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University of Southampton

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

Winchester School of Art

Towards a Theatre of Publishing: A Practice-led Investigation into Performance Storytelling

by

Ana Cavic

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University of Southampton

Abstract

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

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Towards a Theatre of Publishing: A Practice-led Investigation into Performance Storytelling

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This practice-led research project sets out to critically re-evaluate certain artist self-publishing practices situated at the intersection of performance and publishing fields from the perspective of performance theory and practice as belonging to the proposed category of “performing publications”. Performing publications are defined as performance-enabling “texts” that are both generated *by* and generative *of* performance, the primary purpose of which is to stage acts of publishing as theatrical events – as evidenced by performance storytelling traditions grouped under the term *cantastoria* in which visual aids are used as performing publications, but by no means confined to these traditions of, crucially, oral rather than literary publishing.¹ Through the improbable but productive confluence of the fields of performance and publishing, the category of performing publications is uniquely positioned to offer insights into performance publishing processes and practices, critically engaging with Michael Bhaskar’s central question of all publishing: ‘Is publishing a tangible moment?’²

Performance publishing has potentially profound implications for the field of publishing, for performing publications suggest that it is not only possible to publish content partially, temporarily and contingently but also that publishing can be an improvisation.³ Moreover,

¹ Whereas Walter Benjamin saw a direct correlation between the ‘invention of printing’ and the ‘decline of storytelling’, whereby the oral tradition of storytelling was increasingly displaced by a literary tradition characterised by its ‘essential dependence on the book’, it is my contention that, precisely because of their non-dependence on the book, generations of performance storytellers have preserved the tradition by using performing publications instead.

See Benjamin, W. (1936) ‘The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov’, in Arendt, H. (ed.) (1969) *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Reprint. New York: Schocken Books, 2007. p. 87, pp. 83-109. Available at: <https://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Illuminations-Essays-and-Reflections-Walter-Benjamin-edit-by-Hannah-Arendt-Harry-Zohn.pdf> (Accessed: 1 August 2022).

² Bhaskar, M. (2013) *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network*. London and New York: Anthem Press, p. 1.

³ Given that performance storytellers, who are operating within the tradition of oral composition, are improvising the telling of their stories – meaning, they are not reciting stories verbatim but recalling

performing publications suggest that it might be possible to publish the “unpublishable”— a notion I will use to further argue that certain texts cannot be published other than as a performance.

Using performance theory and practice as a lens through which to identify, classify and evaluate performing publications ‘not as the products (decontextualized or contextualized) of generative performances, but as the performances themselves’,⁴ this research project aims to contribute to the history of publishing by evidencing an alternative history of performance publishing that has survived, even thrived, alongside conventional publishing and in productive dialectical tension and dialogue with it.

and rearranging story material as well as spontaneously generating new story material on the spot – their storytelling performances can be interpreted as spontaneous acts of publishing, which are never performed, or indeed published, in the same way twice.

⁴ Davies, D. (2004) *Art as Performance*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, p. x.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Ana Cavic

Title of thesis: Towards a Theatre of Publishing: A Practice-led Investigation into Performance Storytelling

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

X

Ana Cavic

Signature: Ana Cavic

Date: 26 September 2022

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

As theatre scholar Julian Hilton observed ‘Strangely, the most obvious cultural medium in which the triangular relationship between author, text and receiver is to be found, performance, has also been the medium most neglected by theorists of culture.’⁵ This practice-led research project sets out to address this oversight by critically re-evaluating certain artists’ self-publishing practices situated at the intersection of performance and publishing from the perspective of performance theory and practice through the proposed category of “performing publications”. Performing publications are defined as category of performance-enabling “texts”⁶ that are both generated *by* and generative *of* performance, the primary purpose of which is to stage publishing as a “theatrical event”. The proposed category of performing publications encompasses a range of artists’ self-publishing activities that stage theatrical events as acts of publishing, where publishing is envisioned, simultaneously and interchangeably, as both a production and a product of a theatrical event – a process that is enabled by the performing publications themselves.

Along the lines of David Davies’ art ontological argument that ‘artworks, in the different arts [...] must be conceived not as the products (decontextualized or contextualized) of generative performances, but as the performances themselves’,⁷ this research project reframes certain self-published artists’ publications as sites of production, rather than products, of theatrical performances. Using performance theory and practice as a lens

⁵ Hilton, J. (1993) ‘Introduction’, in Hilton, J. (ed.) *New Directions in Theatre*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp. 1-12, p. 2.

⁶ I have adopted D. F. McKenzie’s broad definition of “text” because of his notion that the material form texts take determine their meanings. McKenzie writes: ‘I define “texts” to include verbal, visual, oral and numeric data in the form of maps, prints, and music, of archives of recorded sound, of films, videos, and any computer-stored information, everything in fact from epigraphy to the latest forms of discography.’ Since performing publications appear not only in textual form but in an array of guises, most often as hybrids of other theatre elements, McKenzie’s emphasis on the material form is most appropriate definition for my purposes.

See McKenzie, D. F. (1999) *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*. Reprint. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. i.

⁷ Davies, D. (2004) *Art as Performance*, p. x.

through which to identify, classify and evaluate these types of self-published artists' publications – i.e., performing publications – as instances of performances in and of themselves, but whose status has not hitherto been considered in the context of 'performance',⁸ the research project aims to offer new perspectives by situating them within the tradition of what I have termed performance publishing.⁹ By establishing the category of performing publications my aim is capture acts of publishing, both historical and contemporary, that have occurred on the stage rather than the page, with the ultimate aim of evidencing an alternative history of performance publishing that has existed, and continues to exist, alongside conventional publishing – most prominently print publishing.

Although there are overlaps between performance publishing and other, more conventional, forms of publishing, the main, critical, difference is that performance publishing has evolved within an oral tradition of publishing,¹⁰ which although transformed

⁸ Definitions and theories of performance are multifarious and apply to numerous fields. I have adopted the definition and theory of performance as it is conceptualised in contemporary theatre studies, which encompasses a broad range of performance practices that are nevertheless conceived as belonging to the broader field of theatre. Performance theory is thus understood from the perspective of the historiography of theatre, in which performance practice is positioned in dialectical relation to theatre practice.

⁹ By performance publishing I mean publishing practices in which performance is the medium in which the text is published. Performance publishing is to be differentiated from other forms of publishing that, while engaging with performance modalities, do not realise the publication in the performance medium itself. Related to performance publishing are performing publications, which are one means by which an act of performance publishing can be performed.

Performance publishing is differentiated here also from 'performative publishing', a notion developed by Christopher P. Long. In contrast to my performance publishing, Long's performative publishing focuses on a collective, participatory form of publishing that aims to synthesise theory and practice by aligning the content with the form the publishing takes. Likewise, my performing publication is differentiated here from Long's related notion of a performative publication:

'Performative publication requires authors to reflect upon how our arguments are best set into action,'

See Long, C. P. (2013) 'Performative Publication' Available at: <https://cplong.org/2013/07/performative-publication/> (Accessed: 1 August 2022).

¹⁰ Performance storytelling is still an emergent term that is typically used to describe a range of historical and contemporary storytelling practices that are realised as performance. For example, performance storytelling belongs to the tradition of oral performance, which Walter J. Ong traces back to rhetoric, 'the Greek word for public speaking,' and so to the earliest forms of publishing. In 2008, Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris specifically use the term 'performance storytelling' in relation to contemporary performance storytelling practices, where it is differentiated from other similar performance practices, for example, "performance poetry". Finally, contemporary performance storyteller Vayu Naidu is credited with having coined the term, which she uses to describe her practice that draws on older performance storytelling traditions.

through successive encounters with the literary tradition of publishing, most decisively after the advent of the printing press, has nevertheless successfully resisted conventional publishing. Whereas Walter Benjamin saw a direct correlation between the ‘invention of printing’ and the ‘decline of storytelling’, whereby the oral tradition of storytelling was increasingly displaced by a literary tradition characterised by its ‘essential dependence on the book’ it is my contention that, by using performing publications, performance storytellers have evaded the transformation of storytelling that has occurred in the process of transition from an oral to a literary tradition which was, as Walter J. Ong has pointed out, accelerated by the print revolution.¹¹ Precisely because of their non-dependence on the book, generations of performance storytellers have preserved the art of storytelling within the oral tradition of publishing by staging acts of publishing as theatrical events that use performing publications instead. Moreover, my contention is that performance storytellers, in using performing publications, have maintained an alternative tradition of performance publishing before, during and after the advent of print publishing that survives to this day.

Although they appear in variety of genuinely surprising guises – from concerts to tea ceremonies – they all have improvisatory storytelling, self-publishing and theatricality in common, which have been combined by performance storytellers into idiosyncratic, dynamic and generative performance systems that defy conventional forms and notions of publishing. Furthermore, it is my contention that performance storytelling traditions that feature performing publications – most often in the guise of performance-enabling visual aids – resists not only conventional publishing but that which is considered conventionally

See Ong, W. J. (1975) ‘The Writer’s Audience is Always a Fiction*’, *PMLA*, Jan., 1975, Vol. 90, No. 1, pp. 9-21, p. 9. Available at:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/461344.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A827fd862e2ec984daa0fa67a3bdac3ed&ab_segments=&origin= (Accessed: 12 August 2023).

See Aston, E. and Harris, G. (2008) *Performance Practice and Process: Contemporary [Women] Practitioners*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 2.

See Naidu, V. (2016) ‘Weaving Words, Telling Tales’, *The Hindu*, 14 October. Available at:

<https://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/Weaving-words-telling-tales/article16071184.ece> (Accessed: 15 December 2020).

¹¹ Benjamin, W. (1936) ‘The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov’, in Arendt, H. (ed.) (1969) *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, pp. 83-109, p. 87. Available at:

<https://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Illuminations-Essays-and-Reflections-Walter-Benjamin-edit-by-Hannah-Arendt-Harry-Zohn.pdf> (Accessed: 1 August 2022).

publishable, and instead publishes that which is, for all intents and purposes, “unpublishable”.

In so far as this research project concerns itself with performance as a theoretical and artistic practice that has developed in a critical, dialectical tension with the theatre, I have focused on the notion of performance as a theatrical event and on theatricality, rather than the related notion of performativity.¹² I have adopted the theatrical event as an integrated interpretative model of both performance analysis and performance practice, which takes into account the totality of the production and reception processes and of the exchanges between the performer – who, within the scope of this research project, is most often also the author and, so, I use the term author-performer¹³ – and the audience in relation to the performed text. This research projects applies Patrice Pavis’ approach to performance analysis ‘from the point of view of the practice’¹⁴ to the theatrical event and presents artist self-publishing activity – re-conceived as theatrical events – as interpretative models in themselves. Theatrical events, thus conceived, are further subjected to the criteria set by the category of performing publications.

The proposed category is intended to capture acts of publishing, historical and contemporary, that have occurred on the stage rather than the page, revealing an

¹² In her seminal essay ‘When Gesture Becomes Event’, Judith Butler’s makes a clear distinction between performance studies and theatre studies, arguing that a performance or indeed, performativity, can be enacted ‘even when it is without a stage’, i.e., situating performance and performativity outside of the conventions and constraints of the theatre apparatus. In contrast, I have situated performance decidedly within theatre studies, in dialogue and dialectical tension with theatre and the related notion of theatricality. While Butler’s notion of performance is premised on the absence of the stage, mine is founded on its presence – since performing publications and performance publishing necessarily take place on an actual stage or any surface that stands in for it, thereby ‘assuming the status of a stage.’

See Butler, J. (2017) ‘When gesture becomes event’, in A. Street, J. Alliot, & M. Pauker (eds.), *Inter views in performance philosophy: Crossings and conversations*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. pp. 171-191, p. 180 and p. 172.

¹³ I use the term “author-performer” here to indicate that the performer is also the author of the performing publication. The author is the one who devised the performance system, which is also a publishing system, and typically is also the performer, hence “author-performer”. The author-performer is to be distinguished from the performer who may perform a performing publication devised by another author.

¹⁴ See Pavis, P. (2003) *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance and Film*. Reprint. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2006, p. 319.

enduring tendency towards what I have termed “a theatre of publishing”. To that end, in Chapter 2, I have selected a heterogeneous range of historical and contemporary examples of performing publications and, through a pre-semiotic approach to performance analysis, consisting of a combination of “reconstruction analysis” and “reporting analysis”,¹⁵ I have resituated them in their theatrical performance publishing contexts. This performance analysis approach reflects the research project’s engagement with what contemporary theatre and performance theorists (Richard Schechner, Nicholas Ridout, Nick Kaye among others) have argued is a “return” to theatre, in other words, performance art practices that maintain a critical engagement with theatre and stand in dialectical tension to it. The synthetic approach to performance analysis I have adopted can account for the liveness of the theatrical event, while recognising, as Pavis has observed, that ‘where the stage is examined from a textual point of view: in actual fact, the two fields cannot really be compared.’¹⁶

I have also included case studies on the theatrical origins of Derek Jarman’s film *Blue* as a series of “concerts” that anticipated and prepared the ground for the film (Chapter 3), and Hans Christian Andersen’s improvised storytelling performances (Chapter 4), both of which are original contributions to the fields of performance and publishing and offer fresh insights into Jarman’s and Andersen’s performance storytelling practices in which performing publications – notebooks and papercuts, respectively – were used to stage acts of publishing. Finally, Chapter 5 presents my sustained practice-led investigation into performing publications – an ongoing performance storytelling piece titled *A thread without end (Act I, Act II, and Act III)* in which I stage acts of publishing as theatrical events using different visual aids. The practice-led case study complements and contributes to the

¹⁵ Pre-semiotic dramaturgical analyses, in the main, comprise of two types of analyses, namely “reporting analysis” and “reconstruction analysis”. The former is undertaken live, reporting on the performance and its impact upon the audience and the latter is undertaken after the fact and consist of analysis of the available materials generated by the performance, meaning the texts produced before, during and after the performance: preparatory and promotional material (e.g., artist notebooks, posters, pamphlets, etc.) produced before the performance; performance texts (e.g. artist notes, scripts, performance texts etc.) used during the performance; and documentary material (e.g., performance documentation, artist statements of their intentions, accounts and reports) produced after the performance.

¹⁶ Pavis, P. (2003) *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance and Film*, p. 218.

research, offering an interpretative integrated model of both performance practice and performance analysis that focuses on the theatrical event and on theatricality.¹⁷

My aim, in establishing the proposed category, is to set out the constitutive characteristic and criteria of performing publications. By identifying, analysing and, finally, categorising them, my aim is to differentiate them from other similar theatre elements. Performing publications, far from resembling books, appear – on the stage – in a myriad of guises, most often as hybrid theatre elements – such as scripts, scores, props, scenography and even costumes – with which they share many characteristics and with which they are most often, mistakenly, confused, but which are not necessarily used to stage acts of publishing, whereas performing publications necessarily are. It is my hope that in establishing the category and in reconstructing the conditions of the original theatrical events in which they appeared, performing publications will be appreciated for what they really are: performance-enabling aids specifically used to stage ephemeral forms of publishing as theatrical events.

With the recent resurgence of interest in performance theory and practice, and its potential applications and implications for other fields – including publishing, this tendency has been revived – albeit in different configurations, most prominently in digital publishing.¹⁸ However, it has also been revived, most compellingly, in contemporary forms

¹⁷ I have adopted Patrice Pavis' approach to performance theory and analysis 'from the point of view practice' for the practice-led component of my research wherein the theatrical event is conceived as an interpretative model and method in itself.

See Pavis, P. (2003) *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance and Film*, p. 319.

¹⁸ Among other examples of performance in the realm of digital publishing, Christopher. P. Long's performance publications are, in his words, "enhanced digital books" that encourage participants to enact the concepts they are embodying, for, according to Long, 'publishing has always been a kind of performance'; Alessandro Ludovico has explored "hybrid and processual objects in print", pointing to transformations of print publishing in the era of post-digital publishing, including how performance manifests across print and digital publishing; and Tom Standage has pointed to the similarities between publishing on "new media", including social media networks, and "really old" media arguing that for most of its history, publishing has been a kind of performance that includes, among other examples, 'overlapping informal networks of gossip, songs, poems written on scraps of paper, materials printed with hidden presses', which has been taking place along socially networked channels, 'based on the person-to-person sharing of information.'

See Long, C. P. (2013) 'Performative Publication' Available at:

<https://cplong.org/2013/07/performative-publication/> (Accessed: 1 August 2022); Ludovico, A.

(2015) 'Post-Digital Publishing, Hybrid and Processual Objects in Print' Available at: <http://post->

of performance storytelling, which is the focus of this research project. Contemporary performance storytelling practices have their antecedent in traditional performance storytelling practices that similarly use visual aids as performing publications, historically grouped under the term *cantastoria*, but they are by no means restricted to these traditions. In fact, contemporary forms of performance publishing have their own tradition that can be traced back to the historical avant-garde of the early 20th century.

While the scope of my research into various historical and contemporary performance publishing models is wide-ranging, it is specific in that it focuses on the category of performing publications as used in acts of publishing staged as theatrical events. Paramount among my aims is, first, to firmly establish the category of performing publications and, second, to explore the potentially profound implications it has for the field of performance and, perhaps even more so, for the field of publishing.

My research indicates that performing publications evidence a particularly resilient tradition of performance publishing that has historically survived, even thrived, alongside conventional publishing, however, crucially, it did so in diametrical opposition to conventional publishing. In a sense, it presents us with a form of anti-publishing – or, more accurately, a form of pre-publishing – that is nevertheless, paradoxically, a form of publishing. Consequently, this form of performance publishing challenges fundamental notions of publishing, testing the limits of what, how, when, where and why content can be said to have been not only published but also what, precisely, makes content publishable (or not) in the first place. The improbable but productive confluence of the fields of performance and publishing, which the category of performing publications is uniquely positioned to capture, offers insights into performance publishing processes and practices, critically engaging with Michael Bhaskar’s central question of all publishing: “Is publishing a tangible moment?”¹⁹ This has interesting implications for the field of publishing, for performing publications seem to suggest that it is not only possible to publish content partially, temporarily and contingently, but it also suggests that publishing can be an

digital-culture.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ludovico_2015_post-digital-publishing.pdf (Accessed: 30 August 2022); Standage, T. (2013) *Writing on the Wall: Social Media - The First 2,000 Years*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, p. 151 and p. 4.

¹⁹ Bhaskar, M. (2013) *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network*, p. 1.

improvisation.²⁰ Moreover, performing publications suggest that it might be possible to publish the unpublishable.

By situating performing publication within an autonomous, clearly defined category, it is my hope that their contribution to both the fields of performance and publishing can be properly evaluated and their curious appearance and distinguishing features, which are decidedly performance-born, performance-enabling and, ultimately, performance-generating, can be finally accounted for upon being viewed from a performance publishing perspective.

Finally, this research project proposes that a sustained but largely ignored tendency towards what I have termed “a theatre of publishing” has persisted throughout the history of publishing in dialogue and dialectical tension to it – as theatrical performance. This research projects sets out to provide an original contribution to the existing history of publishing from a performance practice and theory perspective – to include the category of performing publications and the notion of performance publishing in which acts of publishing are staged as theatrical events. It is my hope that performing publications will be included in future conversations about alternative forms of publishing that have yet to be identified, analysed and categorised as forms of performance publishing. It is also my hope that this research project will contribute to what is, according to Bhaskar, as yet a non-existent, definitive and comprehensive, theory of publishing.²¹

²⁰ Given that performance storytellers, who are operating within the tradition of oral composition, are improvising the telling of their stories – meaning, they are not reciting stories verbatim but recalling and rearranging story material as well as spontaneously generating new story material on the spot – their storytelling performances can be interpreted as spontaneous acts of publishing. Since the stories have been composed without predetermination or a precise plan in place, and since an element of aleatory play is involved in their performances, it means that not only their stories but also the instances of their publishing can never be performed in the same way twice.

²¹ According to Bhaskar, ‘Publishing has been thoroughly explored both historically and in the present, but not adequately theorised.’

See Bhaskar, M. (2013) *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network*, p. 4.

Chapter 2 Seven Ways of Looking at a Performing Publication

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I pose a central research question: What are performing publications? I will begin by providing a theoretical basis for the category, in which I will focus on differentiating performing publications from print publications. The strategic decision to compare and contrast performing publications with print publications specifically is a means of focusing on these two *media* of publishing: performance and print. Focusing on publishing as it manifests in the two media will serve as the departure point for my main argument, which is that performance is not only a modality but also a medium of publishing – hence “performance publishing”.²² Focusing on the medium itself is a reliable means of differentiating performance publishing from other forms of publishing, including print publishing.

I will proceed by identifying the seven defining features of performing publications and, through a purposefully eclectic range of examples, elaborate on these features in detail, foregrounding one or another as means of gradually refining the category. Each of the examples, ranging from the simplest to the most elaborate performing publications, offers tantalising leads that could potentially fill gaps in our present knowledge of the interdisciplinary area where performance and publishing meet: performance publishing.

I will focus on examples of performing publications in historical and contemporary artists’ self-publishing practices, showing how these artists negotiate transitions from stage to

²² For this reason, I will not be dealing with other forms of publishing that, while engaging with performance modalities, do not realise the publication in the performance medium itself. This means excluding examples where performance manifests in digital publications, such as in Christopher. P. Long’s performance publications, which are ‘enhanced digital books’, or where performance manifests in digital-born print publications, what Alessandro Ludovico terms ‘hybrid and processual objects in print’.

See Long, C. P. (2013) ‘Performative Publication’ Available at: <https://cplong.org/2013/07/performative-publication/> (Accessed: 1 August 2022); Ludovico, A. (2015) ‘Post-Digital Publishing, Hybrid and Processual Objects in Print’, p. 1. Available at: http://post-digital-culture.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ludovico_2015_post-digital-publishing.pdf (Accessed: 30 August 2022).

page and page to stage when staging acts of performance publishing, also as “theatrical events”.²³ The carefully selected examples will show how these artist use performing publications to bridge the gap between these two media of publishing, between the stage and the page, while at the same time offering new perspectives on, and new possibilities for, participatory, experiential and embodied forms of performance publishing.

