
⁴⁸ In the panel discussion *The Violent Imagination of Financial Capitalism*, Transmediale Berlin (2018), Larry Achiampong & David Blandy, Max Haiven, Amel Ouaiïssa and Nina Power discussed an enduring quality of capitalism as precarity, and its inherent relationship with the imagination, resulting in a pathological system of cooperation. Max Haiven detailed a history of the founding principles of Western capitalism in the extractive frontiers of settler colonialism, the financing of the speculative journeys of merchant venturers, the insurance of those ventures against failure and loss, and the transfer of ownership of appropriated land into real estate.

⁴⁹ From Chantal Mouffe's *Art as an Agonistic Intervention in Public Space* (2018).

⁵⁰ Once gathered into museum collections and archives, these spontaneous declamations produced in the heat of the moment enter the problematic arena of memorialisation. The object remains the same (although its material components are changing with the passage of time) but its locus as a signifier distorts with historical and cultural reinterpretation.

⁵¹ See also the *Shanghai Propaganda Poster Arts Centre* in Section 3, p.115.

⁵² In addition to conventional archives, often produced by a dominant hegemony to assert an historical narrative and an 'official' version of events, I have come across what may be termed *accidental archives*: old storerooms overlooked at the back of businesses, amateur collections verging on hoarding, and other accretions of material which have established themselves simply because no one was bothered to clear up. These are often rich seams from which I can acquire material to be used in the collages (see collages 6 and 10, pp.137 & 198).



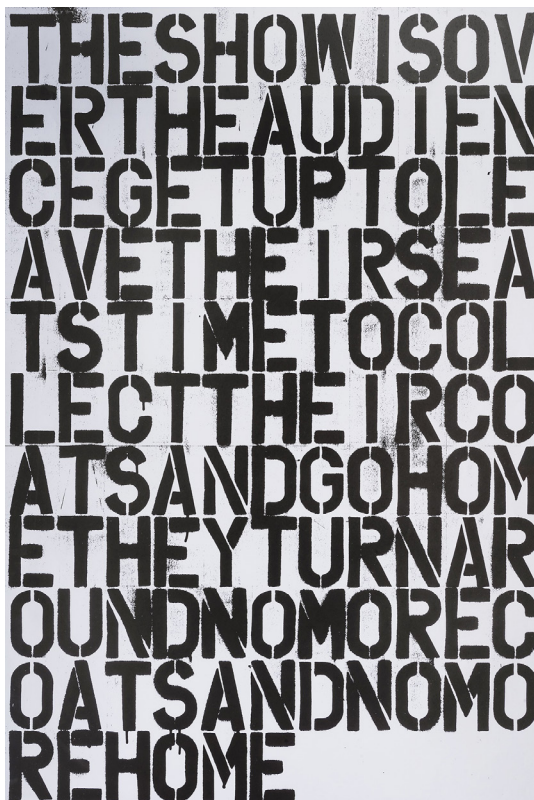
2.13 a b c



2.13 e



2.13 d



2.13 f



2.13 g

2.13 Stencils in various contexts. Old and new numerals and a directional *frecchia* in Venice. (a b)

A valuable source of material for collages is to be found in the many surviving *incisori e stampi* workshops all over Italy that have often been in business for generations

Two stencil details, no. 8 silkscreened from a zinc number stencil and a Cyrillic plastic letter stencil overpainted with acrylic. (c d)

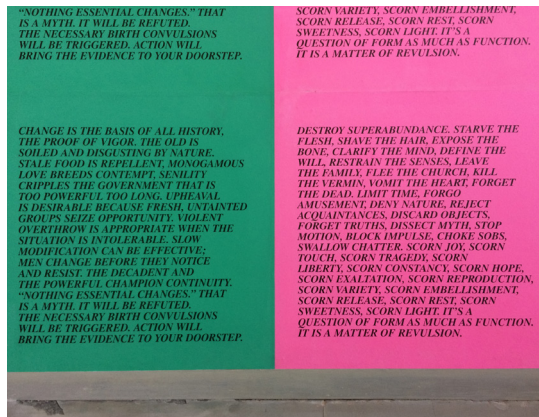
An example of a papercut stencil by SWOON in Berlin, 2002. (e) Christopher Wools *The Show is Over* Litho edition, 2000 (f) and some of the zinc packing crate, wool bale and railway wagon stencils in the collection. (g)

Retrieving and re-contextualising found objects

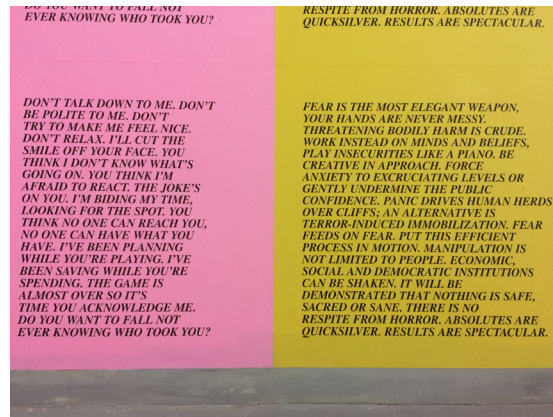
I have appropriated posters⁵³ and ephemera from walls around the world, from Tehran to Berlin, from Barcelona to Massachusetts, from Bandung to Napoli. The act of removal is tainted with some degree of criminality and risk, it is after all the theft of something placed in the public realm, even if not actually ‘owned’ in the liminal space of the street. Conditions have to be right for me to take posters from walls, even those illegally fly posted. My method is consequently stealthy, a dark and preferably rainy night, which sees walls shed their skins of posters - they can be easily peeled before they collapse into the wet street. In drier climates I am armed with bottles of water with which to douse the surface - a short wait for the starch paste to soften and the surface to yield its prize. Once the posters are detached from the wall and rolled under my arm, a further difficulty arises, as I now risk being mistaken for a fly-poster rather than a poster-taker. This happened in Tehran where the consequences could have been serious had not my explanation of being an artist gathering material been accepted by the neighbourhood *Basji Niru-ye*.

I also acquire typographic or graffitied scraps of weathered flyers, stickers or scribbled words wherever I find them in the street, these countercultural messages residing within the archive as

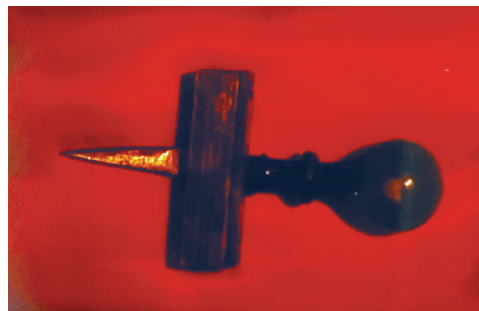
⁵³ Ernesto de Sousa, the Portuguese artist, art critic, poet, filmmaker, curator and cultural agitator assembled a large collection of political and activist posters in his lifetime. As he saw it, the poster is a prime arbiter between the individual and society, speaking as it does in the unmediated *rua*. From the exhibition *Ernesto de Sousa, Exercises of Poetic Communication with Other Aesthetic Operators* Galeria Quadrum, Lisbon (2021-22).



2.14 a b



2.14 c



2.14 d e

2.14 Details of a wall of Jenny Holzer's street flyers, part of the series of *Inflammatory Essays* 1979-82 at the Tate Gallery, London in 2018. Originally the essays were fly-posted across New York City. (a b)

György Galántai's subversive archive in Budapest, photographed in 1984, (c) and items from his collection of disobedient objects; a carved shoe sole to imprint a bare footprint (a signifier of freedom) into fresh snow and a bureaucrat's rubber stamp transformed into a weapon. (d e)

dissonant⁵⁴ and powerful objects, even where only part of the original can be saved (fig. 2.11 and 2.12, pp.87 & 89).

The pre-cut stencil of the graffiti artist delivers a carefully crafted design quickly to avoid detection, readily duplicated across surfaces using spray cans. With deep historical origins in the negative prints of human hands on the surfaces of ancient caves, attesting across millennia to a presence through absence,⁵⁵ stencilling is frequently found in the space of the street in both official and unofficial contexts. The origins of the much-regarded *nizioleti* of Venice date to the military occupation by Napoleon,⁵⁶ stencilled in a traditional sanguine pigment using a typeface clearly derived from the French humanist designs of Firmin and Didot,⁵⁷ one more invader of the city and one which is still preserved today.

Perhaps the provisional nature of the stencil's mark (and its ability to be both of the hand and of the machine) attracted the young Picasso and Braque when prototyping assemblage and collage in the Paris of the 1900s. Decades before the advent of the aerosol

⁵⁴ These are compounded acts of disobedience, the work of illegal street artists and fly-posters and my theft of their work.

⁵⁵ The negative shape, or cut out, or hole punch is discussed in more detail in Section 6: *Being and Things*, p.200. I contributed images from Berlin to early editions of Tristan Manco's *Street Logos* (2004) p.13, TL and TR.

⁵⁶ Napoleon entered Venice in May 1797 and quickly standardised the street signs as an aid to navigating the labyrinth of streets.

⁵⁷ James Clough's excellent series of essays, *L'Alfabeto e la Citta*, included in *Graphicus* (2007), cites other examples of stencil lettering in Italy. He points out their provisionality when introduced as signage and, in some circumstances, such as in Venice, the remarkable fact that they have endured.

(and a very time long after the explosive orality⁵⁸ of the cave dweller) these inclusions of *pochoir* numerals and scraps of text quickly entered the visual language of the avant-garde.

Christopher Wools posters and paintings update both typeface and content, fracturing the flow of comprehension and legibility by utilising unconventional word breaks and letter spacing in his stencilled paintings and posters.⁵⁹ Examples of this kind of deliberate illegibility can be found in collages 7 and 8 (fig. 2.13 p.91). Jenny Holzer's word-based installation work in the streets of late 1970s Manhattan, contributed to the crowded typescape of the commercial and instructional messaging through innovative and provocative interventions. Beginning with the *Truisms* series - cheaply printed aphorisms pasted anonymously on billboards and hoardings at night, and quickly obscured by graffiti and flyposting in the rapidly switching economy of subculture, the posters comprised lists of single line sentences holding conflicting and inflammatory content, although, she stated, held to be true by somebody somewhere.⁶⁰ Holzer reviews this work as not being necessarily an artistic endeavour: 'I was' she says in an interview with Graham Dixon in 2010 'not sure what I was in New York in

⁵⁸ John Cussan's talk for *The Diagram Research Group*, screened in October 2020, introduces this phrase into an extended discussion of the declamatory gesture.

⁵⁹ 'Christopher Wool's paintings seem to capture visual urban experience, carved out of a moment for the duration of an artwork - an artwork that converts the structures of experience into the structures of painting. Non-specific moments and impressions are lifted out of context and fixed into details of a painting that, unlike graffiti, conveys the speed and concentration of its origin only when it is contemplated over a measure of time in an art space.' From the preface to *The Nothingness Before Nothing in Christopher Wool* by Friedrich Meschede, Galerie Max Hetzler and Holzwarth Publications (2007).

⁶⁰ The lists have their origin in a required reading list of philosophical texts issued by the Whitney Independent Study Program in which Holzer was enrolled. She edited these to a series of simple but provocative one-line aphorisms.

the 1970s, I thought maybe I was a crackpot needing to declaim things, and I think the *Truisms* reflect that.’⁶¹

Collaborative engagement: dialogic practice and projects

In 1984 as part of a Mail Art project called *kelet:nyugat* (East:West) I co-curated with the British artist John Furnival, I visited György Galántai in Budapest. György was then a neo-avantgard artist, and a dissident under the Communist occupation of Hungary. György maintained a large network⁶² of Mail Artists behind the Iron Curtain and beyond, acutely aware that incoming mail would be scrutinised for subversive material by the authorities. However, their apparently nonsensical content would confound the censors, and most would arrive safely. György organised several Mail Art and artists’ book exhibitions, including one during my visit. A criterion of its success could be judged by the amount of time elapsing from the moment of opening the doors to its forced closure by the ÁVH⁶³ - occasionally a matter of minutes.

György allowed me to document some of the equipment that was used by the resistance during the occupation to spread their message in the streets, alongside the frequently painted *RUSZKIK*

⁶¹ Theaster Gates reflects Holzer’s intention in work such as *Sanctum* in Bristol (2015) as acting as *an amplifier* for the myriad unheard voices within the community.

⁶² György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay founded Artpool Archive in 1979, as ‘an alternative institution collecting information on national and international artists, and welcoming contributions from any geographic origin, discipline, or type of production’. The source of works for this singular collection was a simple formula stamped on letters or invitations sent out within Hungary and abroad: ‘Please send information about your activity.’

⁶³ The State Protection Authority (Hungarian: Államvédelmi Hatóság, ÁVH) was the secret police of the People’s Republic of Hungary from 1945 to 1956.



2.15 a



2.15 b

2.15 'Official' correspondence from Guy Bleus's Administration Centre, Mail Art project, 1984. (a)

Mail Art and Nail Art contributions (an offshoot I initiated for the Nailsworth festival of Art in the 1980s) from Mr Sandy Fabulous (New York), Ryosuke Cohen, (Osaka) and Pier van Dijk (Amsterdam) shown with an invitation envelope. (b)

HAZA.⁶⁴ These included a roller, bearing the reversed characters of subversive slogans, easily concealed beneath a winter coat, a disobedient criminal act with severe consequences. A companion walking nearby carried a hidden cloth pad pre-charged with indelible rubberstamp ink. At suitable moments a swift gesture could roll the slogan onto official posters and declarations, defacing both the oppressor's authority and acting as a reminder to those that pass that these conditions would eventually end. Other strategies for the spreading of printed material included stuffing frozen downpipes with clandestinely printed leaflets on buildings known to receive full sunshine during the day, melting the icy core and releasing the leaflets onto the pavement, no trace of the perpetrator to be seen. Another technique involved nocturnal walks with rubber overshoes, stamping single words into the snow, which would freeze overnight and reveal their message the next morning in the low light of the Hungarian winter. Some of these artefacts, rollers and shoes, stencils and handbills, are now re-categorised as relics of liberation in the *Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum* (Hungarian National Museum), as testament to the ingenuity of the resistance⁶⁵ (fig. 2.14 p.93).

⁶⁴ *Russians Go Home!* was painted on walls across Budapest, but also on cars, trams and the temporary barricades erected to try to stop the Russian tanks. Documented by contemporary photographers including a notable example on *Kálvin tér* where a Red Soviet star had been torn down. György Galántai allowed me to photograph some of his records of these interventions.

⁶⁵ Historical revisionism in Viktor Orbán's Hungary continues under his illiberal Government. The statue of Imre Nagy, leader of the 1956 rising, in Szabadság Tér has been moved to a less prominent position, and the controversial monument to 'all victims' of the Nazi occupation in Szabadsag Square depicts Hungary as the archangel Gabriel under attack from a vicious Nazi Eagle. The monument was erected over two nights and was immediately denounced as a gross distortion of the wartime Hungarian government's complicity in the rounding up and transport of 450,000 Jews, Roma and others to concentration camps. As George Orwell warned: *Who controls the past, controls the future (and) who controls the present controls the past.*

I am also reminded of the postcards and paper notes - *Mother - don't give to the Winter Relief Fund! - Work as slowly as you can!, Put sand in the machines! - Every stroke of work not done will shorten the war!* by Otto and Elise Hempel, deposited around their home in Wedding, Berlin, from 1940 to 1942 and later fictionalised by Hans Fallada as Otto and Anna Quangel in *Alone in Berlin*. These quiet domestic acts of dissent against the might of tyranny led, ultimately, to their execution in Plötzensee prison the following April. These materials stand as evidence of the disruptive power of the humble scrap of paper in the face of a ruthless regime.⁶⁶

In the construction of the typographic collages I frequently employ overprinting by rubberstamp and stencilling as one of the final acts of addition - a form of certification. Drawing on my large collection of rubber stamps purchased from stationery shops and flea markets around the world, these conclusive acts serve as a form of compositional stitching, bridging two or more surfaces. I have a large collection of date stamps, often utilised to introduce a singular temporal note into a collage, a specific day, month and year calling our attention to the past (and where the date stamp allows, sometimes a future moment).

This method of working derives from the origins of the Mail Art movement, attributed to Ray Johnson and others in 1950s

⁶⁶ Although we know from records of the trial at the People's Court that all but 18 of the 276 notes the couple deposited were immediately handed to the Gestapo, the time taken for the detection and eventual prosecution of the couple amounted to over two years of persistent work by the police, distracting these resources from other more potentially lethal consequences. From *Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand* (The German Resistance Memorial Center), Berlin.

America and which became a powerful satirical method of communication across the sealed borders of the Cold War. Several Eastern European mail artists adopted the aesthetics of State control - the official stamp (upon which so many things depended) was replicated in absurd and nonsensical forms, rubber stamps being easy to hand manufacture and cheap to produce commercially.

Pseudo-bureaucratic documents circulated within the Mail Art movement, including those produced by Belgian artist Guy Bleus's *The Administration Centre - 42.292* in 1978 (fig. 2.15 p.97). Envelopes used to convey correspondence between artists were conceived as art objects in themselves, the stamping and stickers accruing as the envelope passes through artists hands, official sorting offices, and state censors, the authorising and subversive mark keeping close company. These artworks mimic the constructions and affectations of power, which is revealed not only as ridiculous and vulnerable, but subject to being imagined into non-existence.

Male life expectancy for people born in my own birth year (according to actuarial tables based on the UK government's National life tables) is 83.42 years, meaning my lifespan will comprise 30,462.3⁶⁷ days, on average. Date stamps are mostly calibrated in whole days, but some numbering stamps which I use,

⁶⁷ The day I am writing this, June 18th 2025, is day 25,669, therefore 84.24% of my life (calculated as an average) has been lived.

in both western Latin and Farsi Arabic numbers, are infinitely variable within the five or six columns available.

As well as individual number and date stamps, I include stamps which form the mundane paraphernalia of the bureaucrat. The rack of rubber stamps and ink pads on the desks of those in positions of authority is now a thing of the past, and therefore consigned to the flea market or junk shop.⁶⁸ This is the language of permission or denial, invocations to speed, and prompt payment - APPROVED, *CANCELLATO*, *URGENTE*, and many more. These small inclusions in the overall collage enumerate the passage of time and of life lived (measured by heartbeats and breaths) and the random clusters of numbers occasionally included point to the inescapable arc we traverse and the impossibility of envisaging death. Every artefact included in the collages is located in a specific cultural, aesthetic, and technological moment - the intersection creating identifiable visual form.

Individual moments in the time-out-of-time⁶⁹ experience of the gallery include *You are right here right now* by Jeppe Hein. The meta-data in my own photograph (in which I am dimly reflected)

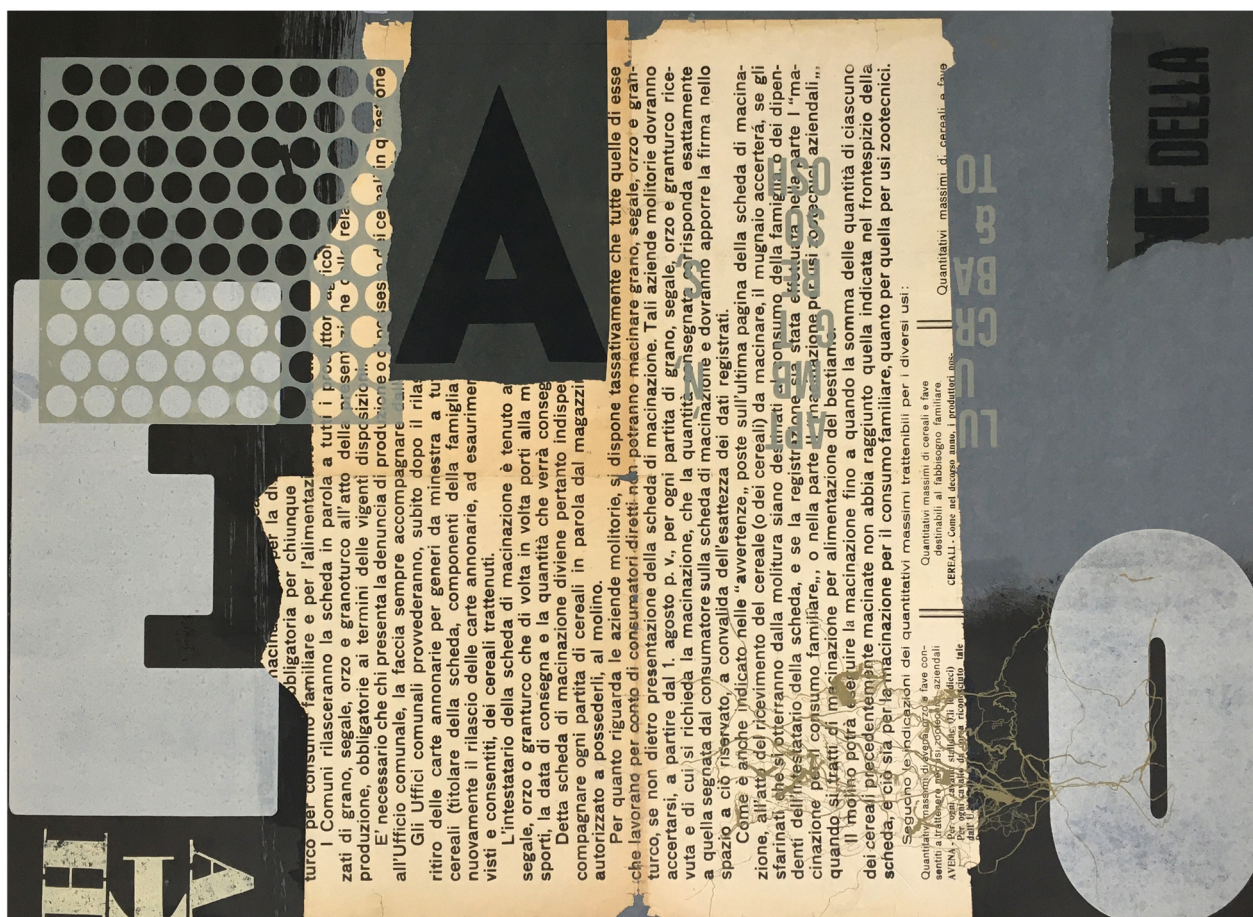
⁶⁸ One exception, particularly in developing countries, is the Visa stamp purchased on arrival. The reassuring clunk following scrutiny of your passport marks the moment of admittance.

⁶⁹ The distinctive moment of a fortuitous find or a vivid realisation of 'being in the world now' is a feeling that characterises both expeditions to collect material and the process of working in the studio. These are heightened moments of awareness and attunement which punctuate the flow of *Chronos*, or regular chronological time. They stand out, I experienced them as valuable, a feeling of an exceptional experience. This is discussed more fully as an ontology of creativity in Section 6: *Being and Time* p.200.

reveals it was taken in the exhibition *How Long Is Now?* at the machine house of Kindl Gallery in Berlin, Germany on the second of February 2017 at 14:27:14. Shortly afterwards I returned to my hotel through the frozen streets of Neuköln, taking a poster from a wall as I pass (fig. 2.16).



2.16 Jeppe Hein *YOU ARE RIGHT HERE RIGHT NOW* 2012.



Collage 4: HTA 90 x 60cm

Screen printed elements are printed onto a background of letterpress ink and lasercut printed characters. The Italian *Manifesto* issued by the *Ministero Della Agricoltura* in 1941 details crop production and milling quotas in the city of Bari relating to war time rationing, and set in a contemporary sanserif. Paul Renner's *Futura* of 1927 informed the production of many sanserif modern typefaces. The letterforms screen printed at bottom left are typical fat face types from British jobbing printers.

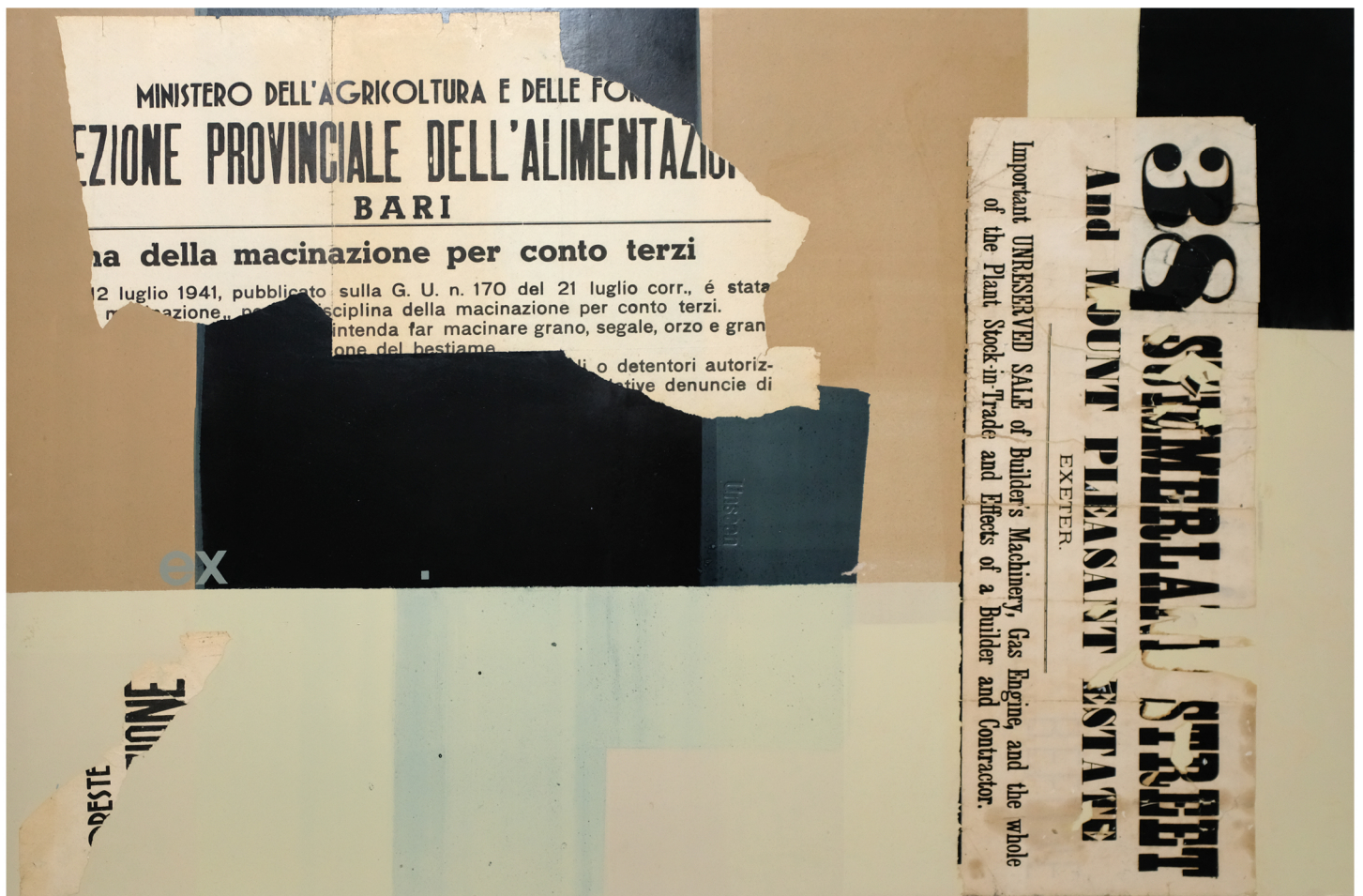
Section 3

An Expedition in the Ruins of Saigon

In this section: Time spent collecting material in Vietnam leads to an examination of the ethical considerations of extraction, the origin, trajectories and destinations of specific materials used in the collages, and the contemporary artistic context in which the work is located. I question the specific ethical issues that arise in appropriating personal documentation for use in the artworks, and how the traces of individuals' lives haunt the objects that remain.

I consider contemporary artworks resulting from catastrophe as acts of commemoration and healing, and investigate how my work is located within these contexts. I propose that an autobiographical and anecdotal methodology informs the process of collecting materials from which to work. Further, I propose an auto-ethnographic stance to accumulation, positioning the ephemera obtained within a postcolonial critique. I investigate how the process of visiting sites directly connected to conflict and collecting material from them can be deciphered in terms of my artistic practice.

I introduce the question of how the ‘thingness’ (*dingewollen*) of things can become an active and participatory part of the process of making the collages, and propose a symbiotic methodology of composition which acknowledges the agency of the printed fragments and other material as vital components within the finished work.



Collage 5: 38 90 x 60cm

Over a background of rolled letterpress inks the Italian *Manifesto* issued by the *Ministero Della Agricoltura* is titled in a sharply condensed Gothic characterised by low horizontal strokes and stylised geometric uppercase Ms Ds, Gs, Os and Ss. In contrast, the English auction poster fragments from 80 years before demonstrate the emphasis of a condensed slab serif alongside an elegant fat face. These fragments are from a bundle of posters so brittle and fragile they were disintegrating in their box, the ink preserving the paper in places. At near-centre is a word debossed into the substrate using metal type. There are also small screen printed additions.

Following a period of work in Vietnam, I reschedule my return flight in order to have a few free days abroad in an unknown city;¹ however, it is one which exists in my vivid memories² of the Vietnamese-American war in the 1970s - the nightly news footage of terrifying close combat, the devastated villages and cities beamed into our living rooms. Up early in my hotel room, I plan a day oriented by visiting two sites from this troubled period: Ngô Gia Tự Street and the Pittman apartment building at 22 Lý Tự Trọng Street, which housed American aid workers, and less conspicuously, the CIA's deputy chief of station³ (fig. 3.01 p.107).

I am hopeful of finding material that resonates with these events, acknowledging both the spectral nature of past catastrophes (encoded in memory as a photographic image, or newsreel clip) and my desire to retrieve some material traces to include in the collages - an ethnography of ephemera.⁴

¹ *Spazieren in Berlin* (1929), Franz Hessel's acknowledgement of the delights of immersing oneself in the crowd discusses a similar heightened sensibility to journeying abroad in the unknowable city.

² I was in the military during the latter stages of the war and spent time in the US with veterans returning from conflict to resume their studies at University, for many a deeply troubling transition, from which many never fully recovered.

³ This building, and the famous photograph by Hubert van Es, showing the evacuation of American and Vietnamese civilians, is frequently misrepresented as the roof of the American embassy. It is still possible to gain access to this site, albeit with some difficulty.

⁴ I am aware of the problematic nature of ethnographic study of the 'exotic'. However blind to an unfamiliar culture and unable to read or speak the language, I have come to rely on an almost universal acceptance and hospitality when travelling in foreign countries. It is often simply the tradition of welcoming strangers that leads eventually to a successful visit. Previous research projects and exhibitions in the politically difficult People's Republic of Iran (2005 and 2006) were made possible entirely by the generosity and welcome afforded to me by complete strangers.



3.01 a



3.01 b



3.01 c



3.01 d



3.01 e

3.01 Evacuees board a helicopter from the roof of the CIA station at 22 Gia Long Street, April 29 1975 (a) as North Vietnamese troops enter the city of Saigon. Photo by Hubert van Es, and the same location today. (b) Those authorised for safe passage were given an identifying SGN baggage tag to wear.

Under the trees near Ngô Gia Tự Street (Now Lý Tự Trọng Street) today. (c)

American G.I. dog tags retrieved from combat sites in the jungle and offered for sale in a flea market in Hanoi. (d)

Torn posters on a wall in Hanoi, 2025. (e)

I set off into the streets with some unsubstantiated information about a national archive that was saved during the liberation, and hopeful of finding some printed material relating to the history of the country, its language⁵ (with its French colonial overlay) and the turbulent political periods after the devastating war. On these mornings of expedition, I am prepared for anything that comes to hand, ensuring a better chance of success relying on an instinct in reading the city, and employing the keen sensibilities of the hunter. Streets reveal older districts where development has yet to take place, and long-established businesses trading in books, second-hand goods, antiques, and the detritus of urban life are still to be found. Here it is possible to come across viable⁶ material lying forgotten in cupboards and cardboard boxes at the back of shops, a residue of material that has accumulated over time.⁷ In similar cities, there is often a long-established printing district surviving precariously by supplying low-cost single-use letterpress printed material: stationery, labels and short-run posters run by an elderly generation of type setters and press operators. They are nearly always welcoming to an unusual visitor such as myself. My strategies involve anecdotal research and casual conversations, as

⁵ The Vietnamese language belongs to the Viet-Muong branch of the Mon-Khmer language family. These languages are spoken in a region extending from the Assam state of India on the west to Vietnamese on the east. The move towards a Romanised national language (Quốc ngữ) begins with the French Jesuit and Lexicographer Alexandre de Rhode's publication of his *Dictionarium Annamiticum* in 1651. Widespread usage (and literacy) was not common until French colonial rule in the early 20th century. From *Sesquisyllabicity, Chữ Nôm, and the Early Modern Embrace of Vernacular Writing in Vietnam* by John D. Phan, *Journal of Chinese Writing Systems*, vol 4 issue 3 (2020).

⁶ These criteria are defined more fully in Sections 1 and 6, pp.22 & 200.

⁷ Raymond Williams distinguishes between the residual and the archaic, noting the sedimentary tendency of cultural elements, and their availability for re-appropriation by the dominant order.



3.02 a



3.02 b

3.02 Nguyễn Ngọc Loan, the national police chief of South Vietnam executes a Vietcong fighter Nguyễn Văn Lém in Saigon on February 1, 1968. Photograph by Eddie Adams, Associated Press. (a)

Manit Sriwanichpoom. *This is Bloodless War #2* (1997) (b)

no guidebook or online resource that I know is of assistance on these forays, instead a helpful address scribbled on a scrap of paper from a chance encounter can lead to a contact or relative, and to treasure.

Spectrality and absence as a focus for acquisition

As I walk, I am thinking of the image, taken by Eddie Adams of the execution of Nguyễn Văn Lém, a Việt Cộng combatant by Brigadier General Nguyễn Ngọc Loan, using his American-made Smith & Wesson .38 special (he used a short-barrelled bodyguard model). The photograph won the Pulitzer Prize in 1969 and was widely misread as the cold-blooded execution of a Vietcong soldier.⁸ The shooting took place at 252 Ngô Gia Tự Street, and was recreated in 1997 by Manit Sriwanichpoom, the Thai photographer, writer, contemporary artist and social activist in 1997. The image was included in the exhibition Contemporary Ruins at Kindl Gallery in Berlin⁹ as part of a set of recreated photojournalist images from the Vietnam War titled *This Bloodless War #2*. The site of the killing is on a busy thoroughfare, the tree on the edge of the frame remains, taller and now shading two small furniture shops. I gather a few of its leaves, fragments of which are included in the collage 9: *Divieto di Affissione*. I am reminded of Tacita Dean, writing about W. G. Sebald's 'ghosts of

⁸ In fact, Nguyễn Văn Lém was the leader of a death squad that had killed 34 people who were known to Loan earlier that morning. Lém was captured shortly after the act. After the war Loan settled in Virginia where he opened a restaurant. When interviewed he stated 'all we want to do is to forget and be left alone'.

⁹ *Ruinen der Gegenwart* KINDL Gallery, Berlin, 22 October 2017-11 February 2018.

repetition'¹⁰ and Hal Foster writing in *An Archival Impulse* 'These remnants are enigmatic, but they are enigmas without resolution, let alone redemption.'¹¹ Discernible in Sriwanichpoom's mining of the Associated Press photographic archive (and the collective memory of the Vietnamese war) is a process of re-configuration rather than commemoration (fig. 3.02 p.109).

These ghosts are everywhere during my time in Saigon (as many of the residents still call it), some as ethereal memories, provoked by the recollection of original or reworked photographic images, although some manifest in more alarmingly physical form.

Presented as an entertainment for tourists, I was asked if I would like a day out in the jungle firing abandoned American ordinance; handguns, rifles, machine guns and heavy weaponry, the bill accumulating per round discharged - a literal bang for a buck.

Popular though this extraordinary outing appeared to be I declined, certain that this level proximity to the actual machinery of death would be profoundly disturbing. Sriwanichpoom is not alone in the appropriation of often shockingly violent press imagery into the art space,¹² but to encounter an event through the two removes (original event recorded as a photograph, re-appropriation of image-as-art-object - a simulacra) is to sanitise its

¹⁰ This notion, which Sebald explores in *Die Ringe des Saturn: Eine englische Wallfahrt* (1995), highlights how rational thought fails to dismiss the haunting, recurring patterns of history.

¹¹ Hal Foster, *An Archival Impulse* October vol. 110, Fall 2004, p.16.

¹² Omar Fast's *5000 feet is the Best* (2011) goes further in blurring the factual and fictive delineation. Fast stages a series of interviews with an actor voicing a disaffected drone pilot's actual words intercut with footage of a re-imagined drone strike against American civilians by a superior occupying Middle Eastern military force.

visceral impact. Viewing work in an art gallery is distinctly different to firing 40-year-old American ammunition in the Vietnamese jungle.¹³

David Claerbout's *Vietnam, 1967, near Duc Pho (reconstruction after Hiromichi Mine), 2001*, appropriates the Japanese war photographer Hiromichi Mine's image of a twin-engined Caribou transport plane loaded with ammunition in the moment that it was shot down by friendly fire near Đức Phổ Base Camp on 3 August, 1967. In Claerbout's video installation, the artist layers a digitally extracted image of the plane and surrounding debris from Mine's original photograph onto a moving image video loop of the accident site under changing light conditions. The original image from the actual event is superimposed over the subtly moving background filmed thirty-three years later. The plane, and its soon-to-be killed occupants, are frozen in the moment of their destruction. Mine's original photograph, a factual recording on black-and-white 35mm film recedes immediately (as all photographs do as soon as they are taken) into the past they inhabit, becoming instantaneous history. The image stands for veracity, bearing witness¹⁴ to the event and recording as certainty that which has occurred - it becomes the incontrovertible

¹³ Anecdotaly, this abandoned ordinance was sold on the black market to al Qaeda insurgents fighting the Americans in Afghanistan - the Americans in combat potentially facing their own ammunition from forty years previously.

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt distinguishes between bearing witness and establishing proof; a consideration that informs Derrida in his approach to responsibility and the relation between the self and others. From *The Acts of Faith: On Witnessing in Derrida and Arendt* by Charles Barbour, *Philosophy and Social Criticism* vol. 37, issue 6 (2011).



3.03 a



3.03 b

3.03 David Claerbout Vietnam 1967 near Đức Phổ (Reconstruction after Hiromichi Mine) 2001
Video installation 3' loop. (a)

Hiromichi Mine C-7 Caribou 62-4161 hit by friendly fire near Đức Phổ, South Vietnam, 3 August 1967. (b)

historical record archived in the narrative of war (fig. 3.03 p.113). Claerbouts's installation intervenes in the nature of the encounter we have with these historically significant images. Retrieving them from the past and placing them into the present-continuous temporal register of film (whilst at the same time integrating fragments of the still image from the past.) We therefore encounter a kind of simultaneity in our interpretation of time and location, past and present folding into one emergent experience.

Walking through Saigon, this merging of image, time, memory and the residual becomes a consideration in my search for materials from which to work.¹⁵ The South Vietnamese State Archives turn out to be no longer accessible to visitors (even if they still exist). However, near the American embassy, I find a display of photographs on the street, recording how the archives were saved in the aftermath of the liberation. These acts of conservation at moments of great national and personal peril stand in contrast to deliberate acts of obliteration. During the Cultural Revolution in China, progress was predicated on the destruction of 'four olds' - old customs, old cultures, old habits, old ideas.¹⁶ The campaign to destroy the four olds and to cultivate the four 'news' did not clearly define what exactly was to be

¹⁵ Archival memory, what actually remains as objects and in the collective consciousness, plays an important role at times of catastrophe. Personal, societal, and historical memory enable an (unreliable) understanding of the past as evidenced by documentation, even when, as in this case, they cannot be accessed.

¹⁶ The slogan *Smash The Four Olds* (破四旧 in Chinese) was first used in June 1966 in the People's Daily newspaper, adopted by the National Congress a week later and endorsed at a mass rally on August 18, 1966. From there, it was adopted by The Red Flag magazine and other Red Guard publications. I met some ex-Red Guards in Shanghai at a photography exhibition, and they reminisced about the exhilarating feeling that characterised this period. 'We were building a new world from the ashes of the old,' one told me, 'it was our time'.



3.04 a b c d



3.04 e



3.04 f

3.04 Photographs of the South Vietnamese State archives. The photographs are captioned *'documents stored after the liberation of Southern Vietnam and the reunification of the country April 30 1975'* and includes ledgers in Vietnamese and Mandarin. (a b c d)

Students and teachers painting big character posters during the cultural revolution, Shanghai 1966. Image from the Shanghai propaganda Poster Art Centre. (e)

Mr Yang of The Shanghai Propaganda Poster Art Centre. The collection is housed in the basement of his apartment block, and displays posters and ephemera he collected during the Cultural Revolution. (f)

destroyed, resulting in the widespread destruction of anything that represented counter-revolutionary values. In Shanghai, I visited a unique archive, curated by the unassuming Mr. Yang. As a young man during the Cultural Revolution, with great foresight, he collected the official propaganda posters and leaflets and photographed the walls covered with short-lived notices (known as Big Character Posters or 大字報 (in traditional Chinese) which responded daily to the rapidly changing political climate.¹⁷ In a period of great political upheaval, during which many irreplaceable archives and records, including genealogy ledgers that detailed a thousand years of family histories were destroyed, Mr Yang's timely retrievals constitute acts of caring¹⁸ as much as preservation (fig. 3.04 p.115).

I experience a sense of the folding of the past into the present, the permeability of time, memory and place. Visiting these sites locates me in *una città invisibile*¹⁹ alongside the physical one through which I walk, and I narrow my purpose of this expedition.

Retrieving the residual: remnants of past lives

In a city where the catastrophe of past conflicts and the violent legacy of colonialism has largely been overwritten by the

¹⁷ As were the posters produced by the *Atelier Populaire* in Paris during the May 1968 strikes discussed in Section 2 *A Disobdient Archive* p.22. New posters appeared each morning in the street, distributed from the *Atelier* by student bill-stickers on bicycles.

¹⁸ The British artist Linda Brothwell utilises 'Acts of Care' in several of her projects, using careful interventions of mending, repair and addition to indicate of form of cultural healing. These projects can be accessed at www.lindabrothwell.com/portfolio/acts-of-care

¹⁹ Italo Calvino's 1972 book *The Invisible City* evokes a cartography of, amongst other things, memory, desire, names, and the dead.



3.05 a



3.05 b



3.05 c

3.05 David Chipperfield Architects' restoration of the *Neues Museum* in Berlin. The building was extensively damaged in the Second World War, and was restored between 1997 and 2009, retaining the evidence of the conflict on some surfaces. (a b)

The wreckage of an American B52 bomber combined with other shot down aircraft in the grounds of the Military Museum in Hanoi. (c)

formation of new unified state, I look for a seam - a lode - between the erasures of inconvenient histories, and its counter in the quiet accretion, and possible survival, of material objects that remain. These are what Arendt might allow to be *substantial* witnesses,²⁰ bearing a form of testimony if not proof. This slim space between things and events (*intermezzo*)²¹ is significant, in that it lies between the disaster of ruin and its legacy of artefacts that remain: enduring shards of copper-jacketed lead lying deep beneath the bark of jungle trees, (not to mention in bone)²² and vast inaccessible archives of mouldering paper lying in the tropical heat.

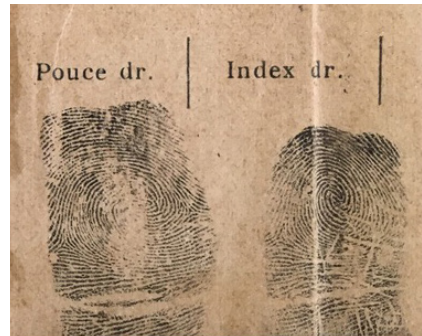
Mechanisms of chance and deliberately planned acts determine what survives and that which is destroyed, or lost to sight beyond retrieval. In these expeditions, I give close consideration to what is disclosed by things that survive, despite their impulse to conceal.²³ In this thin stratum, I am searching for evidence, the fragments

²⁰ Arendt integrated David Rousett's words *When no witnesses are left, there can be no testimony* from his 1947 book *Les Jours de Notre Nuit* in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) p.451. Rousett was survivor of Buchenwald concentration camp.

²¹ *The Elemental Middle* at Transmediale 2017, Berlin, proposed that rather than rely on 'the worn-out critical mechanisms of revealing what lies beneath, or exposing hidden truths', we should undertake processes of de-naturalisation and re-familiarisation, employing a critical examination of infrastructural intersection and entanglement. A useful critical model for navigating the complexities of the unfamiliar in other contexts. Accessible at transmediale.de/en/event/middle-session-the-elemental-middle

²² The novelist Robert Stone, who spent time in Vietnam in 1971, wrote of the American experience of the war as being 'like a wound covered with scar tissue or like a foreign body, a piece of shrapnel... it is embedded in our history, it is embedded in our definition of who we are. We will never get it out of there.' Quote from 'Ten Thousand Mile Mistake' *London Review of Books* vol. 43, February 2021.

²³ See Anna Tsing's notions of receding in *Feral Atlas* outlined below pp.134-6.



3.06 a b



3.06 c

3.06 Mé Rockayabivy's *carte d'identité* and fingerprints from her right thumb and index finger. (a b)
Taryn Simon *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I–XVIII* 2008 -11. (c)

that divulge something of the convergent, a particle²⁴ of the larger matrix, more comprehensible than the complex entirety.

I seek to excavate things that connect people to events, artefacts that have become the mycelium of memory, places and of lives lived. Acts of erasure, particularly in the rebuilding of a national consciousness following conflict and political upheaval, are utilised to rewrite history (I am reminded of the Berliner Schloss in Berlin, subsequently the Palace of the Republic in DDR times, now rebuilt as a facsimile of the royal palace - as though the communist era never existed.) Sometimes, an overlooked fragment is all that remains (fig. 3.05 p.117).

I set out to visit both sites that morning, overlaying the snapshot of memory with a new glaze of experience. Standing in the street beneath the tree on Ngô Gia Tự Street and peering through the busy traffic at the CIA building on 22 Lý Tự Trọng Street, I felt impelled to retrieve something tangible from those locations for use in the collages. I learn that in the chaos of evacuation, the Marines guarding the CIA building issued airline baggage tags to Vietnamese personnel and their families, as credentials for the flight out; contemporary film show them hanging from buttonholes and around children's necks.²⁵

²⁴ A particle can be thought of as an interaction between two waves localised in a momentum basis, an event, not an object itself, but a state localised in a defined position. In this instance, I use it as a *punctum*, Roland Barthes's personal or poignant detail that pricks the viewer.

²⁵ These can be glimpsed being worn by civilians in ITN cameraman Peter Wilkinson's film shot at the US Embassy during the very last hours of the American withdrawal. Accessible at www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OshqBUKhvI

The leaves I take from the ground beneath the tree and the SGN baggage tags,²⁶ fix my experience into a physical object that I can later incorporate into the collages. Once on the surface of a collage, these modest items resonate with their legacies of conflict and violence. In some small but significant way they connect me, and the viewer, to these extraordinary events.

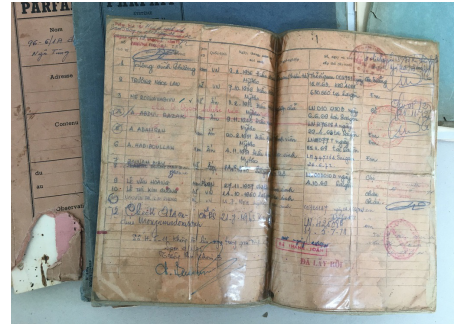
Later in the day, I came across a small second-hand shop that looked to be a likely site where useful materials could be purchased. Characteristically, the shop was heaped with furniture and household goods, mostly from French colonial times; very little appears to have been sold. A layer of dust covered everything and nothing had been done to prioritise one object over another, or to make the environment appealing or accessible to the curious. I have often wondered what the purpose of the shops are. Certainly, making a living from them seems to be impossible, or precarious at best, perhaps allowing the proprietor to develop an accidental archive of his own. The commercial venture merely an excuse to open the shutter in the morning on his own personal museum. On this occasion, one could say that fate, good fortune or luck²⁷ seemed to smile upon me. As, amongst the dilapidated furniture and discarded household items, was a single box of

²⁶ Although I was able to purchase some similar vintage baggage tags whilst in Saigon, I decided to reproduce the original tags depicted in the films by printing with an appropriate typeface. These can be found on Collage 9 (p.129-30) as very faint screen printed additions.

²⁷ I don't believe these things exist. Rather, one makes one's advantage by careful positioning, an acute reading of the environment through which you move, and a stubborn persistence that the material is out there somewhere if you just take a long enough to find it. This has proved to be the case over and over again. I believe you make your own luck, developing into reliable strategies when on location. I find that it is also very unusual for material to be discovered early in the day; a sense of following a scent trail inhabits my mornings.

papers, which, after some surprise from the shopkeeper, I was able to purchase and carry away. The box contains extensive records, that date from the 1920s under French colonial rule, up until the time immediately after the liberation of Saigon in 1975, when the dates on individual items abruptly end (fig. 3.06 p.119).

The files contain papers and documents relating to property, rights of title, developments of new housing, and in particular a protracted set of correspondence and official papers relating to a family intending to relocate to southern India, from which I understand by close reading of the papers, they originate. There are handwritten appeals to the *muezzin* at their mosque, requiring him to validate their religious faith: lengthy negotiations over citizenship, immigration status, requiring medical reports, character references, proof of financial viability and so on. What the eventual outcome was of these entanglements with the police, the state, doctors and religious officials is not known - the box does not reveal destinies, only the process of a hopeful and desperate embarkation. However, contained within dogeared folders and rusted paperclips are the aspirations of a family in an irreversible transition from one life, back to the country of their forbears. Liberated Saigon and the newly unified Communist country are not places in which it is possible for them to remain and their particular circumstances are lost to history. How the box found its way to the shop and subsequently into my hands is open to conjecture. Perhaps the fact that the house they formerly occupied at 16 Rue Desvaux in My Tho was finally being sold or



3.07 a b c d



3.07 e f

3.07 Documents from the box purchased in Saigon relating to planning permission and property rights. Files from the Ministry of Finance, Province of Mythos, Saigon. (a b c d)

The French sanserif bold letterpress typography on the *carte d'identité* has an extended interletter character spacing (or kerning) presumably to aid legibility for Vietnamese citizens. French colonial rule ended in 1954, the smaller identity card is set in a capitalised *Quốc ngữ*, and dates from 1962.

The typewritten carbon copy on the right has had the Vietnamese accents added by hand.

Black and indigo blue bookcloth from the *carte d'identité* and a fragment enclosed in glassine negative sleeve included in collage no 9. (e f)

demolished and in the haphazard business of house clearance this box somehow survived.

Near the bottom of the box, the infuriating processes of bureaucratic approval gives way to the distinctly personal, and I find the *cartes d'identité* of several family members, bearing photographs and fingerprints. Instantly, the past is revealed with a staggering particularity as the images of actual individuals stare straight at me from the surface of the photographic emulsion. Time collapses like a shut telescope.

I ship the box back to England as excess baggage. Once back in the studio I begin a forensic examination of what I have now in my possession. In doing so, I acknowledge the problematic ethics of what amounts to an (almost criminal) postcolonial extractive process - this can feel like plunder - and I can acutely feel, even with the distance of time, of sense of intrusion.²⁸ I treat each object as a rare specimen to be respectfully examined. Once vitally important papers on which the future of the family, its financial security, property rights and intended statehood depended, have become a commodity of negligible value. They are now of interest only to an ephemerist or, as in my case, a collector of printed fragments, who can transform them into something of worth once again.

²⁸ The long reach of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 1988 essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*² points us to the complexities of aesthetic and political representation in postcolonial studies. She elaborates on the problematics associated with 'a nostalgia for lost origins (which) can be detrimental to the exploration of social realities within the critique of imperialism' (page 291).

The ethical considerations of extraction, origins and legacies

This startlingly close proximity to the personal produces a set of ethical considerations in the context of making the resulting collages. Specifically, in the appropriation of artefacts such as family albums, photographs and personal papers.

Again, Foster documents in *An Archival Impulse* the tensions that artists are drawn to explore by mining the factive and the fictive, moving through wormholes in the archive, exploring through an affective and empathetic investigation in contrast to the digital database accessed by the cold algorithms of information technologies.²⁹ When I am collecting and archiving in this manner, I am aware that the method develops a meta-narrative in the resulting artwork, and demands a similar extrapolation in the mind of the viewer.

In Taryn Simon's work, *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I–XVIII* produced over three years from 2008 to 2011 (fig. 3.06 p.119), family bloodlines are traced through stylised portraits of extended families, blank images standing in for the missing and those who cannot, due to religious conventions or

²⁹ In his review of Graham Bader's *Poisoned Abstraction: Kurt Schwitters between Revolution and Exile*, Hal Foster highlights Schwitters's perception that worthless materials, when arranged carefully into collages, 'lose their individual character; their specific poison, they become dematerialised and hence material for the picture.' *Specific poison* translates as *Eigengift*, which Bader interprets as holding the double meaning as indicated by Derrida in Plato's Pharmacy - a toxin that can be turned into its own antidote, and even into an elixir. These personal documents and images of individuals undergo a similar process of transformation to which I am attuned as I assemble the collages. From 'Anyone Can do Collage' *London Review of Books* vol. 44, March 2022.

other reasons, be photographed. Alongside these extended family groups she includes a second frame, featuring text (annotation panel); and a third containing photographic evidence (footnote panel). The text panels give the name, date of birth and occupation (where known) of each family member and their descendants. The footnote images include photographs of objects and places which further serve to illuminate the family narrative, for example a photograph of a human molar belonging to Ahmedin Mehic excavated from mass graves in Podrinje, Eastern Bosnia, finally establishing his death through DNA evidence and directly implicating the Bosnian Serb Army in the massacre at Srebrenica in July, 1995. We encounter an artefact that stands as witness, proof and evidence, Simon's artwork constructing within its meta-narratives another act of commemoration.³⁰

Until the most recent work, I have avoided including direct images of people, acknowledging that the power or charge of photographs draw and hold attention in a specific manner. To apprehend the image of another person looking back at you from the picture plane disrupts our reading of that surface. Unlike the portrait, my intention is that the collage surface exhibits an initial homogeneity, which when associated with aesthetic considerations, deliberately moderate the peaks and

³⁰ Jenny Holzer's 1994 work *Lustmord* (German for a sexually motivated murder) also commemorates victims of murder in the Bosnian war, in this case of women and girls. She engraved text on silver bangles that encircle human bones arranged forensically on wooden tables.

troughs in the economy of our attention. However, in the case of the Rockayabivy family and the particular conditions under which I became the acquirer of their personal documents (in the extractive legacy of colonialism), I was moved to include some trace of this encounter.

Consequently, in the collage 9: *Divieto di Affissione*³¹ I have started to include photographic and other documentation of the individuals that occasionally appear in the collections of printed ephemera that I acquire - and attempt to dematerialise the instruments of statist control that constrain individual lives. Ephemera printed and stamped with the language and marks of authority carry their own particular *Eigengift* (see p.125 footnote 29). The proximity and profoundly intimate connection with an unknown individual is an issue that this work attempts to address. From Mé Rockayabivy's card we learn that she has a distinguishing *pointe cicatriciel à 3cm au dessous de la pointe interne du source droit* (a scar three cm. below the inner point of the right eyebrow). This evidence of past injury flatteringly airbrushed from her portraits by the photographic studio. The result not a true likeness but an idealised representation. A similar intimacy can be found in personal papers, *Arbeitsbücher* (workbooks), party membership cards and passports, many of which bear the marks

³¹ *Divieto Di Affissione*: literally 'prohibited to affix or paste' is a sign seen all over Italy (although many have now been stolen). The instruction is variously signwritten on walls or is proclaimed by a permanent metal or incised stone plaque. They are found where the proprietor of a building or the local *commune* tries, mostly unsuccessfully, to prohibit the sticking of posters. They are the Italian equivalent of the British sign *Bill Stickers Will Be Prosecuted*, which frequently invites to the witty suffix *Bill Stickers Is Innocent!*

and abrasions of a lifetime being carried in an inside pocket or purse. I am aware of the necessary respect afforded to the individual when dealing with these things, as they become components within a large association of artefacts, grouped by distinctive material qualities, of chromatic range, particular kinds of paper and (in particular) typographic and handwritten inclusions. In this collage I have incorporated several photographic negatives³² and material derived from the *cartes d'identité* which were retrieved from the box acquired in Saigon. Close examination of the construction of these cards reveals the hard-rolled paper of which they are made, a soft brown, flecked with small inclusions, indicating some recycling of plant and cloth fibres in the papermaking process. Glazed with an oil-based varnish, the document is made to withstand many years of use in a humid, tropical environment. Beneath the identity photograph, to be fixed (*timbre sec débordant*) above the section for fingerprints (*empreintes*, the *main droit* only) is found the small, printed instruction *récente, ressemblante, et de préférence*, a preference all seem to decline.

Once back in the studio, I soak one or two of the identity cards in warm water to soften the animal glue, the black dyed cotton bookcloth that forms the cover, coming away quite easily. I decide to work with these fragments, retaining their physical traces of the owner and their origins embedded in their fibres. Certainly,

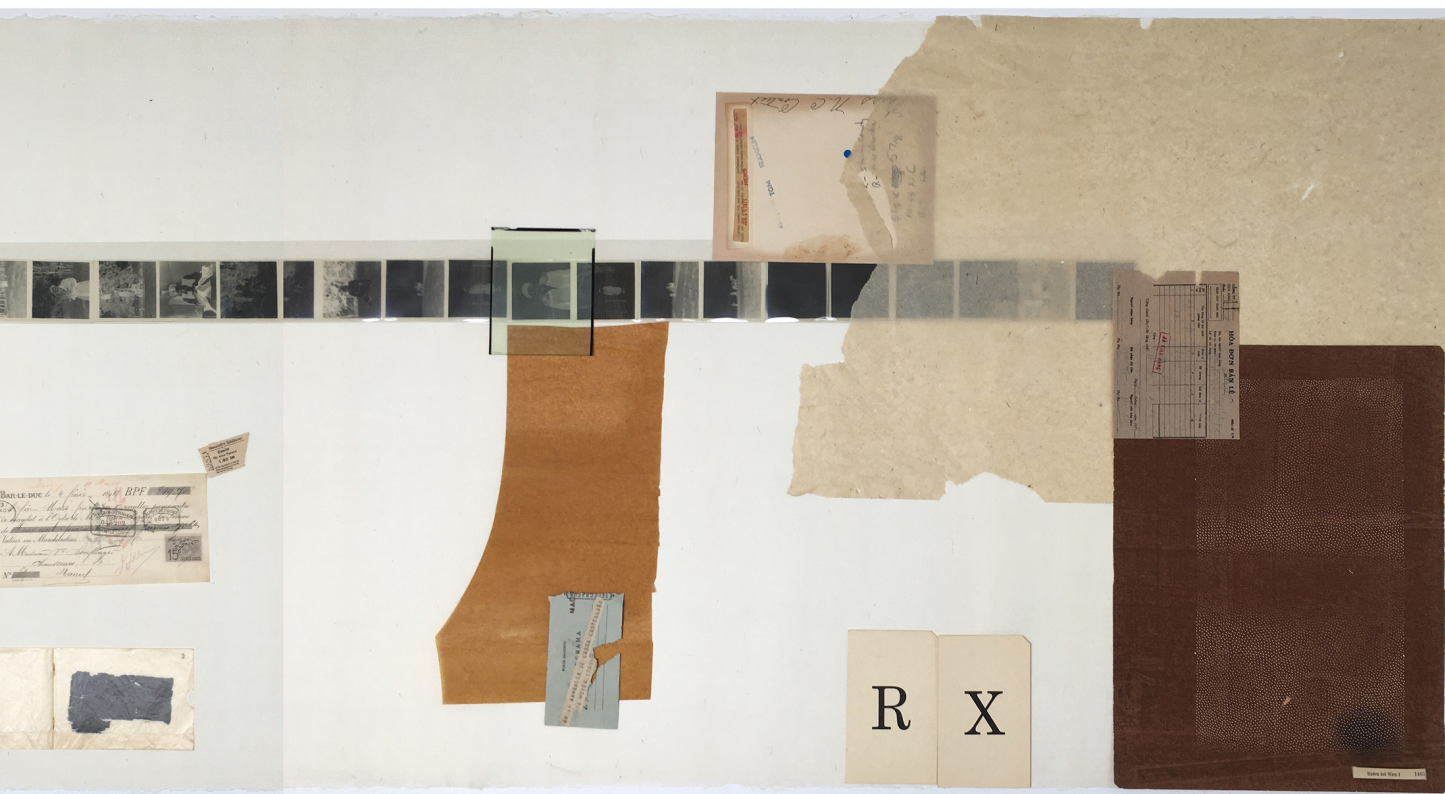
³² Negatives, particularly old black and white formats, subtly invert the power of the image to directly connect with our cognitive apparatus - they are at one remove from understanding, dreamlike and spectral in appearance.



Collage 9: **Divieto di Affissione** 280 x 50cm

Two large sheets of *seichosen* paper support a congregation of objects and fragments that are not permanently attached to the surface. They include typesheet proofs, Japanese *katagami* handcut fabric stencils coated with *kakishibu*, a waterproofing glaze made from persimmon extract that will darken over time. Also included are old faded glassine negative pockets, some with their original occupants still in place, these from a trip to the mountains in pre-war Germany. Included are Belgian bankers drafts, typecase labels, Russian calendar leaves, African airline destination labels, German bus and tram tickets and two letters from a card index to aid writing and reading for children. Inserted in the glassine sleeves are traces of the *chò nầu* tree in front of 244 Ngô Gia Tự Street in Saigon, the site of the execution described in section 3. The tree is numbered, as are all the old trees in the city, this tree is no 70.

handled thousands, maybe tens of thousands of times (colonial rule in French Indochina requiring all citizens to keep identity cards on them at all times, ready for inspection on demand by various authorities), these surfaces are threadbare and timeworn, lasting just long enough for the span of a life. The black cover displays the seal of the province of Mytho in reverse: the photograph on the inside cover has been authenticated by embossing the seal over the photograph, the impression from the metal dies (both male and female metal interlocking under



Indistinct prints from the airline baggage tags worn by evacuees are included in the sleeves at top left, and some of the black cotton bookcloth from Mé Rockayabiv's *carte d'identité* is at bottom centre. Small gummed labels retrieved from 19thc German maps include Žiri in Slovenia and the wealthy spa town of Baden bei Wein in Austria, where all Jewish property was seized following the *Anschluss* in 1938. Those of the 1108 former residents who were not able to escape were persecuted and murdered in the Sobibor and Theresienstadt concentration camps. The unfixed nature of this collage enables slightly different arrangement each time it is assembled, evoking Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of unfinalisation, (*незавершенность*) remaining open to reinterpretation and new possibilities.

pressure, the act of certification) carries through to the exterior. Once the cloth and the book boards have been removed, this impression is lost, the cotton fibres finally relaxing after seventy-one years bearing arms.³³

³³ The rubber stamp version of this seal used inside the document is a strange amalgam of references depicting a seated, robed classical figure with a radiating halo and holding an object very similar to the Roman *fasci* (bundle or sheaf) adopted by the German and Italian fascists in the 1930s.

It is possible that the origin of that cotton (dyed and woven into bookcloth, pasted onto cardboard covers and issued as an instrument of colonial government in Southeast Asia), was the cotton fields of the American South. At the beginning of the American Civil War³⁴ the Confederate leaders were relying on a form of negotiation known as ‘King Cotton’ diplomacy, hoping that the Union blockade of Southern ports from which the cotton was exported would lead to conflict between England and France, strengthening their position against the North. The long reach of the coloniser, through the unforgiving transatlantic slave trade, is closely woven into these fragments, their fibres bearing silent witness to histories of extraction, exploitation, and death. Today Vietnam is the world’s third-largest importer of cotton after Bangladesh and China and Vietnamese-made clothing is exported all over the world.

I have incorporated this cloth fragment inside one of two pages taken from a negative album, some of which are used elsewhere in the collage. By placing the fragment within this translucent sleeve, designed for the preservation of expensive and precious negatives, it assumes a characteristic of archival storage. It can be handled, at one remove from direct interaction with the cloth, to be examined without being touched, a cardinal sin in the protocols of some archival practice. It also assumes qualities of an object of

³⁴ The beginning of the American Civil War and the resulting blockade date from 1861. In September 1858, the French expeditionary Force captured the Port of Danang and then in February 1859, moved south and captured Saigon. All of Cochinchina became a French territory in 1864.

value, to be carefully scrutinised as a specimen of some merit. Included on the glassine³⁵ negative sleeve, is a small, printed number, enabling an indexing of negatives within the series and as an aid to cataloguing. (I have acquired several of these negative albums and only in one case had the owner bothered to fill in the index printed on the inside cover of the album.) The cloth fragment from Saigon is inserted, assigned sleeve number three, previously occupied since the 1920s by the photographic negative of a view of German woodland. It is also a deliberate act of caring and conservation.³⁶

As one component of this large collage (280 x 70cms) the cloth is placed in association with several other objects contained within, or behind translucent surfaces: windows from old envelopes, polyester archival sleeves and cardboard slide mounts. The objects are free, to some extent, to move within their containers; consequently, do not remain in a fixed position either within the composition overall or within the smaller sleeve that contains them. They become partially free agents.

The ability of any object to reveal (whilst simultaneously concealing) itself can alert us to issues of scale, infrastructural

³⁵ Glassine belongs to a group of translucent packaging and storing papers that predates cellophane or plastic. It is a translucent paper manufactured by a process known as *supercalendering*, producing a smooth, acid-free and enamel-like surface. It is still produced as a material for use in the seed, food, medical and collectors markets.

³⁶ Alice Butler's series of *Love Letters* written to her feminist heroines, such as Cookie Mueller, bridges the conventions of distancing between author and subject in the production of what she terms *close writing*. In composing the collages, I invoke this feeling of care and respect. From *Close Writing, Touching Kathy Acker and Cookie Mueller* (2018).

subsets, differences and entanglements.³⁷ Closer reading allows us, as Sara Baume notes in her visit to the studio of Irish artist Dorothy Cross, that ‘a found item must rest for a long time, fomenting meaning, before a certain collision occurs’, and it is able to be perceived more distinctly in its relation to our senses.³⁸

I focus here on the characteristic of things that are not the thing itself, uncovering its impulse of manifestation. In particular, how we can perceive that which is indicated outside the frame of reference - what I may term the *sub-ontological*. As mentioned in Section 1, this category of things resists being easily understood - they point towards the immaterial, existing more in the realm of what they are not than what they appear to be. Thus, a few cotton fibres woven into bookcloth, vegetable-fibre paper, glaze and ink spend thirty years or so providing daily proof of statehood to an Indo-Vietnamese individual (occupation listed as *commerchiante*) before coming to rest in a collage constructed by an artist in the South of England, nearly fifty years later. My proposition here is that the thing itself, in embodying so much more than that which is apparent: some dry leaves, a baggage tag, a scrap of book cloth, a fragment of printed paper, become infused with immaterial

³⁷ Richard White’s *Uncomfortable walks* in English parkland trace the legacies of violent colonial extraction through the histories of plantation owners’ estates and houses. I joined a walk in 2019 in Pittville Park, Cheltenham, where these elegant landscapes betray their past in the now mature trees from colonised lands and houses built on the proceeds of reparations following the abolition of slavery in 1833. From *Speculative Art School: Critical Matter* Jean Boyd and Sarah Bowden, University of Gloucestershire (2019).

³⁸ Dorothy Cross draws on the space between conscious and subconscious meaning, exploring themes of desire, loss, personal history, memory and sexual and cultural identity. From *Winter Papers, An Encounter with Dorothy Cross* vol. 3 (2017) by Sara Baume.

potency; the '*lambeaux de brume*', the '*elliculles absolument minces*'³⁹ that slips from more substantial matter. We are invited to notice Cross's 'collision'. These qualities, as much as the objects themselves, are what the collages reach towards.

Anna Tsing points out that an object is always receding even as it appears, a reactive impulse to concealment inherent in the act of excavation. In a paper⁴⁰ describing her current project *Feral Atlas*⁴¹ Tsing proposes a framework for thinking about the contemporary context. Not in terms of the mechanisms of national economies, globalised markets and the exchange of goods and services, but with an acute degree of specificity scalable from the tiny to the immense. In cautioning against generalities, she notes the ability to zoom in and out reveals both unintended consequences and the overlooked. Citing examples such as the ubiquitous, but simultaneously almost invisible, wooden pallet (developed by the US military and adopted later as a global standard for the transportation of goods - there are over two billion of these in the US alone). We are asked to examine, what

³⁹ 'We should be alert to the surface effects... emissions proceeding from deep within bodies and rising like the wisps of a fog (although the French *brume* alludes more to mist or haze) - interior phantoms that are quickly reabsorbed into other depths ...extremely thin membranes which detach themselves from the surfaces of objects and proceeded to impose colours and contour deep within our eyes, - phantasms created by fear or desire'. From Michel Foucault's *Theatrum Philosophicum* (1969) p.901 (my addition in parentheses).

⁴⁰ *Art in the Anthropocene*, at University College Dublin June, 2019, examined amongst many other themes the rhizometric connectedness of globalised markets and their impact on the earth's resources.

⁴¹ *Feral Atlas* is an ongoing project which 'brings together more than sixty field-based observations from scientists, humanists, artists and indigenous activists to offer a description of the more-than-human Anthropocene. Through these reports, the Atlas constructs a method. This method asks researchers to hold their attention to the scene where infrastructures create feral dynamics.'

else such a mundane object can be asked to divulge? As the transatlantic slave ships carried not just black bodies as cargo, but also mosquitoes from the West Coast of Africa that went on to decimate the white population of the colonies in the West Indies (the slaves had largely developed some localised immunity at least to this threat) so the pallets contain (amongst other stowaways) the larvae of ash beetle, now wreaking havoc in the forests of several continents. Or consider blueberries gathered in the forests of Polesia, downwind of Chernobyl and shipped around the world, bearing not the country of origin but the label ‘packaged in Canada’⁴² to disguise its toxic origins, the fruit containing significance traces of caesium-137, strontium-90 and plutonium 241,⁴³ the isotopes resulting from the smashed atoms released from the damaged reactor now accumulating in the thyroids and bonemarrow of those that consume them, receding almost completely from detection (if ever they were noted in the first place.)⁴⁴

Similarly, Tsing’s 2015 book, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, follows the extended commodity chain of what is the most valuable mushroom in the world, the *Matsutake*, prized particularly by Japanese gourmets.

⁴² The packaging can also be labelled as organic, as radioactivity is not included in the list of prohibited ingredients. A commercial example of the impulse to concealment. Also from Anna Tsing’s paper at *Art in the Anthropocene* Dublin (2019).

⁴³ Caesium and strontium have a half-life of around 30 years, plutonium is radioactive for over 400 years. From US Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board, available at https://www.nwtrb.gov/docs/default-source/facts-sheets/cesium_strontium-rev2.pdf

⁴⁴ This is also from Anna Tsing’s paper at *Art in the Anthropocene* Dublin (2019).