Finally, I will introduce the notion of the artist as storyteller situating some of the artists’ self-publishing practices within the tradition of performance storytelling, which will be taken up again and in greater detail in the case study chapters.

2.2 Publishing on the Page and Stage: What Are Performing Publications?

Performing publications are theatre objects that function as performance-enabling “texts” in which their staging as a theatrical event constitutes an act of performance publishing. Today, performing publications may be encountered in other non-theatrical contexts, but their relationship to theatre and theatricality is maintained through the fact that they are necessarily “staged”. What is distinctive about performing publications is that they are not conventionally publishable. In fact, across the rest of the chapters, I will be gradually building up to the argument that they are used to publish the unpublishable.²⁴ In any case, they are used to publish text before that text is rendered publishable, at least in the conventional sense of print publishing, which fixes text ‘in the space and time of a printed

²³ When I use the term “theatrical event”, I mean any performance that is staged before an audience under theatrical conditions. The term is used to mean performance ‘in dialectical tension with the theatre’, as theorised in the historiography of theatre, where performance is understood as belonging to the same project as theatre.

Ridout, N. (2006) *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 4.

²⁴ The argument that performing publications are a means of publishing the unpublishable will be developed in more detail across the two chapters dedicated to case studies of Derek Jarman’s and Hans Christian Andersen’s performance storytelling practices respectively, and, most pointedly, in the chapter dedicated to my performance storytelling practice in which I develop it further from a decidedly practice-led perspective in relation to my *A thread without end* piece.

page',²⁵ at which point we are no longer dealing with a performing publication but simply a publication.

In contrast to even the most performative print publications, performing publications present the as yet unfixed text of performance, which is only temporarily fixed in the time and space of the theatrical event that constitutes its publishing. To publish a text performatively is not the same as publishing a text as a performance – in this case, as a theatrical event.²⁶

Any published performance text, if its publishing occurs outside of the theatrical event itself, is not a performing publication. It is for this reason that all manner of published performance texts that prescribe or transcribe a theatrical event, before and after the fact of the event itself, are not considered performing publications. Even publishing a performing publication in print, is not the same as publishing it as a theatrical event: the former fixes it in the space and time of the page, whereas the later fixes it in the space and time of the stage – albeit temporarily. These are two very different forms of publishing. Rendering performing publications, which are, for all intents and purposes, unpublishable performance texts, publishable on the page, is not the same as publishing the unpublishable performance texts on the stage as theatrical events. Performing publications are unpublishable performance texts precisely because their publishing cannot be staged other than as a theatrical event.

This is because performing publications are both generated *by* and generative *of* performance. This interdependency, between the performing publication and the performance, means that they do not function as standalone publications outside of the context of the performance they are produced by and they, in turn, produce. Hence my use of the term “performing publications”, with which I am attempting to capture their simultaneous functioning in both the noun and verb sense of the term, i.e., as the

²⁵ Ludovico, A. (2015) ‘Post-Digital Publishing, Hybrid and Processual Objects in Print’, p. 4. Available at: http://post-digital-culture.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ludovico_2015_post-digital-publishing.pdf (Accessed: 30 August 2022).

²⁶ This is because performative publishing realises the act of publishing through a performance modality and not through a performance medium. This means that no matter how performative the instruction, description or documentation of the act of publishing is, it is only ever an after-the-fact reproduction of it.

publications and the performance of the publications, which are component parts of one and the same performance publishing event – in this case, a theatrical event.

Nevertheless, performing publications address many concerns and share many characteristics with other publications and publishing practices – in practice and in theory. As Alessandro Ludovico points out, we are living in an era of hybrid and processual forms of publishing in which even print publishing is conceived an altogether more fluid and unfixed process rather than a product. Today, in our era of proliferating forms of publishing, enabled by emerging technologies, even published texts can be reedited, republished and even unpublished. Informed by emerging publishing practices and theories, it appears that the field of publishing is undergoing a transformation in which the focus of appreciation is shifting to the performance, i.e., the act of publishing, rather than the product of the performance, i.e., the publication. My research proposes that an alternative history of performance publishing where this was always the case has existed alongside print publishing and that performing publications can be used to evidence it. Today, performing publications are especially relevant to expanded, experiential and embodied forms of publishing that embrace performance as a modality and, crucially, as a medium of publishing.

While the production, dissemination and reception modes of performing publications are decidedly of the stage, these processes can be as easily applied to the page – if publishing is reframed from a performance theory and practice perspective. After all, both performance and publishing enable the encounter between the author, text and the audience – the difference being that with the former the encounter takes place on the stage, whereas with the latter it takes place on the page.²⁷ To be sure, the gap between

²⁷ Walter J. Ong, in his article 'The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction', articulates this gap between "readers" and "audience" in relation to how written and spoken texts are disseminated to their respective audiences or, in my terminology, published. According to Ong, readers is a "plural noun", referring to many individuals who are distanced from the author in time and space. In contrast, audience is a "collective noun", and it refers to a group of individuals who 'form a collectivity, acting here and now on one another and on the speaker'. Ong continues, 'There is no such collective noun for readers, nor, so far as I am able to puzzle out, can there be.' Ong then proceeds to argue that this gap between texts of literature and orature is reflected in the precise amount of "fictionalising of the audience" the author must perform when writing the text in order to make it accessible, and I would argue publishable, to the audience. Ong's analysis of a range of historical texts demonstrates that amount of fictionalising is proportional to the distance, in time and space, of the audience from the author. The further away the audience, the more fictionalising of the audience the author must perform. What Ong's analysis reveals is, first, an awareness on the

the two encounters is considerable and each carries with it the entire weight of their respective traditions; the gap between performance and publishing – in theory and in practice – appears, at first glance, insurmountable. However, tracing the history of performance publishing, evidenced by the presence of performing publications, suggests that it is a productive gap. Situated at the intersection of the performance and publishing fields, performing publications can act as a practical and theoretical bridge between the two seemingly disparate fields, and it is my hope that their analysis will make some headway towards bridging that gap, producing practical and theoretical research outcomes beneficial for both fields.

Decidedly performance-born, in the first instance, they propose an alternative model of publishing as performance. This is innovative in and of itself because it challenges existing conceptions of what constitutes publishing, and in a way that is capable of accounting for the performance processes involved in staging acts of publishing as opposed to focusing on the products of those processes – the publications. I am indebted for this ontological reversal in the focus of appreciation – i.e., from the publication to the performance of the publication – to David Davies who argues that all artistic products are performances in and of themselves.²⁸ Davies' argument reflects the recent performance turn in the evaluation of artistic products and it further suggests there is purchase in re-evaluating artistic products previously thought to be fixed – such as print publications – in relation to the not yet fixed performance processes that produced them in first place. The fixed artistic product, Davis argues, it is not fixed at all but is one possible iteration of an ongoing, generative performance that constitutes art production. Applying Davies' argument to publishing, it follows then that performing publications, being less fixed than

part of the authors that there is always some distance between the author and the audience, which is, second, predetermined by the manner in which the text will, ultimately, be published. Ong pinpoints the apparently insurmountable gap between publishing texts on the page and texts on the stage. While Ong demonstrates that “fictionalising the audience” is one means of bridging this gap, more importantly for my purposes here, he also demonstrates is that there is, indeed, a gap. Ong, W. J. (1975) ‘The Writer’s Audience is Always a Fiction*’, *PMLA*, Jan., 1975, Vol. 90, No. 1, pp. 9-21, p. 11. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/461344.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A827fd862e2ec984daa0fa67a3bdac3ed&ab_segments=&origin= (Accessed: 29 August 2022).

²⁸ See Davies, D., (2004). *Art as Performance*, p. x.

print publications, are, ontologically speaking, promising departure points for an investigation into performance publishing.

Performing publications preserve the protean moment in which the performance and the product of the performance are in the process of being generated. As such, performing publications are both generated *by* and generative *of* performance. This, above all, is their fundamental distinguishing feature and the most difficult to untangle – in theory and in practice. It forces us to consider whether a performing publication is generating the performance or whether it is the performance that generates the performing publication. Performing publications put the already complicated art ontological formulation of “token” and “type” into further confusion, by resisting easy categorisation as either one or the other category of thing: are performing publications a performance type, or are they tokens of a type of performance?²⁹ Simply put, are performing publications performances or publications – in the end?

When encountering them in performance context, during which it is possible to experience the interaction between performing publications and the performer, it is often not possible to determine if the performance is “arising” out of the performing publications or if the performing publications are “given rise to” as a result of the performance. What is at stake here is the particular ontological problem raised by performing publications when they are published as theatrical events. Ontologically speaking, this problem has to do with where, precisely, to place the focus of appreciation in the evaluation of performing publications, whether in the performance text (“type”), or in the performance of the text (“token”)?

Performing publications thus pose a singular ontological problem for the fields of performance and publishing: in practice, they are so caught up in the generative process that an alternative possibility arises, namely that they are mutually generative – simultaneously. And, potentially, endlessly generative – as Davis suggests in theory – so

²⁹ Charles Pierce’s “type” and “token” are technical terms that have since been widely accepted by contemporary philosophers when attempting to disentangle “types” of texts from performances of the texts, which are their “tokens”. Pierce’s terminology is instructive in framing the ontological difficulties posed by performing publications that, in resisting easy categorisation as either a token or a type, further complicate the established relationship between performance texts as “types” and the performed texts as their “token” performances. See Hanfling, O. (1992) ‘The Ontology of Art’, in Hanfling, O. (ed.) *Philosophical Aesthetics: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 75-110, p. 80.

long as the performance that constitutes their publishing, the theatrical event, continues to be staged. But, what is driving this mutually generative, potentially endless, performance?

Whenever we encounter a performing publication, we are encountering an entire performance system in which the performer, the performing publication and the performance are inextricably intertwined and interdependent – to a degree not encountered in other performance-enabling texts, such as, for example, scripts and scores. The fact that each of the elements is incomplete without the other may account for the unfixity of performing publications: they are not designed to function as fixed performance-enabling texts, instead, they rely on the performer and the performer relies on them in order to “perform” their primary function, which is to enable the staging of acts of publishing as theatrical events. Since each performance is contingent on the particular dynamics at play during a particular theatrical event, the same component elements can be used to produce completely different theatrical events. From the perspective of publishing, this means that the same performing publication can be published many times but cannot be published in the same way twice. It also means that without activating of the entire performance system, performing publications cannot be published at all. What this ultimately means is that performing publications conflate the performance system with the publishing system.

Since their publishing is dependent on the performance system they are generated *by* and generative *of*, their characteristic unfixity may thus be understood as an unavoidable feature. Unavoidable, however, does not mean it is unintentional: there is every indication that it is a deliberate strategy devised by its author-performer in order to be able to stage improvisatory, aleatory and combinatory performance publishing events. The unfixity of a performing publication thus reflects its function as a component part of the entire decidedly improvisatory, aleatory and combinatory performance system, which is conflated with a publishing system whenever the performing publication is staged.

The performance system that is generated *by* and generative *of* performing publications is difficult to define. The closest comparable system I have come across is Darko Suvin’s “aleatorics”, which he defines as a performance system that combines authorial choice and chance to produce chance-based performances. According to Suvin, aleatorics is a principle of structuring where permutations are variations on a score or script. In the case

of performing publications, the variations are already incorporated into the performance-enabling text rather than being imposed upon a score or script, by which I mean that the performer has no choice but to enact the performing publication in a variable way. In other words, there is no consistent way to perform from a performing publication as there is with a score or a script. In any case, with aleatorics, as with the performance system behind a performing publication, ‘the real innovation lies in the emphasis on the creation of a system’³⁰ – a generative system.

But performing publications are also generative in a more conventional sense. A curious feature of performing publications is that, more often than not, they generate other publications. For the purposes of my argument here – which is to establish a bridge between the fields of performance and publishing, as they are traditionally understood, via performing publications – I will focus on examples where performing publications have led to print publications alone. Crucially, this takes place at some point after the fact of the performance; nonetheless, these print publications have a clear connection to the performing publications that anticipated them, even though, at the point of being published, they no longer function as performing publications but as stand-alone publications in their own right. What differentiates these print publications from performing publications is that they are published outside of theatrical event in which their antecedents, the performing publications, are published. In their transposition from stage to page, performing publications cease to be performing publications to become their print publishing incarnations. However, as we shall see, their performance-born features tend to survive in some form in the print publications, often producing innovative results that arguably could not have been arrived at other than through first being performed as performing publications.

Encountered on the stage, rather than the page, far from resembling conventional publications, performing publications are themselves hybrids of other theatre elements – e.g., props, scenography, costumes, scripts, scores, etc. – though they neither fulfil their functions nor can be easily categorised as one or another theatrical element. Instead, they

³⁰ Darko Suvin quoting Dick Higgins.

See Suvin, D., (1970) ‘Reflections on Happenings’, in *The Drama Review: TDR* Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 125-144, p. 127. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1144565> (Accessed: 2 February 2020).

fulfil a performance-enabling function with a specific purpose in mind: the enactment of a form of performance publishing staged as a theatrical event. The characteristic hybridity of performing publications has made them difficult to categorise historically; they are often miscategorised as one or another theatre element or, even more often, as performance ephemera. The fact that they are staged – as hybrid theatrical elements and component parts of what Patrice Pavis terms the ‘mise en scène’³¹ of the theatrical event – has compounded the problem of their correct identification, definition and categorisation as what they actually are: performing publications. Because performing publications are staged as theatrical events, I will continue to position performance publishing in dialectical relation to theatre and theatricality, because, with the notion of the stage and staging, as Judith Butler has pointed out, ‘we are already in the orbit of performance studies without having left theatre altogether.’³²

The presence of performing publications on the stage has also ensured that they have historically performed – and continue to perform – another function: the creation of spontaneous communities around their publishing, precisely as a result of it being staged as theatrical events. Unlike communities generated around print publications, which on account of being based on mechanically reproductive technologies of print publishing are “imagined communities”³³, as Benedict Anderson formulated, these communities are real;

³¹ Patrice Pavis defines the mise en scène not simply as “staging” but as the entire set of interrelations between the backstage and onstage processes involved in the actual staging of a theatrical event. Pavis’ definition includes a definition of the mise en scène as a system: ‘a system based on theatre performance, or the way in which theatre is put into practice’. Pavis is careful to point out that he is referring to an abstract and not a concrete, system, meaning it is a means of analysing the processes behind the theatrical event, not the theatrical event itself. Pavis’s mise en scène thus fits my description of the performance system behind performing publications, which turns into a publishing system onstage. Pavis’ analysis of the mise en scène, in his book *Contemporary Mise en Scène*, drew my attention to the theoretical challenges of defining the mise en scène, which I certainly came up against in trying to define the performance system behind performing publications. Through Pavis’ notion of the mise en scène, I was able to identify that the practical aspects of staging the performing publications were directly related to the performance system.

See Pavis, P. (2013) *Contemporary Mise en Scène*. Translated by Joel Anderson. London and New York: Routledge, p. 3.

³² Butler, J. (2017) ‘When gesture becomes event’, in A. Street, J. Alliot, & M. Pauker (eds.), *Interviews in performance philosophy: Crossings and conversations*, pp. 171-191, p. 172.

³³ Benedict Anderson’s formulation of an “imagined community” is one in which members of that community have never met and will never meet in person, rather their interactions are mediated by, for example, print publishing technologies. According to Anderson, these are not “true” communities but “imagined” communities because their members only imagine that they are part of a community as a result of, for example, sharing in the ideology because it has been made

they are physically situated in the spatiotemporal and corporeal reality of the theatrical event. Performing publications thus open up other theoretical perspectives and practical possibilities for publishing afforded to them by their embeddedness in performance publishing, rather than print publishing, traditions. Although they can be traced to historical forms of performance publishing such as the *cantastoria* performance storytelling traditions,³⁴ in this chapter I will be focusing on modern and contemporary forms of performance publishing that feature performing publications. In focusing on more recent examples in this chapter, my aim is to present a more complete picture of the history of performance publishing practices that features performing publications right up to the present. Nevertheless, in referencing historical examples across all the chapters, I hope to be able to present a convincing argument that performing publications can be used to trace an alternative history of performance publishing that predates print publishing and has persisted all along on its alternative course, alongside print publishing, up to today.

When Walter Benjamin reflected on the demise of storytelling traditions in his 1936 essay, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', he traced that decline to storytelling's successive encounters with mechanically reproductive technologies, starting with print publishing. According to Benjamin, the decline of the communal art of storytelling is also the decline of a mode of experience predicated on the spontaneous creation of a participatory community around the storytelling event, which ensures the story survives in living memory. Print publishing, Benjamin writes, has enabled the rise of other story forms (e.g., the novel) but at the expense of the experiential and embodied

available to them through printed publications. Thus, despite having never met face-to-face, 'in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.' Anderson acknowledges his debt to, among others, Walter Benjamin for his formulation. Benjamin's criticism of mechanically reproductive technologies, specifically in relation to their mediating and, thus, alienating effects on individuals in modern societies and cultures, is also a critical reference point for this research project. I similarly use Benjamin's criticism of print publishing, specifically its role in the decline of the communal art of storytelling, to reiterate the point that, for example, performance storytelling, fosters real, albeit temporary, communities around the telling of the story (the performance publishing event, in my terminology), precisely because the face-to-face interaction between all members is not mediated. Anderson, B. (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Reprint. London and New York: Verso, 2006, p. 6.

³⁴ Victor Mair traces the origins and history of "picture performance traditions" from around the world. The different performance storytelling traditions, hailing from different historical periods and geographical locations, use a variety of visual aids during their storytelling performances in the same manner as performing publications are used.

See Mair, V. H. (1988), *Painting and Performance: Chinese Picture Recitation and its Indian Genesis*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

dimensions of the ‘living immediacy’³⁵ of the performance storytelling form. Benjamin suggests that one way to overcome the decline of the art of storytelling is to create an appropriate form for the story that enables its content to not only be repeated but also refreshed with every telling. My research strongly indicates that performing publications emerged in the first place to “perform” precisely this function. Originating in different performance storytelling traditions, different performing publications have been “invented” many times in history, in many different societies and cultures. One of the aims of this research project is to demonstrate, that they have preserved, and continue to preserve, the art of storytelling to the present day. My theoretical and practical research towards substantiating this claim will be developed in detail across the chapters dedicated to case studies of performance storytelling practices, including mine, in chapter dedicated to my practice-led research: the performance storytelling piece *A thread without end*. For the present, I can claim that my research indicates that performing publications present us with a variety of appropriate forms for the stories they are telling, which cannot be told other than as performance, along the lines that Benjamin has suggested.

Performing publications, I am claiming, are the as yet uncategorised productions and products of the synthesis of performance and publishing, texts whose mode production, dissemination and reception is that of the “theatrical event”, the publishing of which occurs on the stage. The real innovation of performing publications, then, is that their staging as theatrical events is simultaneously an act of publishing. Performing publications traverse the fields of performance and publishing and, in an attempt to synthesise the two on the stage, I will proceed by presenting examples of performing publications from *within* the theatrical events that generate them and are, in turn, generated by them. I will do so through a combination of reconstruction analysis and, whenever possible, reporting analysis: a synthetic approach to performance analysis that can account for performing publications as both products (“theoretical objects”) and as productions (“empirical objects”) of theatrical events. By focusing on the theatrical event, I will also tentatively

³⁵ Benjamin, W. (1936) ‘The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov’, in Arendt, H. (ed.) (1969) *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, pp. 83-109, p. 83. Available at: <https://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Illuminations-Essays-and-Reflections-Walter-Benjamin-edit-by-Hannah-Arendt-Harry-Zohn.pdf> (Accessed: 1 August 2022).

begin tracing the trajectory of performance publishing towards what I have termed “a theatre of publishing”, in which performing publications “perform” a central role.

2.3 Performing Publications: Defining Features

Although, as we shall shortly see, performing publications manifest in a myriad of guises, through a sustained analysis I have been able to identify a set of defining features they all have in common. These are their defining features because they are consistently present and, as such, provide the foundation on which the category of performing publications can be established. Each defining feature will be covered in detail across the performing publication examples included in this chapter. While I have purposefully selected examples that foreground one or another of the defining features, all of these features are present in all performing publications in one form or another. Before I proceed with the examples, I will briefly list them here for the benefit of the reader so that they may serve as reference point for the rest of the chapter.

The first defining feature of a performing publication is that it must appear onstage. Performing publications appear on the stage as a practical solution to the problems of staging a theatrical event. There are certain conditions when staging a theatrical event necessitates the presence of a performing publication. For example, performing publications may be a response by performers to the demands of staging a theatrical event when there are several elements to coordinate, especially if these have not been predetermined ahead of time. They may be a response by performers to externally imposed constraints, such as inadequate rehearsal time. Or they may be an intentional performance strategy that enable performers to improvise. In all these cases, performing publications function as performance prompts, directing performers in their improvisations by providing crucial performance cues and by providing the basic coordinates of the performance. This is the second defining feature: performing publications serve a performance-enabling function. Their third defining feature is related to the second, which is that they function as memory aids for the performer during the performance. This feature is directly related to the fourth defining feature: performing publications are unfixed texts of performance. For this reason, their publishing can only be staged as an improvisatory performance, which is their fifth defining feature. Also, for this reason, they

are both generated *by* and generative *of* performance, which is their sixth defining feature. Their seventh defining feature is related to the third and fourth, which is that performing publications provide a set of instructions for the performance, typically encoded in an idiosyncratic performance writing system, and typically by visual means, which the performer needs to decode during a performance.

I will develop all these features in more detail in due course. For the moment, it is enough to point out that all of them emerge, in one way or another, out the first feature: the fact that they are necessarily staged. And it is through their staging, above all, that the notion of publishing as a theatrical event starts to make more sense.