A colonising weed, which grows in human-disturbed woodland, it is largely harvested by migrant labourers living on the margins of society, including, in the Pacific Northwest. Substantial numbers of immigrant Vietnamese foragers living in seasonal camps in the forest.elayed via first hand testimonies from sources as varied as Hmong jungle fighters, Yi Chinese goat herders, and Finnish nature guides, Tsing's anthropological survey of the extraction, marketing, and consumption of this extraordinary mushroom lead us into enmeshment with subterranean fungal ecologies and the most unfamiliar recesses of capitalism.

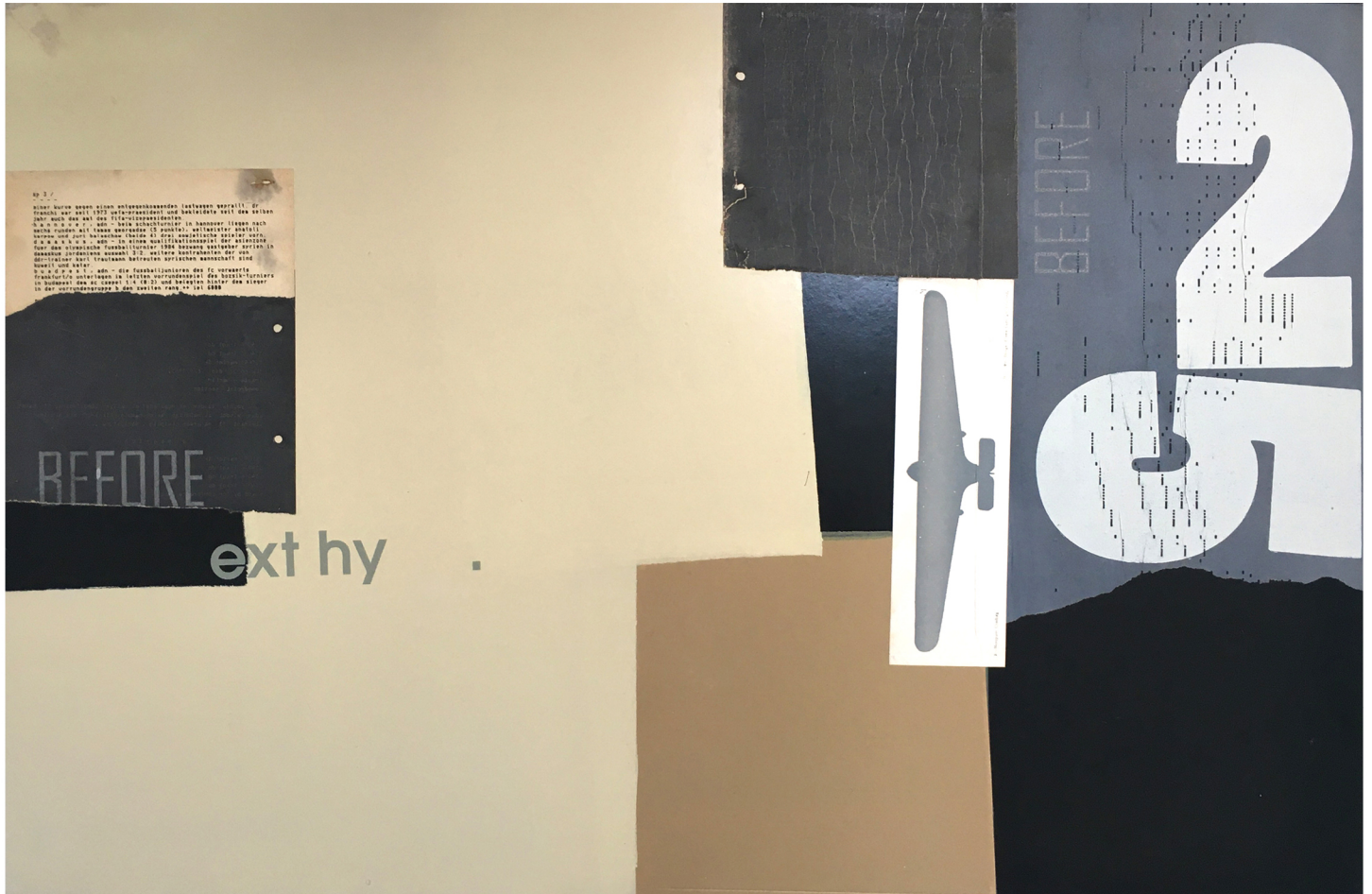
In the same register, Keller Easterling's book *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (2014), argues for a critique of

'The (infrastructural)⁴⁵ operating system of the modern world: the skyline of Dubai, the subterranean pipes and cables sustaining urban life, free-trade zones, the standardised dimensions of credit cards...infrastructure sets the invisible rules that govern the spaces of our everyday lives, making the city the key site of power and resistance in the twenty-first century ... which reveals the nexus of emerging governmental and corporate forces buried within the concrete and fibre-optics of our modern habitat.'

These critical archeologies trawl the deep stratum in which the mechanisms of some of the most powerful organisations reside, hidden from view. Despite this, artefacts resolutely surface, as

⁴⁵ My addition in parentheses for context.

did the box of papers in Saigon, imprinted with histories of power, conflict and exploitation. *Finally*, she says, *it looks like war*.



Collage 6: ext hy 90 x 60cm

Over a background of rolled letterpress inks is another example of a wartime plane silhouette identification print, perforated pianola rolls encoding music as punch holes, the reverse of used carbon copy paper and a report from the abandoned Iraqi embassy in Berlin. Following the Gulf War the embassy was vacated leaving filing cabinets full of teleprinted reports and other material which I was able to retrieve, at some risk, by climbing in to the decaying offices. This report details the death of a UEFA president in a car accident, Soviet chess successes and the results of the Bozsik football tournament in Budapest. These documents were there for the taking. The words BEFORE are silk screen printed in thermochromic ink and are calibrated to disappear at different temperature thresholds - 18 and 24°C.

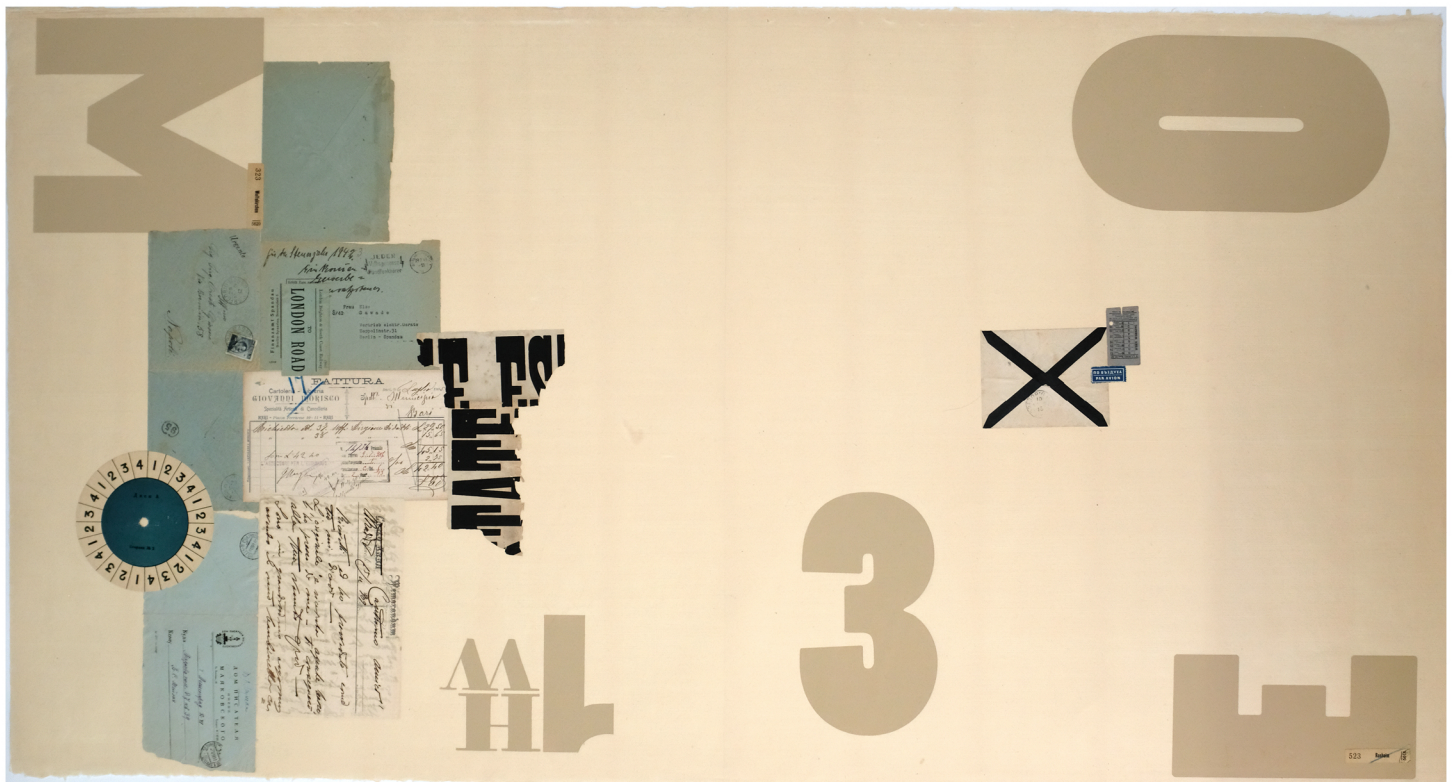
Section 4

The Disorder of Things

In this section: I investigate the claims of the New Materialism that inanimate objects possess ‘vitality’ even ‘agency’ as mentioned in the introduction, and relate these critical theories and my own findings to the process of making collages. The qualities of instability, disorganisation and disorder are examined as beneficial to the creative process. The detritus of consumerism is envisaged as a site of reconstruction, and the resistance of matter to settle obediently into its classification is further investigated.

I propose how fragments reveal something more than their entirety, and how the cumulative effect of the spectral and chimeric concerning the discarded artefacts that I retrieve, and how this elusive quality can be integrated creatively into the compositions. I explore more fully the notion of the fugitive, both in materials that change over time and in the sense of the elusive, occluded characteristic of things. I further explore what is not apparent in the visual field, the imperceptible trace, and relate this absence to a form of presence.

I develop further the notion of a form of alliance with the collage material with which I am working, proposing a synergetic method of composition, and accommodating its latent power and tendency to disruption. I consider the attractions of archival engagement for artists over the last thirty years, including interventions in museums and collections, and the memorialisation of past catastrophe.



Collage 7: 3OE 140 x 50cm

The ochre numerals and letters are printed from lasercut reproductions of historical sans-serif type. Included are examples of Greek and Cyrillic Russian typefaces on telegrams and a child's pinwheel, mourning stationery and invoices from Southern Italy, fragments of British 19thc. auction posters printed in an Egyptian slab serif type face, German war time correspondence, a railway luggage label (which obscures the logo of Nazi *finanzamt* (tax) office in Spandau beneath and a small post office sorting label from 19thc. France. The collages are on *seichosen tosa-washi* paper from Shikoku, Japan.

Entanglements, symbiosis and disordering

The comforting notion that things in themselves possess agency, an idea dating from antiquity,¹ has been embraced by art criticism as part of an enthusiastic re-ordering of the world into a less vertical stratification between the animate and inanimate. New Materialism seeks to demonstrate that our primacy as humans is not absolute, that our supposed dominance of the world is a dangerous misinterpretation, and promotes recognition of the many non-human processes that are involved in how we organise our lives, societies and cultures.² Whilst promoting innovative ways in which to imagine the world, these frameworks, especially those with their origins in Vitalism,³ suffer from significant theoretical flaws.⁴ My interest in how the process of working with objects can be more fully understood acknowledges these critical frameworks, whilst striving for something more elusive.

¹ My historical route to contemporary debate acknowledges the legacies of Democritus, Epicurus, Spinoza, Diderot, Merleau-Ponty, Bergson and Deleuze. However, here I focus on the particular artistic processes that require an acknowledgement of the artefacts being incorporated as possessing a vitality or charge of their own, what Sylvia Benson terms *thing-power*. From *The Face of Things - A Different Side of Ethics* SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy, Albany, New York, (2000).

² Bruno Latour and John Law's theory of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) emphasises the interconnectedness of the social and natural world. It proposed that nothing exists outside these networks.

³ Vitalism, relying on its perception of an unmeasurable, invisible 'life spark', has been allied historically with populist and fascist politics, fomenting a foundational myth rooted in the will of the people, blood and soil, reinforcing prejudices based on identity and exclusion.

⁴ Critical theorists, including Taris Brito, argue that its emphasis on vitality inadvertently reproduces colonial, racial, and gendered hierarchies that privilege activity over passivity, and propose a decolonisation of New Materialist theory with race, coloniality and whiteness. From *New Materialism, Whiteness and the Politics of Vitality: Rethinking Activity/Passivity in Critical Security Studies* (2025).

This is not to invest actual objects with a life of their own, possessing some inanimate form of intentionality and will, but to recognise that in many creative processes in particular, we are as much in partnership with our materials as imposing our direction upon them. Synergy creates a result that is greater than its parts. I reach for a fine balance between my intentions in arranging a visual field and the individual items dictating their position.⁵ I propose this is more true of collage-making than many other artistic forms, as the individual items come to us redolent of their previous usage and history. The items I use leave a long trail of obsolete documentation, printed information and records of individual events. My perception is that in the assemblages and congregations of objects, these histories collide in both harmonic and dissonant opposition,⁶ and from this that a form of potential⁷ may be harnessed.

I propose that the entire archive, in addition to the individual objects within it, possesses a restless energy of its own. The anarchive is unruly, turbulent and uneasy. This metaphysical

⁵ Many creative people have attempted to describe this process, evoking some form of mystical 'flow' or things 'clicking into place' or a sense of 'rightness' in a composition. I am reaching for a better understanding of this process in my methodology.

⁶ Hannah Arendt's notion that all possible futures are encoded in the collision of events reminds us that what happened did not have to happen. Objects, when distributed in oppositional and harmonic arrangements, have a tendency to 'crystallise', which gives rise to a particular set of circumstances. From *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958) p.440. In making the collages, any arrangement is possible, but one particular arrangement actually happens, a process a subject to analysis in Section 6: *Being and Things* (p. 200).

⁷ There is an inadequacy of language here; latency, quiddity, vitality, power, vibrance, Bergson's *élan vital* and Latours's *actant* all fall short of appropriate description for my own purposes. I employ *potential* here in the sense of 'promising' or 'able to develop' rather than containing some elusive charge. These theories are discussed in Bergson's *Creative Evolution* (1907) and Latour's *On Actor Network Theory*, *Philosophia* vol.25 no.3 pp.47-64 (1990).

quality, resonant with Vitalism, but qualitatively different, is an essential contribution to the creative process of making the typographic collages. Sometimes I have the feeling when working that I have to do very little, that the arrangements come to hand effortlessly, items finding their ‘moment of crystallisation’ almost by themselves. In this state of working, I have learnt to step back mentally, and to observe rather than intervene. For some periods of time the process can seem uncanny. I can become disorientated and emerge from the studio exhausted, a collage now complete.

I have learnt to recognise these phases of composition as very significant, and I am quick to recognise the moment of finality that generally arrives after a period of working. Similarly it is important not to revisit the composition and try and improve or rearrange things once this process has elapsed. Thus, my entire methodology could be described as: months (even years) of collecting, items residing in the collection vibrating with their innate energy; a period of selection and preparation; finally a brief phase of synergetic composition over the space of just a few hours.

In the first section, *A Disobedient Archive* (p.22), I outlined how the collection has been assembled and acknowledged the qualities that an archive possesses in terms of memory and record embedded in the material it contains. The way in which the collection is arranged is deliberately unruly and encompasses so many individual items that I cannot conceive of, or remember

everything it contains. Its complexity gives rise to a sense of unknownness and unfamiliarity. Working within the collection when selecting items for inclusion, I frequently find things I have no memory of acquiring. I open items such as old ledgers and bundles of paper, which reveal to me for the first time what lies within their pages.

In addition, I have applied no logical taxonomy - there is no labelling or index to guide me in my search for a particular thing. Thus, during periods of assembling the collages, a particular item comes to hand as much through chance as a carefully directed set of aesthetic decisions. The collection is configured as a repository from which artefacts are able to re-present themselves as much as be retrieved, their agitated energy recognised and encouraged as ungovernable. In this way, the collection behaves as an anarchic, disordered and fluid, always able to present something new.

The art world's concern with the re-interpretation of the archive⁸ in the Western Postcolonial era has been prolific. Perhaps, the origins of this purgative unease lay in the mid-20th-century realisation that the promissory note of modernity would not be paid. Futurity became tarnished with a recognition that extractive

⁸ Derrida's *Mal d'Archive: Une Impression Freudienne* (1995) uses the word *impression* judiciously, as it relates both to the inscription of memory on the psyche (it is worth remembering that the lecture was initially delivered to an international colloquium entitled *Memory: The Question of the Archives*) and described the act of 'printing' in the subconscious from which 'documents' can be retrieved under psychoanalysis, as in Freud's concept of the mystic writing pad.

processes and manufacture were not without their consequences,⁹ and that technological progress may not be the answer many had expected. The spectre of communism was laid to rest in the post-war reconciliation of capital and labour by the founding of the welfare state, whilst preserving capitalism intact. In the 1960s, 70s and 80s much of the developed world faltered economically, with rising unemployment and political dissatisfaction, whilst several major powers prosecuted unwinnable wars in a dying spasm of empire. Everyday life in the West was tinged with the inescapable death-drive of nuclear destruction and an impending climate catastrophe. Hopes¹⁰ for the future transformed into anxieties for what was to come.

Many art practitioners, and the associated industries of criticism, turned *Angelus-like*¹¹ towards the past, keen to question and overturn the certainties of historical ordering and narrative, and reaching for something more elusive than the artefact itself - that

⁹ Greenpeace started its first direct-action protests in 1971, forcing the US to abandon its nuclear testing grounds at Amchitka Island, Alaska. A year later, James Lovelock formulated the theory of Gaia. The term Anthropocene was coined by biologist Eugene Stomer and chemist Paul Crutzen in 2000. From www.greenpeace.org/international/story/46686/amchitka-the-founding-voyage/ and <https://courses.seas.harvard.edu/climate/eli/Courses/EPS281r/Sources/Gaia/Gaia-hypothesis-wikipedia.pdf>

¹⁰ 'Optimism is a natural vice; hope is a supernatural virtue' (loosely) from Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of virtue *qua* grace. From *Summa Theologica* (1265-1274).

¹¹ Benjamin's monoprint of *The Angel of History*, by his friend Paul Klee, was hung in every room he occupied after purchasing it in 1921. We can assume he frequently met its (somewhat averted) gaze when raising his eyes from his writing desk to think.

which is concealed. In working within museums,¹² collections and archives, several artists confronted the institutional directives¹³ that artefacts impart, whilst others appropriated the conventions of ordering and display to build objects that appeared archival or museum-like,¹⁴ assembling collections unfamiliar to established curatorial practice. Infused with the still air¹⁵ of nostalgia, these artworks face both back into the past whilst attempting to inform both the present and possible futures.

Reconfiguring memory: the unruly collection

Fred Wilson's (an American artist of African-American and Caribbean heritage) intervention at the Maryland Historical Society in 1992, *Mining the Museum*, overturned the master narratives of slavery and racism by an apparently simple re-organising of objects from within the collection and retrieved from long-term storage. Wilson worked closely with the employees of the MHS to bring objects in the collection that had never before been displayed into

¹² Douglas Crimp's essay on the scholarship of the museum, *On the Museums Ruins* (1993), is prefaced by a quote by Theodore Adorno pointing out the word-root associations between museum and mausoleum (and the German word *museal* - with its unpleasant overtones of death and decay). In its classical origins, the Greek form *mouseion* (seat of the Muses) and its Latin derivation *museum*, point to both institutions of lively philosophical debate and contemplation.

¹³ Fred Wilson chose to work with the Maryland Historical Society after visiting several potential institutions at the invitation of George Ciscle. 'When I went into the Historical Society, I had a kind of visceral response. I felt uncomfortable there' he recalled in 2017. 'I thought,' he added, 'if I'm having a visceral response, and not really understanding it, I want to explore why.' From *How Mining the Museum Changed the Art World* by Kerr Houston, BmoreArt (2017). Accessible at <https://bmoreart.com/2017/05/how-mining-the-museum-changed-the-art-world.html#>

¹⁴ Mark Dion's *Raiding Neptune's Vault in Venice* (1997/8) and *Tate Thames Dig* (1999) lifted submerged materials from beneath the water for display in purpose-built cabinets.

¹⁵ Louise K. Wilson, as a Hardwick Gallery Artist at Distance during the 2020 pandemic, worked remotely in the University archives. She documents a sense of disturbance to the archive during her residency, even though she was not physically present.

public view,¹⁶ and rearranged established displays to juxtapose the physical equipment of slaveholding with expensive artefacts that decorated the houses of their owners, the spoils of their profitable enterprise. Captions followed established museum taxonomy, categorising artefacts by their materials of manufacture and the dates of their production, allowing the viewer to make their own disturbing connections (fig. 4.01 p.147). This extraordinary device of placing objects in unaccustomed proximity charged the displays with powerful new meanings.

The exhibition became the most visited in MHS's history, became the American Association of Museums exhibition of the year in 1993, and led to the dismissal of the museum's Director. It is important to note that Wilson added no material objects (except sound and projections in some rooms) that were not already in the collection, but invoked the auratic force of objects to act as agents of change.¹⁷ Its success was due to the power of the ironic rather than the didactic, a provocation rather than a moral lesson. The Master's house had been dismantled with the Master's tools.¹⁸

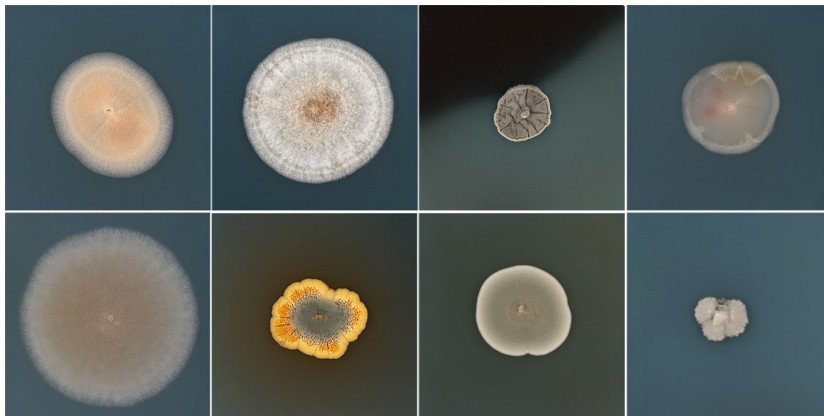
¹⁶ These included a Klu Klux Klan hood (donated anonymously), a whipping post, and the latent sadism of a bootjack formed by the spread legs of a nude black woman - commonly known as a 'Naughty Nelly'. During the exhibition, the MHS phoned Wilson to ask how to manage a school group that included some children whose parents were Klan members.

¹⁷ Two weeks after the exhibition opening on April 4, 1992, the four white police officers implicated in the savage beating of Rodney King were acquitted, and Los Angeles erupted in prolonged civil unrest.

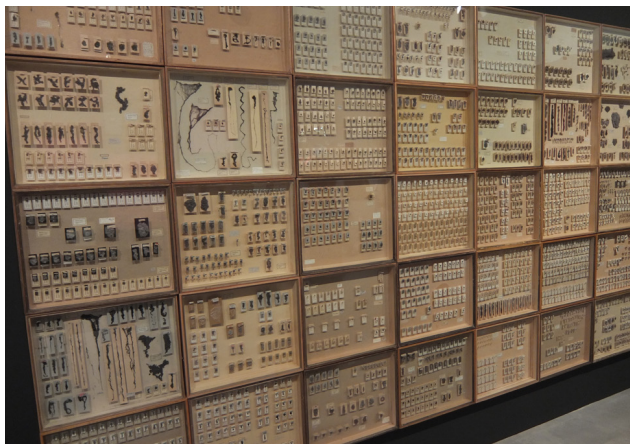
¹⁸ Audre Lorde's categorical imperative 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' is frequently misread as demonstrating that systematic change is not possible by working within the system. But as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) point out, the master's tools were never his in the first place, showing that even warfare, the most violent expression of global capitalism, was originally developed by nomadic anti-state forces.



4.01 a b



4.01 c



4.01 d



4.01 e

4.01 Two images of Fred Wilson's installation *Mining the Museum* at the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1992-1993. *Modes of Transport, 1770-1910* (a) and *Cabinetmaking, 1820-1960*. (b)

Dove Allouche *Fungi*, 2016. (c)

Jenny Michel and Micha Hoepfel *Pulvarium* 2005-7. (d)

The back of *The Arch of Nero* 1871 by Sanford Robinson Gifford. (e)

The storeroom,¹⁹ the little-visited cupboard, the backroom of the museum or archive, is the place to which I am most drawn when visiting institutions. Here, rules and conventions relax to some extent, strict taxonomies do not apply, the overlooked inhabit a very different existence from the privileged object in the vitrine. (This is frequently the reason they are not on display in itself - they are unclassifiable, and do not sit easily in the collective scheme as Wilson so vividly demonstrated.) This marginality affords opportunities, not simply of unruly juxtaposition, but occasional acquisition (although in the *Museum für Druckkunst* in Leipzig I was told I could not have some discarded prints *because* they were in the bin). Retrievals from these sites can also be ephemeral. A smell,²⁰ the feel of a document box unopened for a century or more, the exhalation of a leather-bound book from the fifteenth century resting in its supporting cradle in late afternoon light. These phenomenological additions contribute to the construction of the archive and are as important to me as the objects it contains (fig. 4.02 p.151).

Below the physical strata lies a sedimentary layer of experiences, inscribed deeply in the psyche, accessible through an archaeology

¹⁹ Rosa Barba's *The Hidden Conference* (2010-15) documents the lives of art objects when not on display. The work comprises three 35mm films shot in storage facilities of the *Neue Nationalgalerie* Berlin, the *Musei Capitolini* in Rome, and the Tate Gallery's off-site stores in London. The first film is titled *About the Continuous History of Things We See and Don't See*.

²⁰ Louise K. Wilson recalled after visiting the storage facility in the US (an outpost of the Smithsonian institution) where astronaut spacesuits were stored that they 'smelled of the moon' - somewhat similar to burnt metal, or spent fireworks. From an email exchange in 2020.

of the fugitive.²¹ Here, a paradox becomes apparent: the thing-power of the unruly and ungovernable artefacts (with their impulse to conceal) can be retrieved through an acute attunement, but with no reliable compass as to the veracity of that perception, a contradiction to conventional comprehension.

In the *Fungi* series of prints, visual artist, Dove Allouche collected species of spores from museum storage rooms, some varieties older than humankind. After blowing these ancient fungal particles through a glass pipette onto culture dishes, he photographed their morphologies as they spread and grew, reproducing the photographic images as lithographs. (Fig. 4.01 p147). An echo of these processes can be found in Jenny Michel and Micha Hoepfel's *Pulvarium* (2005-7) - a collection of many manifestations of dust,²² classified in a Linnaeus-like system²³ and arranged as individual specimens pinned in a grid of entomologists' cases. The display privileges material that we conscientiously discard in our routines of cleansing, but despite our efforts, it does accrete, falling silently in spaces undisturbed by

²¹ Although most of the finished collages are presented conventionally, Collage 9: *Divieto di Affissione* allows the viewer to both touch and smell the artefacts within the composition. Smell is known to be one of the most enduring memory inscriptions.

²² Technology researcher Jay Owens maintains a newsletter on all matters relating to dust, which she calls *Disturbances*. In *No. 2: Cosmic Dust* (2018), she relates how over 100 tons of interplanetary cosmic dust land on Earth each day. It is therefore entirely possible that some of the dustball behind our sofas could have come from the Kuiper belt beyond Neptune. The newsletter is no longer active but see www.jayowens.me/dust for her 2023 book.

²³ Carl Linnaeus first published his major classificatory work *Systema naturae* in 1735, at the age of 28. *Systema Naturae* provided a classification of the three kingdoms of nature: mineral, vegetable and animal. Controversially, Linnaeus was the first naturalist to include man within the animal kingdom in the order *Anthropomorpha*. From the Linnaean Society website: www.linnean.org/learning/who-was-linnaeus/linnaeus-and-race

human activity. It becomes a record of time passing and an indicator of the overlooked space. By imposing a pseudo-taxonomy on these fibres, particles and threads, Michel and Hoepfel point to the inadequacies of our knowledge structures and the futility of our systems of categorisation (fig. 4.01 p.147).

Artist Daniel Eatock resuscitates the detritus of past exhibitions by further excavations of the storeroom, hanging collections of old frames within frames on the gallery wall, or mixing all the leftover paint in the storeroom of the Bluecoat Gallery Liverpool to paint the walls (somewhere between a pink and purple) and comically balancing display plinths at strange angles, utilising the tools used in the installation of exhibitions to hold them temporarily in position - a precarious congregation. Phillipe Gronon's *Versos* series (2005-16) reveals a second artwork concealed behind the face intended to be viewed, the backs of paintings documenting their trajectory through histories of ownership, exhibition and restoration. His photographs of empty *châssis-pressé* (frames for photographic contact printing) with a lack of image within the frame, denote a presence through absence.

In attempting to reimagine the divided city of Berlin, the 2015 exhibition²⁴ *The Dialogic City - Berlin wird Berlin* disinterred hundreds of submissions for architectural projects relating to the rebuilding of the city post-unification, the exhibition becoming

²⁴ Supported by the Senate of Berlin, *The Dialogic City - Berlin wird Berlin* was part of the initiative *Stadt/Bild (Image of a City)*, a joint exhibition project consisting of four coinciding exhibitions. Accessible at <https://berlinischegalerie.de/en/exhibition/brandlhuber-hertweck-mayfried/>



4.02 a b



4.02 c



4.02 d e f



4.02 g h i

4.02 Arno Brandlhuber *The Dialogic City - Berlin wird Berlin* Berlinischer Galerie, 2015-16. (a b)

Wolfgang Tillman's archive of images and texts examine the nature of veracity relating to political and social events. *Truth Study Centre* Installation view at Maureen Paley Gallery 2005. (c)

Disturbances in the still air of the archive; working in Tipoteca, Italy (d), Graziani in Naples (e), in Lisbon (f), The Botanical Gardens in Dublin (g) and the store rooms of the *Banco di Napoli*. (h i)

the archive of these largely unrealised ambitions. The repository of many imagined futures, to be formed in the fabric of the reconstructed city, was presented in Berlinische Galerie by the architect Arno Brandlhuber as they appear stacked in storage, consigned to the territory of that-which-will-not-be. In the installation we can trace the attempt to reconcile the many tensions of the past, acutely felt in the turbulent political history of the city. However, the mundane storage depot of these redundant models and schemes transmutes uncomfortably within the space of the gallery into an art object, untouchable and remote in its cultural amber²⁵ (fig. 4.02 p.151).

Museums, collections and archives exist in part to confirm extant knowledge and to provide, as a matter of record,²⁶ what we know about the world (and ourselves) at that point in time. Archives and their databases, obedient catalogues in the service of future researchers, develop their own structures of power - rules of the object handling,²⁷ a few artefacts assume the status of privileged objects, confined within the special collection. Conventions

²⁵ However, lining the wall opposite the long installation of stored items were several thousand silver-bound books documenting the architectural submissions, which were free for the public to take.

²⁶ The UK's Public Record Office at Kew has been renamed The National Archive.

²⁷ During the time I have been working in archives, fragile artefacts such as old books have had to be handled wearing white (acid-free) cotton gloves. Subsequently, cotton was deemed to be more abrasive than human skin, allowing the researcher to actually touch the objects. Now, some archives have reconsidered this approach and are insisting on nitrile gloves (without chalk powder). A minute attention to the effect of human touch.

See: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/professional-guidance-and-services/caring-for-our-collection/conservation-practice-and-research/stories-from-the-studio/gloves-handling/>



4.03 a b



4.03 c d



4.03 e

4.03 Accidental archives: the back rooms and storage cupboards of long-established businesses: Paul Gardner's costermongers supplies shop, Spitalfields, London, trading since 1870, now closed. (a b)

Snr. Ponzi's sign-writing workshop in Rome, specialising in *foglia d'oro su cristallo*, the designs pricked through hand drawn templates and outlined in powdered dragons blood resin for gilding. I was able to obtain some useful materials from Snr. Ponzi for the collection. (c d e)

harden over time,²⁸ and the rituals of requesting access, the methods and search terms of retrieval, what is available and what is not (and the not inconsiderable interactions with the archivists²⁹ themselves) all underscore an atmosphere of compliance, reinforcing the imperative of preservation.³⁰ As a space of power these quiet rooms are literally exclusive, once safely seated at a table, request slip filled, and expectant of treasure³¹ the experience is characterised by a feeling of privilege. An artistic intervention in the archive sets up a kind of diffraction pattern or disturbance, to ‘brush against the grain of history.’³² Thus every incursion alters the stability of the archive, risks an alteration of the record, with every retrieval, a ripple on its smooth surface. The perfect archive may be envisaged as one with every object an obedient component in the completed set, catalogued, indexed and labelled correctly, and resting in exact relationship to its

²⁸ The archives of the *Banco di Napoli* are stored in 330 rooms across two different buildings, the Palazzi Ricca and Cuomo in Via di Tribunale, Naples. Access to certain rooms it is possible under specific conditions, although it is not always clear to the visitor what these conditions may be. When access to these rooms has been requested, I have been met with ‘*mi dispiace, ma siamo in Italia.*’ (*I am sorry, but we are in Italy*). I was finally able to visit in 2023.

²⁹ Sir Hilary Jenkinson, author of the *Manual of Archive Administration* (1922), saw ‘the good Archivist’ as ‘perhaps the most selfless devotee of Truth the modern world produces.’ From <https://american-archivist.kglmeridian.com/view/journals/aarc/7/1/article-p1.xml> p16.

³⁰ Christian Boltanski writes of the dangers of preservation once an article enters a museum or archive, becoming disconnected (forgetting) its function and becoming only an image of its former self. From *Perspectives: Negotiating the Archive* Tate Papers 9, (2008).

³¹ Sue Breakell pinpoints the qualities of hiddenness that artefacts, suspended in time, assume within archives, enmeshed in spells of secrecy, mystery and power. These sleeping objects can be awoken and rescued from their stasis and re-animated by the researcher. Also from *Perspectives: Negotiating the Archive* Tate Papers 9, (2008).

³² When Walter Benjamin asserts that history is conditional on circumstance rather than political or social ideals, he further calls on ‘the historical materialist (to)... regard it as his task to brush history against the grain’ (my insertion in brackets). From *Über den Begriff der Geschichte, Thesis VII* written in 1940. In observing Mussolini’s politics of style, Benjamin concludes that the aestheticisation of politics was a trademark of fascism.

neighbours, undisturbed by any intrusion of audience or researcher. A millpond.

In contemporary academic discourse, art practice, and in popular culture, archival activity proliferates. Used to describe the process of saving things from destruction or deletion, and encompassing unusual behavioural habits such as hoarding, these residues of physical processes and digital capture become imbued with a sense of value: “This is the memory³³ associated with all the events connected to each of these papers. To deprive ourselves of these... symbols and testimonies is to deprive ourselves somewhat of our memories’ writes Ilya Kabakov. ‘in our memory everything becomes equally valuable and significant. All points of our recollections are tied to one another. They form chains and connections in our memory which ultimately comprise the story of life.’³⁴

Reinterpretations of the archive multiply both inside and outside of art practice and critical theory. I believe that objects consigned to an archive are not suspended in a no-place once their purpose is complete, but surface and subside in significance as re-evaluations of the past proceed. They can be disinterred and re-imagined in the prevailing light of the contemporary moment.

³³ Hal Foster reviewing Trevor Paglen’s ‘Sites Unseen’ in the *London Review of Books* vol. 40, no.19 (2018) noted that “*recently my phone notified me ‘you have a new memory,’ and retrieved a photo from its files that it, not I, summoned up: a photo-memory that I did not remember at all. For a moment, I became its replicant.*” Paglen’s work explores the rapidly developing world of machine learning and AI, with the majority of images now produced by machines for machines, exclusive of human oversight, irreversibly complicating our basic ideas of mimesis.

³⁴ From Ilya Kabakov’s *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away* (1996). Quoted by Sue Breakell in *Perspectives: Negotiating the Archive* Tate Papers 9 (2008).

Objects are seen afresh in the light of the present, shedding their previous classification like a skin.³⁵ They become disobedient, unable to reside passively in the established order of things. History is recognised as discontinuous,³⁶ narratives attract their counter-factual challenges, and national myths topple as easily as statues.³⁷

The detritus of consumerism as a site of reconstruction

Even the material consequences of human activity, the effluent stream, the waste site, and the landfill, pulse with their own activity. Material of no further use or economic value discarded in vast dumps on the margins of cities and towns begins its own subterranean life, exhaling plumes of volatile methane and excreting extraordinary trickles of organic and non-organic compounds into the substrata. Teeming with anaerobic fungal

³⁵ Close to where I am writing this, in Stroud, Gloucestershire, a small statue of a black slave boy decorates a clock on the front of a building. He wears a gilded skirt of tobacco leaves and holds a baton with which to strike the clock's bell. Controversy surrounds whether the statue should be removed from view entirely; the current compromise has been to erect an explanatory noticeboard documenting the local slavery abolition movement in the 19thc. Dan Guthrie's commission and solo exhibition *Empty Alcove/Rotting Figure* (2025) at Spike Island, Bristol, envisages a 'radical un-conservation' of the clock - a proposition by Guthrie to describe the acquisition of an object with the express intent to destroy it.

³⁶ The Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski's *Critical Museum* (2011) argued not only for a new horizontal and transnational art history but also underscored Foucault's perception of paradigmatic shifts in the flow of history as essential to a re-ordering of knowledge and perception. From *Traumatic Contemporaneity* by Dan Karlholm, *Baltic Worlds* vol.1:3 (2021), accessible at <https://balticworlds.com/traumatic-contemporaneity/> (2021).

³⁷ The statue of the slaver Edward Colston in Bristol has borne witness to several art interventions, including the 2018 *Here and Now* installation of concrete body casts arranged as in Thomas Clarkson's famous diagram of the Brookes slave ship, which was used as evidence in the antislavery movement of the 1800s. The installation listed modern-day slavery by occupation, such as a domestic servant and a fruit picker. The statue itself was toppled in June 2020, and the plinth was briefly occupied by a statue of the protester Jen Reid, raised by the artist Marc Quinn. Following public consultation, the statue is now on permanent display in M Shed's Bristol People's gallery. Accessible at www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/new-display-at-m-shed-the-toppling-of-the-colston-statue/



4.04 a



4.04 b



4.04 c d e



4.04 f g h

4.04 Receipts on spikes at Smith and Pepper, a long-standing jewellers in Birmingham, now a museum. (a) Part of the Royal College of Arts textile dye sample archive. (b) Piles of old jobs printed in a Chinese printers in Brick Town, Kuala Lumpur. (d)

Practice Chinese calligraphy sheets discarded at Shuzou Arts Insitute, Jiangsu. (e) *Timbre Graziani* in Napoli, specialising in engraving, signs and rubber stamps for local businesses. I have spent several days photographing rubber stamps, letterforms and templates in the overflowing storerooms and busy workshop. (c e f g)

colonies, burrowing insects and invertebrates, these end-of-cycle deposits are in no sense finished with us, an unintended archive lying in its own toxic and unstable stratum.

Several artists have worked with these deposits of consumerism and of manufacturing, attempting to reveal that which is hidden by burial, incineration or geographical remoteness. The Dutch artist Christien Meindertsma's project *Bottom Ash Observatory* (2015) took a twenty-five kilogram tub of municipal furnace waste (the material left at the bottom of the furnace once all commercial value has been extracted) and subjected it to processes of sieving, drying, laser analysis and the separating of tens of thousands of pieces by hand. With photographer Thomas Eyck, individual items were grouped and catalogued in a book reminiscent of 18th century botanical and mineral encyclopaedias. The bottom ash included, amongst many other elements, zinc, aluminium, silver and a minute quantity of gold.³⁸

In a similar vein, Liam Young from *Unknown Fields Division* collected radioactive mud from tailings at the outflow of the Chinese Baogang Iron and Steel Corporation in 2014. The corporation produces rare earths, and discharges into a toxic lake extending for over six kilometres, recording three times the background radiation level for the region. It is one of the most poisoned places on Earth. The mud collected was formed into

³⁸ These elements were refined through chemical processes and lodged in a pseudoscientific object that accompanies the original book and collection. From <https://christienmeindertsma.com/Bottom-Ash-Observatory>



4.05 a



4.05 b



4.05 c d



4.05 e f



4.05 The effluent stream of consumerism: Edward Burtynsky *Salt Ponds #6, Near Tikat Banguel, Senegal* 2019. (a) Christien Meindertsma with Thomas Eycks *Bottom Ash Observatory* 2015. (b)

Unknown Fields Division. Collecting radioactive tailings from the worlds largest rare earth minerals refinery inner Mongolia, and pots made from the mud. (c d) Collecting waste fragments at Grundon's Wigmore Farm landfill site near Cheltenham, England, 2019. (e f)

three ceramic vessels related to the volume of the waste created in the production of rare earths for use in smartphone, laptop and car battery manufacture.³⁹

As part of the Cultural Dreaming⁴⁰ project initiated by the Hardwick Gallery in Cheltenham, I visited the Wigmore Farm landfill site in June 2019, operated by the waste handling company, Grundon. To a continuous background growl of arriving and departing refuse lorries and crawling waste-handling tractors, we gathered exposed ammonite and devils claw fossils in the blue lias clay. This is excavated as a waterproofing layer used in road and canal construction. As the clay mine deepens, the hole is filled with domestic waste, capped with more clay, and rigged with a network of underground pipes to extract volatile gases, which are burnt to supply electricity to the site. The complete cycle of extraction, infilling and compaction is monetised, fossils excepted, the finished areas of oversite planted with rare species of ancient Gloucestershire apples, replacing in part those orchards that have been lost across the region⁴¹ (fig. 4.05 p.159).

³⁹ The project was part of the exhibition, *What is Luxury?* (2014), Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), London. From: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1326004/rare-earthenware-vessel-unknown-fields-division/>

⁴⁰ Cultural Dreaming is one activity of the Speculative Art School curated by Jean Boyd and Sarah Bowden. See: <https://hardwickgallery.org/events/speculative-art-school-2019/>

⁴¹ Amy Balkin's democratic project, *A People's Archive Of Sinking And Melting* (2014 to ongoing) is a collection of materials contributed by those inhabiting areas at risk from the combined physical, political and economic impacts of climate change. Individuals send Balkin objects through the mail, which are archived online at www.amybalkin.com/work-1/sinkingmelting

Jane Bennett asks in her introduction to *Vibrant Matter - A Political Ecology of Things* (2010)

‘How, for example, would patterns of consumption change if we faced not litter, rubbish, trash, or ‘the recycling’ but an accumulating pile of lively and potentially dangerous matter? What difference would it make to public health if eating was understood as an encounter between various and variegated bodies, some of them mine, most of them not, and none of which always gets the upper hand?’

These repositories exist as archives of consumption, but do not lie quietly in their tombs, they are similarly unrestful, disorderly and unstable.

Voids of memory: absence, loss and presence

Several artists have constructed archives of absence or impossibility, serving as sentinels to loss and of the unimaginable. Located in the discordant territory of the irredeemable artefact, these projects are not revelations of what the archive conceals⁴² as much as documents of the unrecoverable or unrealisable. Following the failure of the projected museum in the French postcolony of Réunion in the Indian Ocean - the *Maison des Civilisations et de L’Unité Réunionnaise* (MCUR) - French political scientist Françoise Vergès proposed the notion of *un musée sans*

⁴² Carine Zaayman, writing in *Seeing what is not there: Figuring the Anarchive* (2019), illustrates the demands that are made of the slivers of evidence in colonial archives to yield more than they contain. Her coinage of *anarchive* relates to these imprints of absence - the negative spaces of the archive. Similarly, Tom Overton explored the themes of migration and translation within the archive at the British Library research symposium *Global Voices in the Archive* (2016).

objets, paradoxically affirming presence through the voids of artefacts and meaning.⁴³ The museum would focus not on the lack of objects worthy of a museum (an accumulation of artefacts, she notes, frequently belonging to an economy of predation) but on *objets de rien* (literally: an object of nothingness), arising from an unknown past, ‘the awakening’ as Walter Benjamin writes in his unfinished *Passagenwerk* (1927-40) ‘of a not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been.’ The museum was to consist of immaterial or intangible artefacts, avoiding the problematics of ‘discovery’ and ‘interpretation’ where no material culture from a vanquished people remains.⁴⁴

The Lebanese artist Lamia Joreige left Beirut with her family for Paris during the civil war,⁴⁵ returning frequently as the conflict unfolded and eventually ended. In direct contrast to the familiar documents of war, the grainy news footage, the black-and-white reportage of atrocity and horror, Joriege excavates traces, and reactivates moments from the past, embracing the attendant inconsistencies and distortions.

⁴³ The €60 million project was disbanded in April 2010 when the local Conservatives came to power in the Réunion Regional Council. During French colonial occupation, some 60,000 of the island’s 100,000 inhabitants were slaves. What remains of their culture is encoded colloquialisms and linguistic structure, folk myths and stories, and songs of struggle and endurance. From *Maison des Civilisations et de l’Unité Réunionnaise: A Museum without a Collection* (2007) by Françoise Vergès. *Theory, Culture and Society* vol. 24, 7-8 pp.238-246.

⁴⁴ Vergès warns of the danger of ‘unmasking’ and the desire to unveil a ‘true core’, of explaining events by a structured causality of linear history.

⁴⁵ The Lebanese Civil War, a multi-sectarian conflict, lasted from 1975 to 1990, during which an estimated 120,000 people were killed. In addition, over one million people went into exile. From www.britannica.com/event/Lebanese-Civil-War



4.06 a b



4.06 c



4.06 d

4.06 Lamia Joreige *Underwriting Beirut - Mathaf* 2013. (a b)

John Latham *Skoob Tower Ceremonies*, 1964-68, Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, PA. (c)

Kei Ito *Hiroshima 08/06/2015 - 8:15 am 2015* (detail). (d)

Joreige's *Objects Missing from the National Museum of Beirut* (2013) consists of a black leather-bound book, sealed permanently shut by its binding, which contains anecdotes relating to the museum's disappeared objects, as recorded by the artist through extensive fieldwork. This unreliable (and inaccessible) record contains the stories, true or not, of the many thousands of objects that have disappeared from the museum's galleries and archives.⁴⁶ As no definitive pre-war inventory exists, the extensive collection of antiquities (based on the French colonial excavations in the early 20th century), can be envisaged only through old photographic records, many of which were destroyed in the fierce fighting and occupation by militia during the war, or by human recollection. The museum building was also substantially flooded and endured a series of fires. In a companion piece, Joreige displays *Objects missing from the National Museum in Beirut* as a wall of text detailing the labels for every object that survived to be on display on 15 December 2012. We are asked to observe not the object itself, but rather the museum's brief description of it, a catalogue of impersonal reference⁴⁷ (fig. 4.06 p.163).

⁴⁶ As in other more recent conflicts, many objects in the museum were saved from destruction by the speedy intervention of conservators. In Beirut, wooden boxes were constructed around the museum's large sculptures and stelae; these and wall pieces were covered with concrete and cement. Many small objects were hurriedly placed in storage, and the vaults were sealed up. Professor Farès el-Dahdah wrote of these additional encasements as '*holding within them the memory of those who died in their proximity... both militia warriors and ancient monarchs*', a further process of entombment. When the museum reopened in 1993, it was with a temporary exhibition, with these protective concrete sarcophagi still in place. From *Under Writing Beirut - Mathaf* (2013) by Lamia Joreige, p9.

⁴⁷ As the museum found itself on the dividing Green Line during the conflict, its upper storeys afforded advantageous sniper positions. In another work, Joreige casts the negative space of a hole made through the wall, and the Roman mosaic attached to it, by a gunner to command the Mathaf-Barbir crossing. This *Object of War* forms part of her *Under-Writing Beirut - Mathaf* project (2013 - ongoing).



4.07 a

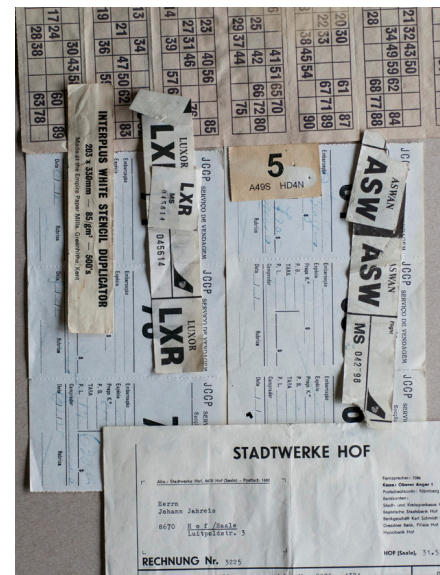


4.07 b

4.07 c d



4.07 e f



4.07 Disordered objects: Coins defaced by stamping with Real Irish Republican Army initials 1990s. (a) Andy Dao and Ivan Cash, Occupy George overprinted dollar bill, 2011. (b)

Sinister matter: transport forms from the Berlin deportations of Jewish citizens and others, *Museum Blindenwerkstatt Otto Weidt*, Berlin. (c d)

Arrivals and departures: destination labels, airline baggage tags, bingo cards, invoices. These are a few of the many thousands of individual items in the anarchive retrieved from many different places and cultures. (e f)

Certain objects appear to us to be inherently disobedient,⁴⁸ redolent of misbehaviour or worse, directly resisting their established order. Piles of burning books (at 451°F as Ray Bradbury reminds us) cast menacing shadows from their flames, from Alexandria to Louvain, from Bebelplatz to Sarajevo,⁴⁹ but repurposed as anti-state actions, they trade on their transgressive quality - a marker of something that should not be happening. In his *scoob* (books backwards) *Tower Ceremonies* (1964 - 68), John Latham constructed tall towers of books arranged as chimneys to aid combustion and stated, 'it was not in any degree a gesture of contempt for books or literature. What it did was ... to put the proposition into mind that perhaps the cultural base had been burnt out.'⁵⁰

As an act of commemoration, Key Ito's *Hiroshima 08/06/2015 - 8:15am*, marks the seventieth anniversary of the bombing with a charred Japanese dictionary, representing one belonging to his grandfather that was incinerated in the blast. Its ink had turned

⁴⁸ The propensity to disobedience that certain microscopic parasites exhibit reached a lethal climax in the SARS-CoV-2 contagion that resulted in the global pandemic of 2020-2022.

⁴⁹ Richard Ovenden, former director of the Bodleian Library in Oxford, gives a chronology in, *Burning The Books - The History Of The Deliberate Destruction Of Knowledge* (2020). The Belgian city of Louvain was ravaged by the German army on August 25th 1914, which deliberately burnt the University library of 230,000 books, 950 ancient manuscripts and 800 incunabula. Erich Kästner (humourist and author of *Emil and the Detectives*) witnessed the infamous Bebelplatz (then named *Opernplatz*) book burning on the 10th of May 1933, initiated by the pro-Nazi German Student Association. Kästner's books were included in the 20,000 books that were burnt. The site of the fire is commemorated by a subterranean cube of empty library shelves by Micha Ullman, *The Empty Library* (1995) a testimony to the assault.

⁵⁰ From John Latham: *Scoob Works*, Lisson Gallery, New York, 2018.

white⁵¹ on the blackened pages as if transformed into a photographic negative. Similarly, French artist, Aubertine Bernard's *Livres Brûlés* in the 1970s became performative actions originating in the conceptual art happenings of the late 1950s.⁵²

The exhibition, *Disobedient Objects* (2014-15), at the Victoria and Albert Museum included coins over-stamped⁵³ with the initials of the Real Irish Republican Army, (frequently the letters are deliberately punched across the profile of the monarch), defaced Libyan banknotes erasing the image of Muammar Gaddafi with a marker pen, small electrical power resistors worn discreetly in the Poland of *Solidarność* (the independent trade union founded at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk in 1980), improved lock-on devices to resist easy removal of a protester, and instructions as to how to make a bucket bomb for the distribution of pamphlets during periods of disorder. A protest banner made of crude white letters

⁵¹ Although accidental, this is a form of thermochromic change similar to the experiments I have made with specialised inks.

⁵² Bernard's book burnings were presaged in his *Tableau de Feu*, such as at the event staged at The Rotterdamsche Kunstring in 1959. From www.archiviobernardaubertin.com/le-opere/ (unreliable).

⁵³ Featured in Ian McGregors's *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (2010), a 1903 King Edward VII penny had been (literally) defaced by stamping over the King's head in crude capitals the words: VOTES FOR WOMEN. As Catherine Flood and Gavin Grindon point out in the exhibition catalogue (2014), currency 'is a highly controlled symbol of state and tampering with it is a small but powerful act of subversion'. In fact, at the time, any alteration of the King's coin was illegal. Older coins utilised for the same purpose and bearing the profile of Queen Victoria were punched on the reverse side across the image of Britannia. Several of these examples of suffragette activism were in circulation.

on red fabric proclaims, in Russian, ‘YOU CANNOT IMAGINE WHAT WE ARE CAPABLE OF’.⁵⁴

This tendency of objects to exhibit an intrinsic instability,⁵⁵ despite the institutional impulse to contain and to order,⁵⁶ is a quality I have developed in the construction of the anarchive. A restrictive institutional culture engendered by organisation structures has long been recognised in corporate and military organisations as an inhibitor to creative development. The benefits of a small autonomous group with flattened hierarchies have their origin in labs such as Lockheed Martin’s Skunkworks, a small expert team unfettered by bureaucratic constraints, given access to rapid communication networks and tasked with a single defined aim. The group swiftly conceived of a radically new jet aircraft design, which was developed with substantially increased efficiency.

Conventional collections and their associated behaviours diminish the artefacts within, constraining them to their categories, placing

⁵⁴ Several reviewers, including Rowan Moore writing in the Guardian in July 2014, commented on the uncomfortable location of the exhibition within the genteel surroundings of an institution named for an Emperor Monarch and her consort.

⁵⁵ Jean-François Lyotard refers in, *The Post Modern Condition* (1979), to the inevitable trajectory of capital imperils the stability of the state. He further develops his bold claim to have reconciled the stable and the unstable systematics of determinism and non-determinism.

⁵⁶ *The Persistence of the Lab* at Transmediale 2016 in Berlin discussed other less successful collaborations during the Cold War in America. *Art and Technology*, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1971, was one of the museum's most legendary curatorial endeavours. Partnerships between prominent American and European artists (all male, including Serra, Warhol, Rauschenberg and Oldenburg) and large corporations produced a confused mixture of artistic creativity and technological prowess. Set against the Vietnam War, the exhibition signalled advancing technology as a problem rather than a solution.

them in the realm of the passive object to be observed. The anarchic resists this, and by dis- and mis-ordering, allows objects to be apprehended anew, to transgress their definition, and be open to reinterpretation of their histories. The separateness that defines objects becomes permeable,⁵⁷ their qualities of unknowableness and our false assumption that we know what they appear to be are deliberately laid to one side. The anarchic reconstructs a quality of the *Wunderkammer* - unknownness, an unconscious psychical resistance to knowledge, as Freud would propose. This is to acknowledge the *disorder* of things, and its utility in the process of assembling the typographic collages.

Michel Foucault records his laughter⁵⁸ whilst reading Jorge Luis Borges's revelatory ordering of animals in a 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia'. The list 'breaks up all the surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things', but points to a dizzying possibility of grouping everything according to imaginary categories. Artefacts within the anarchic are open to misconception, the instantaneous

⁵⁷ Ernst Haeckel's genealogical tree, building on Carl Linnaeus's foundational taxonomy, controversially paved the way for the development of scientific racism in the late 19thc. The development of binomial nomenclature, with its dubious histories reinforcing the supremacy of man, is equally vulnerable to reimagining. Donna Haraway weaves new relationships with the non-human; fauna, flora and machine, encouraging a melding and entangling with the worlds both outside and inside our bodies. The membrane between the same and the other dissolves. Her invocation to '*stay with the trouble*' during the privations and opportunities afforded by the *Capitalocene* (Haraway's preferred term for the current epoch over the *Anthropocene*) pre-figures an ontological shift in relations with the non-human to the benefit of both. Her future concept of a *Chthulucene* points optimistically to a symbiotic future reconfigured for planetary and human survival. From *Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene*, Donna Haraway e-flux journal Issue 75 (2016).

⁵⁸ John Cussans discusses this gesture in The Diagram Research Group event *The Librarians Outburst - Explosive Orality, Cosmic Consciousness and The Art Event/Event of Art* (2020). Accessible at: <https://flattimeho.org.uk/events/diagram-research-group/>

recognition of their object-relations amenable to disruption. The anarchiv is laced with an insubordinate taxonomy, designed to encourage a slower form of encounter than that afforded by rapid assimilation of what we are looking at - artefacts are mislabeled and juxtaposed in their drawers to deflect from being easily understood for what they are, and are considered more as to what they could be, able to fulfil a range of potential meanings. We have learnt to trust our established systems of labelling and signifying, and to be sure (mostly) of what we apprehend to be a reliable representation of what we perceive it to be. Within the anarchiv this may or may not hold good. This stumbling, or faltering, allows us to notice the indistinct,⁵⁹ to notice *our* imprint upon the object under view, and aims to illuminate our understanding of what the artefact might have been, could be now, and shall become.

Borges's *Celestial Emporium of Benevolence Knowledge*⁶⁰ could also have contained other examples of phenomena inadequately described by their name. Intuition, an elusive quality of perception that escapes scientific analysis⁶¹ is barely contained by its descriptor,

⁵⁹ Mary-Kay Wilmers reproduces a Post-it note as the last illustration in the *London Review of Books: An Incomplete History* (2020). The Review, renowned for its penetrating writing on many aspects of politics and culture, is characterised by this thought: *Isn't the indistinct often exactly what we need?* This does not mean in-distinctiveness is an inability to perceive, rather its opposite: it is to become aware of that which is normally overlooked in the habitual process of apprehension and comprehension.

⁶⁰ Perhaps predictably, no reliable attribution of the source of this list exists. Appearing in the essay, *The Analytical Language Of John Wilkins* (1942), Borges claimed it was discovered by the translator Franz Kuhn.

⁶¹ Some of the artist Emma Smith's participatory performance work explores phenomena that defy explanation. Described as the language of intuition, *5Hz* (2015) draws on biomedical and psychological research into vocal rhythm. An associated piece documented how an individual knows they are being looked at, even when blindfolded.

and certainly not limited to its etymology denoting spiritual insight. Whilst engaging with the anarchive when selecting material for inclusion in the collages, I am aware of both an intuitive and counter-intuitive process at work, alongside an instinctual reasoning. In Section 6: *Being and Things*, p.200, I examine this aspect of the ontology of the studio more fully.

Finally, the anarchive stands, or rather lies, in planchest drawers, old folders, timeworn boxes and cardboard trays, the product of carefully planned expeditions: physical journeys as outlined above, lengthy negotiations with other collectors, finds from junk shops, chance purchases, the occasional gift; gleanings from the broad field of letterforms across language, time and culture. The valuable nestles with the discarded and worthless, some items hard-won through concentrated effort of accumulation and skill in printmaking processes, others coming easily to hand, and jostling for their place in the assembly.

Tens of thousands of individual artefacts are thus brought into close proximity, their limitless permutations of juxtaposition apparent, their material vitality recognised, their potential and their incomplete histories acknowledged. Ordered and arrayed within the anarchive, detached from any conventional positioning in the world as it is realised, these modest scraps and fragments slip their moorings and float free.

Section 5

A Typology of Language

In this section: I provide a historical overview of graphemes, tracing the evolution of written language and types of letterforms from the earliest civilisations to now obsolete modern typesetting processes. I examine more closely the inclusion of words and word-fragments within my collages, and distinguish how different kinds of letterforms resonate within the visual field. I question, how is this work located in recent text and type-based art practice? How do letterforms exhibit particular visual and sonic characteristics? How do certain words, incomplete letterforms, acronyms and codes resonate with a distinct poetic significance beyond their obvious meaning? How these can become active components in the visual field of my compositions, such as in collages 7 and 8.

I propose that letterforms produce a subliminal acoustic effect within the viewer, modulated through the design and legibility of the typeface and language, and what occurs when only a small part of the word is visible. I relate this to how these ‘signs for sounds’ (Gill) operate as signals in the typographic collages.

At the point that spoken language¹ becomes inscribed upon a surface, its transient nature abruptly halts. Formed with the larynx, soft palate, tongue and breath, sound is transformed from vibratory molecules to substance with the possibility of endurance, a transition from vaporous to solid state. Across the multitude of civilisations and cultures that were impelled to record speech and ideas in physical form,² symbolic notation was derived from the materials to hand, initially in clay and stone, to pen and paper, type and ink and eventually to the code producing the digital glyphs you are reading right now. These graphemes³ belong to a standardised set of phonograms derived from Phoenician, the first true alphabetic phonemic script, via Greek, Etruscan and Latin. It is arguable that the small black shapes

¹ Our early forebears, both Neanderthals and *Homo Sapiens*, developed the gene FOXP₂, crucially linked to the development of speech. Anthropologists identify the oldest surviving human language as that of the Khosian people in Southern Africa. This language, alongside more conventional sounds, makes extensive use of click consonant phonemes and a range of glottal noises. Spoken Georgian belongs to its own unique sonic heritage, including sounds that exist in no other language. Some consonants, for example, are produced from the back of the throat with a sudden guttural puff of air. From *The Genomic Prehistory of Peoples Speaking Khoisan Languages by Human Molecular Genetics* (2021), Brigitte Pakendorf and Mark Stoneking, Human Molecular Genetics, vol. 30, R1, pp. 49-55.

² In considering non-literate cultures, it is useful to distinguish that written and spoken versions of language are a cultural construct. Linguistically, spoken and written languages are different languages that relate closely but not perfectly, the former from a substrate of sound, the latter from symbols. (Japanese is a good example of this divergence.) There are several non-literate or pre-literate cultures remaining today, for example, the North Sentinel Islanders and the Yanomami in Brazil. The modern South Arabian languages spoken in Yemen and Oman only adopted a written script in 2014.

³ Western alphabets retain one or two logograms (a single written character which represents a word or morpheme) such as the ampersand: &, and diacritics such as accents: acute, grave, circumflex, umlauts, etc.

comprising these words belong to the most significant invention of the entire history of humanity⁴ (fig. 5.01, p.177).

My interest lies principally with language in printed form, and specifically related to the printing technologies discussed extensively above. Words and letters, even barely recognisable parts of letters, exhibit a compelling visual characteristic - you cannot *not* read those shapes, which cognition suggests must mean something, however indiscernible; they are ciphers for information, thought and ideas. Even words formed of letters from unfamiliar languages⁵ appear to strain at the boundaries of comprehension; they demand to be read.

The resonance of the incomplete

How small can a fragment of a word or individual letterform be, yet still allow the mind to extrapolate into a tenuous comprehension? This is a recurrent question in the making of the collages. Some letterforms can be reduced to very little and still speak of the whole. Severely degraded or obliterated text appears

⁴ Current scholarship determines that symbol-based writing systems appear to have been developed independently in at least four different locations in prehistory: firstly in Mesopotamia approximately 3400 BCE, shortly afterwards in Egypt around 200 years later, two millennia later in Shang dynasty China, and sometime between 900 and 600 BC in the cultures of Mesoamerica. There is also evidence of logographic writing systems in the early civilisations of the Indus Valley and on Rapa Nui (Easter Island). From *The World's Writing Systems* Edited by Peter Daniels and William Bright (1996).

⁵ Unlike the thousands of possible typefaces available to typesetters utilising Latin script for a publication, non-Latin typeface choices, until the early digital era, were severely limited. For example, three Arabic scripts, Yakout, Lotus and Quadi, represented 95% of newspaper typesetting and 80% of the remaining commercial printing, providing the dominant visual experience for a majority of readers. These fonts were designed and produced by the British Linotype Department of Typographic Development under the direction of Walter Tracy and subsequently Fiona Ross, based in Cheltenham. From the exhibition and conference *Non-Latin Typefaces*, St. Bride's Library, London (2007) accessible at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/22676/>

to struggle to the surface of meaning, the propensity of the mind to solve a puzzle or to fabricate a solution from sparse clues is in operation. Several passages of the collages deliberately invite very close inspection.

Letterforms, complete and incomplete words, sequences of text and passages of legible and illegible texts form a foundational structure within the collages, a form of visual noise quite distinct from the conventions of abstract or non-pictorial description. These shapes are resonant of the sounds from which they are derived. My intention is to orchestrate an interior acoustic affect in concert with the process of visual apprehension, what I term a *graphophonic*⁶ effect. Like sound, typography suggests a range of registers and modulations, of cadence, accent and counterpoint. Within the composition of a collage, orthographies are rendered unviable, Latin and non-Latin letter forms associating in uncustomary arrangements, both cacophonous and harmonic. A fragment, as Benjamin reminds us,⁷ is emblematic of the allegorical mode of representation, characterised by incompleteness and transforming them into symbols of deeper meaning. They can stand for something more complete, a

⁶ My neologism formed from *graphic* and *phonic* describing a resonance of visual graphics with auditory cues, as can be found in collages 5 & 6, and 7 & 8 (pp.105, 137, 139 & 173).

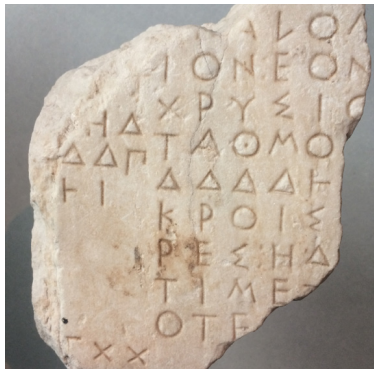
⁷ In the *Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928) Benjamin suggest the dichotomy of fragments as both simultaneously elevated - imbued with significance and symbolic of a higher truth - and also devalued, with their incompleteness and brokenness (*Zerrissenheit*) highlighting the imperfection of the secular realm.



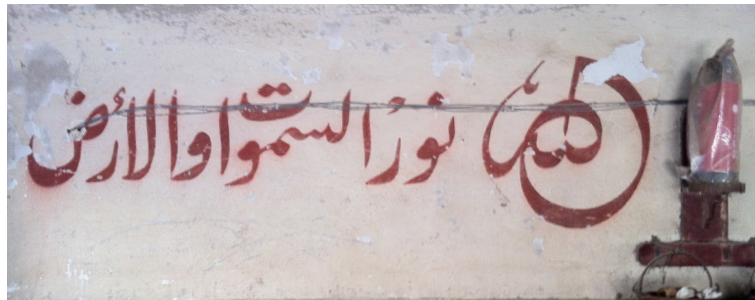
5.01 a



5.01 b



5.01 c



5.01 d



5.01 e



5.01 g



5.01 f



5.01 h

5.01 Early cuneiform from Persepolis, Iran (a). Inscribed Roman tablets in Trastevere, Rome. (b) Early Greek inscription, Athens. (c) A painted sign in Cairo, Egypt. (d) Extraordinary livestock crate labels. (e) Baggage tags with international airport abbreviations. (f) Emily Jacir's unrealised *Stazione* installation on the *Linea 1* vaporetto stops, Venice, 2008-9. (g h)

transition from the insufficient to an elusive distinctiveness.⁸ I aim to position the composition on a plane that exists both above language and within it.

To turn, once again, to Foucault's consideration of Borges's fanciful list, it may be that the 'non-place' of language is the only possible location where these, and many other, extraordinary meetings are possible; 'yet, though language can spread them before us it can do so only in unthinkable space.'⁹ The notion that language, and by extension the letter-shapes that give it material form, possesses a quality of unknownness alongside its idiographic function, qualifies its use within the work. Printed words are simultaneously the material object, the thing they represent, the thing we can imagine and the thing that lies out of reach of our thoughts. The typographic inclusions are not messages, the intention is not to instruct but to indicate an untethering and loosening of meaning. This quality of volatility, prompted by texts

⁸ Walter Benjamin's notion that a fragment possesses 'special rights' in that 'it interrupts the context into which it is inserted', combined with his assertion that the fragmentary 'counteracts illusion', was a key principle in the construction of the *Passagen Werk*. Begun in 1927, it was planned originally as a newspaper article, evolving into an essay entitled *Pariser Passagen: Eine dialektischer Feerie* (A Dialectical Fairyland). Through his idiosyncratic method of literary construction, he conjures a world of 'secret affinities', constituting a 'magical encyclopaedia'. The essay was famously unfinished as Benjamin fled Paris in the face of the advancing German army, leaving his transcript with George Bataille. The work alludes to the enduring pull of *Eingedenken* (lost time) and the shock of the *Jetztzeit* (the now-time) ripe with disruptive potential. I reach for the same inflexion in the fragments of collage assembled into finished works.

⁹ Foucault delineates the 'monstrous quality' of the 'atlas of the impossible' in the non-site of Borges' imaginings. We are dis-placed, the 'tabula that enables thought to operate upon the entities of our world' has been removed. (From the preface to *The Order Of Things*, first published in 1966). In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), he introduces a methodological framework of archaeology as a challenge to a convenient historical continuum, with its presupposed stability of meanings through time. This indicates the possibilities of formation and transformation in contrast to fixed teleological certainties. Again, this sense of *untethering* or *loosening* is a key methodology of the making of the collages.

on the cusp of comprehension, and subject to the torque of our imaginings, is carefully considered in the construction of the anarchive and the in the resulting compositions.

The workaday quality of most printed ephemera unites form and function, produced primarily to deliver a message or information as efficiently as possible within the aesthetic context of its age.

Mundane imperatives and instructions become resonant by their dislocation¹⁰ from their intended uses: in the collection are printed costermongers showcards and fish buyers tallies declaiming; **STILL**,

MORNING GATHERED, OCTOPUS SUPPLES, EMPIRE GROWN, a Belgian label

warning **EXPLOSIF**¹¹ and the mail sticker **EXPRESS** in Collage 1

(fig. 5.01 & 5.02 pp.177 &181).

Also in the collection is a German road sign, set quietly in upper and lowercase and prefiguring all our destinies: **Ende**. For many years, transport companies in Italy affixed a paper label to cartons at dispatch centres as an aid to quicker loading, designating the destination city or town. An arrival in a new city would be marked by the many discarded boxes and crates on the pavement, repetitively announcing where you were: *Firenze, Bologna, Napoli*,

¹⁰ Emily Jacir's *Stazione* (2008) for the Venice Biennale translated the names of the *Linea 1 Vaporetto* stops into Arabic, to be displayed alongside the Italian, honouring the historical links of the Venetian Republic to the Middle East. The first Arabic book to be printed in its entirety from movable Arabic type was the *Book of Hours* published in Venice in 1514 by Gregorio de Gregorii. The project was abruptly halted by the authorities, and never realised. (See p177) From www.artdubai.ae/blog/emily-jacir-stazione/

¹¹ The label was glued to an old wooden strongbox I purchased in the *Place de Jeu de Bal* flea market in Bruxelles (I was after the label alone). The box was nailed tightly shut - I gingerly prised it open to find it was empty but retained a strong smell of cordite from World War II munitions.