2.4 Performance Publishing: On-and-off the Page and the Stage

The simplest example of a performing publication I have come across is the set list. A set list is typically a handwritten document that lists the order of texts (e.g., songs, poems, stories, etc.) that a performer intends to present during a particular performance. This example, though basic, conforms in every respect to my proposed category of performing publications; it contains every defining feature I have been able to identify in my analysis of performing publications. I will therefore use the set list as a foundational example of a performing publication.

Since this chapter focuses on performing publications in modern and contemporary artists' self-publishing practices, I will use a contemporary artists' self-publishing collective Liver & Lights, led by poet and artist John Bently, example of a set list.

2.4.1 Liver & Lights' *Liver & Lights No. 8 THE ONE TRUE G'LOVE* (1988): The Set List

Active since 1983, over the years, however Liver & Lights have developed more elaborate versions of performing publications than the set list, which they each use during their theatrical events. For, as well as an artists' self-publisher, Liver & Lights have a

'performance wing',³⁶ the art band Bones and the Aft. Nevertheless, their performing publications are elaborations on the set list and serve that basic function. As we shall see, however, the elaborations are purposeful and enable their performing publication to perform multiple functions: including publishing the performance text simultaneously on-and-off the printed page and the stage. This is because Liver & Lights sometimes use their print publications as performing publications, and vice versa, which is highly unusual. The 1988 example I will present in this section was simultaneously used as performing publication and a print publication.

All performing publications are integral to the staging of a theatrical event, providing the performer with a provisional structure of the performance, usually by way of a prop whose function is to facilitate the performance by prompting the performer with a performance-enabling text. This is the basic function of a set list. For this reason, after the fact of the event, once they've served their performance-enabling function, performing publications such as set lists are discarded. However, when they are intentionally incorporated into theatrical event from the beginning, performing publications function as not only an integral but also an integrated component part of it. These performing publications tend to be more elaborate, and my research indicates that the more elaborate the more integrated they are not only into the theatrical event but also into the performance system behind the theatrical event. And, in turn, the more integrated they are into the performance system the more their performers rely on them to stage the theatrical event. In other words, when performing publications are self-consciously incorporated into the performance system, they tend to perform a more central role during the theatrical event than when they are incorporated last-minute, which is more often the case with set lists.³⁷ In such cases, they tend to be preserved.

³⁶ Bones and the Aft (2023). Available at: <https://bonesandtheaft.blogspot.com/> (Accessed: 2 February 2020).

³⁷ Here I am prompted to recall a revealing comment made by Neil Finn, lead singer of the band Crowded House, about the role of the set list – that most basic of performing publications – in a performance. He made the comment during a live performance broadcast on BBC 2 on 2 July 1999, which had apparently been hurriedly prepared: 'This programme gave us about an hour to work up an entire repertoire, so... Hence the importance of small sheets of paper lying casually around the stage.'

See Neil Finn's comments made immediately before the performance of 'Fall at Your Feet', part of a set recorded live at BBC Four's long-running television show 'Songwriters Circle' on 2 July 1999.

The “punk publishing collective” Liver & Lights, a self-publisher of artists’ publications headed by John Bently, have been staging partially improvised concerts since 1983. Their concerts are properly theatrical events which feature original sets, costumes, lyrics and music, which are directly related to their print publications and are typically timed to coincide with and complement their print publication launches. What is interesting about the print publication I will be presenting in this section, *Liver & Lights No. 8 THE ONE TRUE G’LOVE* (1988), separate from their other print publications, is that it is also a performing publication. It thus enabled Liver & Lights to stage a synthesis between the performance of the text on the printed page and the performance of the text on the stage: simultaneously.

Liver & Lights No. 8, the print publication, started out as a performing publication: an elaborate set list that contains the performance text (including a list of songs, song lyrics and drawings) for an “opera”, which is handwritten on notebook paper by painter, poet, mystic Joseph B’erryman Soake, a relatively obscure artist whose mythology is based on a supposed visitation by the spirit of William Blake. “Joe Soake”, however, is a persona adopted by Bently.³⁸ Bently explains: ‘I spent a year in character as Joe... I made a whole exhibition’s worth of large paintings purportedly by him, wrote poetry as him and constructed an imaginary biography, which became both the book and the basis of a retrospective of his work at The Crypt Gallery beneath Hawksmoor’s magnificent and spooky church on New Oxford Street in central London.’³⁹

The performance text for *The Soake Opera: The Clash of the Tight-uns* (1988), which was originally handwritten and illustrated on notebook paper by Bently (See Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3) was performed, by a cast of performers, including Bently, as an opera at the

³⁸ In fact, Joseph B’erryman Soake is one of many personas Bently has created over the years, which he uses as inspiration for his poetry, lyrics and art. His publications and performances are typically structured around these personas. As he indicated, these personas take on a life of their own, typically over protracted periods and may come in and out of Bently’s artistic practice. A recent example is the *Liver & Lights No. 56, One Shoe Michael: A London Song Cycle*, which a print publication and a collection of songs performed as concerts, complete with original costumes and scenery, all structured around a persona, “One Shoe Mickey”, who Bently adopts when he is performing. Bently’s artistic practice can be understood as a type of performance storytelling, which he enacts on the page and the stage.

³⁹ Bones and the Aft (2015) ‘Liver & Lights Compleat Catalogue 1983-2015’, *Bones and the Aft*, 15 June. Available at: <https://bonesandtheaft.blogspot.com/2015/06/liver-lights-compleat-catalogue-1983.html> (Accessed: 2 February 2020).

opening of the abovementioned exhibition of Soake's work at the Crypt Gallery in London, in November 1988. I will call the notebook performance text the first performing publication, for there is a second, the "book" Bently refers to above.

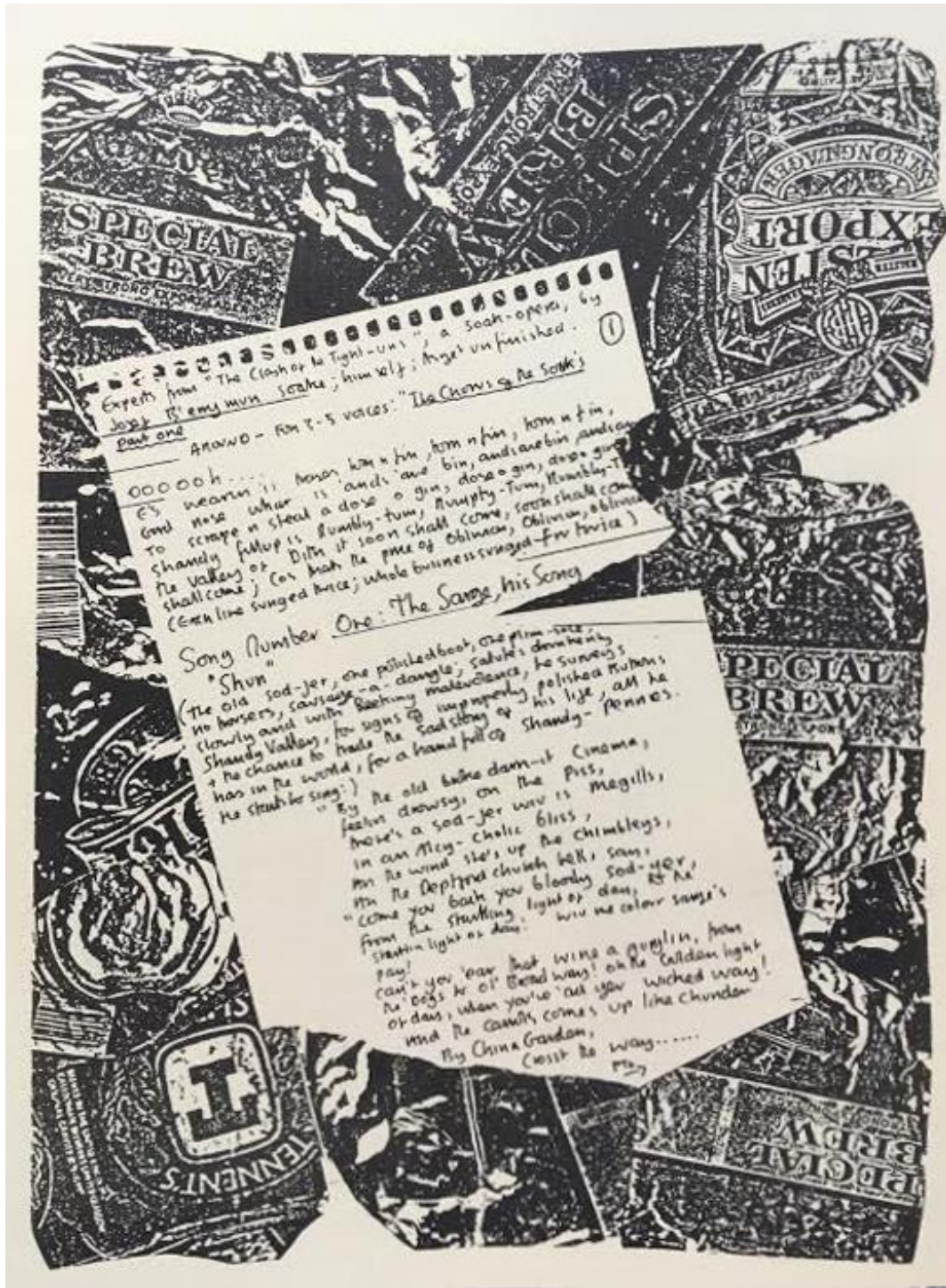


Figure 1 A reproduction of the first page from the notebook text for *The Clash of the Tight-uns* featured *Liver & Lights No. 8 THE ONE TRUE G'LOVE* (1988). (Image: Artist)

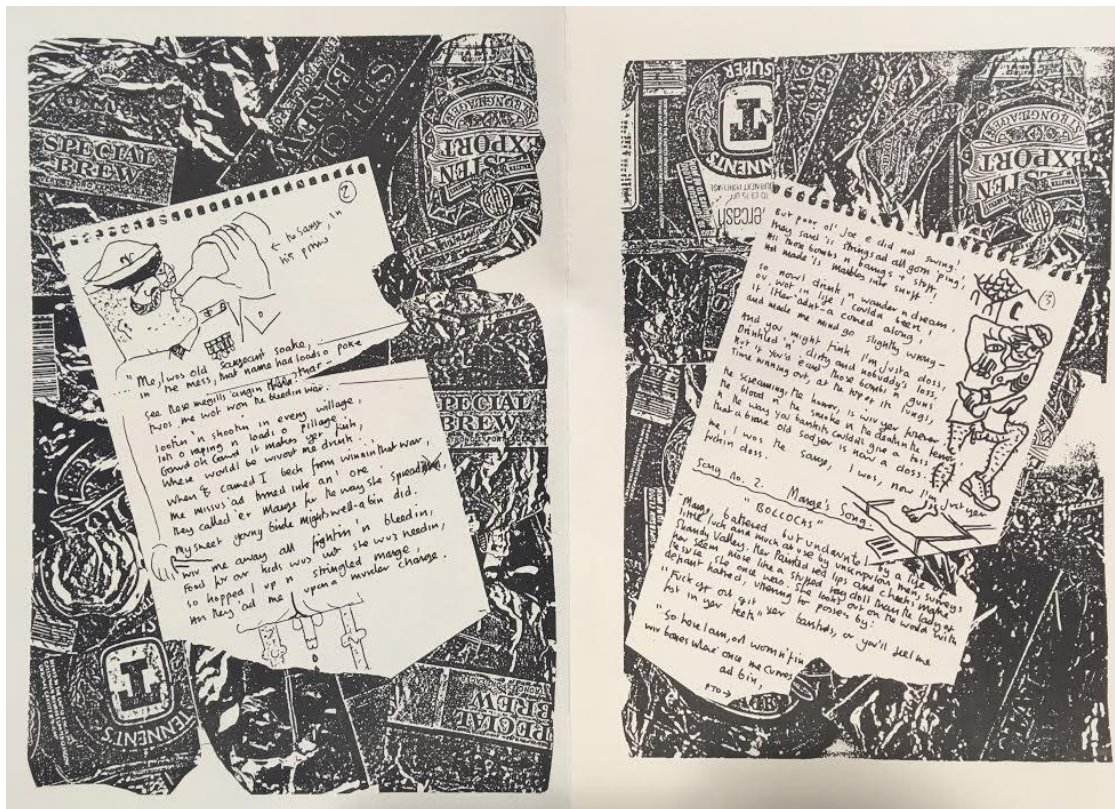


Figure 2 A reproduction of the pages 2 and 3 from the notebook text for *The Clash of the Tight-uns* featured *Liver & Lights No. 8 THE ONE TRUE G'LOVE* (1988). (Image: Artist)

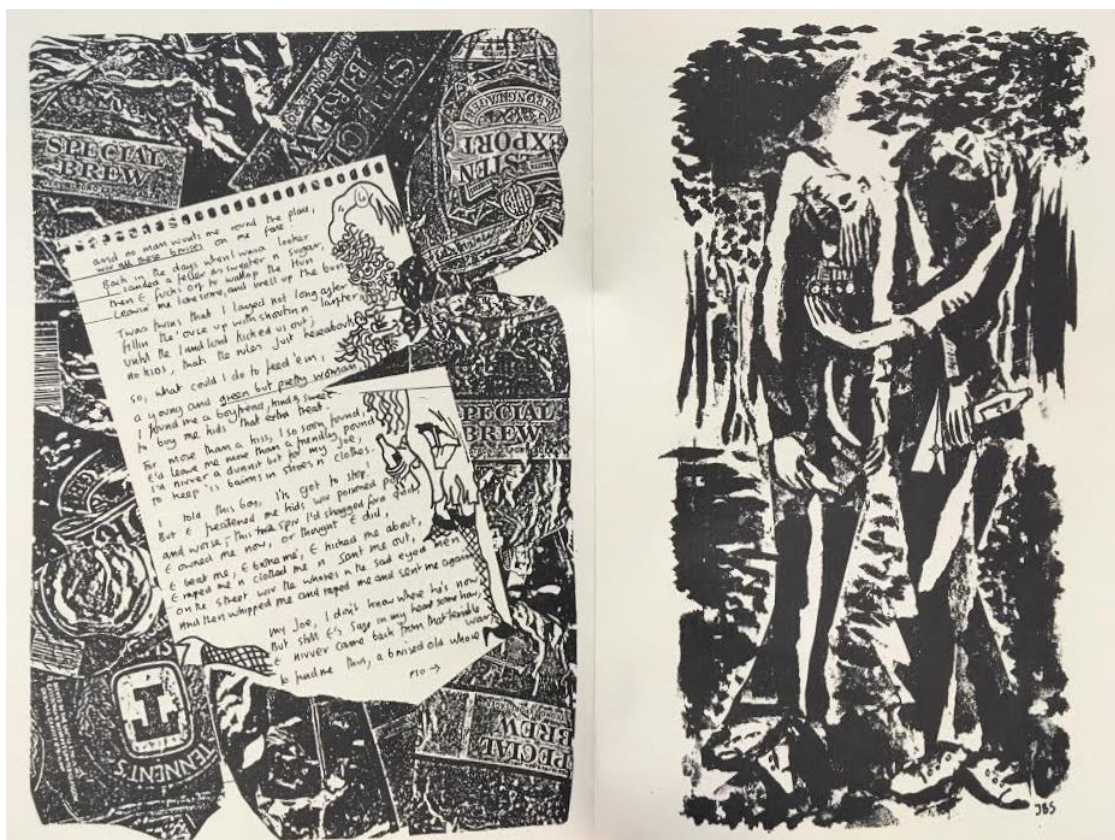


Figure 3 A reproduction of the page 4 from the notebook text for *The Clash of the Tight-uns* featured *Liver & Lights No. 8 THE ONE TRUE G'LOVE* (1988) (Image: Artist)

The performance text on notebook pages, which served as a performing publication during the opera concert, was reproduced in full in *Liver & Lights No. 8* by Liver & Lights, who self-published the artists' publication as an accompaniment to *The Soake Opera*. This is the “book” that Bently refers to above, and it is the second performing publication. The publication not only reproduced “Soake’s text”, the performance text, but also reinterpreted it for their audience in typeset script, which was illuminated with 36 William-Blake style prints. The script itself is divided into two columns, the body text features the performance text, i.e., “Soake’s” idiosyncratic poetry in his own vernacular”, while the margin text provides translations of the performance text, providing stage directions and clarifying the main narrative.

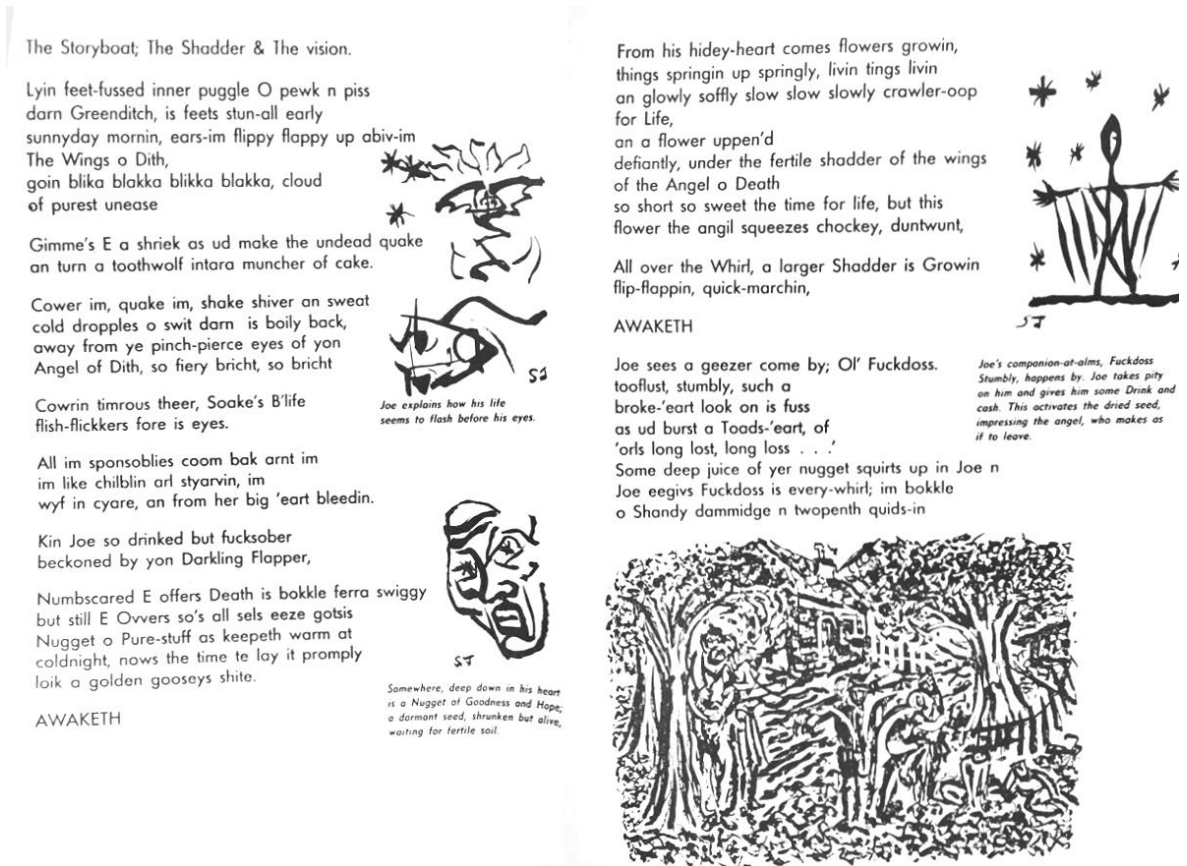


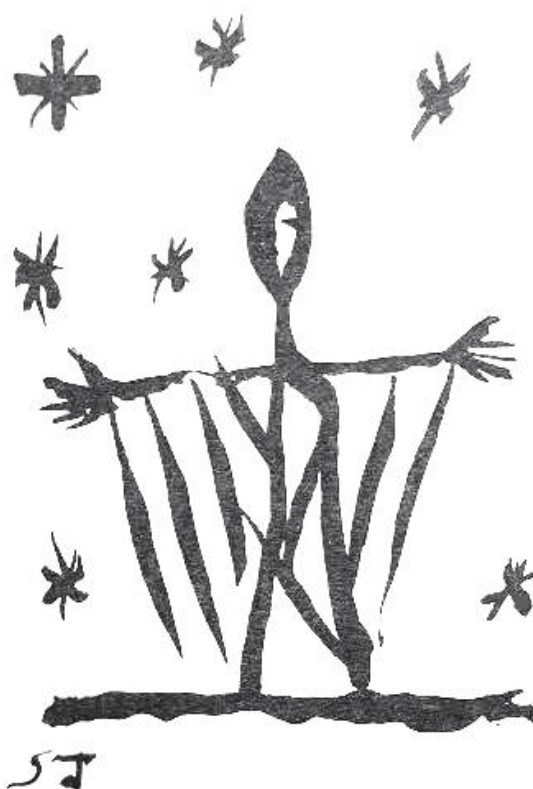
Figure 4 A page spread from *The Clash of the Tight-uns* featured *Liver & Lights No. 8 THE ONE TRUE G'LOVE* (1988), showing the typographic and image layout interpretation of the original handwritten manuscript of the notebook performance text. The notebook text is divided into two columns; the body text consists of "Soake's" idiosyncratic poetry, which has been typed out, while the margin text provides stage directions, clarifying the narrative. (Image: Artist)

rs growin,
ngs livin
crawler-oop

er of the wings

e, but this
y, duntwunt,

lder is Growin



Fuckdoss.

Joe's companion-at-arms, Fuckdoss Stumbly, happens by. Joe takes pity on him and gives him some Drink and cash. This activates the dried seed, impressing the angel, who makes as if to leave.

squirts up in Joe n

Figure 5 Detail of the page spread from *The Clash of the Tight-uns* featured *Liver & Lights No. 8 THE ONE TRUE G'LOVE* (1988), showing the explanatory margin text in the form of stage directions. (Image: Artist)

The print publication *Liver & Lights No. 8* was launched at the same exhibition and concert and was intended to function as a programme for *The Soake Opera*. It featured an annotated typographical rendering of the performance text, the function of which was to guide the audience through the performance by offering additional text normally reserved for the backstage, such as stage directions and main plot points. After the concert, *Liver & Lights* also intended it to be a relic of the performance – ‘a beautiful record of a memorable event.’⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the reproduction of the original notebook performance text in the print publication was used as a performing publication during the concert, as described by Bently: ‘At the launch my brother Peter, actress Sue Kingerlee and myself performed *The Soake Opera*, a ranted poetic song cycle (also in the book [...]).’⁴¹ It is at the point of the staging of this print publication that it became a second performing publication for the duration of the concert. What I mean to say is that, in combination with concert, the print publication itself was turned into a performing publication for the duration of the concert, at which it was published as a theatrical event.

What I am suggesting with this example is that the *Liver & Lights* achieved a synthesis of the performance text both on-and-off the stage and the printed page – simultaneously. Audiences at the concert could experience the performance of the text, while reading the annotated performance text for themselves – a double-layered form of performance publishing they simultaneously participated in by attending the concert. After the concert, audiences could take the publication away, as a “record” of the event, which is, in a sense, another form of performance publishing since their memories of the event would form another invisible layer of performance over the print publication – a layer that is not available to those who did not attend the concert. In contrast, anyone picking up a copy of the print publication after the fact of the concert would not have access to these layers of performance publishing, in which the backstage and onstage performance text was published simultaneously on-and-off the printed page and the stage. After the fact of the concert, the performing publication simply reverted to a print publication for anyone but

⁴⁰ See Press Release for Bently, J. (1988). *Liver & Lights No. 8 THE ONE TRUE G'LOVE*. London: *Liver & Lights*. University of Southampton Library, Winchester School of Art Library Artist's Books (Reference Only).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

those who attended the concert, for whom it is presumably had residual significance as a result of their participation in the performance publishing event.

Thus, it was through the presence of this second performing publication that the concert was turned into a participatory performance publishing event, which took place on the stage and the printed page simultaneously. What is remarkable is that *Liver & Lights* enabled the audience to participate in the simultaneous publishing of both the first performing publication (the notebook performance text for *The Soake Opera: The Clash of the Tight-uns*) and the second performing publication – the print published rendering of the first performing publication (*Liver & Lights No. 8*) – as a concert, which became a form of performance publishing staged as theatrical event. This, in turn, influenced the audience's reception of the first and second performing publications during the event and, later, the print publication after the event, in ways that are only possible through this particular form of performance publishing.

This particular example of performance publishing, which simultaneously traverses performance and print media, both on printed page and on the stage, again simultaneously, is highly unusual. I have endeavoured to describe how *Liver & Lights* were able to perform this, to my mind, extraordinary triple-layered form of performance publishing, crucially, with the aid of their performing publications, because I believe it might prove useful to scholars in both performance and publishing fields. It demonstrates how performance and print media might be brought into closer relation, and how these two modes and media of publishing might be used in combination to produce other hybrid forms of publishing – simultaneously.

It might also prove useful to theatre scholars. For example, performing publications in general, and *Liver & Lights*' two performing publications in particular, could contribute to the scholarship on what Ric Knowles terms 'public discourses'.⁴² Like performing publications, public discourses are described by Knowles as a category of written, visual, spatial, auditory and sensory texts that are made available to audiences at theatrical events. With this category, Knowles is endeavouring to capture a range of texts that he

⁴² Knowles, R. (2004) *Reading the Material Theatre: Theatre and Performance Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 91-99.

claims inform and influence the reception of theatrical events but have received considerably less scholarly attention than performance texts (by “performance texts” he means the “play scripts”, which is how play scripts are sometimes referred to in theatre scholarship). Caroline Heim, for example, considers the theatre programme as one of Knowles’ public discourses. Heim points out that the theatre programme ‘is the only public discourse from the happening of the event that is owned solely by the audience collective.’⁴³ Since it is the only text that the audience brings to and then takes away from the theatre event, Heim examines how the theatre programme mediates the audience’s reception of the theatre event before, during and after it.⁴⁴

Knowles and Heim’s research into public discourses highlights the effect public discourses have on audiences’ reception of the theatrical event. *Liver & Lights No. 8*, as an “opera programme”, can add to the research by highlighting the reverse: the effect the theatrical event has on audience’s reception of such public discourses themselves, both during the event, when the publication is taken in, and after the event, when the publications is taken away. This shift in the focus of appreciation from the reception of the theatrical event to reception of the publication might prove useful also to publishing scholars and not only to performance scholars. It certainly raises pertinent questions about reception of such publications as *Liver & Lights No. 8*. For example, it prompts us to consider who, exactly, the audience is for such publications: is it the primary audience at the event, or is it the secondary audience after the event? Because *Liver & Lights No. 8* was published both on the stage and the printed page, both are its audiences, but their reception of the publication is completely different depending on when audiences encounter the publication, whether it is during or after the theatrical event. Such questions can be raised only because *Liver & Lights*, unusually, “staged” the performance publishing event also on the printed page.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 2.

⁴⁴ Heim, C. (2006) ‘The Theatre Programme: A Public Discourse at a Staging of Maxwell Anderson’s *Anne of the Thousand Days*’, in *Proceedings of the 2006 Annual Conference of the Australasian Association for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies*. The University of Sydney, Sydney (Australia), 4-7 July, pp. 1-5, p. 2. Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/41231246.pdf> (Accessed: 3 May 2020).

What *Liver & Lights* also “staged” in the print publication is their performance system, which is also a publishing system. *Liver & Lights No. 8* reveals the mechanics of their performance and publishing system: how the performance text such as the notebook text for *The Soake Opera: The Clash of the Tight-uns*, the first performing publication, became another performance text, the second performing publication *Liver & Lights No. 8*, when staged as a concert, to finally become a print publication, after the concert. Typically, such texts are overlooked in the historiographies of both performance and publishing. This is because they are not understood either as productions or products of either performance or publishing, much less of what I have termed performance publishing. The fact that *Liver & Lights* used their performing publications to “stage” this encounter between performance and publishing, in both performance and print media simultaneously, ensured that their performing publications were, ultimately, preserved, again, unusually, as a print publication.

Here I would like to say something about a peculiar challenge of evaluating performing publications, which relates to their most basic function as set lists of sorts. Many, if not most, performing publications start out backstage as something like set lists, as hurriedly scribbled performance texts that the author-performer then brings onstage. The purpose of a set list is to provide its author-performer with the rudimentary coordinates of a particular performance, primarily the titles of the texts to be performed and their sequence. A typical set list, once it has served its performance-enabling function, is no longer valuable to its author-performer and is often discarded after the performance. On rare occasions when it is preserved, performance analysts may be able to establish that it is a set list but will not be able to analyse it in relation to the particular performance it enabled in any detail.

A peculiar feature of performing publications, which starts to make sense if we think of a performing publication as a more elaborate set list, is that their evaluation, and ultimately their value, is entirely dependent on the performance event. In other words, because their evaluation is only possible at the time of the event means that not only their perceived value but also their actual value is time-limited: their value, to everyone involved – the author-performer, the audience as well as performance analysts – decreases in direct proportion to their proximity, in time, from the performance event at which they were

performed and published. Thus, the actual value of a performing publication lies in the performance-enabling function it provides at the time of the performance event. For example, while a set list, even an elaborate set list such as *Liver & Lights No. 8*, is absolutely crucial at the time of the particular performance event, it fades in significance immediately after the fact of the event. Less elaborate set lists tend to fade into insignificance. In a similar way, performance analysts encountering a performing publication outside of the context of the performance event are severely limited in their ability to evaluate its functioning at the time of the event. Moreover, their ability to do so decreases with the passage of time and distance from the event itself.

It is highly unusual, to say the least, for a performing publication to be a print publication, as is the case with *Liver & Lights No. 8*. But, as we have seen, it can only be so for the duration of the performance publishing event. However, paradoxically, the fact that *Liver & Lights No. 8* preserved the performing publication in print gives us a rare insight into the backstage production processes involved in staging acts of publishing as theatrical events, which are normally concealed from view. It also affords us a privileged view of the performance system behind the performing publications, which is not immediately apparent, if it is apparent at all, in a typical set list and, indeed, in a typical performing publication.

But another paradox immediately arises: in “fixing” their performing publication in the space and time of the printed page, however, *Liver & Lights* essentially prevented it from evolving further. All the distinguishing features, too, were “fixed” at the point that it appeared in a print publication, which is the reason that they are much less apparent in this example than in other “less fixed” performing publication examples. For example, consider the provisional nature of the notebook format of the first performing publication, which is evidently less fixed than the typeset rendering of it in the print publication, in which more precise stage directions and more detailed plot points have been added. It is easy to see how the first performance text might have given rise to more improvised and generative performances than the second performance text, simply due to being less fixed. All performing publications sit somewhere along the spectrum of more or less unfixed performance texts; they are never entirely fixed, which is one of their defining features. And, it is the characteristic unfixity of performing publications that ensures that

their other distinguishing features come to the fore and, more importantly, that they continue to permute, into perpetuity. I suspect this is the reason performing publications rarely appear in print.

It is important to remember that *Liver & Lights No. 8* was once, a performing publication, first and foremost. For the duration of the concert, it was performed and published as a more or less unfixed performance text. While it is tempting, after the fact of the concert, to see *Liver & Lights No. 8* as a print publication, which it is, or as an “opera program”, which it also is, or “beautiful record of a memorable event”, which it also is for some audiences, in order to correctly identify it as a performing publication it is imperative to resituate it in the concert itself. Only then does it become apparent that it was used, first and foremost, as a performance-enabling text to enact a participatory form of performance publishing, which was staged as theatrical event.

This example, perhaps more than any other I have encountered, with its triple-layered form of performance publishing, demonstrates the potential significance and impact of performing publications on the production, dissemination and reception of texts in both performance and publishing fields, which are, of course, conflated in performance publishing. *Liver & Lights* are extremely attentive to audiences’ reception of their performing publications. They specialise in presenting texts produced in performance contexts to their audiences, whether on the stage or on the printed page. As we have seen, they also provide public discourse as a means of engaging their audience with the performing publications further. Through revealing the backstage processes involved in the staging of their performing publications, they enabled their audience to participate in the performance publishing event itself. This attentiveness to the reception of their performing publications is directly informed by their multi-layered form of performance publishing in the first place, which is reflected in their multi-layered performances and publications. *Liver & Lights*’ performance publishing practice, with its simultaneous embeddedness in both performance and print as media of publishing is one model of what I have termed performance publishing, but there are others.

Such artists’ self-publishing practices are not new, they have their antecedents in the performances and publications produced by the historical avant-garde – the Dada, Futurist, Constructivist and Surrealist performances and publications in particular.

However, the central question author of *Latest Rage the Big Drum: Dada and Surrealist Performance* (1980) Annabelle Melzer posed when she set about reconstructing similar artists' self-publishing practices, which similarly emerged from literary and art movements and not out of the theatre itself is this: 'A conceptual problem remains: just what is this "performance" that I set about describing?'⁴⁵ I propose that Meltzer is, in fact, describing performance publishing, as it appeared in artists' self-publishing at the turn of the last century, both on-and-off the page and the stage.

2.5 Performance Publishing: From Stage to Page

Here I would like to say something more about the relationship between performing publications and print publications, specifically examples where the publishing on the stage leads to publishing on the printed page. In the course of my research, I have consistently come across examples of performing publications that confirm innovations on the stage anticipate innovations on the page. This is one advantage and value of performing publications and of performance publishing: they tend to anticipate things to come in print publishing. The innovations tend to reflect performance-born features that could not have been arrived at other than through first being performed and, thus, published as a form of performance publishing.⁴⁶ The characteristic unfixity of the performance text found in performing publications is one such innovation, and its transposition from stage to page is what I will be exploring in this section. However, even though the resulting print publications are innovative in and of themselves, I will be primarily focusing on innovations that are specific to performing publications by foregrounding expanded, experiential and embodied forms of performance publishing that they enable.

To this end, I will proceed by taking up the notion of the unfixing performance text as a defining feature of performing publications introduced towards the end of the previous section. I will do so through presenting one historical avant-garde art example of a

⁴⁵ Melzer, A. (1980) *Latest Rage the Big Drum: Dada and Surrealist Performance*. p. xvii.

⁴⁶ I will develop this point detail in Chapter 3 dedicated to the case study of Derek Jarman's film *Blue* (1993), which started out as a series of performance storytelling concerts and eventually led to his print published artist's publication *Blue*.

performing publication and one contemporary art example. I have selected these two examples not only because they display all the defining features of performing publications but also because both performing publications generated print publications, thus providing us with an opportunity to see how these artists negotiated the transition from the stage to the printed page.

First, Oskar Kokoschka's "key phrases on slips of paper", which he supplied to the performers of his improvised play *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* (Murderer, Hope of Women) at its premiere in Vienna, in 1909. The unfixed performance text was used as a sort of provisional play script, which prompted the performers' improvisations during the theatrical event, after having rehearsed the play only once. What started out as "key phrases on slips of paper", was first transformed into an improvised play in 1909, then a scripted play in 1910, finalised in 1916, and, eventually, an illustrated print publication in 1916.⁴⁷

Second, I will present contemporary artist and performance storyteller Neja Tomšič's performing publication, an illustrated tea set, which she uses during her *Tea for Five: Opium Clippers* (2017–) storytelling performances. The tea set, which the artist devised specially for her storytelling performances, is used as a provisional storytelling script, only this time the unfixed performance text has been rendered entirely visually. Tomšič uses the visual cues provided by the tea set to prompt her during her improvised storytelling performances, while serving tea to her audience. During her storytelling performances, which are also tea ceremonies, Tomšič makes and serves tea to the audience as she recounts stories about the characters, ships and episodes in the history of the opium trade, which she simultaneously illustrates through the very tea set from which the audience is drinking. *Tea for Five: Opium Clippers* was transformed into an award-winning artist's book *Opium Clippers* in 2018.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Kokoschka, O. (1916), *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* (Murderer, Hope of Women), Berlin Verlag Der Sturm.

⁴⁸ *Opium Clippers* won the Best Artist's Book Award 2017/2018 at the Ljubljana Blind Date Convention and the Most Beautifully Designed Book award in the category "Book as Object" at the Slovenian Book Fair 2018.

2.5.1 Oskar Kokoschka's "key phrases on slips of paper": *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* (Murderer, Hope of Women), 1909

Oskar Kokoschka staged his proto-Expressionist play *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* (Murderer, Hope of Women), for the first time, at the Kunstschau exhibition in Vienna in 1909. The improvised play was performed by Kokoschka's friends and acting students after only one rehearsal, during which performers improvised from, in his words, "key phrases on slips of paper". This provisional play script, the performing publication, then appeared on the stage at the play's premiere, at which point it became an act of performance publishing staged as a theatrical event. The premiere was also the first and only instance of publishing of the unfixed performance text and it occurred on the stage – two crucial defining features of performing publications. By the time the play was performed again, at the Albert-Theater in Dresden in 1916, the play script had been finalised, at which point it was no longer a performing publication and the performance no longer an act of performance publishing, since the necessary defining feature – the unfixed performance text – was no longer present. Thus, by the time the first version of the provisional play script of 1909 had been finalised and published in 1916, the play could be performed in a more traditional manner. For example, in the 1997 adaptation of the play presented at the Federal State University of Rio de Janeiro's Sala Glauce Rocha, the performers no longer have pieces of paper in their hands, instead they recite their lines from memory.⁴⁹

RoseLee Goldberg notes that Kokoschka participated in the only rehearsal for the first play, during which he also 'demonstrated the essentials of the play, complete with variations in pitch, rhythm and expression.'⁵⁰ Kokoschka described the rehearsal and first performance thus:

Actually, I had simply improvised it at a night-time rehearsal in the garden with my friends. I gave the principals and other players an outline of the action and wrote

⁴⁹ To view a recording of the 1997 adaptation of the play performed at Sala Glauce Rocha (UNI-Rio), Federal State University of Rio de Janeiro on 19-21 and 26-28 September 1997 see: Thomas Klein (n.d) *Kokoschka: Murder Hope of Women*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOIPZJuLSgE> (Accessed: 15 April 2020).

⁵⁰ Goldberg, R. (1988) *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. London: Thames and Hudson, p. 53.

down each of their parts in short key phrases on slips of paper, after first acting out the essential of the play for them, complete with all the variations of pitch, rhythm and expression.⁵¹

In line with the rest of his direction, the unfixed performance text remained open to interpretation to performers who improvised the play from the handwritten provisional play script on pieces of paper provided by Kokoschka.⁵²

The chaotic nature of this first improvisatory play, not to mention its subject matter – a dramatization of the primal clash of the sexes in which its two nude central figures enact acts of violence – instantly cemented Kokoschka's reputation as one of Vienna's wildest artists. This, of course, was entirely intentional and Kokoschka's use of the unfixed performance text was central to achieving his aims.

Critics have consistently labelled the play as chaotic, some finding its melange of motifs, fragmented content and 'lack of development or resolution'⁵³ of either character or plot groundless while others interpreted its chaotic nature as intentional, claiming that Kokoschka deliberately set out to confound and confuse his audience. The latter is based on Horst Denkler's analysis of Kokoschka's various script revisions of his play (the 1910 version, created immediately after the play, and the 1916 versions), in which Kokoschka, Denkler argues, tends to further obfuscate rather than elucidate the meaning of his

⁵¹ Kokoschka, O. (1974) *My Life*. Translated by D. Britt. New York: Macmillan, p. 29. For the German original, see Kokoschka, O. (1971) *Mein Leben*. Munich: Verlag F. Bruckmann, pp. 66-67.

⁵² Kokoschka's approach to writing and directing the play is reminiscent of descriptions of playwrights in the Elizabethan period, when performers did not have copies of the play but instead were given their "parts", typically a sheet of paper containing their lines and cues. H. R. Woudhuysen, for instance, describes 'the sheet of paper' as a compositional unit and of 'the practice of composing plays by the sheet' in relation to Shakespeare's plays. Such unfixed performance texts suited the playwrights' improvisational approach to writing and directing plays and, consequently, the unfixed structure of the plays not only during rehearsals but also while they were still being performed from these provisional play scripts – which was a typical practice at the time. It was only later, when Shakespeare's plays appeared in print, that the provisional play script was finalised and fixed.

See Woudhuysen, H. R. (2010), 'Shakespeare's Writing: From Manuscript to Print, in De Grazia, M and Wells, S. (eds.) *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 31-44, p. 35.

⁵³ Graver, D. (1995) *The Aesthetics of Disturbance: Anti-Art in Avant-Garde Drama*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, p. 69.

theatrical productions. Conversely, and I suspect correctly, David Graver argues that the script changes can be explained as 'alteration necessitated by the different audiences for which the two versions were intended.'⁵⁴ Graver elaborates, 'Since the 1910 version arose from an intimate performance, at which Kokoschka was responsible for costumes and make up, and was accompanied, in its printed form, by his own drawings, he may have felt that elaborate delineation of character would only be distracting.'⁵⁵

The 1910 version of the play script, to which Graver refers, was crated immediately after the first performance of the play. Even though this play script was not the final one, it is already a more fixed version than the "key phrases on slips of paper". What is intriguing is that Kokoschka, unusually for a play script, provided illustrations for it already at this early stage, which were included in the print publication of the final play script of 1916. The evident importance of the illustrations can be explained by the importance of visual elements in the first staging of the play itself. During the first production of the play, Kokoschka had painted "nerves" running along the faces and bodies of the performers, which were clearly visible and produced a striking effect in the intimate setting. In a sense, the "costumes and make up" Kokoschka painted onto the performers can be seen as component parts of the performing publication itself: a visual means of supplementing the unfixed play script. Since Kokoschka's staged the play from what was still not only an unfixed but also an unfinished play script, he seems to have employed visual means not so much to compensate for the missing "text" of the play script, but to elaborate on it, to expand on it and, in a sense, enhance its expressive possibilities. This feature, I am suggesting, survived in the printed versions of the play script. This is not an unusual practice: the performance texts in many performing publications are rendered partially, or entirely, visually. Similarly, many performing publications are hybrids of other theatre elements, most often props, since they tend to be handled by the performers, like Kokoschka's "key phrases on slips of paper", but also often costumes and masks, which Kokoschka resolved visually by painting them on the performers directly. These are two means by which performing publications are typically elaborated, expanded and enhanced on the stage, at the same time producing expanded forms of performance publishing when staged as theatrical events.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 73.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 74.

Indeed, in the 1916 play script, when Kokoschka's visual elaborations of the unfixed performance text were no longer as prominent a part of the staging of the play as they were at the premiere, there is greater emphasis on characterisation and more direction given as to how the script should be performed. For example, the final speech of the character "Woman", there is a direction "more and more violently, screaming out" where there was none before. Graver explains this by the fact that the 1916 production was intended for a larger audience, in a larger venue (the Albert-Theater in Dresden). In the larger setting, Graver speculates that Kokoschka might have 'felt the bodies of the actors would not be sufficiently imposing without a more elaborate verbal augmentation of their emotional energy.'⁵⁶ He concludes, 'In a way the words added to the 1916 version replace the nerves Kokoschka drew on the faces of his actors in 1909.'⁵⁷

Thus, the addition of the "nerves", to the earlier 1909 version of the play script (on the stage) and the "words added to the 1916 version" of the play script (on the page) are serving the same end: expressivity and the exteriorisation of emotion – achieved by different means. In the first performance of the play, Kokoschka used visual means to elaborate on the unfixed performance text, treating the make up, the characters, the scenography and the play script text as equivalent "texts". These component parts, I am suggesting, constitute the performing publication when it was staged as a theatrical event. In the second performance of the play, Kokoschka still emphasised the primacy of the visual, only this time he relied more on "words", on using visually striking imagery in the play script and on more elaborate and emphatic stage directions. All of these innovations, meaning Kokoschka's particular approach to rendering parts of the play script by visual means, on both the stage and the page, I am proposing, arose out the unfixed performance text, the performing publication. In other words, I am proposing that it was the very unfixity of the provisional play script that prompted Kokoschka to elaborate on it further, first, on the stage and, later, on the page.