Roma. Each truck firm adopted a unique system of colour codes, sometimes based on the medieval heraldry of the individual town. I collected many of these labels while they were still in use. Up early and into the street with my scalpel, ready with an explanation for my unconventional behaviour. Also to be found lying pristine on the street each morning, were the small folded slips from night watchmen (the *Vigili di Notturmo*), tucked in the shutter or padlock as proof of their visit, and liberated each morning by the shopkeeper on opening up.¹² The truck companies' destination labels have long gone, replaced by barcodes, but the *Vigili* still patrol, their infrequent visits now more often by car, marked by an occasional vinyl sticker on a rural gatepost.

Inclusion of the name of a city by using the dispatch label, or by other means of printing¹³ serves both as a memory-marker of my own time and experiences there, and also as an evocation to the unknowable experience of viewers, who discover it within the collage: Saigon, Teheran, Berlin.¹⁴ Airline baggage tags, with each destination reduced to just three letters; AZD, KUL, VIE, MOW,

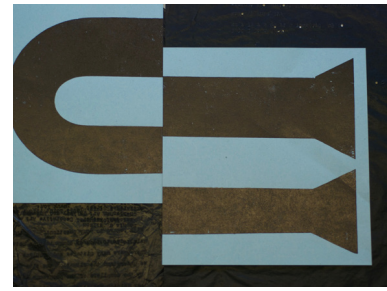
¹² Erica Van Horn produced a limited edition of artist books called *Italian Lesson* documenting her discovery of the *vigili* slips in Milan. Published by Coracle Press, London, (1991).

¹³ I have a large collection of rubber stamps of place names, easy to buy in stationery shops when in a particular city. They are often some of the last marks to be made on the collage, locating a disparate surface in a specific geographical context.

¹⁴ In the two collages 7: 3OE and 8: BE (pp.139 & 173), small postal destination labels from 19thc. German envelopes are fixed where one would expect to find a signature or title. Easily overlooked, these attachments appear to inform the whole composition.



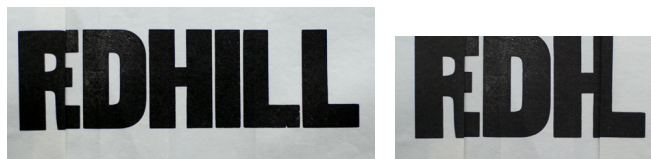
5.02 a



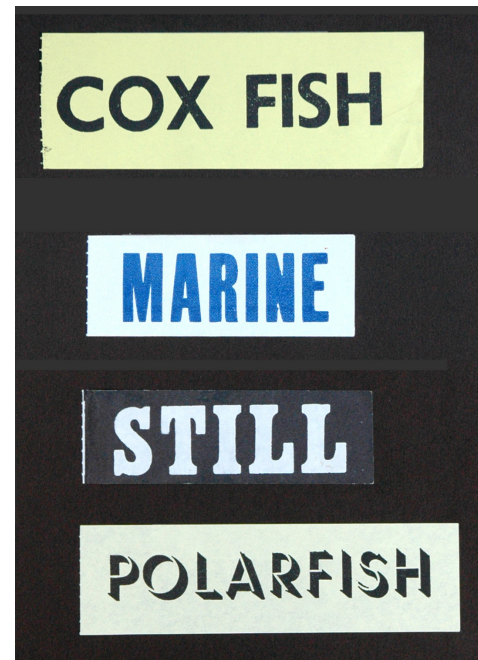
5.02 b



5.02 c



5.02 d



5.02 e



5.02 f

5.02 Examples from the anarchive; details of decaying posters, (a) altered letterforms by cutting and folding (b d), a steamer trunk label, (c) a group of letterpress printed fish buyers tallies used at quayside auctions (e) and two very large Neapolitan theatre posters in bold sanserif and condensed serif wood type. (f)

RUH, SGN¹⁵ can represent the experience of visiting unfamiliar cities, and our brief transits within them.¹⁶

Some individual letter forms denote multiple meanings; an X with its associations of otherness (as in xenophobia) is many things: a cancelling out, a multiplier, a warning on poison, an unknown mathematical quantity,¹⁷ a mask of anonymity, a cross, a vote, an illiterate signature, a hazard, a Roman ten, a chromosome, a kiss, something banned or censored, or simply the letter X. U and I lean towards the troubled waters of pronouns, A and Z to beginnings and endings, both spiritual and secular. E was associated in classical times with the Sun, Apollo and divination.¹⁸ Zero, or nought, invites the philosophical question, how can nothing be something?¹⁹

Lawrence Weiner, in turning aside from the anxious surfaces of abstract painting (behind many of which was to be found a

¹⁵ These last three, Vienna, Moscow and Riyadh, supply double meanings in their abbreviation (or nearly in the case of RUH, as in the German for peace: *ruhe*).

¹⁶ Baggage tags are another form of printed ephemera that has nearly disappeared now that our self-service bag-drop produces a laser-printed adhesive label, which still displays the three-letter city code. Examples of tags within the collection, some printed with three or four colours, are attached whole or screenprinted onto the surface. The codes above include Yazd (Iran) and Kuala Lumpur. As mentioned in section 3 (p.104) as the last evacuees left Saigon, a baggage label worn on clothing indicated that you were authorised for extraction - a matter of life or death.

¹⁷ The X owes this function to an unforeseen typesetting necessity. René Descartes originally assigned X, Y and Z to represent any three unknown mathematical quantities; however, the printer had only sufficient Xs and a severely limited supply of Ys and Zs. Descartes agreed that X should stand for all. From *The Alphabet* by David Sacks (2003).

¹⁸ From Plutarch's *Essay on the Letter E at Delphi*, from *Moralia* vol. 5, translated by Frank Babbitt (1936).

¹⁹ The word Zero enters the western lexicon from the Arabic *ṣifr* صفر, a translation of the Sanskrit *śūnya* शून्य (nothingness or emptiness). Essential to the development of mathematics, the symbol also stands for the pre-cosmological state in the creation myths of many cultures.

duplicitous state-funded cold war political agenda)²⁰ sought an accessible syntax with which he could best communicate with a wide audience. Inviting viewers to develop their own personal interpretations (in keeping with Foucault's sense of possibilities over certainties) his text-based works, painted directly onto the walls of galleries and urban spaces using uppercase Franklin Gothic Extra Condensed,²¹ the works follow his generic formula: **LANGUAGE + THE MATERIALS REFERRED TO**. As catalysts to individual interpretation rather than didactic aphorism, words appear both solely in English and alongside translations into other languages. Location amplifies possible meanings; in Vienna **SMASHED TO PIECES (IN THE STILL OF THE NIGHT)/ ZERSCHMETTERT IN STÜCKE (IM FRIEDEN DER NACHT)** temporarily painted on a World War II flak tower in Esterhazy Park as part of the *Festwochen* in 1991, is widely interpreted as referring to the events of 9th-10th November 1938, the *Kristallnacht* pogrom against Jewish synagogues and businesses by an SS and Nazi mob across Germany and Austria. In an interview in 2011,²² Weiner related the work to his experience of hearing beer bottles smashing in the street during his time in

²⁰ The promotion of American Abstract Expressionism during the Cold War as a form of cultural propaganda is well documented. Alfred H. Barr, as director of MoMA from its inception until 1944, and subsequently one of America's reigning tastemakers, aligned the anti-communist stance of the New American Painting with the more clandestine activities of the CIA in advancing the dubious Western values of 'freedom'. From *Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War* by Eva Cockcroft, ArtForum, June 1974.

²¹ A typeface produced by The American Type Founders, designed in 1906 and credited to their head designer, Morris Fuller Benton. Part of a family of industrial grotesque styles, many still in use today. From <https://atftype.com/fonts/franklin-gothic/>

²² In an interview in the design magazine *It's Nice That* (issue 6, 2011) Weiner confirms that 'once the viewer sees or knows about a piece of... work they own it, and then it's impossible..to remove their own interpretation from them. It can no longer be removed from the culture.' (my edits for grammar)

Vienna, resonant of that past event, and demonstrating how personal interpretations are an integral part of the work itself.²³ To reverse the Nietzschean question of ‘*who is speaking?*’²⁴ we may ask ‘*who is reading?*’ (fig. 5.03, p.185).

However, many of the typographic and numerical fragments included in the collages are selected for their very lack of associative meaning, coming to the surface ‘as found’ and open to multiple interpretation. Sequences of letterforms and numbers with no discernible signification are attached or printed complete (sometimes sideways or upside down) or partially obscured by other elements. Nevertheless, these shapes, formed of recognisable characters as they are, can never be truly neutral: **ext hy** and **M wh13 E0** (found in collages 6 and 7, pp.137 & 139) appear to convey an encrypted message; they are legible but not comprehensible. They are of language, but are not language.²⁵

²³ ‘I am involved with simultaneous and parallel realities. We live in a simultaneous reality... these realities cannot have anything to do with each other, but they exist at the same time and in the same place... sometimes these worlds intersect’. From an interview with Lawrence Weiner by Alexandra-Maria Toth (2017). From www.collectorsagenda.com/en/in-the-studio/lawrence-weiner

²⁴ The symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé’s response to Nietzsche’s question includes the notion of ‘enclose(ing) all possible discourse within the fragile density of the word, within that slim, material black line traced by ink upon paper’ to denote designation. For Mallarmé ‘it is there, in the *holder* of the discourse and, more profoundly still, in the *possessor* of the word, that language is gathered together in its entirety.’ Quoted in Foucault’s *The Order Of Things* (1966). Mallarmé’s poem *Un Coup de dés Jamais N’abolira le Hasard* (1897), with its dispersed lines of text, is a feat of complex typesetting, first appearing in print according to its original designs in 1914.

²⁵ Foucault is careful to delineate between the everyday ‘utterances’ that disappear as soon as they are spoken, and the whole of a language, with its gradations of specialised discourse. He points out that the distinction is nevertheless porous - ‘neither stable, constant nor absolute’. From the lecture *L’ordre du Discours* delivered at the *Collège de France* in 1970.



5.03 a



5.03 b



5.03 c



5.03 d



5.03 e

5.03 Lawrence Weiner *Smashed to Pieces (In the Still of the Night)/Zerschmettert in Stuckuke (Im Frieden der Nacht)* 1991, (a) fragments of French *Adjudication* posters in provisional arrangement on a collaged surface. (b)

Inter-war European typographic innovation: Karel Teige's designs for Czech publications. (c)

Football poster from 1950s Lazio, Italy. Printed in large woodtype the typeface sports a particularly lively uppercase E, (d) Italian Futurist architects office sign in Southern Italy with unusual hand drawn letterforms. (e)

Certain feral words include shibboleths,²⁶ mistranslations,²⁷ neologisms and slang. Particular invocations (for example, **Quiet Please, Jour et Nuit, Ancient Light**)²⁸ exert an uncanny pull on the imagination. In these instances, language vaults, detached from its definition, and diffuses through the mind as a series of associative encounters - clues but not solutions.

Words as visual elements within the picture field exhibit an uneasy tension of representation,²⁹ a lineage traceable from the faded *journaux* of early cubist collages, through Duchamp's readymades, the non-sense texts of the dada and surrealists, the posturing of pop art, entanglements of the conceptualists to the self-absorbed declamations of post-modernity.³⁰

²⁶ In this context, I am referring to linguistic passwords: inflexions and pronunciation that identify members or nonmembers of a particular group. Long used in military close-combat situations to identify a potential enemy, urban gangs develop a shibboleth to reinforce cohesion and exclude outsiders.

²⁷ Judith Butler recounts sharing a stage with Jacques Derrida in New York in 1993, in a brief private conversation, she leaned over to ask whether he felt he had to repay his debts, in the context of what fellow philosophers had freely offered him. 'My death?' he replied, 'no... your debts' corrected Butler, 'my death!' confirmed Derrida. In his later writing, Derrida conflated death and debt in the unreconcilable final accounting of a life. From *The London Review of Books* vol. 26 no.21 (2004).

²⁸ Ancient Light is a sign fixed to a building to preserve the right to sunlight under an easement in English property law dating to 1633.

²⁹ Duchamp, who may be regarded as the patriarch of text-based art, introduced a new and uneasy awareness that Art is a system determined by language, its meanings interpreted by consensus and not necessarily by any quality inherent in the work itself.

³⁰ The question of how to live a life that is true to oneself has been a preoccupation of philosophy for millennia. Aristotle's counsel to develop an honest, authentic self and nature, as opposed to a constant regard for how one is seen by others, has particular relevance in image-centred contemporary culture.

With its origins in the *sachplakats*³¹ of early 20th century Berlin, word-as-image (and letterforms as primary visual device) found new expression in revolutionary Russia and post WW1 Europe. In commercial production, designers - *Gerbrausgrafikers* - were charged with marking a break from the past with a confident, bold and essentially modern aesthetic. From the drawing boards and drafting offices of Marinetti and Depero's Italy, Piet Zwart and Theo van Doesburg's Netherlands, the Bauhaus of Lazlo-Moholy Nagy and Herbert Bayer and the studios of Hercz György and Lajos Kassák in Budapest, designs promoted the primacy of the word over all other content.

Typeface design as a mirror of society

New typefaces, underpinned by confident geometric certainties, signalled an optimistic future of technological progress and radically different societal structures. In Lazar (El) Lissitzky and the Stenberg brothers' reconstructed Russia a largely illiterate population were confronted by typographically energetic designs promoting (for the first time) books, the new mass media of cinema and consumer goods. Distilled into the strictures of Jan Tschichold's *Die Neue Typographie*³² this orthodoxy attracted its

³¹ In deliberate contrast to the languorous letterforms and whimsies of Art Nouveau, the designers Lucien Bernhard and Ernest Groussin established a bold, reductive style in the posters produced by the *Berliner Plakat* commercial studio in the 1900s. Bracingly modern and dynamic in tone, the designs asserted their place on the cluttered hoardings across the city.

³² The New Typography was featured in the 1925 issue of *Typographische Mitteilungen*, a Leipzig-based printers' trade journal guest edited by Tschichold. Three years later, van Doesburg issued a manifesto calling for a universal art of absolute clarity based on arithmetical standards. A progression of geometric sans serif typefaces - Akzidenz Grotesque, a utilitarian monoline typeface derived from late 19thc. designs, Futura (Paul Renner, 1927), Univers (Adrian Frutiger, 1954), Helvetica (Max Miedinger, 1957) culminated in Aldo Novarese's Microgramma (designed with Alessandro Butti) and Eurostile in the 1960s.

heretics,³³ explosions of unconventionally set type³⁴ produced by Dada, Futurist and Surrealist artists who sought to shatter the authoritative conventions of the grid.

The humanist san-serif variations produced by British type designers of the early 20th century, sought to embody the values of an emergent modern society in its graphemes, employing a degree of stroke modulation and proportion developed from their origins in Roman carved capital letters. Edward Johnston's Underground (or Railway) Alphabet,³⁵ commissioned in 1913 by the visionary Frank Pick, commercial manager of The Underground Electric Railways Company of London (later the London Passenger Transport Board and ultimately Transport for London), became one of the first applications of a corporate font, initially on printed posters and later in the enamel signage and roundels. With its close relations Gill Sans and Granby, it became

³³ Kurt Schwitters was both disciple and iconoclast. Running a commercially successful design company by day, his extraordinary alternative world of MERZ; publications, performances and constructions occupied much of his domestic time. Forced to flee his home in Hannover and later from Norway, he was buried in Ambleside, where he made his home after being liberated from internment as an enemy alien after the war. His gravestone carries the legend: Kurt Schwitters 1887-1948. Creator of Merz.

³⁴ Two examples of Dada and Futurist typesetting invite closer examination. Theo van Doesburg's poster from January 1923 advertising a *Dadamatinée* combines conventionally set quoin-locked type with free-form headlines at odd angles, possibly set in plaster on the press bed. Fillipo Marinetti's *Une Assemblée Tumultueuse. Sensibilité Numérique* (1919) cannot, in my view, have been produced by letterpress alone (despite this designation by the Metropolitan Museum in New York). More probably, individual letterpressed elements were collaged, and the result was reproduced as a line block, produced photographically, and printed as an illustration.

³⁵ I have been printing with large facsimile woodtype produced by Thomas Mayo and Co. for a memorial to Edward Johnston installed as part of the Farringdon Station refurbishment in 2019. Johnston's design, in ordinary and bold (later a condensed version for use on buses), was intended only for use in larger point sizes; below 48pt, Gill or Granby was substituted. The larger woodtype was manufactured by Robert DeLittle, the metal type by Stephenson Blake.



5.04 a



5.04 b



5.04 c

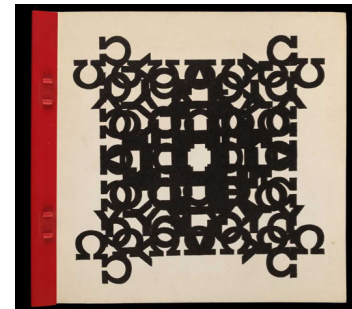
Modern medicine means the maintenance of good health and the prevention and early detection of disease. This is achieved by periodic medical examinations at Centres such as the new Finsbury Health Centre, where modern methods are used.

DESIGNED BY A.B.C.A. EXECUTED BY P.A.C.I. AD.

5.04 e



5.04 d



sem um numero
um numero
numero
zero
um
o
nu
mero
numero
um numero
um sem numero

5.04 f

5.04 Printed detail including Edward Johnston's Railway Alphabet lower case g. The woodtype is very large at nearly 80cm high, (a) part of a Russian Theatre poster used for gum Arabic printing, (b) Abram Games *Your Britain - Fight for it Now* showing the newly built Finsbury Health Centre. (c)

John Furnival in 2011 with *The Protestations* formed of hand drawn lettering in Indian ink on wooden panels, (d) and the cover of *Arlington - Une*, an exhibition with John Furnival, Ken Cox, Dom Sylvester Houard and Charles Verey at Arlington Mill, Gloucestershire, 1966. (e)

Augusto de Campos *Ficheiro*, circa 1956. (f)

the unifying sign language of rail,³⁶ bus and tube travel between the wars. Standing for progress and modernity, yet infused with the British qualities of restraint, reliability and reserve. I have included several examples of these typefaces on transport ephemera in the collages, readily perched from specialist collectors.

The clear speaking voice rendered into the letterforms that characterise this era, reflect the reassuring tone adopted by government in communicating with the public during the second world war. (It's hard not to hear BBC received pronunciation when one reads these typefaces, with its clipped phonemes underscoring the authority of The News). Alongside bulletins for radio and film, the Ministry of Information produced millions of printed posters and leaflets during the crisis. Campaigns focused on defence of the home front, food production and salvage, allied unity, our fighting forces and famous personalities. In June 1940, the terrifying prospect of invasion resulted in the printing and distribution of over fifteen million leaflets (every household received a copy within three days) addressing the imminent threat: *If the Invader Comes* was an unhappy compromise of instructions, oscillating between the patronising and the unachievable (farmers should continue to milk their cows; invading parachutists are powerless against any organised resistance.) The leaflet was not

³⁶ Eric Gill's sans-serif, developed from Johnson's Underground Alphabet, was released by the Monotype Corporation in 1928. It became the standard typeface of the London and North Eastern Railway, employed on the covers of Penguin paperbacks from 1935, and in Government publications produced by the newly re-constituted Ministry of Information during the Second World War.



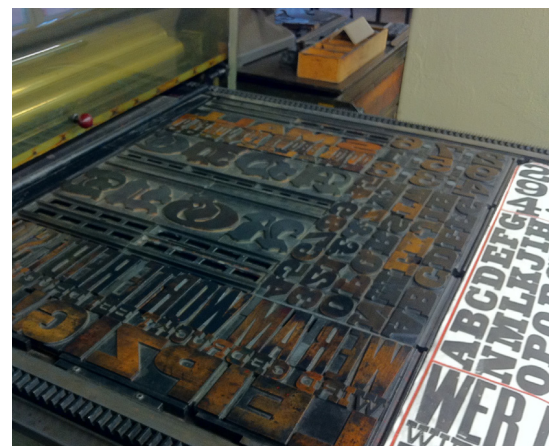
5.05 a



5.05 b



5.05 c



5.05 d

5.05 Tom Phillips *Berlin Wall with German Grass and Skies (first version)* 1973, postcard, (a) and *The Quest for Identity* 1974 collage on canvas. (b)

Detail of printed ephemera with a range of letterforms from Collage 8; BE. (c)

Woodtype on the press in the *Museum für Druckkunst*, Leipzig. (d)

well received,³⁷ despite its commanding headline set in Gill Sans Display Extra Bold.

More effective were the motivational posters of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs, which aimed to empower our fighting forces with the additional weapon of ambition. The coloured lithographs designed by Frank Newbold, Abram Games³⁸ and others, depicted an idealised rural landscape and a better future worth fighting for. Posters for civilian use included, among many other incitements, encouragement to make-do-and-mend, to produce more food, to be mindful of careless talk and for women to join the labour force in the factories. The images were hand-drawn, complete with the lettering, rendered as colour separations for lithography - the bold headlines in letterforms derived from drafting instruments rather than printing types, and amenable to rendering in perspective and distortion for emphasis. These letterforms are the visual imprint of the dominant paradigm of that era, charged with the optimism of ultimate victory, an invocation of patriotic will.

³⁷ *A Publishing and Communications History of the Ministry of Information, 1939-45*, a major research project at King's College London, has made available extensive material in digital form from Home Intelligence Reports and Wartime Social Services and other primary material from the National Archives and the Imperial War Museum. These provide a useful insight into the efficacy of wartime propaganda. Accessible at <https://moidigital.ac.uk/>

³⁸ Three versions of Games' *Your Britain: Fight for It Now* were produced - the first draft depicting a bomb site enclosing a stick-figure boy with rickets was deemed by Churchill to be too demoralising, and by the ABCA to be too socialist. Subsequent re-drawings removed the figure and overlaid a bright modernist facade on the dark ruins of war. Games went on to design material for the Festival of Britain and was active into the 1970s.

Type and text based art practices

Early 20th century typographic conventions and their attendant upheavals informed the Concrete Poetry movement that emerged in 1950s Latin America, and later across the Western world. The visual arrangement of words as important as the associative meaning, if not more so.³⁹ Often produced by cheap and accessible technologies (including the typewriter, hand-drawn lettering, photocopying and the relatively new Letraset),⁴⁰ works were deliberately modest in scale and democratic in their distribution; convenient to send in the mail as affordable postcards, small pamphlets and broadsides. Private presses and kitchen-table-top artists and poets produced a steady stream of publications, exploring the shape and form of language, resonant linguistic expression, visualised as a typographic effect. A loose collaborative network promoted a postwar spirit of internationalism, optimism and counter-cultural communication across political and social divides. In grass roots affiliations including Noigandres in São Paulo, Fluxus in (mostly) Europe, Art

³⁹ There are historical precedents for typesetting in unusual forms, for example, Lawrence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristan Shandy, Gentlemen*, published in 1759, contains several capricious typographic innovations - paragraphs consisting entirely of asterisks, recto and verso pages printed with black solids, numerous lengthy dashes and curving lines populate the text.

⁴⁰ Originally, a wet transfer system, the company developed a dry transfer system in the early 60s. Waterslide transfer technologies had been in use since the 1860s; however, the revolutionary Type Transfer System gave the commercial artist access to hundreds of typefaces which could be easily rubbed down in position for camera-ready artwork at the drawing board. Previously, captions for layout would have necessitated a type mark up, conventional printing on a press and the resulting proof (powdered with French chalk to prevent smudging) affixed to the artwork using cow gum. Letraset cut both time and cost, and increased the choice of typeface available beyond most typesetters' holdings. In addition, fashionable fonts could be quickly produced: the rare *Countdown and Data '70* 'computer' typefaces are good examples of *Letragraphica* specials. Dry transfer lettering was also produced for non-Latin markets; in the desert city of Yazd in Iran, I found a desiccated display of Farsi typefaces in a stationery shop, unusable and worthless. I bought the entire stock.

& Language in England, the Gloucestershire Group⁴¹ (Gloop), Bosch+Bosch in Subotica, and Collective Actions in Moscow work was produced in print, performance and film which challenged the *madeness*⁴² of language, and its instrumentalisation for ideological purposes.

Nearly 50 years ago, I bought a postcard of Tom Phillips's *Berlin Wall with German Grass and Skies (first version 1973)* (fig. 5.05 p.191). The gouache painting is composed of 24 squares arranged on a grid, framed by a border of stencil lettering; eight pointillistic squares each of sky and grass (one from Goethe's garden), themselves reproduced from German postcards, enclose a further eight squares depicting different surfaces of the west side of the 'antifascist defence wall' built in DDR Germany in June 1961. Collage-like in its fragmentary structure, the work appeared to me at the time (and still to some extent does) to contain all that was needed to interpret this monumental expression of state power, at least from the privileged advantage of those outside its

⁴¹ My personal introduction to this revelatory world was initially through my tutor at Bath Academy of Art, John Furnival, with whom I later worked at his house in Rooksmoor near Stroud. John produced an extraordinary body of work in his lifetime, mostly hand-drawn lettering made meticulously with a Rotring pen; he also editioned screen printed, lithograph and letterpress publications under Openings Press, whilst maintaining a lively Mail Art correspondence with artists across the globe. John spoke fluent French and Russian, passable German and Italian and had a working knowledge of Latin and Greek. His work often included trans-linguistic wordplays, puns and double meanings.

⁴² Again, in his lecture *L'ordre du Discourse* delivered at The Collège de France in 1970, Foucault reminds us that language never reveals truth through transparency of meaning, but transcends its immediate function to evoke the unimaginable and impossible, creating spaces where extraordinary associations can occur, leading to unconventional understandings and unexpected possibilities.

containment.⁴³ In his *Here We Exemplify* (1967 to 68) and *Thesis As Object* (1969), the ‘message digests itself’. Employing the device that the title and techniques of execution become the picture itself, overlaid stencil letters in four sizes are infilled with colour-coded paint where they intersect, and erased where they do not. The resulting image hovers on the edge of legibility and comprehension,⁴⁴ revealing to persistent viewing the method of its making, hermetic, unassailable and absurdly finalised.

In commercial typesetting, new technologies prefigured the digital age, the brief era of photosetting⁴⁵ (quickly superseded by the first digital typesetters) imitated the optical precision of the printer’s proof but also allowed the possibility of distortions and blurring of letterforms only previously available to the commercial artists through hand-drawn rendering and airbrush shading. The counterculture of the 1960s found its typographic iconography in the hallucinogenic distortions of hand-cut silkscreen stencils, coupled with new fluorescent ink technologies, boldly announcing its distance from the regularising grid of modernism. By the early 1970s the graphic designer (as the profession was now called)

⁴³ Phillips comments in relation to collage and analysis that his work is informed by ‘Coleridge’s idea of keeping the greatest number of things suspended in the unity, the greatest of diversity possible within a single thing: there, after all, lies the *Imago Mundi*.’ From *Works, Texts to 1974*.

⁴⁴ A tapestry version of this technique was used in *Una Selva Oscura* (Dante’s Dark Wood), which arose from Phillips’s epic reworking of *The Inferno*, and also occurs in his earlier work *A Humument* - a reworking of a Victorian novel excavating a meta-narrative within the text.

⁴⁵ Photosetting aided the paradigm shift in technology from metal typesetting to digital code, although early machines such as the Lumitype (early 1950s) were basically a projection apparatus. Commercial printing was converting to offset lithography, and by the 1960s, software was developed to produce computer code from typed paper tape. Photosetters such as the Linotron produced film for the direct production of the lithoplate, making hot metal setting obsolete. Modern plates are produced directly from a computer with no film intermediary stage (CTP). I utilise unexposed or plates containing errors as substrates for some collages.

could start to envisage a design process in which multiple variations of both letterform and typesetting could be achieved quickly and economically - it was possible to infinitely extend and condense characters by percentage, to kern, scale and copy-fit more precisely than ever before. In the flickering blueish light of the early monitor, the lo-res letterform was suspended before limitless permutations. Design became not the process of creating a prefigured markup based on skills and experience that anticipated the arrival of the printer's proof,⁴⁶ but a decision to fix the elements in *that* one version of innumerable possibilities, and press 'save'. The anarchic contains several examples of early computer lo-res typesetting.

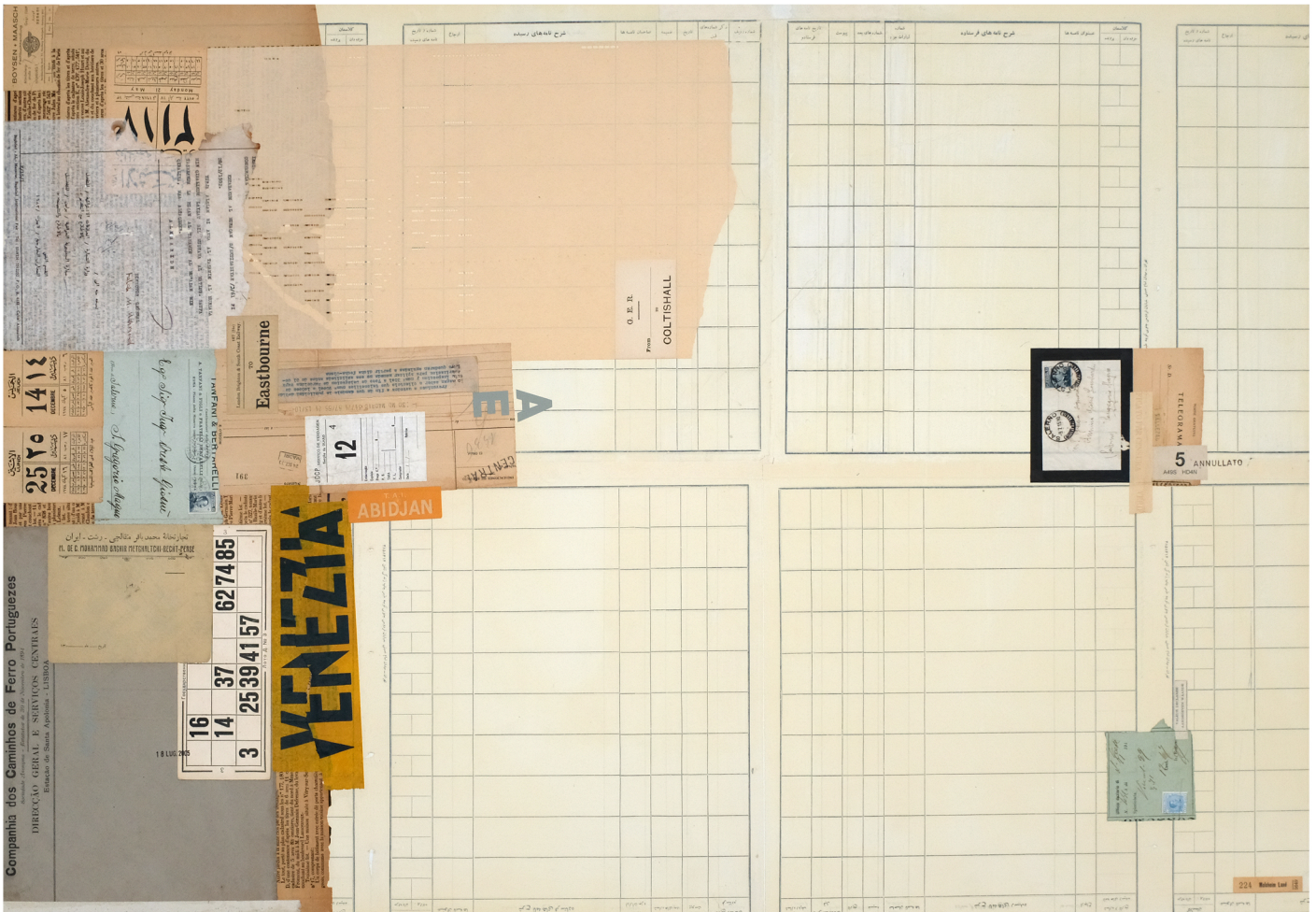
As deconstructionists recalibrated history, society and culture, so the energies of Punk, Lo-fi and Grunge abraded the optimistic letterforms of the first half of the 20th century into grimy streetworn mutations, plastered across subway trains, T-shirts and human skin.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ The arrival of the proof from the printers was a much-anticipated moment in design studios before the computer, being the first time the result of painstaking artwork was seen in printed form. Nearly always requiring some correction or modification, the final proof was eventually initialled *BAT* to authorise the edition, a legacy from the Parisian lithographic ateliers' *bon à tirer*, designating a pull rather than an impression.

⁴⁷ In an interview I conducted with the British type designer Jonathan Barnbrook in 2008, he outlined the unintended destination of a font once released for commercial use. Mason (originally called Manson after the American serial killer but changed on the advice of its distributor Emigré) was designed to '*express extreme opposite emotions - love and hate, beauty and ugliness.*' It has found a home (alongside variations of Blackletter) in Goth, heavy metal, biker culture and, (unfortunately), the Alt-right.

These rich legacies⁴⁸ of typographic innovation, experimentation and subversion, in both the field of fine art and commercial design, have served to establish the territory that the typographic collages occupy today. The collages, in particular numbers 1, 2 and 10 (pp.24, 55 & 198), are populated with a rich typographic fauna, wild, tamed and feral. Some inclusions are invested with specific meaning, some specifically mean nothing, others suggestive of specificity; these large and small shapes and fragments distribute their sonic resonance across the visual field, accessible, mysterious and volatile.

⁴⁸ In my case, the legacy is literally so. Arriving as a student at Bath Academy of Art on the Visual Communication course under the directorship of Benno Zehnder in the 1970s, *Die Neue Typographie* was still canonical. Benno was wise enough, in the spirit of the times, to know that this was both a reassuring dogma and something that could be used to react against. He had attended the *Kunstgewerbeschule Luzern* in the 1960s, closely associated with the Swiss International Typographic Style formulated by Joseph Müller-Brockmann at the Zurich University of the Arts and Armin Hoffman in Basle. The progenitors of Swiss Design, Theo Belma and Max Bill, had studied typography at the Bauhaus and retained the philosophical aim to achieve objective clarity rather than individualistic style-imprinted communication. A small part of me belongs to that continuum.



Collage 10: VENEZIA 150 x 65 cm.

Letterpress printed ephemera, screen printing, relief printing and rubberstamp inclusions, perforated pianola roll. Formed on a surface of old letterpress account books from Ferdosi Street in Tehran, the assembly includes Egyptian calendar leaves, Italian and Iranian envelopes, traditional black-edged letter of condolence envelope, fragments of French Adjudication posters, documents from the abandoned Iranian embassy in Berlin, British railway luggage destination labels, date stamps, part of a Spanish telegram, a Portuguese lotto-card, German postage labels and a facsimile trunk label.



Collage 11: CHROMA

85 x 65 cm. A speculative composition exploring the fugitive and mutable characteristics of specialised ink and materials. Printed areas using thermochromic ink are positive and negative printed at different temperature thresholds, and stencilling used to deposit greater amounts of reactive pigments. Very thin gum Arabic printing has been used to near invisible effect. These results are evaluated in sections 1, 2 4 and the conclusion of the thesis.

Section 6

Being and Things

In this section: I present findings from the philosophical and practical methodologies examined in sections 1 to 5. I propose a methodology for time spent working in the studio during the composition process, whereby I hold in balance all the multiple resonances and considerations outlined above, attuned to the qualities of *dingewollen* and *graphophonic* affect. I analyse what optimal conditions align in making the work, how it develops alongside my wider sense of being-in-the-world.