What Kokoschka also "staged", again on the stage and the page, was his idiosyncratic performance writing system – another defining feature of performing publications. This is what Graver is, in fact, describing in his analysis of the different versions of the play

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 74.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 74.

scripts: the innovative interplay between the textual and visual component parts of an integrated “text” as it evolved across the different versions. When Graver observes that ‘He places imagery [...] within the play’s action’,⁵⁸ he is describing Kokoschka’s performance writing system in action on the stage. When he further points out that the printed play script ‘is not the explanation of the play but, rather, one of the props on the stage’,⁵⁹ he is again describing the performance writing system as it first appeared on the stage, and, later, on the page.

It is here, with the notion of “props on the stage”, that Kokoschka’s visual elaboration on the provisional play script starts to make sense as a performing publication. The unfixed performance text that appears as a prop within a larger constellation of props was used by Kokoschka to stage a spectacle of expressionist theatre, but the presence of this performing publication also meant that it was an act of performance publishing staged as a theatrical event. Why, then, did Kokoschka use “key phrases on slips of paper”, a performing publication, to stage his expressionist theatre as a form of performance publishing?

Graver suggests that Kokoschka’s use of shock tactics – such as his ‘blasphemous use of religious motifs, vivid sexual imagery in language, costume, and stage business, disturbing graphic portrayals of violence, and a calculated denigration of plot and character development’⁶⁰ – are deliberate. So, how might have his particular performing publication and his form of performance publishing aided Kokoschka in achieving his aim of shocking his audience and, moreover, to what end?

Kokoschka’s ‘disingenuous use of programmatic material’,⁶¹ Graver argues, is a deliberate strategy designed to provoke criticality in the audience’s responses. He points out: ‘For Kokoschka’s audience disgust and vexation signify some sort of mistake.’⁶² This mistake, the failure of the play to conform to expected conventions and conventional audience responses is what, according to Graver, endows the audience with criticality precisely because it is anti-theatrical: ‘When a play begins to anger or appal, the spectators cease

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 69.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 69.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 71.

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 70.

⁶² Ibid. p. 69.

to see only the representation of an action and begin to notice the gestures of the actors, the dictates of a director, or the words of a playwright, whichever seems to be the source of the play's problems.⁶³ This argument is entirely in line with Nicholas Ridout's argument that it is the "mistakes" and "problems" of theatre, that criticality aimed at the theatre arises. According to Ridout, who further situates "theatrical problems" within a critique of capitalism, it is 'precisely in theatre's failure, our discomfort with it [...] that its political value is to be found.'⁶⁴

Kokoschka, who Graver argues 'uses shock in his play for its own sake rather than in the service of a thesis,⁶⁵ is nevertheless capable of generating and engaging with a thesis through the use of disruptive elements – the props and other stage elements, including his slips of paper, painted masks and costumes that constitute the performing publication – which he puts to strategic use. Moreover, performance publishing is itself anti-theatrical or, more precisely, it is anti-illusory: the "performance" and the "publishing" are achieved precisely by exposing the performance system and the publishing system that is behind the theatrical event itself, through the mechanism of the performing publication. This is something that Graver noted too when he observed that Kokoschka was equally invested in the text and the performance of the text in his pursuit of staging an "anti-theatrical" spectacle that was 'primarily concerned with the pure emotive power of imagery (either represented in printed text or produced upon a stage)'.⁶⁶ I would suggest that publishing the unfixed performance text as a theatrical event on that first occasion in 1909, when it was still a provisional play script, ensured that the 'aggressively immediate spectacle'⁶⁷ Kokoschka envisioned was able to be realised on the stage also through 'physical movement, vivid colors, changes in lighting, aggressive verbal exchanges, and startling tableaux.'⁶⁸ This was then transferred onto the printed page in successive versions of the play script, in which the spectacle was preserved by textual and visual means as a hybrid "text".

⁶³ Ibid. p. 72.

⁶⁴ Ridout, N., (2006). *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems*, p. 4.

⁶⁵ Graver, D. (1995) *The Aesthetics of Disturbance: Anti-Art in Avant-Garde Drama*, p. 72.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 73.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 72.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 72.

2.5.1.1 *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* (Murderer, Hope of Women), 1916: The Print Publication

Kokoschka would go on to publish an illustrated book of the play in 1916. Once the script was finalised and printed in 1916, Kokoschka endeavoured to preserve the performance conditions of the staged spectacle also on the printed page. Indeed, as Graver has pointed out, 'This emphasis on spectacle is as true form the printed page as for its performance,'⁶⁹ evidenced by the play script's 'detailed, arresting didascalic descriptions'.⁷⁰ These serve the same function on the page as they did on the stage when Kokoschka first demonstrated the essentials of the play to the gathered performers during the rehearsal, during which he gave detailed directions such as "variations of pitch, rhythm and expression".

Berlin dealer and publisher Herwarth Walden initially printed four of Kokoschka's drawings for the play in his influential Expressionist periodical, *Der Sturm*. In 1916, Walden's Verlag Der Sturm published the play as an illustrated book, combining Kokoschka's play with reproductions of the drawings relating to the play.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 72.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 72.

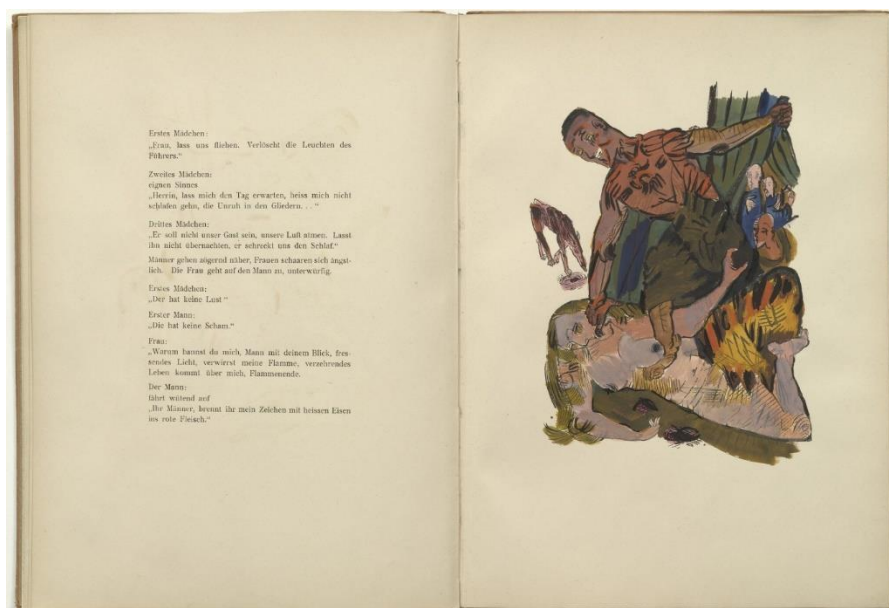


Figure 6 A page spread from Oskar Kokoschka's 1909 play *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* (Murderer, Hope of Women) as it appeared in the illustrated publication of 1916 showing the script for the play together with a line block reproduction illustration made after a pen and ink drawing. (Image: © Scala Archives via MoMA Number 580.1949.3)

2.5.2 Neja Tomšič's "tea set": *Tea for Five: Opium Clippers* (2017–)

Of all the examples of performing publications I have come across in the course of my research, Neja Tomšič's is the most surprising: it is a tea set. The hand-painted tea set, which she uses as a performing publication during her *Tea for Five: Opium Clippers'* story performances, is an unfixed performance text. It features visualisations of elements of the story and each piece is "organised" according to the fixed but flexible story structure of her improvised performances, which enables her to tell new stories from the same set of story ingredients encoded visually in the tea set. Thus, the in-built flexibility and unfixedness of Tomšič's performing publication enables her to compose her storytelling performances in an improvised manner, producing variable stories with every staging. The tea set functions as the performing publication in her improvised storytelling performances which are also acts of performance publishing staged as theatrical events.



Figure 7 Performance documentation of Neja Tomšič's *Tea for Five: Opium Clippers* (2017–) storytelling performance at Glej Theatre in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in 2017. The image shows Neja pouring tea into one of the hand-painted teapots. The tea set is displayed on a table at which her audience is seated. (Image: Vojtěch Britnický)

Tomšič's performs *Tea for Five: Opium Clippers* (2017–) in a variety of venues including art galleries and museums as well as theatres. This is how the storytelling performance is described:

Opium Clippers is a visual essay with painted ceramics and narration. It's a tea ceremony through which we are guided by the stories of the five Opium Clippers, which tell the history of the opium and tea trade in the 2nd half of the 18th and 19th centuries in China. The stories of the ships do not only conceal international

conflicts, colonisation and the development of consumerism, but also give rise to a reflection on the profound implications of the tea and opium trade for our times.⁷¹

During her performances, Tomšič uses the tea set, in which the provisional storytelling script has been rendered visually, to prompt her in her storytelling. The tea set is thus used as a “memory aid” to prompt her narration of the unfixed performance text, which she has memorised but nevertheless improvises at every telling – crucially, with the aid of the performing publication. It would appear that while her performing publication functions as memory aid, Tomšič’s must commit most of the performance text to memory and, because she improvises her storytelling performances, she must memorise the performance text in its as yet unfixed form. My research indicates that the more the performing publication is used as a “memory aid” by the author-performer less of the performance text the author-performer needs to memorise.⁷² Conversely, the author-performer need to memorise more of the performance text if the performing publication is functioning as a memory aid minimally.⁷³ In Tomšič’s case, the performing publication is used as a memory aid minimally, but in a very specific and structured way.

When interviewing Tomšič about the form, content and function of the tea set itself, she confirmed that she had indeed designed the tea set with the idea that it would function as a memory aid for her storytelling performances. At the same time, she explained that her visual rendering of the provisional storytelling script in a tea set is an efficacious solution to the problem of having to memorise the structure of the story rather than the story itself. The tea set is “organised” according to the fixed but flexible story structure, which she first realised as a series of posters. In 2017, at the same time as Tomšič was making the tea

⁷¹ Tomšič, N. (2017), *Glej*. Available at: <https://www.glej.si/en/opium-ships> (Accessed: 1 June 2020).

⁷² Hugo Ball, for example, describes how he performed a text, which was concealed on the reverse of one of Marcel Janco’s body masks, during The Second (*Strum*) Soire on 14 April 1917. The performance text and the mask together were used by Ball as a performing publication on that particular occasion. While the performing publication was used as a memory aid by Ball, prompting his improvised performance, the fact that the performance text was inside the body mask meant that he did not need to memorise it. According to Ball, his body mask ‘was so big that I could read my script inside it quite comfortably.’

See Ball, H. (1996) *Flight out of Time: A Dada Diary*. Translated by A. Raimés. Edited by J. Elderfield. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, p. 106.

⁷³ A typical set list, such as a band’s set list, is an example of this. The performers have memorised the songs, the lyrics and music, and only use it to remind them of the order of songs at a particular performance.

set, she also made a series of three (out of five planned) posters, each one based on a clipper used during the Opium Wars. These posters, which anticipated the performance by a day, were the first steps towards visualising of the story structure that had up to that point existed in Tomšič's notebooks as notes, diagrams, tables and drawings. Through making the posters, Tomšič explained, she was then able to organise the tea set into a fixed but flexible story structure, from which she could then deliver an improvisatory performance. The tea set is organised into:

1. teacups (visualising the main stories of the clippers and their owners);
2. teapots (visualising the main stories relating to historical events);
3. the choan (visualising either a historical personality or a historical anecdote and used to tell side stories, or "branching stories").

The tea set thus enabled Tomšič to preserve a fixed but flexible story structure, with which she could then improvise the different stories when prompted by the visual cues, which in turn enabled her to "structure" the as yet unfixed performance text, which she has memorised, differently at each performance storytelling event. What I am describing here is also Tomšič idiosyncratic performance writing system.⁷⁴

While the story structure that informs the performances is not necessarily evident to audiences at the *Tea for Five* performances, its fundamentals are embedded in the tea set – the performing publication – itself. Which is another way of saying that what Tomšič's

⁷⁴ Tomšič's *Tea for Five* storytelling performance, specifically the manner in which she used her performing publication as a memory aid, is similar to examples typically found in older performance storytelling traditions. We know from surviving *cantastoria* forms of performance storytelling, such as contemporary Indonesian *wayang kulit*, a puppet form of *wayang* related to Javanese *wayang beber*, that their performers typically undergo many years of training, which includes memorising performance texts taken from myths, legends, poetry, which have been written down – originally, on palm leaf manuscripts. The performers must familiarise themselves with the entire cast of characters, which run into the hundreds, with their dialogues as well as with the main and side stories or "branching stories" – all before their actual performance training begins. How, precisely, the performers then integrate their preliminary training with the performance training, in practice, is not something I have been able to find out. However, I can confirm that they are trained by "master" performers who pass on not only the performance text but also the performance craft, how the performance writing system is put into practice, to the trainee performers. The performance writing system is always encoded in the performing publications, which is decoded by performers during the theatrical event. This applies to all *wayang* forms: in *wayang kulit*, the performers are trained in performing a puppet theatre and in *wayang beber* a set of painted scrolls. In both cases, the performing publication is a visual aid, so the performance writing system is encoded by visual means, as it is in Tomšič's tea set.

performing publication “stages” is her performance system, which is also a publishing system, but this only becomes apparent to audiences with repeated performances. Indeed, it was only through attending multiple performances that I was able to detect the performance publishing “system” that Tomšič was employing because of their distinctive variability. It is not so much that the storytelling performances are improvisatory, but rather that they are variably improvisatory that really distinguishes her form of performance publishing from others. Tomšič systematisation of the story structure and its visual translation onto the tea set gives us an insight into how an author-performer might go about devising a performing publication in order to be able to present fixed content in a flexible way – indeed, a variable way. This variability results from the fact that whenever we encounter a performing publication we are, in fact, encountering an entire performance system, and when that system is structured around variability then it inevitably results in variable performances and variable performance publishing events. If we accept that performance publishing is a means of staging acts of publishing, then each separate staging is also a separate act of publishing. A variable performance publishing system such as Tomšič’s enables us to perceive this innovative feature of performance publishing because it is readily apparent in the variable results: the variable stories and storytelling performances.

The variable performance publishing system that Tomšič has devised has certain advantages and disadvantages. One disadvantage is that her use of an unfixed performance text means that she must commit much of the story to memory. However, she mitigates this by easing her cognitive load during her storytelling performances by using the performing publication as a memory aid. The systematic way in which she has imposed a story structure onto the performing publication aids her in this process: it is a reliable system that enables her to improvise within the fixed by flexible story structure. While variable improvisation is an advantage in terms of her aim to constantly refresh the story she is telling, it is also a disadvantage in terms of the cognitive load that variably improvisatory performance itself demands. Undoubtedly, however, a major advantage of her variable performance publishing system is that it is robust, by which I mean it is able to absorb variations in any component part. For example, when in 2021, one of the teacups from the tea set broke, Tomšič simply incorporated it into her storytelling repertoire. She still displays the broken teacup as part of the tea set and still tells its story,

only she tells it differently because, for her, it has become a 'ruin',⁷⁵ something like a shipwreck, and only if a curious audience member asks about it. She explained that its story is somehow a part of the story of the ever-evolving storytelling performance piece itself. Or, in her own words: 'I think it is important that it's there even though it's broken.'⁷⁶ What is intriguing is that, when prompted by a curious member to tell its story, the teacup still functions as a memory aid, even in its broken state. This is because Tomšič's performance writing system is visually encoded in her performing publication, meaning that she is relying on a visual cue to retrieve the relevant story, the unfixed performance text, from memory, before she can improvise the storytelling performance. This example thus foregrounds how the unfixed performance text, a defining feature of performing publications, interacts with two of its other defining features: its functioning as a memory aid and as an aid to improvisatory performance.

But, Tomšič's use of a variable performance publishing system also means that she has no choice but to enact the performing publication in a variable way, which is, of course, the her intention. The variable performance publishing system is also in place because it enables Tomšič to stage her ongoing research into the Opium Wars through her performance storytelling practice; it enables her to update the stories she is telling based on the latest information and insights she had gained. Again, this is only apparent to the audience with repeated performances over a protracted period. Here, the function of the unfixed performance text, the one she has memorised, comes to the fore; it is necessarily unfixed because it enables her to add one or another piece of research, another story, as she comes across it. Thus, even though she has memorised the unfixed performance text, it's very unfixity enables her to constantly add to her storytelling repertoire.

At each performance, Tomšič also reads a different handwritten quote from Carl A Trocki's book *Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800-1910*, which serves as the epilogue to her performance and reflects the final word on the particular story she has performed. When asked why she ends her storytelling performances by reading a quote (usually from a piece of paper taken out from under the tea tray) she explained there are several reasons. Tomšič selects a quote according to

⁷⁵ Quoted from a conversation with Neja Tomšič on 19 August 2023.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

what “feels right” for the story she wants to tell during a particular performance. Practically speaking, she handwrites the selected quote because she doesn’t have time to memorise it and wants to make sure it is accurately quoted. Of course, the issue of practicality is not actually the point. After all, she could memorise it and merge it more seamlessly into the rest of the performance during the course of which she also quotes other writings and historical facts in combination with her own performance text. I suspect that it is evidence of another, more basic form of performing publication, embedded in the more elaborate performing publication – the tea set. Conceptually speaking, it is the one element in the performance that, although consistently applied, is more variable than the others. Although Tomšič sees it as framing mechanism for each performance, her selecting a quote is actually the last element introduced in her storytelling repertoire at a particular storytelling performance. According to Tomšič, this is because the quote is either a new piece of research, or one that is seen in a new light in relation to her own ongoing research. It is timelier and enables her to respond to contemporary issues in real time, issues that relate, either directly or indirectly, to the Opium Wars. This piece of paper gives us an insight into her ongoing research on the Opium Wars, as it stands, at a particular moment in time. It also gives us an insight into why Tomšič actually collects and compiles the story material her storytelling performances. Her choice of story material is directed by the research she is conducting.

In order to present her research to her audiences in an immersive and innovative way, however, Tomšič turns to the performing publication itself and to performance as a medium of publishing. Her form of performance publishing enables her to stage her improvised storytelling performances as participatory, experiential and embodied theatrical events.

Tomšič is concerned with creating not only an engaging environment but also an embodied experience for her audience at her improvised storytelling performances. To this end, she has used the concept of the “tea ceremony” to create the scenography for her storytelling performances, deploying a number of theatrical elements including script, props, set design, costume and sound – all structured around an actual tea ceremony.

The performing publication, the tea set, plays a central role.⁷⁷ Tomšič's *Tea for Five* storytelling performances are structured around a Chinese tea ceremony, during which she prepares and serves Chinese green tea to the audiences in the hand-painted teacups with images of characters and clippers that feature in her stories. The tea is central to the premise of her storytelling performances also because the story of the tea trade is bound up in the story of the opium trade. As she tells it, the British Empire resorted to trading opium in order to acquire the precious tea plants and the knowledge of how to cultivate and prepare the tea for themselves from the Chinese. As Tomšič passes the tea around to the audience, she recounts the various historical episodes that enabled the tea to be served to her audiences today. Thus, Tomšič's performing publication – her tea set – as well as functioning as a memory aid that prompts her improvised storytelling performances, also enables her audiences to also taste the story she is telling.

As I have already suggested, performing publications present us with a variety of appropriate forms for the stories they are telling, which cannot be told other than through performance. Because they are decidedly of the stage, rather than the page, authors-performers can use performing publications to exploit performance presentation modes not available to print media. For example, Tomšič uses her performing publication to engage her audiences' sensory perceptions, expanding and enhancing their experience of the storytelling performance while at the same time staging an embodied form of publishing. When Ludovico wrote of the sensory dimension of print and the 'entire small perceptual universe that is instinctually unfolded every time the physical printed medium is used',⁷⁸ he excluded the sense of taste. As Tomšič's tea set demonstrates, performing publications can also involve the sense of taste.

Tomšič uses her performing publication to stage a participatory, experiential and embodied form of performance publishing, and certainly the appropriates of the story form

⁷⁷ In fact, rather curiously, I have observed that the more central their role, the more central their placement on the stage. The centrality of a performing publication's role in the theatrical event can also be ascertained, more reliably, by the amount of interaction there is between the performer and the performing publication. The more interaction there is, the more critical the performing publication is to the staging of the theatrical event.

⁷⁸ Ludovico, A. (2016) 'The Touching Charm of Print', in R. Bishop et al. (eds.) *across & beyond – A transmediale Reader on Post-Digital Practices, Concepts, and Institutions*. Berlin: Sternberg Press and transmediale e.V, pp. 100-113, p. 100.

for the story content aids her achieving this aim. But, as Benjamin has observed, it is not enough to have the appropriate form for the story content, the storyteller must also ensure that the story is preserved in living memory. The way to do so, Benjamin suggests, is to ensure that the story ‘does not expend itself’,⁷⁹ that it is constantly renewed with every telling. Tomšič’s variable performance publishing system is designed with this specific purpose in mind: to generate variably improvisatory storytelling performances. In this way, Tomšič’s ensures that her stories are retold and, indeed, republished variably every time they are performed.

2.5.2.1 *Tea for Five: Opium Clippers* (2017–): The Print Publication

In 2018, Tomšič transformed her artistic research conducted and performed as *Tea for Five: Opium Clippers* (2017 –) into an unpaginated, loose-leaf publication *Opium Clippers*, which reflects, in form and content, the structure of her performances.⁸⁰ In the same spirit of the “visual essay”, the text is visually supplemented.