I propose a phenomenology of the studio, whereby the successful process of assembling the collages depends on a set of critical physical and mental conditions, as well as an acute sensitivity to the legacies and potential of the materials I am using. In so doing I draw on the notions of innate energies which inhabit non-living matter, as proposed by New Materialist theorists, and the entanglement of human and non-human worlds proposed by Donna Haraway and others.¹ These creative procedures require an interior state of concentrated thought and action whilst

¹ Haraway's *speculative fabulation* indicates a mode of creativity and a way of describing all of the wild facts that will not hold still. In *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) she defines speculative fabulation as 'a mode of attention, theory of history, and a practice of worlding.'

acknowledging the coalition between my intentions and the components themselves. I show how these phases of creative work are characterised, being brief in duration but resulting from weeks and months of preparation. I detail the nature of the decisive stages of finalisation and attunement to the works becoming complete.

I analyse the processes and techniques of advanced creative composition and how the criteria for including items have been refined. I expand on an analysis of the histories, compositional and elemental properties of individual artefacts, theorise the invisible qualities associated with materials, and further consider the notion of absence as indicative of a form of presence.

A methodology of synergetic working with the materials is provided, including the role of intuition and introspection in the creative process.

Artefacts entering the relative turbulence² of the anarchic become subject to a further intense process of scrutiny. They arrive from their many origins, trailing their histories, expectant of re-imagination. They are also undergoing a transformative process of being 'owned', belonging, for the time being, to me, becoming possessions. The precarious economy of their use and exchange value is in flux. Any, or all of the objects are potential candidates as elements within the typographic collages. However, the visual field that I intend to create is uncrowded, deliberately sparse in large areas of composition - a process of reduction as much as accretion. From the thousands of individual items assembled in the collection, only a few dozen will arrive on the surface of an individual collage. Their inclusion is the result of careful consideration.

A range of criteria and methods of analysis are employed in initial selection, and suitability for inclusion. Each item is appraised for (a) its material properties, (b) the specifics of its function, (c) its prehistory leading to this point of existence as an element of an artwork, and (d) the particular visual qualities that it exhibits. Individual objects are no longer simply themselves, but are to be grouped into proximate or dispersed arrangements in the collage, both retaining and discarding their distinctiveness, as in the melding of notes in a chord. In musical composition, harmonic or discordant passages can be constructed and areas of

² Turbulent, in that most objects have arrived from a place of stasis, undisturbed, in many cases, for decades, and are reactivated within the anarchic.

visual intensity contrasted with a relative calm. The creative process is often described as intuitive; however, I find this insufficient, inviting the challenge of a fuller understanding, one of the aims of this section.

An embodied ontology of the studio

In most cases the completion of a series (I always work on several at once) of collages proceeds best from a distinct set of conditions: (a) sufficient material that meet the specific criteria,³ (b) unencumbered passages of time in the studio, (c) a large range of printmaking materials and equipment to hand, and (d) a mental state conducive allowing the work to proceed both successfully and with difficulty. Many artists will be familiar with the recognition, achieved through experience, of knowing what each day, or passage of each day, is best suited to in terms of what may be achieved. There are alignments of conditions that lead to an optimal creative state: my mental state (alert, calm, expectant, focussed), how I feel physically (well in my body, rested, energetic, well-fed, metabolically stable),⁴ the physical state of the studio (plenty of space, tidy, organised, clean, warm and well lit), time available (uninterrupted days, no pressures on schedule or

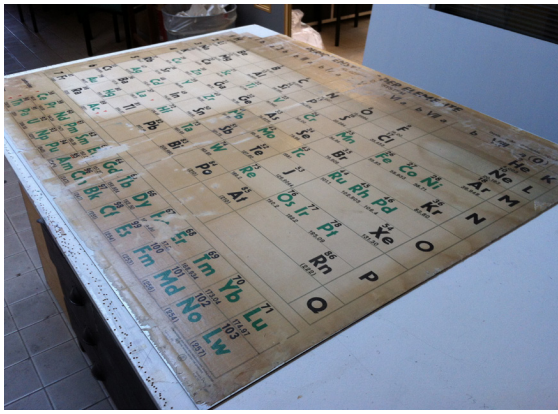
³ These criteria are detailed below. I have developed a set of qualities that an artefact must possess to 'qualify'. Some individual items are more highly prized than others, a mixture of aesthetics, component materials, type inclusions, previous function and relative scarcity. The Russian alphabet and number wheels in Collages 7 & 8 (pp.139 & 173) are an example of 'high value' items according to this speculative taxonomy.

⁴ Being able to know how I am feeling, and consequently which of the many tasks involved in making the collages is most appropriate to that passage of time, can be the most significant thing to recognise of all. In particular, the final stages of the collage when things are irretrievably attached to the surface require me to be both very focused and decisive. These phases are often characterised by very rapid working after many hours of careful preparatory work.

impending distractions), and an acute awareness that this moment or time is for this task and that for another (mixing colours, preparing paper, rolling ink, arranging compositions, reviewing progress and finally glueing down all have their particular time).

In the initial stages of starting a series, I find it necessary to embark on a ritual of organising, cleaning and arranging the studio in which I am working until the environment feels ready.⁵ During this preparatory phase, I attempt to empty my imagination of any pre-figuring of how the work will look, even in its initial stages, and to dispel the ghost-memories of previous working. In the mundane maintenance of the workspace, the sweeping, wiping, sharpening and oiling of tools and equipment, I attempt to hold something apart - a mental and physical space of possibility, a particular anticipatory way of being. I endeavour to make the studio as organised as possible, visually and audibly quiet, uncluttered, orderly and waiting. It can feel like a stage that has been set for action, a room before the guests arrive, the moment before something important begins. A sense of conviviality characterises these periods of work, I feel I am living with and in the collection. This is not to say that these actions are an attempt to impose calm - rather the opposite - these strategies

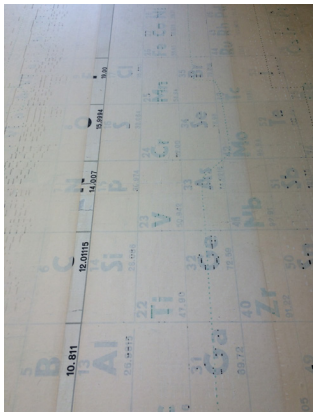
⁵ Since I've had my own purpose-built studio in which to work, this process has become further ritualised, taking several days to get everything in order, ready to start work. In the many temporary studios that I have worked in or constructed in different countries around the world, I have been constrained by the conditions in which I find myself, but the necessity of a preparatory phase of cleaning and tidying has always been seen as a necessary first stage. It is not just the studio which is being prepared, but a deliberate interior process of clarity and anticipation.



6.01 a



6.01 c



6.01 b



6.01 d



6.01 ef



6.01 g

6.01 Initial stages of composition: grounds of a German periodic table of elements (a) Iranian ledgers, pianola sheets and poster fragments (b), and partially occluded by perforated paper overlays at the next stage. (c)

Sorting and making selections of elements with potential for inclusion, (d e) including black-edged Italian 19thc. mourning stationary used in the case of a death to convey news or condolences. (f)

Dispersed elements exhibiting *shi*, or beneficial compositional structure, detail of collage 7: 3OE (second state). (g)

of reduction deliberately amplify the energy of the anarchic, an involuntary crackle and hum of expectation (fig. 6.01 p.205).

Once the studio is 'set' I will retrieve individual and groups of artefacts from the collection, mindful of their associative and particular qualities. Some items will be retrieved only to be returned to the drawer or box within the anarchic, replaced by an alternative selection, or reconsidered after an interval of time and retrieved once more. These compositions are speculative:⁶ they are arranged in temporary cardboard trays, unattached to one another or any substrate. They are fluid, unstable and indefinite, latent mosaic congregations of raw matter.⁷ In these provisional works, I am alert to Bennett's notion of ad-hoc groupings of non-human objects that function together in affective ways despite their internal dissonance. Drawing on Spinoza's concept of *Conatus*, she describes assemblages as living confederations operating with agency distributed across a field of dynamic interactions. In addition, she describes qualities of discarded

⁶ Françoise Julien expands on the Chinese concept of 是 (*shi*) in *The Propensity of Things: Towards a History of Efficacy in China* (1999). With its origin in inexplicably advantageous military strategy, the concept encompasses the energy (or *élan*) inherent to a specific arrangement of things. 'The kind of potential that originates not in human initiative but instead results from the very disposition of things.' *Shi* describes the dynamic force emanating from the complete configuration rather than from any individual element within it.

⁷ In thinking about the qualities of matter, Spinoza distinguishes things that are neither *Deus sive Natura* (God or Nature), and proposes an ontological vision encompassing *modes* of a common substance. Composed of a mosaic of interrelated parts (some of which come from 'elsewhere'), these modes form alliances and enter assemblages - they are modified by their interactions within the whole. The Roman poet Lucretius, identifying mosaicism as an essential quality of things, reminds us there is not 'anything which is not created from well-mingled seed.' From *De Rerum Natura* (50 BCE).

objects, shimmering between debris and value, both something to be ignored and worthy of our attention.⁸

The anarchivite is largely comprised of objects with specific qualities, produced by print processes and having little residual use or commercial exchange value, the detritus of obsolete communication technologies. Pre-digital paper ephemera originating in the 19th and early 20th century, was produced with manufacturing processes which were relatively easy to understand; mechanisms and technologies of iron, steel, lead and wood, compounds of organic origin, plant and animal-based oils, varnishes and inks, and the ever-present trace of the worker, annotator or official. These artefacts are readily accessed due to their pre-synthetic⁹ means of manufacture, we can see what they are made of, understand (although the anarchivite disrupts that understanding) what they are now, and predict what they will eventually become. They are the tangible evidence of human-nature transactions in distinct contrast to the desolation of an

⁸ From *Vibrant Matter, Chapter 1, The Force of Things*, which analyses the concept of ‘the out-side’. Whilst acknowledging the considerable contribution of Bennett’s theories, I stop short of embracing her (and Latour’s) concept of *actants* for the purposes of this thesis.

⁹ These technologies remain rooted in the lineage of transmuting the natural into the cultural, as proposed in the theoretical foundation of modern anthropology. Post-digital cultures have become increasingly distant from their organic origins, with incomprehensible materials and technologies deeply entwined with everyday life. Termed *The Great Acceleration* by the International Geosphere-Biosphere Program (IGBP), 24 socio-economic and earth system trends from 1750 to the present demonstrate synchronous acceleration from the mid-20th century to the present day - a single human lifetime. The clear signal is that the Earth’s system processes are now driven by human consumption and production, with an ever-increasing rate of exponential growth. From: <https://futureearth.org/> which replaces the IGBP website.

ontology formulated by the algorithm or data-point,¹⁰ with its attendant anxieties of scale.

Synergetic working: intuition and attunement

In choosing to work with these kinds of objects, I acknowledge a form of nostalgia,¹¹ perhaps seated in a naive childhood quest to understand the world as it was composed in order to gain a sense of security. However the choice is not solely rooted in yearning for a past, (although I do notice how quickly I will discard any ephemera printed after about 1960); it is because these materials yield to scrutiny in a specific way. Low-grade paper (conspicuously composed of vegetable fibres, sometimes visible to the naked eye) will retain printing ink in a particular way,¹² most pre-digital ephemera will accept new ink onto its old surface compliantly. These materials respond in an obedient manner to alteration in that visual results can to some degree be predicted when printed, torn, or otherwise altered through printmaking processes. This is to discern a paradox between the unruly nature of the anarchive and how some materials ‘behave’ themselves, and can be relied upon to produce the effect required. Letterpress printing does not conceal the inherent characteristics of its means of production,

¹⁰ Lev Manovich describes the contemporary world ‘*as appearing to us as an endless and unstructured collection of images, texts, and other data records.*’ In contrast to the dominant Enlightenment symbolic forms of linear perspective, branches and hierarchies, *Database as a Symbolic Form* (1998) models the ontology of the computer onto human experience, endlessly searchable and resistant to narrative.

¹¹ The German concept of *Sehnsucht*, with its implied qualities of *longing*, might be more appropriate to describe what I mean.

¹² Some very brittle posters within the collection benefit from the preservative qualities of the ink impregnated into the paper, the white unprinted areas falling away to dust on handling, leaving the letter forms in ink as fragile remainders. See illustration 2.07 p.75.

discernible in the minute deboss of the characters on the printing paper, the uncomfortable kerning of headlines,¹³ the difficulties of mitring rules in corners and the cloudy glaze of the ink surface.¹⁴ These objects hold a visible record of their origins, allowing access to their interiority.

My own fanciful taxonomy of groupings within the anarchive, include: *Things Relating To Arrivals and Departures*; tickets, documents of embarkation, luggage labels,¹⁵ and telegrams, nearly always relating to a life changing event - births, marriages, deaths, *Specks in the Panoptic Eye*; identity cards, police and medical files, records of attendance and membership, certificates of achievement, certification stamps etc, *Final Reckonings*; ledgers, account books, *faturi*, bills of exchange etc, *Absences and Presences*; old photographs

¹³ From time to time, a font of larger-sized woodtype will include letters that have been cut to allow individual characters to be more closely spaced, particularly where the combination of letterforms creates large areas of blank space, as between a capital L and T, or F and A. I have several examples in the collection.

¹⁴ An entry in the *Diario della Stamperia di Ripoli*, a Florentine convent printshop, lists the ingredients purchased for making ink in the 15th century. The convent bought lamp black (refined soot), linseed oil, turpentine, resin and linseed varnish, solid or liquid according to the season. Turpentine was heated until all of the volatile content had evaporated, leaving rosin, which gives body to the ink and prevents spread and haloing around the printed area; too much rosin, however, will produce an excessively tacky ink that can cause the paper to dry prematurely and risk tearing the print. From Turin-based ink manufacturer Reinol, *Writing And Printing Inks Through The Ages* (2018).

¹⁵ Old suitcases accrete a history of their travels in the many labels pasted onto the surface. Destinations, instructions for stowage (*Not Wanted On Voyage* being common), cautions to porters (*Heavy, Special Train*), and the more recent *THRU* and *LAST BAG* keep close company with hotel stickers and owners' names - this last frequently in stencil lettering. I have reproduced destination labels for use in the collages using historically accurate woodtype, as in Collage 2, NAPOLI. The suitcase itself becomes emblematic of departures (and of lethal termination in the camps), a notion explored in Frances Stonor Saunders's essay 'The Suitcase' *London Review of Books* vol. 42 no.15, 2020, documenting the complexities and imperatives of life in interwar Eastern Europe. I am reminded also of Benjamin, on his last desperate flight from France over the mountains to Portbou, refusing to abandon a 'heavy black suitcase' that he was so ill-equipped to carry owing to his poor health.

and film, metal and paper stencils, punched data cards, fugitive materials which change under certain conditions, *Elemental Echoes*; chemical substances,¹⁶ the essential components of compounds and mixtures, and *Enchanted Vagabonds (Unclassified)*; those objects which elude convenient labelling and possess their unruly characteristics, mutable and quietly powerful.¹⁷

In this last category, some artefacts possess a metaphysical dark enchantment, and by their potency exclude themselves from inclusion in a collage; they simply possess too much power. I have been using the reverse side of old maps as substrates, those manufactured in Germany in the late 19thc. were frequently backed with grey linen, now faded. I recently bought several from a dealer in Hamburg, a job lot of unspecified locations. Near the bottom of the pile I turned one over, Number 17, relating to the towns and villages North East of Munich, to reveal its label: *Dachau*. The finely engraved outlines of fields, woods and hills (they are very good maps) delineate the course of the river Isar,

¹⁶ Primo Levi concludes his book *The Periodic Table* (1975) with a neat typographic trick. The final chapter considers the chemistry of carbon, lying inert for millions of years, bound to atoms of oxygen and calcium in the form of limestone. The key element of living substances, he charts the journey of a single atom released through the smoke of the limekiln, inhaled momentarily by a soaring falcon, brushing a leaf in a vineyard and penetrating it, fixed by a ray of the sun. Now a component of a molecule of glucose, the carbon atom becomes an element within a grape, then wine, ingested and expelled in the breath of the drinker. Airborne once again, the atom becomes part of the cellulose within a tree trunk, is ingested by a moth, carried through micro-organisms in the process of decay, and ultimately drunk by the writer in a glass of milk, entering his bloodstream, and into a nerve cell in the brain. The nerve cell is part of those employed in the act of writing the full stop at the end of the last sentence in the book, guiding the hand to impress on the paper this dot, here, this one - a speck of carbon-black ink.

¹⁷ A blue ticket retrieved from the top pocket of a dress suit belonging to a deceased American relative shows he was sitting in seat 750 in the Boston Garden on the evening of the 7th of November 1960. The occasion was a reception for Senator John F. Kennedy. The following day, a Tuesday, Kennedy was elected president in a victory against Richard Nixon.



6.02 a

6.02 b

6.02 c



6.02 d



6.02 e



6.02 f

6.02 An Italian sign (that was nailed on a wall) asserting that it is forbidden to fix anything to the wall. (a) An Italian *Biglietto D'Imbarco* from New York to Napoli in 1933, possibly a returning *emigrante* from the Southern Italian diaspora. The one way ticket cost \$107, a not inconsiderable sum for passenger Francesco Ragone, occupation: labourer. (b)

A label from a ledger in the port of Ithaca, Greece recording losses at sea. (c)

Stencilled numbers and labels affixed to baggage, (d e) the 4090 is on a suitcase belonging to Herr Joseph Beuys. The orange label informs us the suitcase is bound for Wellington, New Zealand. (f)

flowing south towards the Danube, the railway line already inscribed in the landscape, unknowing of its lethal future. The map will be used, but turned face down to the collage surface, its sinister charge concealed (fig. 6.03 p.213).

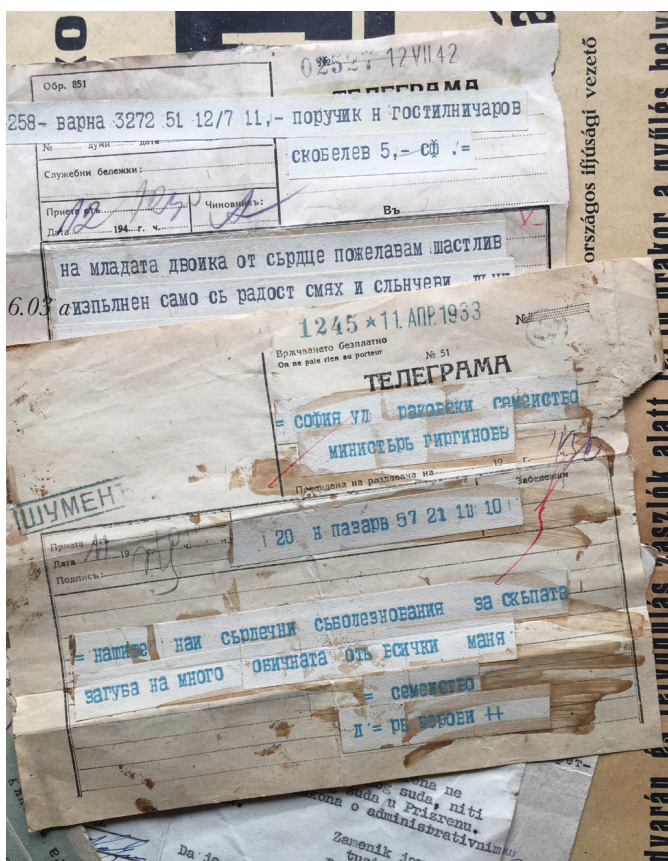
In working with these historical objects and in the manufacture of new printed materials with which to work, I return again and again, to a consideration of their elemental properties, alongside their speculative qualities. The realms of organic chemistry and particle physics, however dimly perceived from the perspective of art practice, at least offer useful revelations in the consideration of what materials are, how they are constructed and how they will behave. Metal type is an alloy of lead, tin and antimony, cast from moulds and matrices of copper or brass which have been struck with the punchcutters hand-carved steel character.¹⁸ Wood type (at half the cost of producing metal type) is best machined or hand-cut from close-grained hardwoods for both crispness of form and durability - beech, maple, and cherry are common. Woodtype from poorer areas, particularly in larger sizes, is often cut from less durable wide pine boards.¹⁹ Traditional pre-chemical black printing ink, as we have seen, relies for its opacity, ease of transfer from character to paper and legibility of the finished

¹⁸ Typesetting machines employ a brass matrix stamped with punches machined from large-scale drawings using pantographs. These scaled-down characters allow for a much greater accuracy in the smaller point sizes than the traditional method of hand-carving the same-size punches, although highly specialised master punchcutters are still able to achieve this level of detail.

¹⁹ Jobbing printers would occasionally find themselves short of a letter, necessitating a quick home-made remedy. Fonts of old wood type sometimes turn up an O doctored into a C, or a Q dismembered for the same purpose. It is not uncommon to find a hand-cut letter on the back of a similar-width character as a make-do-and-mend substitute for a missing character.



6.03 a



6.03 c



6.03 b

6.03 A canvas-backed 19thc. map of Dachau bought with a job lot of other maps of the countryside around Munich (a) and the reverse side used as a background grid for collages. (b) A telegram of condolence sent to Alexander Angelov Girginov in Sofia in 1933. (c)

impression on lampblack,²⁰ combined with organic oils and resins. The polysaccharide cellulose from which much paper is made is the most abundant organic polymer on Earth.²¹ These elements, compounds and molecular structures combine to give the printed artefact material form.

An example of the embedded properties I seek to excavate can be found in a detailed forensic examination of a telegram I acquired recently from a dealer in Bulgaria. A scrap of yellowing paper, a process produced by glucose molecules within the cellulose fibres absorbing moisture from the atmosphere, initiating a reaction of acid hydrolysis, brings an urgent message. The paper is not designed to endure,²² corroding lignin from the trees from which the cellulose was derived is still active, and the paper's alum-rosin sizing (added to the surface to reduce absorbency and minimise

²⁰ The optical density of black ink relies to a great extent on this commonly occurring material - it is essentially soot. Low-grade inks and polishes could be readily manufactured at source by grinding the powder collected by door-to-door itinerants. Higher quality powders were obtained by the controlled burning of resinous woods in terracotta and (later) copper retorts, a series of ascending chambers collecting finer and finer smoke particles. Advances in grinding technology in the late 19thc. produced inks of increased plasticity compatible with the accelerating speeds of mechanised presses. Modern inks are derived from carbon black, produced from tar. Lampblack is lightfast, chemically inert, and contains no substances that can damage the substrate to which it is applied.

The earliest recorded ink manufacturer in London was a company founded by William Blackwell in King Street in 1754. (From the authoritative *Annals of Printing* (1966) by W. Turner Berry and H.E. Pool.) By 1818, ink making had assumed an industrial scale in France, with the founding of an ink factory by Pierre Lorilleux, printer at the *Imprimerie Royale* in Paris. I still buy Charbonnel's (founded in 1862) excellent *Noir Taille Doux*, sold as an etching ink, but very suitable for hand-printing wood type with the addition of plate oil.

²¹ Before the middle of the 19thc. most papers were made with cotton and rag waste, producing paper made of long fibres with great strength and durability. Cellulose fibre paper has a much shorter life and is more challenging to conserve in archival storage.

²² I have found that often paper made hundreds of years ago is in better condition than 50-year-old paper, already well on the way to complete disintegration.

the bleeding of ink) generates a slow secretion of sulphuric acid. On the original blank telegram form (type No. 51) a letterpress printed grid of double-hairline rules²³ frame rows of dotted rules (dot leaders in typesetting) indicating where the message is to be pasted. The letterpress ink has bled through the paper and can be seen in reverse on the back of the form. Coming over the wire from an indecipherable origin to Sofia, a Cyrillic printing telegraph²⁴ generated the message on paper tape in an indelible spirit-based blue ink, applied to the brass character wheel by a saturated felt pad. The tape, made of stronger cotton rag fibres and consequently less yellowed than the form, has been cut into sections by the receiving telegraph operator and pasted down with animal glue²⁵ (now aged to a dark sienna-brown), revealing in the marks of the paste brush the rapid movement of their hand. As a method of saving a few seconds, the essence of speed essential, the operator has applied the paste not onto the strips of tape but the form itself, and rather wildly. Rubber stamped *No. 1245, 11th*

²³ The lightest weight rule in typesetting is the hairline rule, followed by the half-point rule, the one-point rule, and further variations increasing in increments of (usually) one point. The most commonly-used rule is the half-point rule. From https://printwiki.org/Rule_Line

²⁴ These printing telegraphs, such as those built by Siemens & Halske in St. Petersburg, had a black-and-white keyboard layout similar to that on a piano; when a key was pressed at the point of origin, it caused the corresponding letter to print at the receiving end. A 56-character type wheel at the sending end was synchronised to run at the same speed and to maintain the same position as a similar wheel at the receiving end, an early example of a synchronous data transmission system.

²⁵ Animal glue refers broadly to all glues made from the skins, bones, sinews and other abattoir and tannery waste. Collagen, a complex insoluble protein, is hydrolysed through boiling in water into a soluble jelly, dried into sheets or cakes, broken up by machine and sold as flake glue, which is made up at the point of use by redissolving in hot water. The surface of the telegram attests to the slaughterhouses of 1930s Bulgaria.

*April 1933*²⁶ (a diminutive Soviet star between these numbers in a slightly darker blue) and bearing three rapid initials in red and black ink and pencil, two more stamps (55 and another too faint to read) and a final red tick confirming the address to which it is to be sent, the message is complete. Folded three times and secured by a glued paper tab, the telegram was dispatched to Alexander Angelov Girginov in Sofia, conveying the heartfelt condolences of the Berovi family on the loss of his beloved *Маня*. Girginov was a Democratic Party Minister for the Interior in the Government of the Peoples Bloc from 1931 to 1934 and an active opponent of Communist rule after World War II. Persecuted by the regime, he was later imprisoned, deprived of basic necessities and unable to communicate with his son. In 1952, he was deported to Belene Labour camp,²⁷ where he died a year later. There is now a memorial plaque on the facade of his house at 120 Rakovski Street in Sofia, the address to which the telegram was delivered. He held this fragment of paper in his hands that evening, as I do now. In a remote sense I am ‘being with’ Alexander Girginov across distance and time²⁸ (fig. 6.03c, p.213).

²⁶ The 11th of April 1933 was a Tuesday. On the Friday before, a thousand miles away in Berlin, the first laws were enacted against the employment of Jews. On the 11th, an amendment was added excluding those with one Aryan parent or grandparent.

²⁷ The island of Persin, on which the camp was built, stands in the River Danube opposite the village of Belene. In 1949, the *Trudovo-vazpitatelno obshtezhitie* (TVO or labour camp) was built to imprison those who, for ‘political, security or other reasons, could not be taken to court’. The camp was converted to a prison for convicted criminals in 1953 and remains one of the main employers in the town to this day.

²⁸ Heidegger’s concept of *Mitsein*, ‘being with’, acknowledges a fundamental structure of human relationships which allows us to feel connected to others when not in the same physical space or time. The individual artefacts I use to construct the collages often promote this sense of intimate personal connection to individuals, places and events in the past.

So much may be said to inhabit this ‘document of civilisation’²⁹ that it transcends the boundaries of its description. Any visual material is located within and resistant to its temporal and aesthetic *locus*. Even the everyday possesses ‘a specific and purposeful *kunstwollen*’³⁰ which ‘asserts itself in conflict with practical purpose, material and technique.’ When making selections from the anarchive it is these qualities I am attuned to, and alongside formal aesthetic considerations of colour, tone, and form become the criteria by which something is chosen, and something is not. Certain objects, such as this telegram, are so redolent in their histories and composition that they may be thought of as possessing a particularly forceful *dingewollen*.³¹

²⁹ Walter Benjamin reminds us that ‘*there is no document of civilisation (kultur) which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.*’ Benjamin is referring to the triumphant parade of the spoils of exploitative victory, which a historical materialist cannot contemplate without horror.’ Although the opposite of a ‘cultural treasure’, an item of ephemera speaks clearly of the ‘anonymous toil’ that brought it into being. From *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (On the Concept of History, 1940). We may also consider Nietzsche’s ‘*There are no beautiful surfaces without a terrible depth*’ From *Fragmente* (1869-74) Band 1 Kapitel 7.

³⁰ Alois Riegl’s contentious concept of art possessing an intrinsic creative drive or *will* arising from an epoch’s particular aesthetic and political conditions can also be applied in a wider context. When viewed concerning what was to shortly follow, *Triumph des Willen*, for example, its dangers are conspicuous, and it is clear that history does not proceed in a homogenous fashion. In the design of printed objects, however modest, political and societal ambitions are encoded in the decisions governing layout, composition and typeface. Indeed, in regressive or oppressive epochs, a counter-will can be discerned in these objects, the imposition of false historical narratives discernible in the resurrection of typefaces with nationalistic connotations, as described in collages 4 and 5 (pp.103 &105).

³¹ Riegl’s *Kunstwollen* is variously translated as the ‘will of art, or ‘art-volition’ or ‘the will to form.’ My coinage of *Dingewollen* points to this hidden force of a ‘thing-will’ or ‘thing-striving’, similar, but different from Bennett’s ‘thing-power’. The *Museum der Dinge* in Berlin groups objects not by any formal taxonomy but by similarities of colour or materials used in their manufacture. The policy is one of ‘open storage’ - strange congregations of similarities and differences.

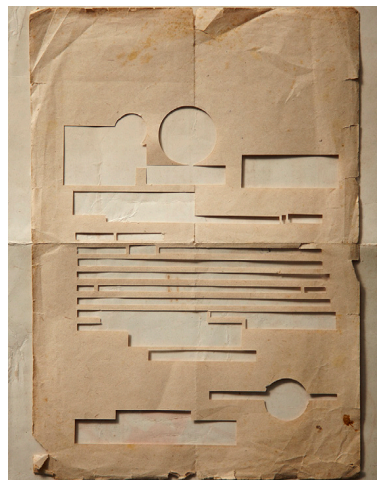
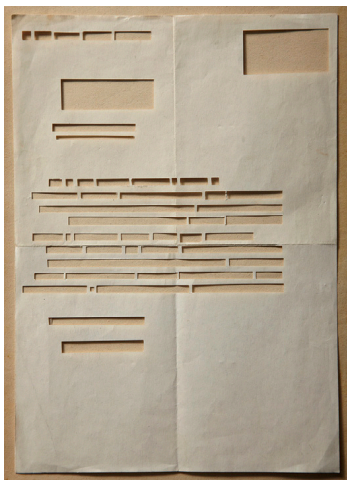
Composition: reduction, accretion, finalisation

In addition to the methods of working and selection criteria described above, I also reach for areas of sparseness as well as visual intensity in the composition - calm passages amongst the turbulence. Here, blank pages, sheets of unprinted paper, the reverse side of those maps, letterpress printed grids from unfilled ledgers and account books stand for quietness, a background hum against which the static crackle of carefully selected items can be placed. Material properties are amplified through a reduction of visual stimuli. However, each minor element, relegated (literally) to the background of the composition (such as the table of elements in collage 1, p.24), is also subjected to intense scrutiny and appraisal. In the anarchive are folders of highly specialised papers; intense matt ultramarine typists carbon-copy paper, (some still bearing a record of the many documents it was used to copy), translucent amber waxed paper used specifically for wrapping steel engineering parts before plastic became commonplace, onionskin papers of various weights,³² an extraordinary jade-green and ochre laid paper concealing within a protective layer of black tar retrieved from boxes of fireworks, imported wholesale from manufacturers in Hunan province, Eastern China.

³² Onionskin paper, which has nothing to do with onions except by appearance, is a thin (25gsm or so) strong, translucent paper with a high cotton-fibre content. It was used by typists behind the carbon paper to make duplicates, sometimes supplied with a textured surface to improve grip beneath the rollers. Its translucency and lightness meant it was also suited to the manufacture of airmail stationery and cell animation drawing. Digital animators retain the term onionskinning to describe 'tweening' between keyframes, where multiple layers are rendered visible.



6.04 a



6.04 b c



6.04 d e

6.04 Kiri Dalena *Erased Slogans* 90 x 109cm. Lambda metallic print, commenced 2008. (a)

Ania Wawrzkowicz *Ambiguous Documents* 2011. (b c)

Jenny Holzer *Waterboard 0000090* 2008, (d) and a moulded paper pulp version made by Gangolf Ulbricht in Berlin, photographed in his workshop in 2012. (e)

These areas of blankness, where a lack of visual stimuli reveals to us the elemental properties of both materials and the act of viewing, point also to immateriality, to no-thing-ness as negative form.³³ The legacy of reductive visual fields proceeding from Malevitch and Minimalism to post-digital anxieties relating to visibility and disappearance³⁴ also finds expression in popular culture. Protesters in Hong Kong demonstrating against the imposition of new National Security Laws brandished blank placards, in an attempt to evade arrest for spreading anti-state propaganda. Following the example of an anonymous young woman at the first of the July 2020 protests who held aloft a blank card,³⁵ police and the authorities were subsequently faced with a mass of banners and placards proclaiming precisely nothing - a powerful indictment of the right to free speech in its very lack of expression. Simply being present in this political landscape, even if apparently not stating anything, becomes a powerful act of anti-state resistance. Within the anarchive, many modest remnants of official bureaucracies are similarly charged with a kind of refutation of their original purpose; in 'breaking down' they have become debris.

³³ To extend the musical notation metaphor, these areas of composition are equivalent to spaces between notes or chords, connective tissue between the skeletal structure of more prominent elements. I referred to *intermezzo* in Section 3 as 'the space between things'.

³⁴ Hito Steyerl's *How Not To Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .Mov File* (2013) presents five lessons in invisibility in the post-digital surveillance state. The opening sequence pictures her against a testcard backdrop with the words 'I AM COMPLETELY INVISIBLE'.

³⁵ The young woman was inspired by remembering a dark joke from Soviet era Russia: On the Red Square, someone was handing out flyers, when the police arrived at the scene and arrested them, they found that the flyers were blank. The officer thought for a while and said to the man 'Do you think I don't know what you wanted to write?' From an interview in *Stand News*, July 2020.



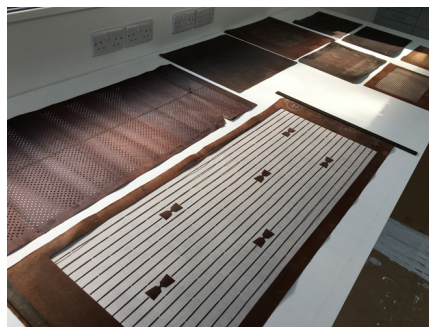
6.05 a



6.05 b

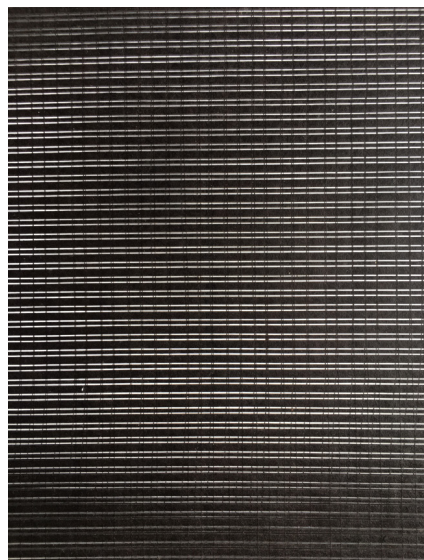


6.05 c



6.05 d

6.05 e



6.05 Japanese *seichosen* paper similar to that I use in collages 7, 8 and 9 being raised from the vat by a papermaker in Nishinomiya, Japan. (a) Fugitive elements: ochre earth pigment and stencilled letters details from speculative collages. (b) Deckle edge rag paper in the studio. (c)

Katagami Japanese stencils coated with *kakisibu* made from fermented persimmon juice which will darken over time. These are for printing textiles; typically Edo *komon*, *yukata* for summer kimonos and *yūzen* coloured silks. Fragments are incorporated in Collage 7 *Divieto di Affissione*. (d e)

Erased Slogans (commenced 2008) by the Philippine artist Kiri Dalena is a series of digitally altered archival photographs of mass protests preceding the declaration of martial law by the dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1972. They indicate both the prevailing historical amnesia relating to this era, and the projection of personal meaning by the viewer onto the literal blank space of the placards. A fissure opens in time in which we are invited to insert our own reflections. A similar counter-history to centralised State power can be seen in Ania Wawrzkowicz's series of 'ambiguous documents' made in 2011. Historical official documents altered by cutting, sewing and shredding anonymise the mechanisms that control the individual. Absence³⁶ is rendered as a potent signifier³⁷ (fig. 6.04 p.219).

In the collage 9, *Divieto di Affissione*, (p.129) I have selected large sheets of Japanese *seichosen* and *seikozen tosa-washi* as a support layer. These sheets are produced by hand in the Kōchi prefecture on the island of Shikoku, a craft tradition dating back to at least the Heian Period (794 -11 CE). *Seichosen* is made from 100% *kozo* bark fibres peeled, cooked in lime and washed in mountain streams (the quality of the water is important), the resulting bast (bark fibres) teased out by hand, considered the most skilful part of the production process. The fibres are then beaten with

³⁶ Absence is distinguished from nothingness, with its intimations of the void and the theological interpretation of matter composed of both substance and 'spirit'. Henri Bergson's notion of life's ceaseless *becoming* (the *élan vital* described first in his 1907 book *Creative Evolution*) impelling evolution forward through time acknowledges this insubstantial quality in living things.

³⁷ Jenny Holzer's *War Paintings* (2005) - versions of the heavily redacted US Government documents relating to the War on Terror, similarly, speak volumes through an almost complete lack of information. See fig.6.04 p.119.

wooden mallets (never iron as the oxides would discolour the paper) to form the long-fibered pulp for *washi*. Once couched from the vat using two-handled moulds, containing fine split bamboo deckles (which leave a distinctive laid gridline within the paper), the damp sheets are transferred to wide pine boards and brushed smooth with traditional *nazebake* brushes made of hemp palm bristles. These brushmarks (once the moist sheets have been dried in the sun), are discernible in the matt light-ochre surface of the paper. I value the trace of the maker's arm and brush (fig. 6.05 p.221).

Kozo, or paper mulberry - *broussonetia papyrifera*, is a tough deciduous shrub grown as a farm crop, and held to embody elements of strength and protection. Its sister washi, *Seikosen* is made from mitsumata - *edgeworthia papyrifera*, a smaller low growing flowering shrub embodying qualities of gracefulness, delicacy and modesty. The sheets I work with are large, at approximately 74 x 140 cm (almost a double square), the dimensions dictated by the reach of the Japanese papermaker standing over their vat. It is not surprising that these papers are expensive (around £60 per sheet), require decisive and careful handling and demand a keen attention to the possibility of the error. They exert a steady quality of authenticity and craftsmanship, a quiet will of their own.

Some surfaces are left as found, others over-painted with thin glazes of oil-based ink or acrylic paint, partly occluding objects

placed beneath. Monochrome areas are created by rolling with relief ink, completely covering items that are visible only in faint outline of relief. Powdered pigments³⁸ are rubbed directly into the paper surface, fixed with thin glazes or incorporated into gum Arabic or gesso underpainting.³⁹

Very thin tissue, such as that used in dressmaking patterns, or translucent and transparent paper (bible paper is a good example) can be overlaid in sparser areas of the collage. Some of these sheets prove extremely difficult to print on and to paste down successfully. I am drawn to attempting technically challenging procedures, employing paper-handling techniques from archival paper restoration and large-scale bookbinding.⁴⁰ This kind of work has a substantial rate of failure (the paper's propensity to disobedience), occasionally, it seems as though the materials have developed a degree of ill-will, creating nothing more than an expensive pile of torn pulp destined for the bin. In these situations, I am forced to accept the disobedient tendency of materials in being allowed to behave as they will.

³⁸ These are still to be found sold by the *chilo* in old *Ferramenti* in Italy, usually in just four colours: ochre, a light and burnt siena and the most expensive - a pale blue. The first three earth colours are used in quantity, mixed with milk, for traditional limewash on buildings, the last (chemically derived) usually reserved for niches containing the Madonna, or as spiritual protection immediately inside the front door.

³⁹ In William Kentridge's text-based series, including *Blue Rubrics (Defensive sleeping)* (2018), pages from an old thesaurus and dictionary are printed with phrases extracted from his notebooks using genuine lapis lazuli pigment. In 2009, at Oregon State University, scientists conducting experiments with semiconductors accidentally produced the first new blue pigment in 200 years. YInMn Blue (an intense opaque colour close to Cobalt or Prussian blue) is now available for artistic use, although very expensive.

⁴⁰ Getting a large wet sheet of a very delicate and rapidly disintegrating paper onto a substrate entails the use of elaborate support rods and rollers, particularly when one is working alone.

Areas of minimal visual signalling within the composition focuses attention on the essential qualities of the materials in use and signal reduction *as* presence; our sense of being-in-the-world is heightened by a lack of external stimulation,⁴¹ our presence and thoughts becoming enhanced. Long regarded as an ontology rooted in Eastern philosophical thought (something of a Western misconception) the doctrine of less-is-more⁴² enters fine art practice and modernist architectural style with a revolutionary swerve in the early years of the 20th century.

Quoting Kazimir Malevitch's *Black Square* (1915) Taryn Simon's *Black Square XVII* (2015) extends the concept of representational negation into a visual absence. For the next 1000 years, until 3015, a void, cast in concrete to the exact dimensions of Malevitch's original at Garage Gallery in Moscow anticipates the arrival of a black square of vitrified nuclear waste, currently held at the Radon nuclear waste disposal plant in Sergiev Postad, 72km north east of Moscow. Buried in a reinforced chamber surrounded by clay-rich soil, the black square cannot be handled or exhibited until its radioactive properties have diminished

⁴¹ Edmund Husserl's *Lebenswelt* converges to a form of heightened and intensely personal *innenwelt*. Husserl, in developing ideas of intentionality (*intentionalität*) from his teacher Franz Brentano, distinguishes between the common meaning of 'having deliberate purpose' and his theory of the mind perpetually reaching or stretching towards something ahead. (Latin: *tendere*.) This notion of the mind as propelled into the world through intentions becomes the liberating philosophy of the Existentialists in escaping the confines of the self.

⁴² Often incorrectly attributed to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, he appropriated the phrase from Peter Behrens when working on the design for the glazing of the utilitarian west courtyard elevation of the AEG turbine factory in Berlin. Readily adopting the principle, Mies went on to design buildings and their components in the simplest possible geometric forms, and to this form of architectural expression the aphorism became attached.

sufficiently over the coming centuries. Finally, it will occupy its void, and the artwork will be complete (fig. 6.06 p.227).

As acts of commemoration, absences - sometimes in the form of empty or negative spaces - speak powerfully of what has been lost. In Micha Ullman's *Empty Library* (1995) in the Bebelplatz (mentioned in Section 4), Christian Boltanski's *The Missing House* (1990, created just after the fall of the Berlin Wall) a few hundred metres away, is the site of a building destroyed by Allied bombing in February 1945. One of many counter-memorials⁴³ across Europe, this empty lot stands for the former inhabitants of the building (as do the Stolperstein cobbles by Gunter Demnig across Europe). The names of the mostly Jewish families are fixed on plaques to the adjoining walls of the buildings, which remain. As we apprehend something that is not there; our interior world connects with events not through a depiction of horror, but an empathetic resonance based on disappearance. Mind and thought reach out towards the past.

I have previously alluded to the spectres that inhabit the anarchic, discernible in artefacts that embody the distinctly personal, in time-worn membership and identity cards carried in a pocket for a lifetime, in the fingerprints and photographs of official files and documents, and in the trace of a temperament in

⁴³ *The Monument Against Fascism Hamburg-Harburg* (1986 - 93) by Jochen Gerz is a 12m high column covered in lead which slowly descended into the ground over the seven years it was visible. Plaques in seven languages invite passers-by to add their names to the column with metal styluses provided. Part of the text on the plaque reads: 'In doing so, we commit ourselves to remain vigilant... In the long run, it is only we ourselves who can stand up to injustice.'



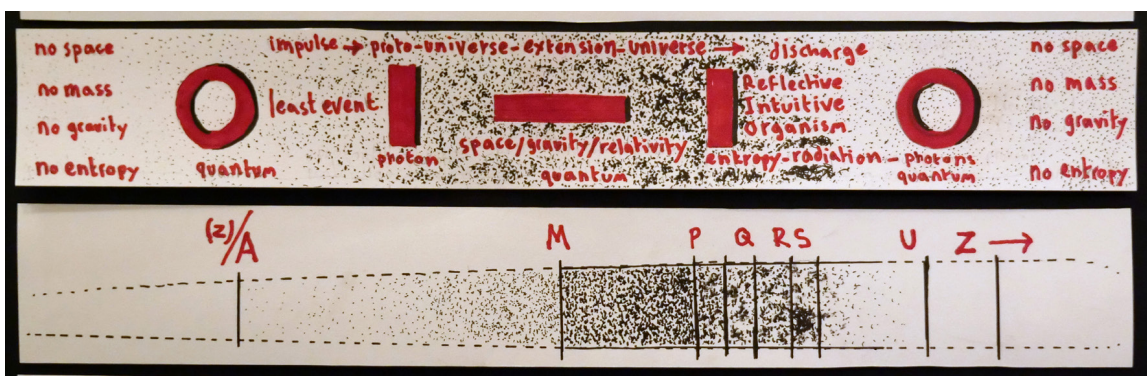
6.06 a



6.06 b



6.06 c



6.06 d

6.06 Absences: Taryn Simon *Chapter XV11 Black Square* 2015. Installation view of the waiting void at Garage, Moscow. (a) Christian Boltanski *The Missing House* 1990 Große Hamburger Straße, Berlin Mitte. (b) Micha Ullman *The Empty Library* (1995) Bebelplatz, Berlin. (c)

John Latham's *01-10*, a time-based diagram expressing the structure of events proceeding (detail). (d)

a handmade mark or gesture. But another enchantment can be dimly perceived if one imagines hard enough: not the objects as they really are, not the collage as it appears, or the one I have made, but the collage you think you have seen (or are seeing): a chimeric collage suspended somewhere between substance and illusion. This retinal after-image, inscribed in the (mystic writing pad) of memory, displaces the actual for an imagined real.

The Italian author Elena Ferrante describes this elegantly:

‘between the book that is published and the book that readers buy, there is always a third book, a book where beside the written sentences are those we imagined writing, beside the sentences that readers read are the sentences they have imagined reading. This third book, elusive, changing, is nevertheless a real book. I didn’t actually write it, my readers haven’t actually read it, but it’s still there. It’s the book that is created in the relationship between life, writing and reading.’⁴⁴

I aspire to this replicating this experience for the viewer in making the collages, the work always reaching for something beyond the apparent.

⁴⁴ From *Franumàglia: A Writers Journey* (2017). A *Franumàglia* resists translation into English, in Neapolitan dialect it is a malaise that cannot be defined otherwise - characterised by mental shattering, sometimes brought on oneself by intolerable circumstances.

Becoming, duration and temporality

John Latham's all-encompassing theory of cosmology, Time-Base Theory (sometimes termed Flat Time Theory or Event Theory), displaces the scientific orthodoxy of primordial space-and-object with the primacy of time-and-event, relegating objects to the trace-products of a fundamental impulse. Expressed diagrammatically, and relating as much to individual human actions as to the entirety of creation, existence and collapse of the universe, the theory envisages nothing, from which arises the first event: 0 to 1, a duration impelled towards another event consequent on the first: - 1, and finally an inevitable entropic process returning to nothing: 0. (0 1 - 1 0)

Seen through the lens of Latham's time-and-event continuum, the collages that I am making proceed similarly: nothing becomes something, that something becomes something else, and ultimately nothing of that will remain. In the scale that Latham envisaged - universal time from a point before time existed⁴⁵ until it ceases to exist once more - we may consider a similar trajectory.

A collection of elements, minerals, metals and neurons⁴⁶ that

⁴⁵ Professor Stephen Hawking, in collaboration with James Hartle, refuted the Big Bang theory in his 1983 paper: *'Wave Function Of The Universe'*. Seeking to solve the fundamental question of physics and theology as to what existed before the Big Bang, Hawking formulated an alternative: *The New Boundary Proposal*, in which everything: space, time and matter, proceeded from a zero point with no beginning or end. This concept of the universe envisages the entire past, present and future as existing simultaneously, with our notion of time contingent on our relative position to the zero's beginning and end points.

⁴⁶ Vladimir Ivanović Vernadsky was a Soviet mineralogist and geochemist who lived through the Russian Revolution and advised on agricultural policy in the Soviet Union. An early proponent of nuclear power and a pioneer of environmental science. *'We are,'* he said, *'walking talking minerals... redistributions of oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon, sulphur, phosphorus, and other elements of the earth's crust made into two-legged, upright forms'*. Quoted in *What is Life?* by Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan (1995).

form the bones, blood and cognitive mechanisms of a human being organises, in one brief flash, artefacts composed of organic and synthetic compounds that transform into aesthetically regulated assemblages (me making the collages for a few years during my brief lifetime.) These objects will decay and ultimately revert to the constituents from which they emerged.

Any deep consideration of materials leads naturally to a consideration of the nature of matter itself, and its (and our) relative impermanence in the vast arc of time. This is not a mystical or mysterious process by which things manifest from some cosmological void, but a carefully structured and considered set of circumstances, materials and processes in association with my physical and mental interventions that produce the typographic collages presented here.

In my analysis, I encounter something very difficult to describe,⁴⁷ however carefully one can document procedures and processes. My best hypothesis is to acknowledge that (quite briefly) many different optimal conditions intersect and that when they do, it appears to produce the best visual results. These are the moments where all of the planning, searching, collecting, organising,

⁴⁷ In attempting this analysis I acknowledge one critique of Action Based Research (ABR) as being under-theorised, and less 'legitimate' than traditional qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Locating the enquiry as personal and not (at least in terms of other people) participatory, I recognise Margaret Wetherell's notion of affect and emotion in reaching a fuller understanding of my process. She usefully theorises 'embodiment' in ABR in order to recognise affective and aesthetic knowing, including visceral feelings of joy and togetherness. This may provide fertile grounds for future research. From her *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding* (2012).



6.07 a



6.07 b



6.07 c



6.07 d



6.07 e f



6.07 Examples of the extensive stencil, punch cards and metal symphonion discs held within the anarchive. (a b c) Early Jacquard loom punch cards at Cluny Lace Works, Ilkeston. (b)

Kakishibu persimmon dye details with Japanese *Katagami* stencil fragments and parts of reversed letterpress posters. Part of the speculative work with fugitive materials. (e f)

processing and assembling concentrate into a semiconscious harmonic and synergetic interaction of my mind, body and materials. Suspended in the conducive space of the studio, all possibilities condense into a congregation of collaged items on a single surface, and the work is resolved.

Certain objects within the anarchive use voids as data, utilising a calibrated lack of substance (a hole, slot, or letterform), to be the code by which a signal or mark is delivered. These include symphonium discs and pianola rolls, Jacquard weaving rolls, Monotype keyboard ribbons,⁴⁸ Morse and braille ticker tapes, pre-digital mainframe computer punchcards, metal and paper stencils including Japanese *katagami*⁴⁹ for printing textiles, and analogue loom and knitting pattern cards.⁵⁰ As elements within a collage these perforated objects do double duty, appearing at once both a surface and a lacuna, able to both conceal and reveal the objects beneath. They are both positive and negative; their polarity is amenable to visual switching. I value them as assistance to

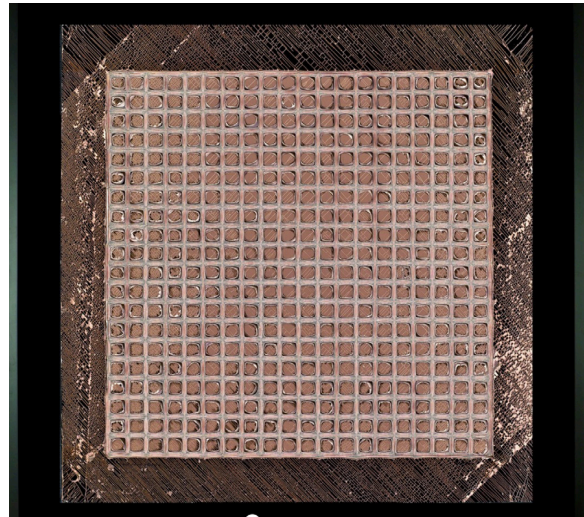
⁴⁸ In common with the mechanical Monotype and Linotype hot-metal machine, setters and operators had to work 'blind'; early digital equipment had no image of the type on screen, monitors displayed only the code being input. (WYSIWYG arrived in 1974) A simple error of coding would not be discovered until the film output was produced; no digital equivalent of the Linotype operator's cigarette paper patch to correct a mis-key was available.

⁴⁹ These very intricate cut paper stencils are made with tiny sharpened punches in traditional figurative and abstract patterns. Loose counters are held in place within the stencil with fine cotton threads, in some older stencils from the Edo period this is occasionally human hair. The paper stencils are coated with *kakishibu*, a fermented persimmon tanning dye discussed further below.

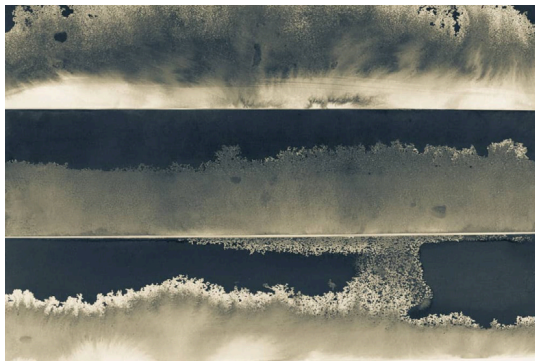
⁵⁰ Joseph Marie Jacquard's 'chain of cards' enabled existing looms to produce complex weaves such as brocade, damask and matelassé automatically. I have only ever seen these cards in museums and never for sale, but I reproduce them from old tympani using hole punches.



6.08 a



6.08 b



6.08 c



6.08 d



6.08 e

6.08 William Fox Talbot *Leaf Study*, salt print made in the late 1830s at Lacock England. (a) Pierre Cordier *Chemigram 2/2/75* 1975. (b) Lisa Lavery *Seaward* cyanotype chemigram, 2020. (c) Two thermochromic experiments with triaryl-methane phthalide leuco dyed paper and underexposed commercial lithography plates. (d e)

thinking about things we cannot easily think about, pointing to the deep geologies of being-in-the-world⁵¹ (fig. 6.07 p.231).

Certainties of perception, upon which we (rather inadvisedly) rely, are also challenged in a category of materials that are mutable and fugitive. Printed ephemera, particularly notices and handbills, imply authority and permanence, and, as we have seen, even in single-use ephemera, durable materials are commonly employed, a testimony to their survival against the odds. In direct contrast, and to cultivate a form of atemporality, I have investigated materials that are given to impermanence and instability, fugitives in the anarchic; thermochromic inks, early photographic light-reactive and fixing chemicals and *kakishibu* - a tannin dye made from fermented persimmon juice, used in Japan as a waterproofing varnish on paper and wood surfaces.

I have introduced visual elements within some compositions composition that fade and reappear through the use of heat sensitive ink, specially formulated for silk screen and relief printing. The use of ink using micro-encapsulated thermochromic pigments is (as far as I can ascertain) relatively unknown in

⁵¹ Voids and absences are also recognised to possess utility, in subjects as far apart as metallurgy and social anthropology. The British historian and metallurgist Cyril Stanley Smith details how, in the structure of iron, there are 'inter-crystalline spaces...vacancies as important as the atom in determining the property of a particular metal' and the property that allows its conversion into steel through the application of heat. From the lecture *Atoms, Blacksmiths and Crystals* (1966). Paradigmatic shifts in societal structures may seem to occur when a spreading network of irreversible cracks renders previously held beliefs untenable.

printmaking,⁵² having been developed for novelty goods in the packaging industry,⁵³ and in dynamic specialised paint finishes applied to hotrod cars. By utilising inks that trigger at specific points within the interior environment temperature range (from approximately 12° to 26°C - a cold unheated room to a heated room in sunlight) elements can be made to both disappear as temperature rises (at, for example, a 18° trigger point) and to appear at a higher threshold, for example at 21°. This chemical reaction is reversible to some extent, with initial experiments indicating that a small amount of degrading takes place after multiple transformations. Over the space of eighteen months a test print in my studio reacted many hundreds of times to temperature change, but eventually stopped reacting and became a stable mid-brown in the printed areas (fig. 6.08 p.237).

I have completed extensive research⁵⁴ into these thermochromic pigments incorporated into acrylic mediums and printed on a wide range of paper and board substrates, exploring the receptiveness (or not) of coated and non-coated stock, and their

⁵² Tania Bruguera's 2018 installation in the Tate turbine hall used heat-sensitive ink to reveal a portrait of Yousef, a young man who left Syria in 2011. Technically difficult at this scale, the work was, in my view, less than successful, particularly in the difficulty of revealing the full extent of the photographic image embedded under layers of protective varnish. This could only be obtained by many spectators using their body heat in unison - the idea of a cooperative effort was one response that the artist intended.

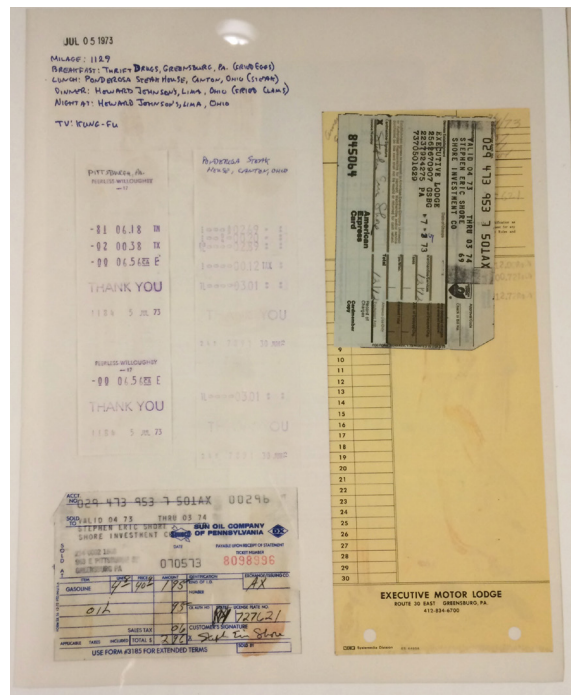
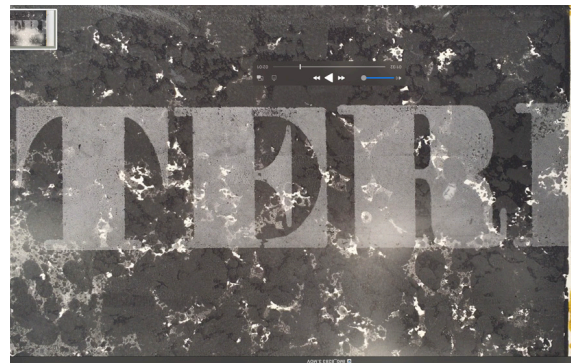
⁵³ As, for example, 'knowing when the temperature of liquid within a coffee cup is correct, or when to take a bottle of syrup out of the microwave.' From *Implications of Thermochromic Ink*, Amanda Sarley (2011).

⁵⁴ See fig. 6.08 and 6.09, collage no.11 (p.199) and in appendix B: Thermochromic Ink: Experimental Film Screenshots (p.277).

suitability for incorporation into completed collages.⁵⁵ Printing directly onto gesso and acrylic surfaces has also been evaluated, resulting in both successes and failures. Absolute temporary invisibility of the ink is possible under certain conditions, with no trace of its being visually present after the trigger point. However, the majority of substrates were found to retain a slight residual image of the medium used to carry the pigment onto the surface. Depending on lighting conditions and the reflective or non-reflective nature of the surface, these ghosts are just discernible, anticipating the return of the distinctive image when the temperature threshold is achieved.

By incorporating additional heating equipment behind or within the substrate on which the text or image is printed the operable temperature range can be increased significantly, allowing elements to appear or disappear outside of the normal temperature range. The inclusion of ultra-thin terrarium heat mats in localised areas trigger individual elements by controlling temperature thresholds precisely. Areas appear or disappear to the eye over time by either assisted or ambient method - they manifest either at controlled intervals defined by supplementary heat sources and timers, or due to the prevailing temperature conditions within the room in which the work is displayed. Nested

⁵⁵ There are two main types of thermochromic inks: leuco dyes and liquid crystals. Leuco dyes are better suited for use in screen printing than liquid crystals. The activation temperature of thermochromic leuco ink 'is determined by the temperature where the solvent changes from solid to liquid state, causing the colour-forming components to be in contact below the transition temperature (coloured state) and separated above this temperature (discoloured state)' Sarley (2011).



6.09 A sequence of state changes using screen printed thermochromic ink over 120 seconds between 15 and 25°C. (*a b c d*)

Reverse side of a News Agency press photograph with markup instruction for the reprographic department with captions and attributions. (e)

Stephen Shore, a page from *Travel Diary* photographed at his retrospective at CO Gallery Berlin 2016. (f)

within the permanent visual elements these fugitive signals have an intriguing and disconcerting effect on memory and perception, their transitions through appearance and disappearance visible to the passing viewer and taking place unobserved in an uninhabited room. Frames from short films illustrating these heat-induced changes is included in appendix B (p.273).

My conclusion from this experimental research has been to relegate thermochromic elements to a marginal role within the composition, to pass almost unnoticed except under close observation.⁵⁶

The second category of fugitive materials is those belonging to early photographic and reprographic processes and the associated chemistry. In this part of the research, as well as working with processes in the correct manner, I have deliberately omitted some of the stages normally followed or substituted alternative chemicals. William Henry Fox Talbot, the inventor of the negative and positive photographic technique in the early 1830s (Daguerre's invention in Paris a few years later was an entirely different chemical process), wrote that the idea came to him in a 'philosophical dream' whereby things were induced to create

⁵⁶ My conclusions rest on a rather disconcerting perception: that, however intriguing the process, it tends to dominate the act of apprehension by the viewer, exhibiting some of the distracting characteristics of a magic trick - we are but momentarily engaged by the unfamiliar. In *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgement and Capitalist Form* (2020), Sianne Ngai proposes a category of 'compromised form' in which certain objects we encounter claim both too much of our attention whilst simultaneously failing to live up to their expectations. This excess and deficiency produce an attendant uncertainty about value and time, best understood as performative: 'both a wonder and a trick.' She outlines the Marxist notion of some objects existing as 'ordinary sensuous things (s)' transitioning through commodification into gimmickry, dancing of their own free will. Marx's term is *aus freien Stücken* - literally out of free (or unbound) pieces.'

images of themselves. He spent the next several years solving the practicalities of that dream, inventing processes that would permanently fix the fugitive image to the paper.⁵⁷ The technical problem was not image capture, progressing naturally from the drawing apparatus of the camera obscura, but the retention, preservation and duplication of the image for subsequent viewing.⁵⁸

Talbot was preceded in his investigations into photo-sensitive chemicals by Johanne Schulz over a century before, who produced images directly onto the paper without the use of lenses or negatives. Chemigrams, a term coined by the Belgian artist Pierre Cordier in the 1950s, is an area of established contemporary art practice and a technique I have incorporated to create surfaces on old and unviable photographic paper. A related process was used by photojournalists working in the field without recourse to a properly equipped dark room. Pre-sensitised photographic paper could hold an image just long enough to enable it to be

⁵⁷ This became his main challenge, the relatively easily-gained imprint of ultraviolet light from the sun through the stencilling effect of a leaf or fern (later a paper negative, a Calotype) on paper coated with salt and a solution of silver nitrate would fade frustratingly quickly after exposure. Talbot's friend, the eminent scientist Sir John Herschel, suggested a more permanent means of fixing the image using hypo-sulphite of soda. It is still used today as a fixer for black and white photographs.

⁵⁸ Talbot acknowledged the agency of these natural forces in the formation of his images. *The Pencil Of Nature*, first published in 1844 to publicise his patented Calotype process, included 24 prints which were 'impressed by Nature's hand.' His tribulations with fixing the image with alkaline iodide is described in the introduction as arising from 'a new and unexpected cause, namely, that when a picture is so treated, although it is permanently secured against the darkening effect of the solar rays, yet it is exposed to a contrary or whitening effect from them; so that after the lapse of some days the dark parts of the picture begin to fade, and gradually the whole picture becomes obliterated, and is reduced to the appearance of a uniform pale yellow sheet of paper.'

transmitted by wire to the picture agency before fading, saving valuable time when filing to a deadline.

In the collages nos. 6 and 11, (pp.137 & 199) I have introduced elements within the collage that once exposed to sunlight will fade into illegibility over time. Again these elements play a minor role in the visual field, but introduce into the work a consideration of duration, and the impermanence of both appearance and material substance. I have experimented with fax paper (a thermal paper also based on triaryl-methane phthalide leuco dyes) using heated metal type, the chemistry associated with cyanotype, and procion dyes which can be reversed through the action of sodium hypochlorite.

These materials exhibit chemical impulses towards disappearance that happen relatively quickly, a matter of days or weeks, in contrast to the long timeframes involved in the third category - the slow darkening of *kakishibu*. Valued in Japan for its water repellent and preservative qualities,⁵⁹ the organic compounds react slowly with sunlight, temperature and air, and particularly in association with iron oxides, changing from an initial bright chestnut brown when first applied, through the deeper tones of aged leather and finally to a rich dark near-black. The timeframe of these subtle changes is measured in years and decades, the floors and woodwork of ancient buildings praised for their rich patina.

⁵⁹ Kakishibu can be used as a non-toxic, sustainable bio-alternative wood preservative, derived from the astringent persimmon fruit of *Diospyros Kaki*.

I have been coating a variety of papers with a thin coat of raw *kakishibu*, and hastening the chromatic shift towards grey and black through the introduction of ferric oxide. An understanding of the chemistry of these long-duration shifts in visual appearance informs the inclusion of elements deliberately set to change imperceptibly over large intervals of time. Thus, the collage we see today will not be the one we see in a few months, and after the passage of several years, we may not remember how the original appeared. These elements are synchronous with our own ageing, visual appearance apprehended as a sequence of stages rather than a continuous process of transformation.

Certain artefacts, on account of their trajectories through multiple hands, each adding a confirmatory mark or notation, become accidental collages which can be viewed as complete in their composition and narrative structure. This category includes the reverse side of news agency photographs, captioned and marked up for reproduction, the fibreboard cases used to transport 16mm films on their multiple journeys, certain packages, grain sacks, envelopes and cartons.⁶⁰ These I collect intact; they may form part of a larger composition, but in many instances, I view them as sufficient; no further addition is necessary in the fulfilment of their destiny as works of art.

⁶⁰ Stephen Shore's retrospective at CO Gallery Berlin in February 2016 included, alongside his photographs, pages from a lined notebook recording the day's expenditure. Receipts for gas, food, accommodation and parking are attached to the page along with mileage records and credit card slips. The pages are date-stamped and include small notes in biro, annotating each meal and what he watched on TV that evening. The methodical arrangements charting his progress across America are a good example of an accidental collage, complete in its arrangement. From <https://co-berlin.org/en/program/exhibitions/stephen-shore>

Ultimately, the artefacts that I have collected or created need to be assembled and affixed into an association to become the completed typographic collage. In most of the series, individual elements are attached permanently to the surface using bookbinding and industrial adhesives, an irreversible act of conclusion. In the later work (collage 9 in particular: *Divieto di Affissione*), I have resisted the impulse to permanently glue elements down, preferring the assembly of objects to inhabit a realm of provisionality, a few objects are attached to the substrate by temporary or reversible means, including stitches and loops of linen thread and glassine sleeves, from which objects can be inserted and removed. Although ‘finished’, these arrangements suggest a continuation of the process of composition - a form of unfinalisability.⁶¹

These acts of (in-)completion need to be rapid, after days of careful consideration of the intrinsic quality of both materials and the histories, a decisiveness is called for in the process of conclusion. Decisions and choices are made quickly, and once made, are not reversed.⁶² These periods of resolution are

⁶¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian philosopher, literary critic and semiotician, anticipated the postmodern deconstructions of reality, truth and subjectivity. In discussing Fyodor Dostoevsky’s writing, he identifies the concept of everything existing in a state of perpetual becoming - Dostoevsky’s characters are always on the threshold of the decisive moment. Extending this context to encompass all human experience within societal and political structures, with their impetus to regulate and constrain, Bakhtin argues for a liberating condition of unfinalisability, in which all futures are possible and nothing in a life is either destined or ordained.

⁶² Hannah Arendt places human intentionality as the centre of all agential factors. Within what she terms ‘the crystallisation process’, unaffiliated elements combine to initiate political or social change, seen retroactively as the (sometimes catastrophic) consequence of human volition. When concluding the collages, I am very focused on these moments of crystallisation, although my intentions are creative rather than political.

characterised by distinct physiological and mental conditions; I require mental clarity and physical resilience. I have found it impossible to force these conditions into being, as the acts of finalisation depend to a great extent on a watchful waiting for the right time to appear. When it does, marked by an inner certainty and resolve, mind, body and materials are felt to be held in a beneficial tension. Working swiftly in concentrated silence I frequently realise I have not eaten or drunk anything for hours. At the end of one of the sessions I am pleasingly exhausted. The collage, and my day, is complete.⁶³

⁶³ The British painter Mary Newcomb kept a diary for a single year during 1986 at the suggestion of her gallerist and patron, Andras Kalman. On the 8th of April, she wrote, '*I know when a painting is finished - instantly - but not why...*'

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to uncover the occluded energies and resonances embedded within a collection of printed ephemera and reconstituted artefacts. Subsequently, through the process of mining this disobedient archive, I have produced original artworks in the form of typographic collages. I have proposed a methodology that challenges conventional notions of order, permanence, and artistic finality, working with unfamiliar and innovative creative methods and strategies. I have investigated what occurs when we become attuned to that which is not readily apparent, excavating elusive histories, meanings and energies that lie embedded within the artefacts and the work. These qualities have been proven to be vital symbiotic participants in the creative process, aligning with my own artistic and aesthetic decisions to determine the final composition and structure.

Through the process of constructing the collages, I have explored the agency of materials in shaping artistic outcomes, the interplay between absence and presence, impermanence and endurance. At the heart of this research is the concept of the disobedient archive which I term an *anarchive* - the repository of artefacts that resists conventional taxonomy and embraces disorder as a generative force. This unruly collection, vibrating with latent potential,

allowed artefacts to re-present themselves, revealed their intrinsic *dingewollen* or ‘thing-power.’

The archive becomes a site of retrievals, not merely of the objects it contains, but of the histories, memories, and possibilities obscured by the surface appearance of things. By deliberately disrupting the conventions of archival storage and retrieval, the anarchival challenges the interpretive sovereignty of conventional systems, promoting instead a methodology of attunement to the indistinct and the fugitive. This approach has demonstrated that artefacts, when liberated from rigid categorisation and interpretation, possess a restless energy that can be harnessed creatively, allowing them to behave as active participants in the process of composition.