Tomšič’s print publication, inspired by her *Tea for Five* performances, is intended to prompt the reader to similarly “perform” a reading, echoing the performances and, indeed, it does. Opening up the publication is already a performance. Instead of being bound inside a conventional cover, the loose-leaf publication is nested inside a trapezoidal red cardboard box, resembling a tea set box, that requires the reader to lift the cover at one end by pulling on a black ribbon. The publication is a ‘catalogue of sites, individuals and events’,⁸¹ arranged as “stories” consisting of one image and one short text per page. While the publication is arranged in a particular order when it is purchased, the design of the publication encourages the reader to re-shuffle the order of the pages and read it in an improvisatory and variable manner, taking note of the illustrative images, which have been

⁷⁹ Benjamin, W. (1936) ‘The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov’, in Arendt, H. (ed.) (1969) *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, pp. 83-109, p. 90. Available at: <https://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Illuminations-Essays-and-Reflections-Walter-Benjamin-edit-by-Hannah-Arendt-Harry-Zohn.pdf> (Accessed: 1 August 2022).

⁸⁰ Tomšič, N. (2018). *Opium Clippers*. Ljubljana: Rostfrei Publishing.

Tomšič, N. (2018) *Opium Clippers*. [Website]. Available at: <http://ne-ja.com/opium-clippers.html> (Accessed 5 May 2022).

⁸¹ Ibid.

carefully selected to capture the reader's attention, in the same manner that the visual components do at Tomšič's *Tea for Five* performances.

Opium Clippers, however, is not a performing publication. Even though the contents of the *Opium Clippers* publication are sourced from the same texts and images Tomšič uses for her performances, neither Tomšič nor the reader are able to perform from the publication in the manner that *Tea for Five* is performed with the performing publication: the tea set. Nevertheless, the performance-born elements are innovative and make for an engaging experience which has been staged on the printed page.

What this example shows is that performing publications have the function of preserving the performance aspects of what is published, which can only be done by staging the performance storytelling event itself. These performance aspects, such as Tomšič's use of her unfixed performance text in a variably improvisatory manner or the sensory dimension of her storytelling performance, are not necessarily transposable to the printed page. Performing publications preserve not only the stories they are telling but also the manner in which they are told. Thus, performing publications preserve stories in living memory through enabling them to be performed again and again, as Benjamin noted with reference to performance storytelling traditions.

2.6 Performance Publishing: From Page to Stage

While it is far more common for performing publications to be turned into print publications than the other way around, there are rare examples where the reverse is true: when print publications are used as performing publications.

In this final section of the chapter, I will present one such contemporary art example of a performing publication. In fact, it is a series of performing publications. Performance artist and designer Nora Turato generates her performances from specially designed print publications that enable her to stage improvised spoken word performances in which the performance and print publication are published simultaneously as a form of performance publishing. Her ongoing series of print publications entitled *pool* (2017–), while anticipating the performances are actually structured around her particular form of performance

publishing they are designed to enable: The *pool* series is, in fact, one piece that involves the simultaneous publishing of both the performance and the publication.

At the same time, I will be foregrounding another defining feature of performing publications, the fact that they are both generated *by* and generative *of* performance, which is prominent in Turato's performance and publishing practice. I will be exploring the generative relationship between her print publications and her performances through her concept of "circulation".

2.6.1 Nora Turato's "pool": *pool* (2017–)

Turato is interested in the circulation of information in contemporary life – specifically, the circulation of text. Her publications are themselves pools of information consisting of sampled text in circulation in her life. Her most recent publication, *pool 4*, for example, is an assemblage of sampled texts the artist has collected from a wide range of sources such as emails, advertisements, books, social media, which she then uses as material for her performances. However, since her performances are the most "circulated" of her pieces, she uses the performance as the starting point for her production process, a process that starts with the print publications. The publications are the result of months of research and information gathering of text materials before they are assembled, designed and, finally, published as print publications. Throughout this process, Turato is conscious of the eventual use the publications will be put to: as potential performance texts for her performances. It is at this point that they are performed that the print publications become performing publications.

Turato does not perform the entire publication. Instead, the performance text is selected from the pool of texts in the publication. While Turato refers to the publications as "scripts" for her performances, the aleatory and combinatory manner in which she selects the text to be performed on each occasion casts them as performing publications.

Turato uses the publications to write the potential scripts for her performances. During the Instagram Live conversation with MoMA curator Ana Janevski that took place on 1 July 2020, Turato described this process in these terms: 'When I write performances I take

from this pool.⁸² While Turato selects her performance texts ahead of the performance, she nevertheless ensures that the publication and the performance are always published simultaneously – as performance publishing events. During the same Instagram conversation, she confirmed that it is important that the performance and publication are not only published simultaneously but also that they are physically presented alongside one another, which is how Turato stages them. To this end, Turato creates the scenography for her performances out of her publications, typically installing them on the floor as platforms or piles, in front of which she performs in the galleries and museum spaces she performs in, so that her audiences are able to experience a total publishing event in which the performer and the publications are presented ‘always in combination.’⁸³

The simultaneous performance and publication *pool 4* was due to premiere at MoMA in May 2020. However, the closure of the MoMA Museum due to the pandemic prevented their publication. The planned simultaneous premiere of her performance and the publication would have taken place in MoMA’s Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Studio in which the *pool 4* publications would have been arranged in the middle of the space as a stage on and around which Turato would have performed. MoMA intends for Turato to eventually stage the 25-minute-long performance of a selection of memorised text from the publication as initially conceived and to simultaneously publish the publication.

Foregrounding the importance of circulation, Turato has further instructed the Museum to remove a number of her *pool 4* publications from the performance space following her performance and place them in MoMA design store where they will be available for sale. The publication was printed in March 2020 and awaits publication when publishing it simultaneously with the performance will once again be possible. The simultaneous publishing of the print publication and the performance will constitute the publishing of *pool 4* as a complete performance publishing event. After the event, Turato makes her

⁸² Nora Turato quoted from her Instagram Live conversation with MoMA curator Ana Janevski that took place on 1 July 2020 on Instagram.

Turato, N. and Janevski, A. (2020) *Drop in with Nora Turato*. [Instagram]. 1 July. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/tv/CCHDKGCjIzL/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y%3D> (Accessed: 2 September 2022).

⁸³ Turato, N. and Janevski, A. (2020) ‘Nora Turato’s pool 4: The artist uses found language to speak loudly, publicly, and boldly, and shares downloadable posters’, *MoMA*, 1 July. Available at: <https://www.moma.org/magazine/articles/361> (Accessed: 2 September 2022).

publications available as stand-alone print publications, at which point they are no longer performing publications since they are separated from the specific performance publishing event that, together with the performance, constituted their mutual publishing as one irreducible entity, as Turato described above.

According to Turato, the *pool* publications arose out of her realisation that audiences did not understand her production process and the interdependent relationship between her performances and her texts. The publications were a way for her articulate the mutually generative processes between the production of her texts and the production of her performances, and make them available to her audiences. Emphasising this irreducible connection between her publications and her performances in the *pool* series, Turato considers her publications as sites of her performances. ‘Having the book,’ according to Janevski, ‘it’s also having the performance’, since it contains the potential script she will perform.⁸⁴

Turato’s simultaneously generative performances and publications are enabled by her performing publications. For instance, her text in her print publication might be realised as a spoken word performance, the performance publishing event, at which point the print publication turns into a performing publication, which in turn generates another text, the performance text. The performing publications are thus used as generative tools, not only to generate a performance but also another performance text through the performance, which is simultaneously published as it is performed. In other words, another publishing outcome.

What Turato’s performing publications do in practice has implications for theory. Ontologically speaking, they set in motion a perpetual generative cycle between the performed text (“token”) and the printed text (“type”) in which the “token” performances can influence the printed text “type” and the reverse. This can occur retrospectively or prospectively. For example, a token performance of a text can retroactively influence its printed type, as when a particular performance casts a different light on the printed text though being performed other than as printed.

⁸⁴ Turato, N. and Janevski, A. (2020) *Drop in with Nora Turato*. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/tv/CCHDKGCjIZL/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y%3D> (Accessed: 2 September 2022).

What the Turato example demonstrates is a peculiar feature of performing publications, which is that they enable, indeed, they set into motion a mutually generative relationship between the text type and its token performance. In a sense, they maintain this type/token relationship in a state of perpetual motion, enabling a movement in both directions: from type to token and back again, into perpetuity. This is what Turato describes as “circulation”. Performing publications thus present unique problems but also unique solutions in the fields of performance and publishing, precisely because of their unique ontological status as entities suspended somewhere in between tokens and types – as neither one nor the other, but both at once. This, I am suggesting, is uniquely a property of the particular mode of performance publishing enabled by performing publications. It appears to be a result of the defining feature of performing publications: the fact that they are simultaneously generated *by* and generative *of* performance.

Because of her interest in and commitment to the circulation of text in print published form, Turato has consistently published one publication per year, starting with *pool 1* (2017) and has plans for *pool 5* and *pool 6*. Turato describes the publications as time capsules and hopes they will gain in relevance with the passage of time. Viewed together, she hopes they will show shifts in the collective consciousness through the texts she has collected. Her appropriation of text into a new collection is a way of reanimating and reinvigorating existing texts and of presenting them in new combinations. Paraphrasing Turato, from her Instagram Live conversation, her approach to publishing was informed by her realisation that she was able to give “new life” to the texts by collecting them. By extension, her aleatory and combinatorial publishing performances are another way of enlivening the text and are comparable to approaches used by other performers in the examples provided in this chapter. In the sense that Benjamin describes the art of storytelling – specifically the storyteller’s task to preserve the story in living memory by ensuring it is renewed with every telling – Turato’s practice can also be seen as belonging to performance storytelling traditions.

As regards the performances themselves, Turato is interested in foregrounding her physical presence and her voice in an unmediated way. She uses her voice in a variety of ways: chanting, enacting dialogues, screaming, etc., in direct response to her typographic designs, which are themselves visualisations of the various registers of the texts she has

sampled. Thus, she is able to adapt her voices to suit vocalisations of political slogans, news, personal correspondence, etc. She adopts different registers to deliver the different tones, as a result of which her vocalisations are very distinctive in her performances. Additionally, the fragmentary, non-narrative style of performance is a direct result of the fragmentary way she has assembled her sampled texts in the publications, which read as textual collages.

Although these publications are available separately from the performances, at the time of their simultaneous publishing, however, they are inseparable from the performances. MoMA describes the function of the publications during the performance in these terms: 'The accompanying publication, *pool 4*, serves simultaneously as prop, set, exhibition, archive, and artist's book.'⁸⁵ Interestingly, the MoMA description does not include the script among the listed items. Perhaps this is because the potential script is self-evidently embedded in the publication, which is the case with all performing publications. Scripts, as we conventionally understand them, enable performers to perform in a consistent way. In contrast to scripted performance, there is no consistent way to perform from a performing publication; there is only ever a potential script and a potential performance.

2.7 Performance Publishing: From Page to Stage

As we have seen, when staged as theatrical performance publishing events, performing publications can innovate print publishing, offering ingenious performance-born solutions to the problems of the fixity, in time and space, of the printed page. In our post-digital era of proliferating forms of publishing, as the contemporary examples show, it appears that performance artists, especially, are turning to performance-born strategies in order to overcome the fixity of print publishing even as they engage with it. Increasingly, contemporary artists are turning – or returning – to performance not only as a modality but also as a medium of publishing and to performance publishing forms, such as performance storytelling. What might be the reason for this trend? My intuition is that this

⁸⁵ Turato, N. and Janevski, A. (2020) 'Nora Turato's pool 4: The artist uses found language to speak loudly, publicly, and boldly, and shares downloadable posters'. Available at: <https://www.moma.org/magazine/articles/361> (Accessed: 2 September 2022).

trend reflects a more general trend, namely a resurgence in the interest in storytelling: in both their traditional forms and in their modern and contemporary iterations.

Chapter 3 The Spirit of Storytelling: Tracing the Evolution of Derek Jarman's Film *Blue* from the Page to the Stage

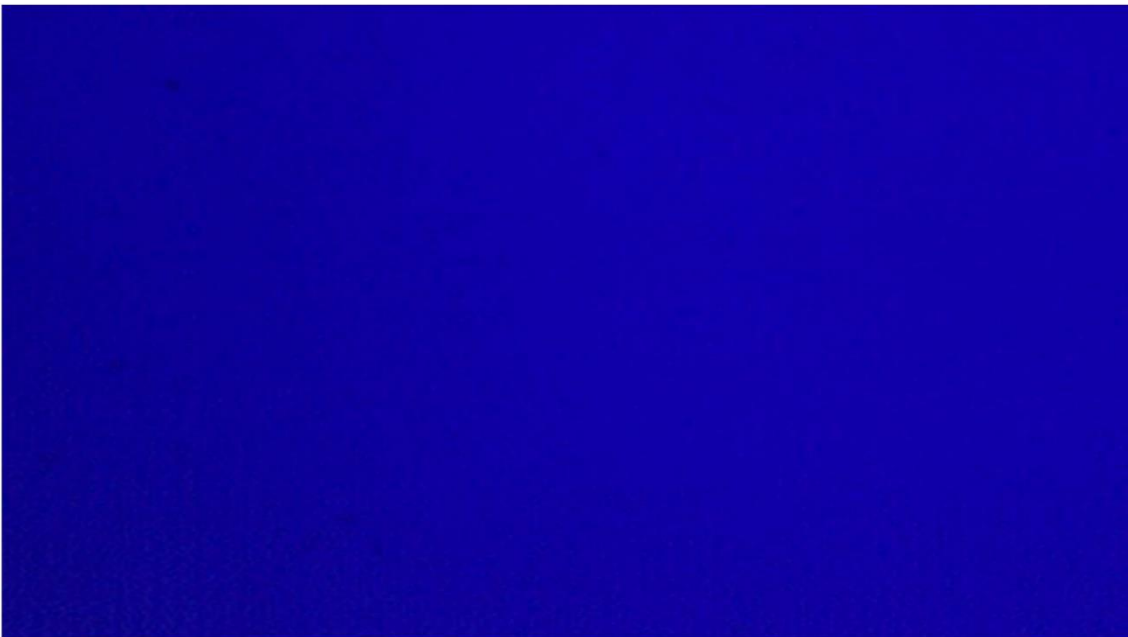


Figure 8 Screenshot of Derek Jarman's film *Blue* (1993). (Image: Artist)

3.1 The Storyteller

In Laurens C. Postma's 1989 documentary film *Derek Jarman, you know what I mean* (1989), filmmaker (painter, writer and set designer) Derek Jarman states that his films are attempts to 'restore the spirit of storytelling.'⁸⁶ In his 1936 essay *The Storyteller*, Walter

⁸⁶ *Derek Jarman: You Know What I Mean* (1989) Directed by L. C. Postma. [Documentary film]. London: Yo Yo Filmz.

Benjamin reflected on the decline of the oral tradition of storytelling not only as a narrative art form but also as an embodied communal experience. According to Benjamin, ‘the art of storytelling has declined’⁸⁷ because of successive encounters with mediating technologies, which have led to the loss of narrative from living speech and the possibility of a shared experience. According to Patrizia C. McBride, for Benjamin, the loss of storytelling – an experience predicated on a participatory community of speakers and listeners – is a symptom of ‘modernity’s loss of experience’.⁸⁸

Living in an era when television (the latest in a long line of mass communication mediating technologies) had, in Jarman’s own words, ‘stolen the spirit of storytelling’,⁸⁹ and he increasingly investigated film as a tool for storytelling, a journey that finally led him to empty film of all images and replace it with a blank blue screen – a 35mm film comprising of a single, continuous 79-minute image of International Klein Blue – accompanied by voice-over narration and an ambient soundtrack.

This case study tells the backstory of the makings of Jarman’s last film, *Blue* (1993), a ‘blank blue film’⁹⁰ in which Jarman comes closest to achieving his vision of restoring the spirit of storytelling. In tracing its development from page to set, I will be paying particular attention to a crucial stage in the process that has hitherto been overlooked: Jarman’s staging of *Blue* as a series of live “concerts” between 1990 and 1992, which anticipated the 1993 film. The first of these concerts, which Jarman “directed” in every sense – also creating the entire scenography – and at which he also performed by reading ‘the blue

See YoYo Films 3000 (n.d) *Derek Jarman, you know what I mean*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbOlwIC0538> (Accessed 2 February 2020).

⁸⁷ Benjamin, W. (1936) ‘The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov’, in Arendt, H. (ed.) (1969) *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, pp. 83-109, p. 93. Available at: <https://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Illuminations-Essays-and-Reflections-Walter-Benjamin-edit-by-Hannah-Arendt-Harry-Zohn.pdf> (Accessed: 2 February 2020).

⁸⁸ McBride, P. C. (2016), *The Chatter of the Visible: Montage and Narrative in Weimar Germany*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, p. 41.

⁸⁹ *Derek Jarman: You Know What I Mean* (1989).

⁹⁰ Sir Jeremy Isaacs in conversation with filmmaker Derek Jarman.

‘The Late Show’ Face to Face: Derek Jarman (1993) Directed by J. Fraser-Crook. [Documentary (TV mini-series)]. London: BBC.

See TLYT (n.d.) *Face to Face - Derek Jarman*. Available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnDr-xW5uo> (Accessed 2 February 2020).

bits⁹¹ of text likely drawn from his so-called “Blueprint for Bliss notebooks” (1989) that contain much of the final film script, will be the focus of this case study. Later, the finalised script for the film would be published in full in numerous formats, including in Jarman’s book *Chroma: A Book of Colour* (1993) and in his limited edition letterpress artist’s book *Blue* (1994) among others, but this case study concerns itself with the provisional script for the film before it was finalised; before there even was a film, and while *Blue* was still a storytelling performance during which the “the blue bits” of text served as a performance script.

In this case study, I argue that Jarman’s performance storytelling practice, exemplified by his *Blue* concerts, is a crucial component and stage in the development of the film *Blue*, lending the film curious performance-born characteristics that blend oral storytelling with film traditions. I will trace the development of the film script back to its source in his notebooks, which Jarman likely used during the *Blue* concerts as performing publications.

⁹¹ This interview with Derek Jarman is from *Edinburgh Nights*, a television programme broadcast by BBC Two in June 1993 to coincide with the Edinburgh Film Festival 1993. See Janee doan (n. d) *Blue Derek Jarman Interview at Edinburgh Festival 1993*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cV0P1cR6j6A> (Accessed 2 February 2020).

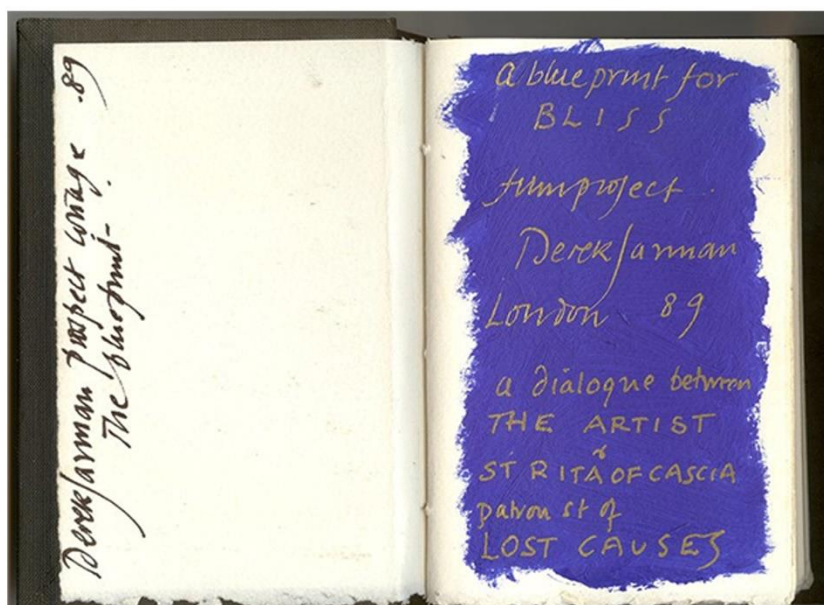


Figure 9 Title page of Derek Jarman's *Blueprint for Bliss* notebook (1989). Collection: Tate Gallery Archive. (Image: © Estate of Derek Jarman courtesy K. Collins)

This case study is part of my research into what I have termed performing publications, a category of performance-enabling texts that are both generated *by* and generative *of* performance, the primary purpose of which is to stage acts of publishing as performance events – concerts in this case. Performing publications are typically encountered in performance storytelling traditions where the text is first published on the stage before being realised in some other form – film in this case.

In the hands of the storyteller, performing publications are used to produce a certain type of storytelling that can only emerge out of performance process and practice, which can only be published as a performance event. Today, its protagonist is likely the author-turned-performer whom you might encounter at performance storytelling events, a contemporary incarnation of the storyteller – and Jarman was certainly that.

In this case study I argue that Jarman's first *Blue* concert is an act of publishing staged as performance event and I will be looking for evidence of the existence of performing publications in his practice to support this claim. Jarman, who has cast himself in the role

of a storyteller, is the perfect subject for this case study that focuses on performance storytelling as a form of publishing. I will be drawing on primary and secondary historical sources relating to the period during which Jarman developed *Blue*, from the earliest notebook entry dating to 1986 to the film's release in 1993. They include Jarman's notebooks, workbooks and performance ephemera as well as interviews and posthumously published biographies and notebook reproductions.

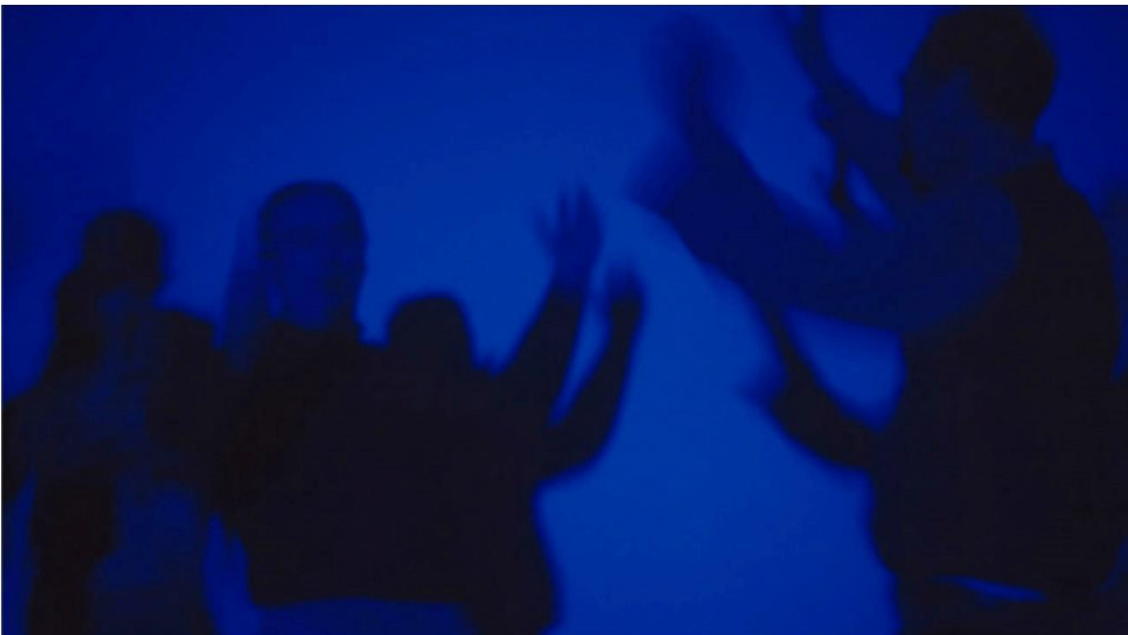


Figure 10 Derek Jarman and others photographed in front of a projection of *Blue*.
Collection: Tate, Presented by Tate Patrons 2014. (Image: © Basilisk
Communications Limited)

3.2 “Film without Film: Derek Jarman’s *Blue*”

Jarman called *Blue* ‘a blank blue film’⁹² and ‘a film with no images’⁹³ referring to the emptying out of the filmic image and dematerialisation of film into pure abstraction – into blue light. *Blue*, ‘a film dedicated to Yves Klein’,⁹⁴ began as an homage to the artist

⁹² ‘*The Late Show*’ *Face to Face: Derek Jarman* (1993).

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

whose particular shade of International Klein Blue fills the film screen. According to Jarman, while the film ‘has roots in painting... on the other hand it is a film.’⁹⁵ Although Jarman’s blank blue film is devoid of images, it is still an image. Moreover, it is a moving image that, while emptied out of images, is filled in by layered soundtrack consisting of narration by Tilda Swinton, John Quentin, Nigel Terry and Jarman himself, ambient sound and a score by Simon Fisher Turner – a frequent collaborator of Jarman’s.

Essentially, *Blue* is a film to listen to, while its blue light washes over you. It is a view supported by Fisher Turner who noted, ‘Because there’s nothing to look at apart from the blue, it gets your aural senses going.’⁹⁶ Or, as Jane Ure-Smith observed, ‘*Blue* is more sound than image.’⁹⁷ Steven Dillon similarly notes its aural quality, calling it a “brilliant blue radio programme” and, at the same time, tries to make sense of it in terms of film. He writes:

And then the brilliant blue radio program that is *Blue*, a tremendously poignant final film, no doubt, and a superb experiment in cinematic expression. But as a film in a career, beyond its authentic personal bathos, how should we draw it on a map?⁹⁸

In that sense, *Blue* can be interpreted as a form of oral storytelling presented as film. Yet, something about it resists easy categorisation as film. It is as if the film itself insists that there is more to it than meets the cinematic eye. While Fisher Turner proclaimed, ‘it’s more than cinema,’⁹⁹ in his 2014 article, Mason Leaver-Yap, even went to so far as to

⁹⁵ *There We Are, John* (1994) Directed by K. McMullen. [Documentary film]. Looseyard Productions.

See Guy Landver, *There We Are John – A Portrait of Derek Jarman*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xddcSuzCrvq> (Accessed 2 February 2020).

⁹⁶ Huggett, S. (2014) ‘Simon Fisher Turner On Derek Jarman’s Blue’, *The Quietus*, 18 February. Available at: <https://thequietus.com/articles/05380-world-aids-days-simon-fisher-turner-on-derek-jarman-s-blue> (Accessed 5 February 2020).

⁹⁷ Ure-Smith, J. (2019) ‘Derek Jarman: a major meeting of art and activism’, *Financial Times*, 22 November. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/3c5abbd0-09fe-11ea-8fb7-8fcec0c3b0f9> (Accessed 5 February 2020).

⁹⁸ Dillon, S. (2004) *Derek Jarman and Lyric Film: The Mirror and the Sea*. Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 203.

⁹⁹ Huggett, S. (2014) ‘Simon Fisher Turner On Derek Jarman’s Blue’. Available at: <https://thequietus.com/articles/05380-world-aids-days-simon-fisher-turner-on-derek-jarman-s-blue> (Accessed 5 February 2020).

claim that 'Blue is not only a film emptied of image, but it could be a film without film, a film without cinema.'¹⁰⁰

What then is *Blue*?

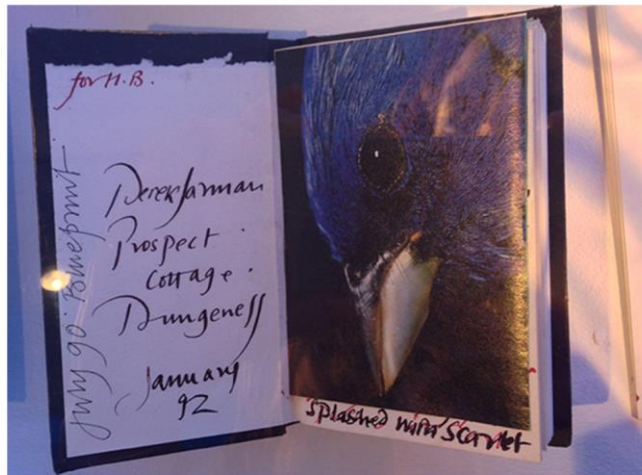


Figure 11 Title page of Derek Jarman's Blueprint for Bliss notebook (1990-1992).
Collection: Tate Gallery Archive. (Image: © Estate of Derek Jarman courtesy K. Collins)

3.3 The Storyteller Finds His Story

Although *Blue* is regarded one of the as most experimental films ever produced and an exemplar of avant-garde filmmaking, Jarman was adamant that 'It is not an experimental film of any sort, whatsoever.'¹⁰¹ Instead, 'for some reason or another, it was the best solution for the subject – that there should be no images on it.'¹⁰² With *Blue*, Jarman's priority had always been the telling of the story. Innovating the filmic medium was an

¹⁰⁰ Leaver-Yap, M. (2014) 'Film without Film: Derek Jarman's *Blue*', *Walker*, 23 October. Available at: <https://walkerart.org/magazine/film-without-film-derek-jarmans-blue> (Accessed 5 February 2020).

¹⁰¹ *Derek Jarman: You Know What I Mean* (1989).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

unintended outcome of his efforts to find the right form that would do justice to the story. However, the subject for the story emerged gradually, sometime after the *Blue* concerts, in fact, when Jarman came upon the idea of making a film as 'a self portrait'¹⁰³ about what it is like to live with AIDS, using his hospital diary, his book *Chroma* and his entries from the Blueprint for Bliss notebooks and others as the story material. The AIDS infected Jarman had, at the time of its making, begun to lose his sight and the resulting film is an exploration of his personal struggle with that particular aspect of the illness. It is the story of Jarman's attempt to image an inner vision, which he felt could only be approached through the removal of all other images except the blank blue of his film. Jarman commented that his use of a blank blue screen was a way of overcoming the difficulty of making a film about a subject he felt could not be imaged, 'I can't imagine it with images on it.'¹⁰⁴ A solution to the problem of representing the hardly representable on film, Jarman himself was not sure why it worked, 'What the ingredient is I don't know.'¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ 'The Late Show' *Face to Face: Derek Jarman* (1993).

¹⁰⁴ *Derek Jarman: You Know What I Mean* (1989).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

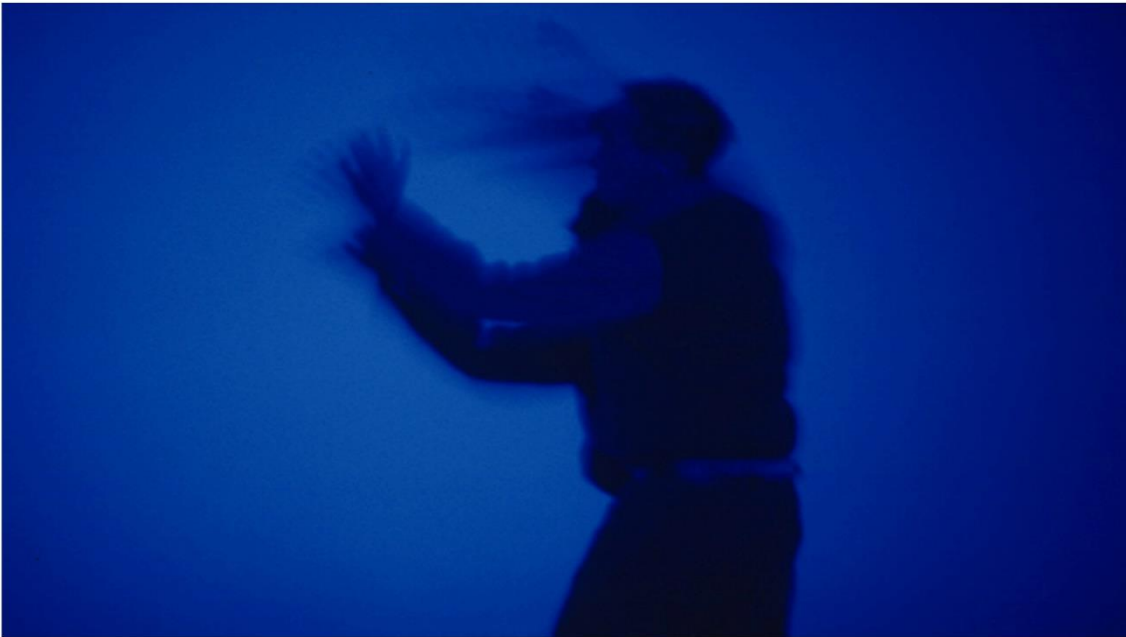


Figure 12 Derek Jarman photographed in front of a projection of *Blue*. Collection: Tate, Presented by Tate Patrons 2014. (Image: © Basilisk Communications Limited)

3.4 “A sort of Scheherazade, you know”

In order to discover that the ingredient was, we need to return to the original *Blue* concert. Like many storytellers before him who likewise used story scrolls with painted images or screens onto which images were projected in their storytelling performances, Jarman used a screen to tell a story.

According to Jarman, *Blue* is ‘a sort of Scheherazade, you know. You’re telling the stories and of course because there are no images you can be as free as you like.’¹⁰⁶ What is radical about his innovation is that the screen is blank, indicating that in the absence of images the story text is to be found elsewhere, such as in Jarman’s *Blueprint for Bliss* notebooks, which I am suggesting might also have been used as performing publications during the 1990 concert.

¹⁰⁶ Janeé doan (n.d.) *Blue Derek Jarman Interview at Edinburgh Festival 1993*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cV0P1cR6j6A> (Accessed 2 February 2020).

Since Jarman staged this concert as part of his promotion for a film that, at a time, only existed on paper, the concert offers us a unique opportunity to trace the film's development from page to set, *via* the stage. The first concert marks a crucial stage in the development of the storytelling form the film would eventually take. It was the first time Jarman used the screen not as a filmmaker but as a storyteller: as a screen that was not projecting out images but was projected onto. As Turner pointed out, 'The words were what "coloured" the colour.'¹⁰⁷ At the concert, the absence of images on screen had freed both Jarman and the audience to project their own images onto it, which were generated by the storytelling performance. In the same manner, the film *Blue* would later act as a blank screen onto which viewers could project their images, which are generated by its storytelling soundtrack.

Author Jim Ellis, in discussing the treatment of time and space in the film, describes the blank screen of the film as an agentic interface, 'By eschewing the image, *Blue* becomes all space, spilling out into the audience, erasing the line between the spectacle and the spectator, inviting the audience to become the film.'¹⁰⁸ Temporally, *Blue* blends 'spectatorial time and aesthetic time, attempting to make them collide or coincide in productive ways.'¹⁰⁹ Ellis' description of the agentic effect of the film upon the audience evokes the spatiotemporal experience of an audience at a live event such as at a theatrical or performance event. At the first concert, the staged encounter between author, text and audience is mediated by the screen, a theatrical object that acted as an interface for the storytelling performance.

3.5 The Concerts

Initially unaware of Jarman's concerts that preceded *Blue*, while watching and listening to the film, I was suddenly struck by the notion that it might have emerged out of an oral storytelling performance. Perhaps it was the fact that it replicated the intensity of a live listening experience an audience might have at a performance storytelling event? Or the

¹⁰⁷ Schütze, P. (2014) 'Notes on Film', *Frieze*, 30 April. Available at: <https://www.frieze.com/article/notes-film> (Accessed: 25 February 2020).

¹⁰⁸ Ellis, J. (2009) *Derek Jarman Angelic Conversations*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, p. 200.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p. 199.

attention paid to oral delivery – the precise pacing and articulation of the poetry and storytelling? Or the episodic nature of the narrative, the pregnant pauses and repetitions that are the tell-tale signs of oral traditions of storytelling? Or the way the narration was intermingled with suggestive sound effects that support the storytelling in the absence of images? I decided to look more closely into Jarman's production spanning the development of the film – from 1986 up to 1993, when the film was released – and was delighted to discover that what I had intuited had indeed been the case. While the film was still being written, over a period of 18 months starting in January 1990, Jarman had staged a series of "concerts" – live spoken word performances accompanied by projections and live music, sometimes involving dancers and other performers handing out performance related elements. In an interview for Frieze Magazine, Fisher Turner recalled that they performed 'six of seven concerts before we did the film.'¹¹⁰

3.6 The First Concert, *Bliss* (1990)

The first *Blue* concert, the fledgling project was then titled *Bliss*, was an approximately hour-long storytelling performance, set to a projected backdrop of Klein's IKB screen and live performance of Klein's 1949 *Symphonie Monotone*, took place in 1990 as a preface to a charity screening of Jarman's latest film *The Garden* (1990) at the Lumière in St Martin's Lane in London. This concert is the focus of my investigation into the possible presence of performing publications at the concert and in Jarman's performance storytelling practice.

In his biography *Derek Jarman*, biographer Tony Peake describes the performance as follows:

The screen was suffused in IKB, the Yves Kline blue, on which, at intervals, was projected a series of slides: images from Jarman's super-8s and of passages from an essay on blue. Dressed entirely in the colour of the moment, Jarman and Tilda Swinton sat at a table to the side of the screen and recited the poetry and dialogues Jarman had been writing for the film... Jarman hoped to place a naked and blue devil under the table and have him frequently interrupt proceedings by

¹¹⁰ Schütze, P. (2014) 'Notes on Film'. Available at: <https://www.frieze.com/article/notes-film> (Accessed: 25 February 2020).

cursing both the readers and the audience. He also hoped to distribute blue fruit and have a cannon fire blue confetti into the auditorium. In the event, the made do with Jody Graber (the young prince in *Edward II*), who handed out pebbles painted blue and gold to various audience members, plus a couple of dancers. On the floor in front of the screen sat eight musicians who, under Turner's leadership, improvised some purposefully monotonous music, thus providing a meditative ambience in which the minds of the listeners could drift into the blue in pursuit of Jarman's evanescent poetry.¹¹¹

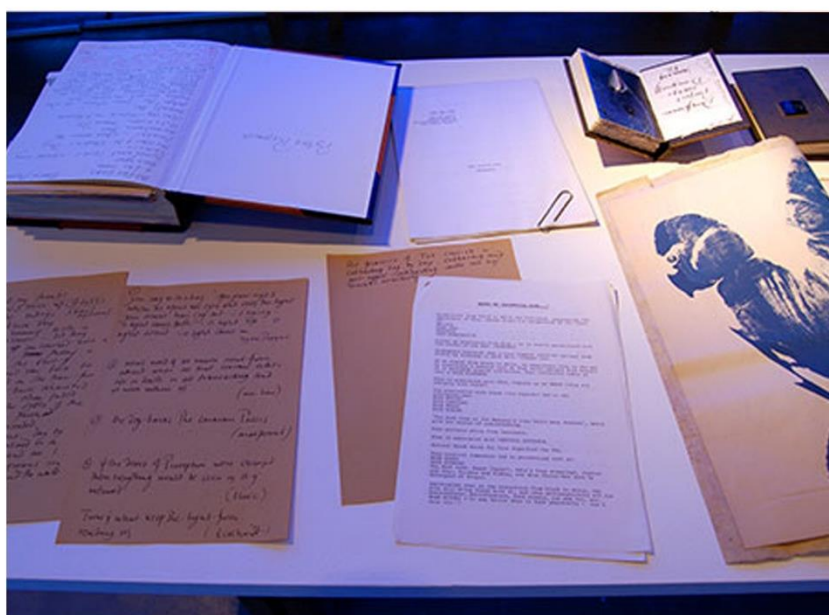


Figure 13 Derek Jarman's notes (bottom and centre), research books (top left and bottom right), *Blueprint for Bliss* notebooks (top right), all preparatory texts for *Blue*, as displayed at the *Almost Bliss: Notes on Derek Jarman's Blue* exhibition held at the Chelsea Space in 2014.

¹¹¹ Peake, T. (1999) *Derek Jarman*. Reprint. London: Abacus, 2001, pp. 473-474.

3.7 The Makings of *Blue*

In order to be able to trace the development of the film from page, to stage, to film and the role performing publications may have played in that process, it is important to separate out the makings of *Blue* from the making of *Blue* – the film.

In an interview Jarman gave about the making of *Blue* at Edinburgh Festival in 1993, he gives an account of the different stages in the development of *Blue*, which is very helpful in disentangling the ingredients that went into its making. According to Jarman's recollection, *Blue* had begun as a film loop to which a 'collage tape'¹¹² soundtrack by Fisher Turner and voiceover by Swinton or Jarman (he couldn't recollect which) was added. The material for the voiceover was taken from Jarman's notes for the film, which he had been writing as early as 1986 under several different working titles, most often 'Bliss'.¹¹³ Upon seeing the results, however, Jarman said: 'Well, it doesn't work', and we more or less forgot about it.'¹¹⁴

At the time of the first concert, 'it seemed to Jarman as if the film he envisioned would never withstand the funding process.'¹¹⁵ Reflecting on it, in 1993, Jarman said: 'We knew we'd never make a film out of it because no one would commission it.'¹¹⁶

Instead, Jarman poured his preparatory material into the concert that included all the main elements that would later appear in the film: the blue projection, narration and score – alongside additional elements that could only be staged as performance, such as the blue and gold pebble distribution and, of course, the live and improvised staging of the reading, the music and the projection. The result was a breakthrough. In the interview, Jarman gives special significance to the concert because it was the first time *Blue* seemed to "work", saying:

¹¹² Janee doan, *Blue Derek Jarman Interview at Edinburgh Festival 1993*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cV0P1cR6j6A> (Accessed 2 February 2020).

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Peake, T. (1999) *Derek Jarman*, p. 474.

¹¹⁶ Janee doan, *Blue Derek Jarman Interview at Edinburgh Festival 1993*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cV0P1cR6j6A> (Accessed 2 February 2020).

And then we did the *Blue* concert... and that was wonderful. We had, you know, a large audience. It sort of works, and everyone improvised and Tilda and I read out the blue bits.¹¹⁷

The concerts anticipated the film and functioned as testing ground for it. They also incorporated much of the material that would eventually be realised in the film. They were, as Peake remarked, ‘a complimentary step towards *Blue*.’¹¹⁸ In that sense, the concerts functioned as rehearsals for the film. Turner, who composed and performed the music for the concerts and, later, the film, emphasised the central role played by the text in both instances. He described it in these terms: ‘The words were what made me make the music. We got lost in the blue and lost in the words, which was wonderful.’¹¹⁹

We know that at the time of the first concert, there was no script for blue. According to Turner:

We did the very first concert [...] Initially there was no script at all. Derek would make lists of anything that was blue: blue helmets, blue movies, blue whales, blue stories, blue poems, blue films, you name it, anything to do with blue. There was a dancer involved, there were two narrators – Derek and Tilda Swinton talking on stage. They were really improvised and mad, and then gradually a script emerged [...].¹²⁰

Turner’s 2020 recording *Life Recordings From Prospect Cottage and The Ness*, recorded on 20 June 1992 and documenting the early stages of Jarman’s writing of *Chroma*, corresponds with his account of how the text for *Blue* was generated: it began with Jarman collecting a list of blue things that gradually developed into a script over the course of the concert performances. In it, we first hear Jarman reading a provisional script text on the colour white: the turning of the pages is audible, as is the tapping and straightening of the loose-leaf papers as puts them away at the end of the reading – the

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Peake, T. (1999) *Derek Jarman*, p. 473.

¹¹⁹ Schütze, P. (2014) ‘Notes on Film’. Available at: <https://www.frieze.com/article/notes-film> (Accessed: 25 February 2020).