Innovative printmaking processes have been integral to this methodology, enabling the transformation of materials and the creation of new artefacts that align with the historical and aesthetic qualities of the originals. Techniques such as laser-cut relief printing, gum Arabic offset printing, screen-printing, and thermochromic ink applications have been employed successfully to produce typographic and visual elements that are both aesthetically striking and conceptually layered.

These processes, often experimental and technically challenging, have allowed for the exploration of impermanence, mutability, and the interplay between material and meaning. The use of

thermochromic inks, for example, introduces a temporal dimension to the collages, with elements that fade and reappear under specific conditions, creating a dynamic interaction between the artwork and the viewer. Similarly, the incorporation of light-reactive chemicals, including kakishibu dye, with its slow darkening over time, underscores the evolving nature of the compositions, aligning them with the rhythms of human experience and the passage of time. The use of these fugitive elements introduces impermanence as a deliberate characteristic within the compositions.

These materials, as they shift and evolve, have been shown to disrupt the static nature of the artwork, inviting the viewer into a temporal dialogue with the work. Several of the collages have been constructed as not being in a fixed state; they may be considered in flux, their surfaces representative of one phase of the trajectory from genesis to finality. This research has demonstrated that impermanence, far from being a limitation, can serve as a powerful tool for deepening engagement and expanding the temporal dimensions of art. The inclusion of materials that change under specific conditions, whether through heat, light, or air, redefines the relationship between the artwork and the viewer, creating a dynamic interplay that unfolds over time.

The effect of these fugitive materials used in the processes has been carefully evaluated and I have concluded that they are best

resolved as a subtle background effect rather than something more apparent, they are therefore positioned as subliminal. My conclusion is that, when used as a prominent visual factor in the composition they produce a form of distractive fascination that limits the overall visual engagement in the work. The mutable visual elements appear to assume the characteristics of a gimmick or visual trick, which is in opposition to the subtle attunement that I wish to produce.

Absence and voids, including sparse areas of composition, have been employed as potent signifiers within the visual field, a lack of stimuli standing for stillness and resonance. Punch cards, pre-digital computer indices, pianola and monotype setting spools use literal holes in paper as information, the nothing as data point. I conclude that these lacunae, far from being empty spaces devoid of substance, hum with presence, inviting the viewer to engage with the unseen and imagine what lies beyond the visible.

Absence becomes a form of presence, a quiet yet insistent force that amplifies the resonance of the materials and the histories they carry. This research has revealed that absence, when integrated into visual compositions, can serve as a powerful counterpoint to presence, creating spaces of stillness and reflection that deepen the viewer's engagement with the work.

I have determined that the notion of spectrality, especially when indicated by mere traces, reveal how artefacts are haunted by their histories and previous lives, and contribute directly to visual and

emotional engagement through the unseen qualities of individual items. I have identified how these objects, often discarded or overlooked, carry traces of their previous use and trajectory through time, including the individuals who interacted with them, the events they witnessed, and the cultural contexts they inhabited. The fingerprints, photographs, and handwritten marks embedded in these objects speak of most distinctly of lives lived, of particular moments suspended in time, and contribute directly to the visual power of the work. They act as spectral presences, simultaneously absent and present, evoking a sense of haunting that permeates the compositions, an indistinctness, a *chimera*.¹ This research has demonstrated that these qualities can deepen their significance, transforming them into active participants in the creative process and inviting the viewer into a dialogue with the past.

The collages are not merely assemblages of materials; they are illusionary, layered compositions that exist simultaneously as physical objects and imagined constructs. The viewer's perception of the collages is shaped not only by what is visible but by what is imagined - by the traces, shadows, and after-images that linger in memory. This research has revealed that the spectral quality of the collages allows them to transcend their materiality, creating

¹ As I define in the lexicon at the beginning of this thesis I am using the word here in the sense of something shadowy or illusionary something just perceived but elusive. With its origins in Greek mythology, a *chimera* always suggests something fantastical that lies beyond the normal realm.

spaces of resonance and reflection that extend well beyond the visual field.

Ethical considerations have been integral to this research, particularly in the appropriation of personal and historical artefacts. The methodology of attunement and consonance² proposed here acknowledges the profound intimacy of these artefacts, treating them with care and respect while navigating the complexities of their extraction and re-contextualisation. This research has demonstrated that the use of historical and personal artefacts in artistic practice requires a careful balance between creative freedom and ethical responsibility, proposing an ethnographical and anthropological framework that respects the legacies and histories embedded in these materials.

The notion of unfinalisability has emerged as a supplementary principle, challenging traditional ideas of completion and permanence. By allowing some compositions to remain provisional, open to change, or inhabited by elements that resist permanent attachment, the work reflects the dynamic and evolving nature of both artistic practice and the human condition. The collages are not endpoints; they are moments within a continuum, crystallisations of time and matter that remain in flux. This research has revealed that unfinalisability, far from being a

² To extend the musical metaphor established in the notion of *graphones*, consonance indicates an harmonic agreement between different components, an accord.

limitation, can serve as a liberating principle, allowing artworks to remain open to reinterpretation and transformation over time.

Through the interplay of typography and language, the collages bridge the visual and the philosophical, creating a graphophonic effect that vibrates between sound and sight, meaning and form. Letterforms, fragmented and incomplete, resist easy comprehension, inviting the viewer to linger in the space of ambiguity and possibility. This research has demonstrated that typography, when integrated into visual compositions, can serve to expand the dialogue between visual art and philosophical discourse.

This research has revealed that artefacts are not simply passive objects but active participants in the creative process, their material properties and histories shaping outcomes in ways that are both tangible and elusive. I have concluded that there are particular ways of being-in-the-world in the activity of creative composition that acknowledges a symbiotic and synergetic partnership with the collection. I have analysed the component parts of my process: expeditions to collect material, the generation of original and re-constituted elements, innovative printmaking techniques, phases of preparedness and production, and the optimal characteristics of final composition and completion. In doing so I have revealed a greater understanding of both the material with which I am working and the interior physical and mental states necessary to bring about a successful conclusion.

The new knowledge generated by this research has significant implications for artistic practice, offering a framework that is dynamic, ethical, and attuned to the unseen forces embedded within materials. By redefining the archive, embracing impermanence, integrating absence, and exploring spectrality and the chimeric, this research proposes a methodology that challenges traditional notions of order, permanence, and completion in art practices associated with collage and printmaking. It offers new ways of thinking about the relationship between the materials, the artist, the artwork, the process of composition and the viewer, creating spaces of resonance, reflection, and transformation that extend beyond the visual field.

The typographic collages presented here are retrievals from obscurity, aggregations of fragments that speak of the past, inhabit the present, and anticipate the future. They are, ultimately, invitations to an acute emotional resonance - to the indistinct, the fugitive, the spectral, and the chimeric, offering a way of engaging with materials, histories, and the unseen in ways that are open and dynamic. They propose an alertness to the possibilities that transcend the visual field and reach toward the unknowable. A yearning.

End of thesis.

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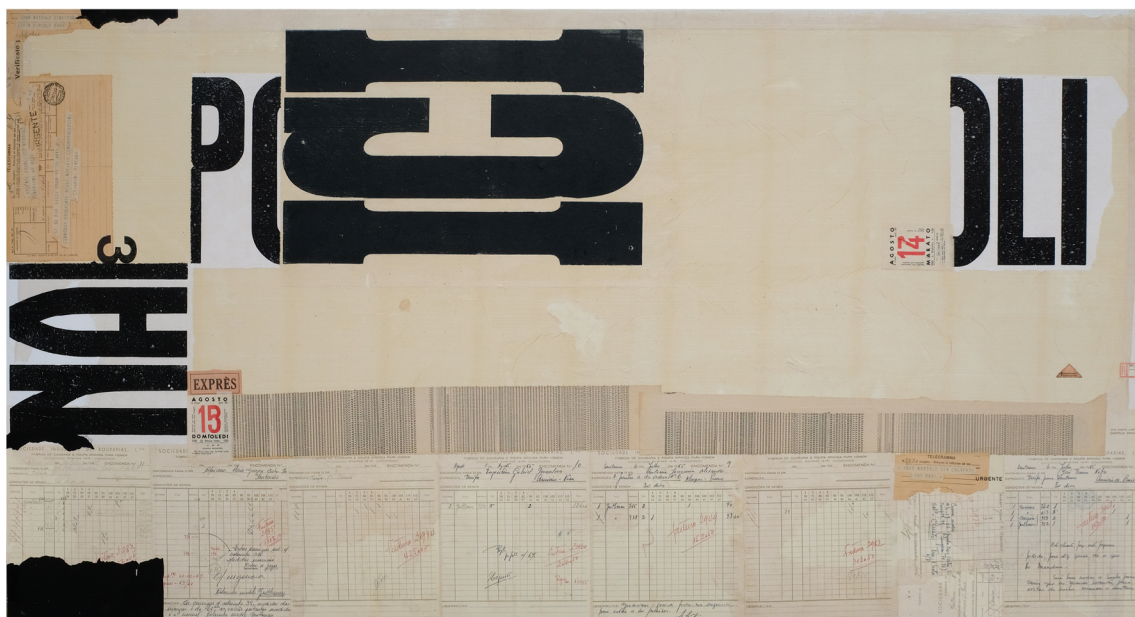
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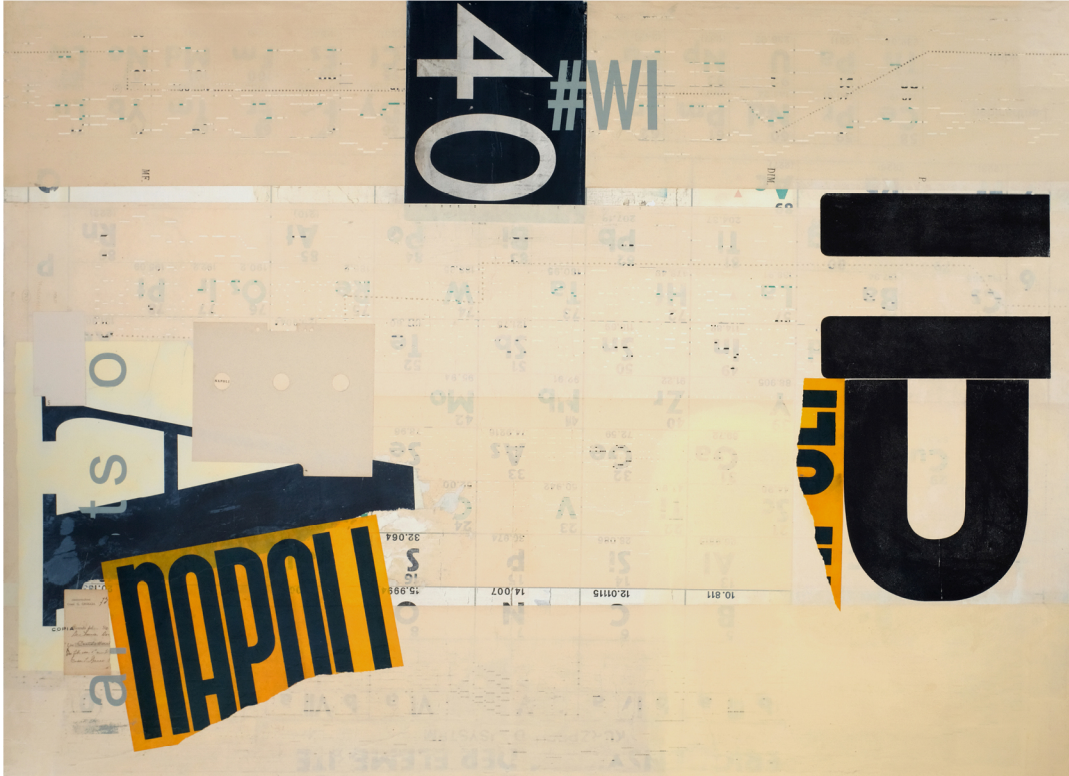
Appendix A: Portfolio of Practical work

The portfolio consists of 11 completed colleges alongside the archive from which material has been retrieved. These works were shown in an exhibition in my studio at Melbourne House, Lower Street, Stroud, Gloucestershire, GL5 2HT during the Spring of 2026. The exhibition was both the venue for the examination viva and was open to the public over two weekends.



Collage 1: ICI 147 x 80 cm

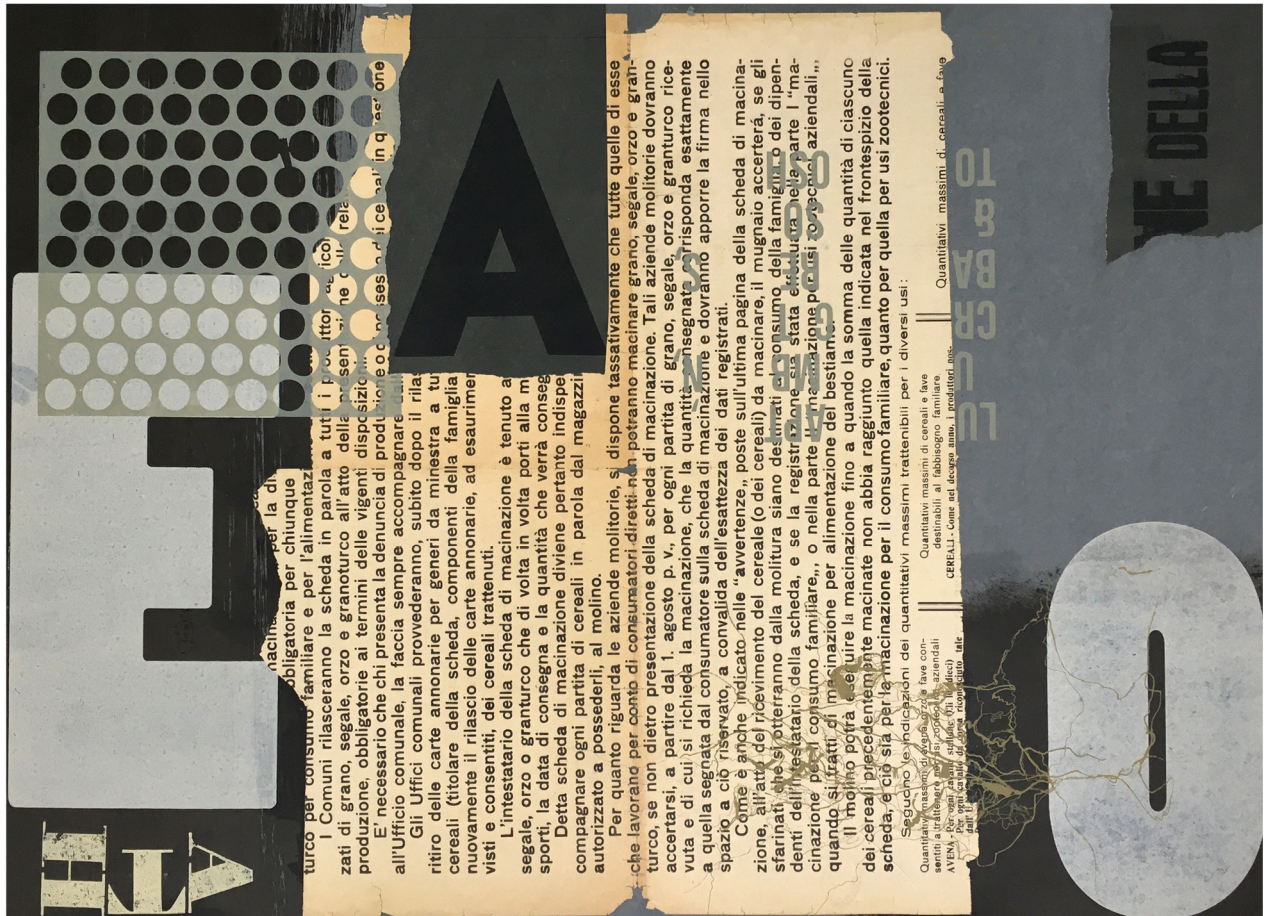
Letterpress ephemera including a sequence of receipts from a Spanish clothing company, large woodtype printed from the collection at Tipoteca, Cornuda, Italy, typesheets made by proofing metal fonts in the format they arrive from the manufacturers to check the characters are viable, fragments from an Italian telegram, a sticker attached to mail exhorting speed; *EXPRES*, Italian calendar leaves and small inclusions from pre-war German documents. The collage includes rubberstamp overprinting, including an authorising stamp *Verificato*.



Collage 2: NAPOLI 161 x 119cm

The background is formed of an 19thc. German Periodic Table of Elements over-pasted with punched Victorian pianola rolls. Letterpress characters include a very large two part uppcase U normally assembled on the press. The NAPOLI label is characteristic of a range of typefaces used in early 20thc. Italian typesetting and reproduces a luggage label I was unable to obtain. The number 40 is part of a London bus blind which were screenprinted in reverse, using black ink on a white linen roll.

Also included are screen printed letters, fragments of ephemera and rubber stamping.



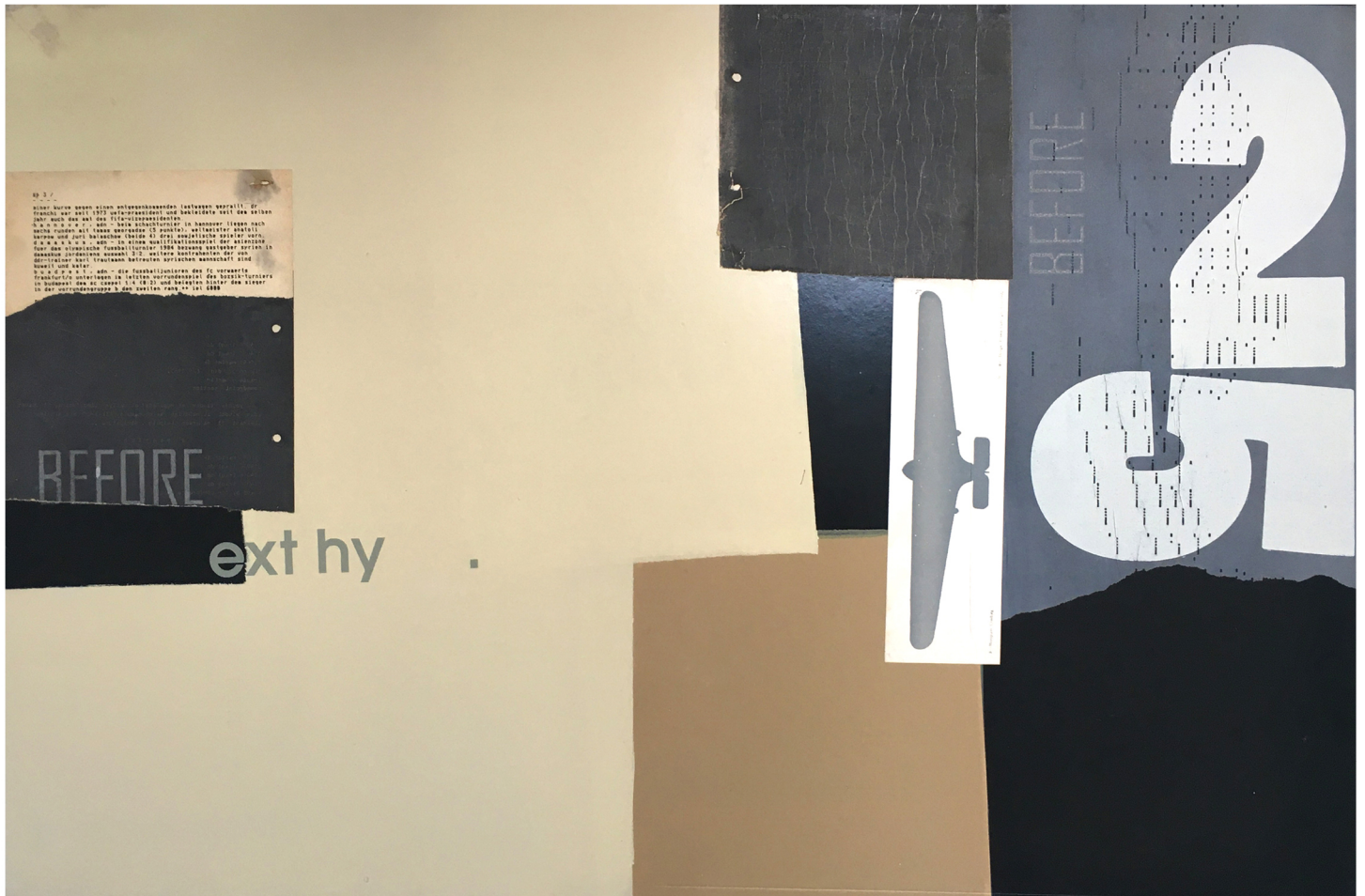
Collage 4: HTA 90 x 60cm

Screen printed elements are printed onto a background of letterpress ink and lasercut printed characters. The Italian *Manifesto* issued by the *Ministero Della Agricoltura* in 1941 details crop production and milling quotas in the city of Bari relating to war time rationing, and set in a contemporary sanserif. Paul Renner's *Futura* of 1927 informed the production of many sanserif modern typefaces. The letterforms screen printed at bottom left are typical fat face types from British jobbing printers.



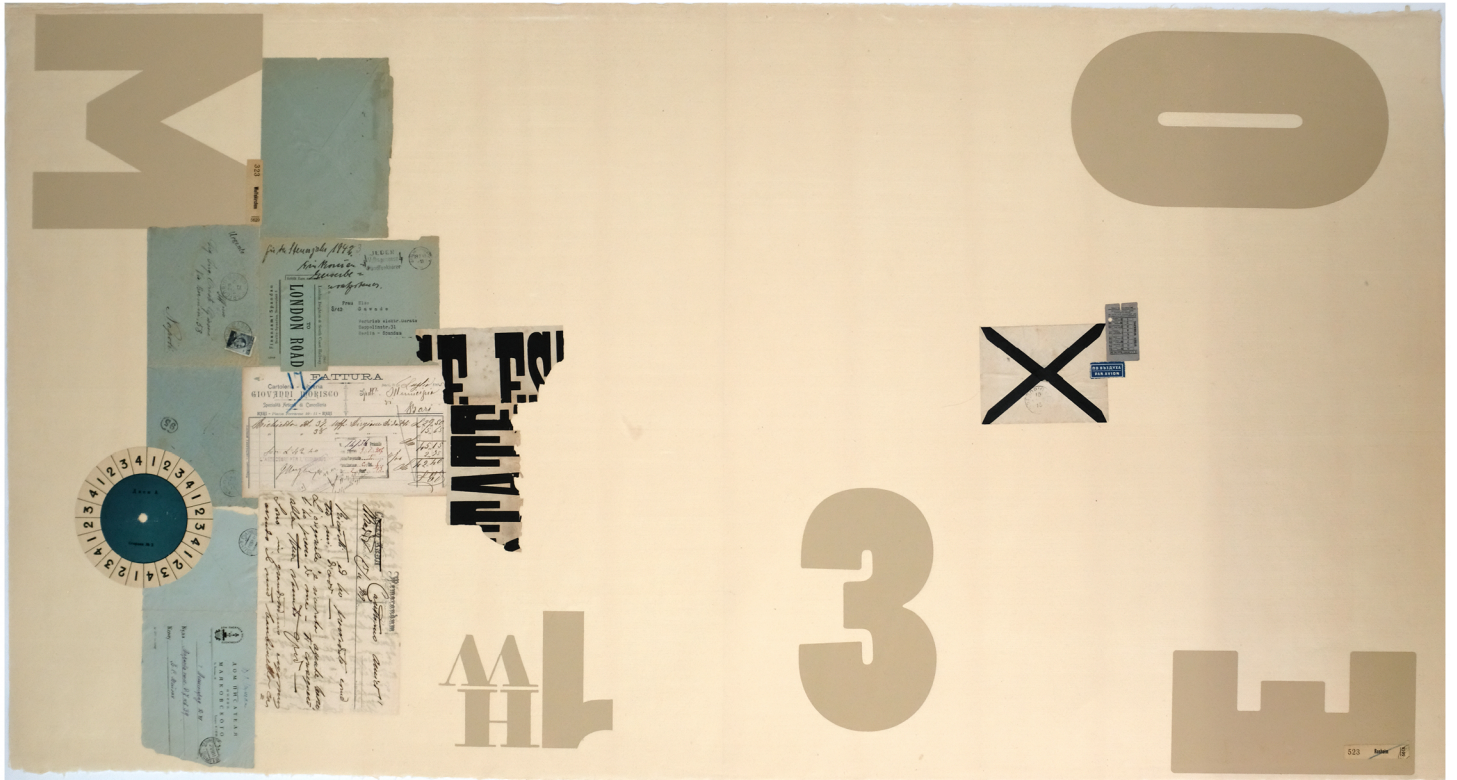
Collage 5: 38 90 x 60cm

Over a background of rolled letterpress inks the Italian *Manifesto* issued by the *Ministero Della Agricoltura* is titled in a sharply condensed Gothic characterised by low horizontal strokes and stylised geometric uppercase Ms Ds, Gs, Os and Ss. In contrast, the English auction poster fragments from 80 years before demonstrate the emphasis of a condensed slab serif alongside an elegant fat face. These fragments are from a bundle of posters so brittle and fragile they were disintegrating in their box, the ink preserving the paper in places. At near-centre is a word debossed into the substrate using metal type. There are also small screen printed additions.



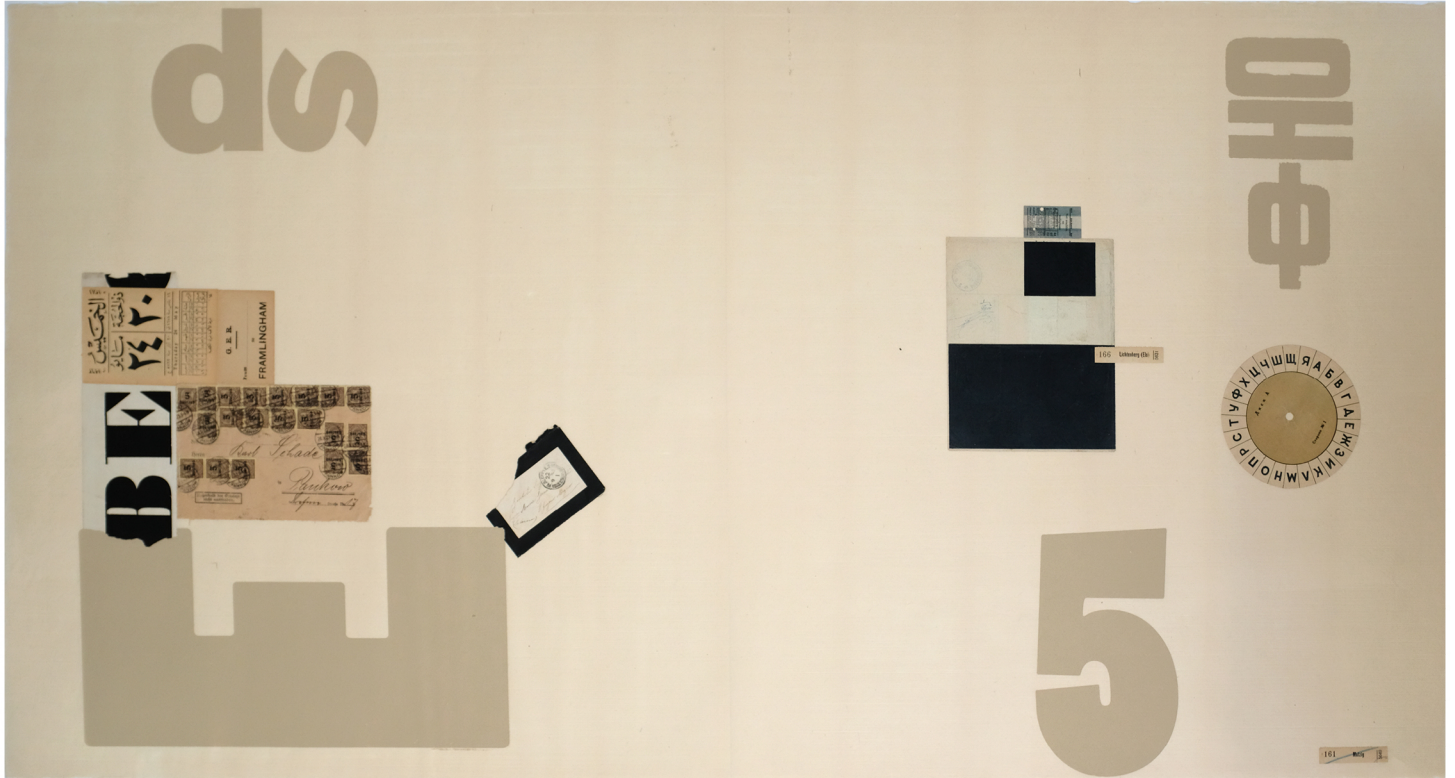
Collage 6: ext hy 90 x 60cm

Over a background of rolled letterpress inks is another example of a wartime plane silhouette identification print, perforated pianola rolls encoding music as punch holes, the reverse of used carbon copy paper and a report from the abandoned Iraqi embassy in Berlin. Following the Gulf War the embassy was vacated leaving filing cabinets full of teleprinted reports and other material which I was able to retrieve, at some risk, by climbing in to the decaying offices. This report details the death of a UEFA president in a car accident, Soviet chess successes and the results of the Bozsik football tournament in Budapest. These documents were there for the taking. The words BEFORE are silk screen printed in thermochromic ink and are calibrated to disappear at different temperature thresholds - 18 and 24° C..



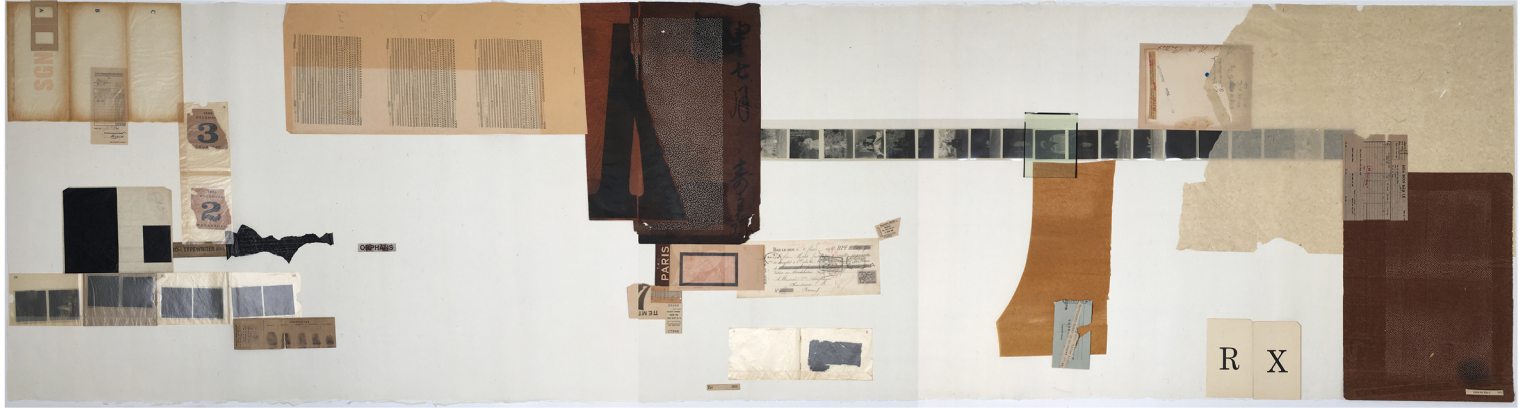
Collage 7: 3OE 140 x 50 cm

The ochre numerals and letters are printed from lasercut reproductions of historical sans-serif type. Included are examples of Greek and Cyrillic Russian typefaces on telegrams and a child's pinwheel, mourning stationery and invoices from Southern Italy, fragments of British 19thc. auction posters printed in an Egyptian slab serif type face, German war time correspondence, a railway luggage label (which obscures the logo of Nazi *finanzamt* (tax) office in Spandau beneath and a small post office sorting label from 19thc. France. The collages are on *seichosen tosa-washi* paper from Shikoku, Japan.



Collage 8: BE 140 x 50 cm.

As in Collage 7 the ochre numerals and letters are printed from lasercut historical sanserif type. Also included are an Egyptian calendar leaf for Thursday May 24th *Dhu al-Hijah*, the twelfth and final month of the Islamic calendar, a time of pilgrimage and marking the beginning of *Eid al-Adha*. Also included are a carbon copy back of an invoice, the reverse side of the children's pinwheel in collage 7, a morning envelope and a fragment from a 19thc. British auction poster. A small blue and white card ticket for a 11d return bus ride on a London trolleybus has been punched once, the French sorting office label at bottom right cancelled with blue crayon.



Collage 9: Divieto di Affissione 280 x 50cm

Two large sheets of *seichosen* paper support a congregation of objects and fragments that are not permanently attached to the surface. They include typesheet proofs, Japanese *katagami* hand cut fabric stencils coated with *kakishibu*, a waterproofing glaze made from persimmon extract that will darken over time. Also included are old faded glassine negative pockets, some with their original occupants still in place, these from a trip to the mountains in pre-war Germany, fragments from Belgian bankers drafts, typecase labels, Russian calendar leaves, African airline destination labels, German bus and tram tickets and two letters from a card index to aid writing and reading for children.

Inserted in the glassine sleeves are traces of the *chò nầu* tree in front of 244 Ngô Gia Tự Street in Saigon, the site of the execution described in Section 3. The tree is numbered, as are all the old trees in the city, this tree is no 76. Indistinct prints from the airline baggage tags described in that section are included in the sleeves at top left, and some of the black cotton bookcloth from Mé Rockayabivy's *carte d'identité* is at bottom centre.

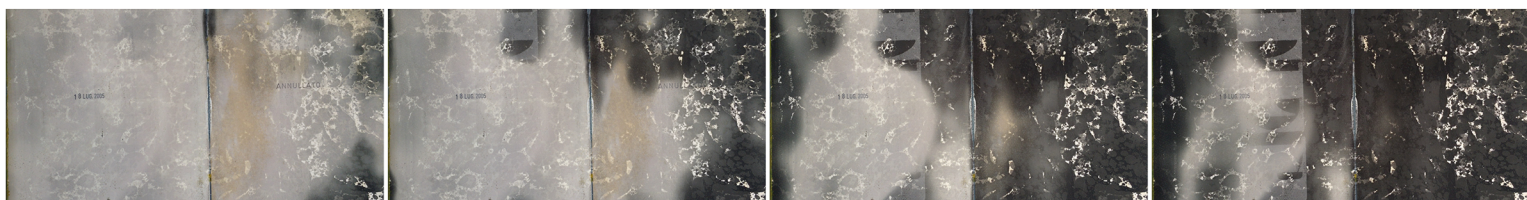
Small gummed labels retrieved from 19thc. German maps include Žiri in Slovenia and the wealthy spa town of Baden bei Wein in Austria, where all Jewish property was seized following the *Anschluss* in 1938. Those of the 1108 former residents who were not able to escape were persecuted and murdered in the Sobibor and Theresienstadt concentration camps. The unfixed nature of this collage enables slightly different arrangement each time it is assembled, evoking Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of unfinalisation, (*незавершенность*) remaining open to reinterpretation and new possibilities.



Collage 11: CHROMA

85 x 65 cm. A speculative composition exploring the fugitive and mutable characteristics of specialised ink and materials. Printed areas using thermochromic ink are positive and negative printed at different temperature thresholds, and stencilling used to deposit greater amounts of reactive pigments. Very thin gum Arabic printing has been used to near invisible effect. These results are evaluated in sections 1, 2 4 and the conclusion of the thesis.

Appendix B: Thermochromic Ink Experimental films screenshots.



Screen shots from thermochromic ink research.

By using a combination of four temperature threshold inks overprinted and integrated with each other, elements can be made to appear, disappear and obscure what is beneath.

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August 2026