¹²⁰ Huggett, S. (2014) ‘Simon Fisher Turner On Derek Jarman’s Blue’. Available at: <https://thequietus.com/articles/05380-world-aids-days-simon-fisher-turner-on-derek-jarman-s-blue> (Accessed 5 February 2020).

audio indicates he is not reading from a notebook at this stage. Having read out an associative list of things related to white, for instance, 'white heat, Albion',¹²¹ Jarman admits 'there is still a lot to do... there are no poems in it yet',¹²² indicating that the writing of the poetry comes after list writing.¹²³ He then offers to 'improvise a piece',¹²⁴ and this time the listing is more performative, a flurry of associations punctuated by pauses (here indicated by ellipsis) and repetition (here indicated by bold text), once again introducing into the text the tell-tale signs of oral storytelling traditions: 'white **tar**, white house, white man, **tar**, order, cleanliness, the bathroom, salt, preservative, deathly white, white swans of death, the dove... the knack, white lies, salt lake'.¹²⁵

The recording is a rare insight into Jarman's writing process and the role the performance of the text plays in it. In it, Jarman describes the performing of the text as the production of a 'white moment',¹²⁶ linking its publishing to a moment in time, as a performance event. I therefore anticipated I would discover that Jarman had used some sort of preparatory notes during the first concert and that these might also have taken the form of Blueprint for Bliss notebooks or other notebooks, which he might have taken to the stage, thus transforming them into performing publications.

As the concerts unfolded, their form changed whereby the live readings were replaced by recorded readings, sounds and projections, moving ever closer to the form the final film would take. Nevertheless, something of its origin on the stage as a performance

¹²¹ To listen to the audio recording play Part 1 of *Life Recordings from Prospect Cottage and the Ness*.

See Fisher Turner, S. (2020) *Life Recordings From Prospect Cottage and The Ness* [Audio recording]. 31 March. Available at: <https://boomkat.com/products/life-recordings-from-prospect-cottage-and-the-ness> (Accessed 2 March 2020).

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ As early as 1971, records show that Jarman wrote text towards writing poetry. For instance, in a box held at the BFI National Archive Special Collections lists an item relating to the draft script for an unrealised project entitled *THROUGH THE BILLBOARD PROMISED LAND WITHOUT EVER STOPPING*. The listing reads: 'Further Draft without annotation in a grey folder marked 'and poems on the way', January 1971.'

Jarman, D. (1976 – 1993) [UNREALISED PROJECTS: DEREK JARMAN II] ITM-18985. London: BFI National Archive Special Collections. Available at: <http://collections-search.bfi.org.uk/web/Details/ChoiceArchive/110019699> (Accessed 3 March 2020).

¹²⁴ Fisher Turner, S. (2020) *Life Recordings From Prospect Cottage and The Ness*. Available at: <https://boomkat.com/products/life-recordings-from-prospect-cottage-and-the-ness> (Accessed 2 March 2020).

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

storytelling event has been preserved, evidently contributing to the engulfing effect of the film. For example, during one concert given in Rome in 1993 – at which time the script for *Blue* had been finalised – the 22-minutes long spoken word text¹²⁷ was read by a performer to a blue gel projection instead of a looped blue film, on account of the latter repeatedly jamming in the film projector. This was the performance most closely resembling the film, by which time the original performance so evocatively described by Peake had been stripped to its barest essentials. Nevertheless, traces of the performance survive, albeit in other forms where the performance text was transformed into the film script and aspects of scenography translated into the blue screen – both of which were incorporated into the film *Blue*.

¹²⁷ Over the series of concerts, the performances appear to have become shorter. From the original hour-long performance (dictated by the duration of Klein's *Symphonie Monotone*) in 1990, it was shortened to 40 minutes in the audio recording of a 1991 performance (released as a special feature on the Blue DVD by the BFI in 2019) and shortened again to 22 minutes at the performance in Rome.

3.8 Blueprint for Bliss Notebooks



Figure 14 Pages from Derek Jarman’s Blueprint for Bliss notebooks reproduced in *Derek Jarman’s Sketchbooks* (2013)

There are two Blueprint for Bliss notebooks. They have been preserved by the Derek Jarman Estate and were acquired by Tate in 2015 but were not publicly accessible at the for the duration of this research project.¹²⁸ However I was able to see them on display at Tate Britain¹²⁹ and they have been partially reproduced in *Derek Jarman’s Sketchbooks*

¹²⁸ The Blueprint for Bliss notebooks were acquired by Tate in 2015. They were still in the uncatalogued collection in 2021. They have since been catalogued and are presently held at the Tate Gallery Archives (Reference: TGA 20158) and are available to the public by appointment. To view the Tate Report listing the acquisition of the Blueprint for Bliss notebooks in the financial year 2015-2016.

Tate (2016) *Tate Report 2015/16*. Available at: https://www.tate.org.uk/documents/1169/tatereport1516_HpBPQUF.pdf (Accessed 3 March 2022).

¹²⁹ The notebooks were on display in the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Archive Gallery at Tate Britain until 1 May 2022.

Tate Archive is 50 (2020-2022) [Exhibition]. Tate Britain, London, UK. 12 October 2020 – 1 May 2022. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-britain/display/spotlights/tate-archive> (Accessed 3 March 2022).

(2013).¹³⁰ The book traces the evolution of Jarman's use of sketchbooks throughout his career, chronologically exploring their format, style, aesthetics and usage – one of these uses, I am contending, is as performing publications.

Based on Jarman's notebooks that have been made available, as manuscripts or reproductions of manuscripts in his books, my intuition is that Jarman might have had some preparatory performance notes to hand during the first concert in 1990 that could be categorised as performing publications. According to his own account of the first concert, given during a 1993 interview for the Edinburgh Festival, Jarman recalled that he and Swinton "read the blue bits", meaning the text relating to *Blue*.

Performing publications are performance-enabling texts rather than a precise set of instructions for a performance, such as a script. They are the as yet unfixed texts of a performance that the performer takes on the stage (or set) in order to be able to perform. Since their primary function is to prompt the performer, they are necessarily provisional, preparatory, prospective – only providing the merest outline of the performance. In traditional publishing terms, they are as yet unpublishable. Instead, their publishing is entirely reliant on the performer's ability to interpret and enact them as a performance during a performance event. It is the performance of the text that enables their publishing. In that sense, they are both generated *by* and generative *of* performance. These peculiar performance-enabling texts are particular to the performer who is also often their author – an author-performer. As such, they can only be performed by their authors or by those the author has instructed in how to perform them. In the 2007 BFI DVD release of *Wittgenstein* (1993),¹³¹ which includes behind-the-scenes footage of Jarman at work on set in the special features, we see Jarman on the set of the film, counting down three performers dressed in red, green and blue: 'Three, two, action!',¹³² and then prompting and directing them by enacting the sequence of movements off camera. There are several

¹³⁰ Thames & Hudson published a book featuring partial facsimiles of the 29 notebooks and sketchbooks Jarman completed during his lifetime. Farthing, S. and Web-Ingall, E. (2013) *Derek Jarman's Sketchbooks*. London: Thames and Hudson.

¹³¹ *Wittgenstein* (2007) [DVD]. Directed by D. Jarman. BFI. Available at: <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/blu-rays-dvds/wittgenstein> (Accessed: 3 March 2020).

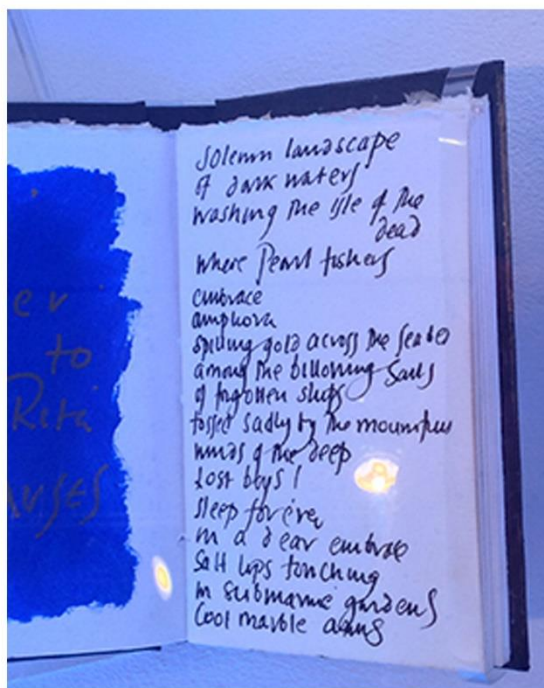
¹³² cuore nucleare, *Wittgenstein (Derek Jarman) – Behind the Scenes*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PqFr-jHp28> (Accessed: 3 March 2020).

scenes in which we see Jarman making notes on set in one of his large notebooks both during rehearsals and in between filming. Might Jarman have instructed Swinton in the performance of the “blue bits” of text at the first concert as he might have directed her as an actor in his films? If so, what form might the performing publications have taken on that particular occasion?



Figure 15 Derek Jarman on the set of *Wittgenstein* (1993) directing performers. This image is a screengrab from the special features footage included in the BFI DVD release of the film. (Image: Artist)

By comparing the available text from Blueprint for Bliss notebooks with the film script for *Blue*, I was able to establish that much of the text produced in 1989 had been preserved in the 1993 film. For comparison, I have bolded the text in an excerpt of the film script where it matches the text found in a typical Blueprint for Bliss notebook page (Figure 16).



Deep **waters**
Washing the isle of the dead
 In coral harbours
Amphora
Spill
Gold
Across the still seabed
 We lie there
 Fanned by **the billowing**
Sails of forgotten ships
Tossed by the mournful winds
Of the deep
Lost boys
Sleep forever
In a dear embrace
Salt lips touching
In submarine gardens
Cool marble fingers

Figure 16 A page from one of the Blueprint for Bliss notebooks (left) and a transcript of the film script for *Blue* (right). I have identified the portion of the film script that matches the text in the notebook and bolded the text that remained the same in the final film script for comparison. (Image: Artist)

Given that the Blueprint for Bliss notebooks already existed in 1989, it is likely he used them at the first concert in 1990 and that the “blue bits” he and Swinton performed were read from the actual notebooks. Since Jarman habitually brought his notebooks on set, it is probable that he also brought them on stage. At any rate, if not the notebooks themselves, Jarman would have brought the text drawn from the Blueprint for Bliss notebooks with him on stage at the concerts and used the text a performing publication.

My analysis of the available notebooks, such as the one I have briefly given above, suggests that Jarman would more likely have performed from his Blueprint for Bliss notebooks, at least during the first concert. However, without further scholarly research into the staging of the concerts themselves it is not possible to know for sure.



Figure 17 One of Derek Jarman’s “Large Notebooks/Workbooks” relating to the film *Blue* held at the BFI National Archive Special Collections. This image is a screengrab from a BFI short feature. (Image: Artist)

3.9 “Large Notebooks/Workbooks”

The BFI National Archive Special Collections holds a number of Jarman’s scripts, documents and ephemera, which can be physically accessed via the BFI Library. Among them, several are categorised as “Large Notebooks/Workbooks”, which are described as working manuscripts, ‘manuscript writing [script drafts]’,¹³³ (to be differentiated from his

¹³³ Jarman, D. (1976 – 1993) [Notebooks/Workbooks] JAR-2-1. London: BFI National Archive Special Collections. Available at: <http://collections-search.bfi.org.uk/web/Details/ChoiceArchive/110096255> (Accessed 3 March 2020).

other diaries, notebooks, journals held at the collection) or ‘working copy’¹³⁴ texts. These notebooks were the ones in which Jarman would plan his projects, pasting in draft scripts or other texts, with sketches, cuttings and handwritten notes or aide-memoires.

One of his Large Notebooks/Workbooks, featuring a blue cover with a gold panel and gold calligraphy, contains a list of all working titles for *Blue*, including ‘International Blue’, ‘Into the Blue’, ‘My Blue Heaven’, and ‘Blue is Poison’, alongside the preferred title Bliss.¹³⁵ It contains manuscript/typescript poems pasted onto pages alongside other items such a passport photograph of Jarman, photocopied images of Yves Klein and his work, postcards and colour photographs of his collages relating to *Blue*. Another undated small black pocket notebook, archived under miscellaneous notebooks, ‘contains ideas from the word “blue”’.¹³⁶

Indeed, alongside preparatory illustrations, sketches, pasted in images and ideas relating to all aspects of film pre-production – for both his realised and unrealised films – these Large Notebooks/Workbooks also contain items apparently generated during the film production process itself. They include heavily annotated film scripts indicating script changes and notes on other changes to costumes, scenography, shots as well as production photographs that serve as markers of specific moments in time during film production. Other miscellaneous items such as pressed flowers, newspaper clippings, personal letters and so on can also be used to reconstruct the timeline of the production. The Large Notebooks/Workbooks themselves are time capsules documenting specific periods of time during production. Where they point to specific moments in the production processes, it would seem that they were used as performing publications. In analysing them, I realised that the layered annotations can be separated into several preserved moments in time. Somewhere, in between the layers, there emerge moments when the

¹³⁴ Jarman, D. (1976 – 1993) [JUBILEE] ITM-5637. London: BFI National Archive Special Collections. Available at: <http://collections-search.bfi.org.uk/web/Details/ChoiceArchive/110006351> (Accessed 3 March 2020).

¹³⁵ Jarman, D. (1976 – 1993) [JUBILEE] JAR-2-1-16. London: BFI National Archive Special Collections. Available at: <http://collections-search.bfi.org.uk/web/Details/ChoiceArchive/110019677> (Accessed 3 March 2020).

¹³⁶ Jarman, D. (1976 – 1993) [MISSELANOUS BOOKS] ITM-18991. London: BFI National Archive Special Collections. Available at: <http://collections-search.bfi.org.uk/web/Details/ChoiceArchive/110019705> (Accessed 3 March 2020).

workbooks appear to have been used by Jarman in the manner of performing publications, meaning as props that provided prompts for further action.

Jarman appears to have used his workbooks as an aide-memoire and there is an implication that they were working manuscripts at the time, ones that he referred to repeatedly to remind himself of outstanding actions. His “to-do notes” or “notes to self”, in particular, refer to concrete elements and events in the production process. They “read” very differently to his pre-production notes, which are more speculative in nature, for example, the potential crew and cast listed in his 1986 Workbook/Notebook for *The Last of England*.¹³⁷

Derek Jarman: The Scenographer

Considering, for a moment, Pamela Howard’s notion of scenography as the process involved in the creation of a complete, immersive environment – including the performance text, set design, lighting, costume, props, and so on – in which a performance takes place, then Jarman’s first concert fits into her definition of the work of a scenographer. This is perhaps unsurprising since Jarman started out his career in film, theatre and ballet set design at a time when the role of the scenographer in mid-20th century British theatre was gaining importance as ‘the creator of the theatre event.’¹³⁸ At that time, the scenographer assumed many of the roles and responsibilities traditionally held by the theatre director, most prominently in independent theatre. Jarman assumed the role of the scenographer in his films and he developed much of his film material during rehearsals on set, as a theatre director might on the stage. Writing about the eight-day shoot of his film *The Garden* (1990) in his notebooks, Jarman documented the film’s evolution on set in these terms, ‘You start with one thing and end with another [...] I was continually on my toes as so many of the scenes were improvised.’¹³⁹ Jarman writes of the

¹³⁷ Jarman, D. (1976 – 1993) [LAST OF ENGLAND notebook] JAR 2-1-12. London: BFI National Archive Special Collections. Available at: <http://collections-search.bfi.org.uk/web/Details/ChoiceArchive/110096265> (Accessed 3 March 2020).

¹³⁸ Howard, P. (2009) *What is Scenography?*. Oxon: Routledge, p. 219.

¹³⁹ The five episodes, *Modern Nature Episodes 1 to 5*, were streamed daily starting on 24 June 2019.

Book of The Week: Episode 1: Modern Nature: Rupert Everett reads Derek Jarman's vivid memoir of his life and the garden he made in Dungeness in the wake of his HIV diagnosis. Recorded to mark 25 years since Jarman's death (2019) BBC Radio 4. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00066xg> (Accessed: 24 June 2019).

'improvising sets and costumes... to music'¹⁴⁰ and of the film coming together in 'a series of emblemata, improvised'.¹⁴¹ Jarman recollects that his emphasis was, in his own words, on 'The filming not the film.'¹⁴²

But, since *Blue* sidestepped the shooting altogether, I would suggest that the concerts became the site for the rehearsals for the film that would have normally taken place on the set. The concerts were also a staging of the "film" before it was a film.

According to Howard, scenography blends the "on and offstage world, co-existing, dependent on each other yet invisible to the public".¹⁴³ Howard notes that scenography develops alongside performance and rehearsals are opportunities for testing out the scenography. The rehearsal process may alter the scenography, but the reverse might also occur whereby the scenography may lead to changes in the performance and performance text. This is, in fact, what happened with *Blue*.

Following the first concerts, evidently inspired by the scenography and other theatrical elements that were developed on the stage, Jarman wrote several proposals for a new script in which he 'completely abandoned his original concept, that of a purely blue screen, and considerably modified its successor, the masque dedicated to Klein and acted out against a blue background.'¹⁴⁴ In one proposal dated 22 April 1991, the film is reimagined as a series of visions suspended in a blue void: a floating circus, 'blue velvet curtains' parting to reveal 'a spinning carrousel' and a gilt horse, a ringmaster conjuring 'a menagerie of fabulous beasts' from mythology, there are dancers, jugglers, tightrope walkers enacting love scenes from literature and, finally, there is a scene where the ringmaster takes us through a gallery of the greatest works of art 'while a celestial orchestra performs the finest music'.¹⁴⁵ A month later, Jarman wrote another script based around an everyman character called Bliss set in London, where the only remnant of the original Klein idea would be a 'sea of time, presented as a blue void.'¹⁴⁶ The film would follow the life of the protagonist from birth to death and beyond, to the afterlife, where the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Howard, P. (2009) *What is Scenography?*, p. xxiii.

¹⁴⁴ Peake, T. (1999) *Derek Jarman*, p. 475.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 475.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 475.

voiceover would be drawn from the character's diaries. By the time the character Bliss was replaced by another character, Pansy, and a new script was written and presented to Channel 4 in place of the original *Blue* (then known as Bliss) script – it was rejected on the grounds that the script was better suited to the stage than film. Channel 4 had agreed to develop *Blue* based on the original Klein idea – the colour blue and narration.

If we see the *Blue* concerts as rehearsals for the film then what I have described as performing publications are textual snapshots of the performances at particular moments. They are the as yet unfixed texts of performance whose time-limited publishing is only fixed by the performance event – the concerts. Because performing publications evolve from performance to performance, we can use them to trace the evolution of *Blue* from page to stage.

We know that Jarman's Blueprint for Bliss notebooks, which contain much of the final film script, existed at the time of the first concert. Might he have used them during the performance? If he had, it might explain the differences in the text as it appears in the Blueprint for Bliss notebooks of 1989 and the finalised film script of 1993.

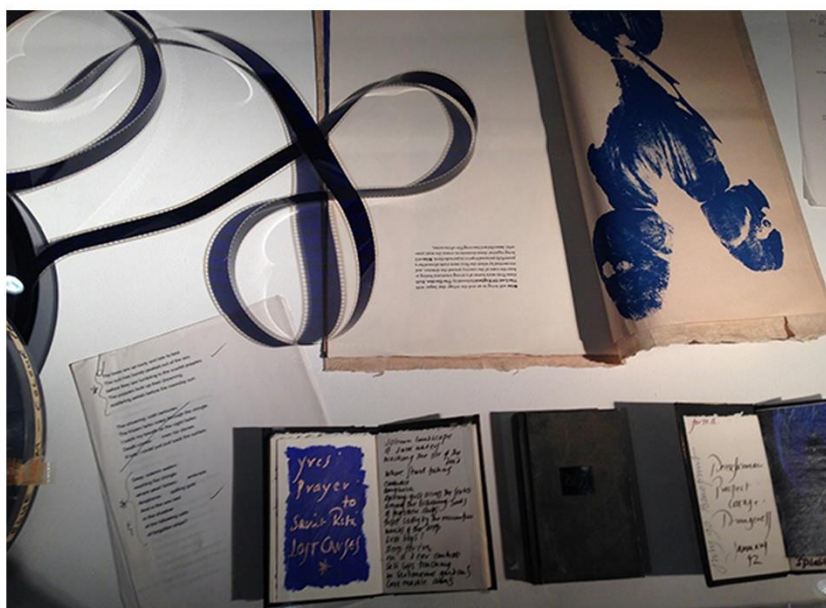


Figure 18 Derek Jarman's Blueprint for Bliss notebooks (bottom right), research book (top right), notes and film reel related to *Blue* displayed at the Almost Bliss: Notes on Derek Jarman's Blue exhibition at Chelsea Space in 2014. (Image: © Chelsea Space)

3.10 On the Set?

The decisive factor in determining whether Jarman's Large Workbooks/Notebooks or Blueprint for Bliss notebooks were, if fact, used as performing publications is whether Jarman used them on stage during the concerts that led to *Blue* – the movement from page to stage being their distinguishing characteristic. It is precisely because *Blue* was not developed (or indeed rehearsed or filmed) on set but on the stage a series of concerts, that it offers us a unique opportunity to investigate how Jarman might have used the notebooks on the stage. We know that the script for *Blue* was put together following the concerts from which it draws much of its material. The first and second draft scripts for the film, for instance, which have been preserved in documents relating to the film at the BFI National Archives, are dated between 21 September 1992 and 29 August 1993 – later

than the concerts.¹⁴⁷ But, we still have to extrapolate whether and in what way Jarman might have used his notebooks at the concerts from accounts of how they were used on the sets of his films.

Swinton describes Jarman's notebooks as 'Way beyond a sketchbook, it was a movable brainbox,'¹⁴⁸ that Jarman constantly referred to on set. In her foreword to *Derek Jarman's Sketchbooks*, Swinton writes:

When shooting each of the seven films I made with Derek, the book would sit on his director's chair with appropriate dignity: humming away, frequently consulted, crucial evidence of the work already carved out in his mind's eye [...].¹⁴⁹

Swinton notes the prominence and importance of the notebooks in Jarman's process while filming on set but, more importantly, for my purposes, is that she confirms they were "frequently consulted" on set when shooting. Swinton gives an account of Jarman's use of the sketchbooks on and off set, writing:

They were the very battery of his working process. For as long as I knew him, and lived alongside him during the making of nine years of work, there was always a sketchbook on the go. It was unthinkable that there would not be [...].¹⁵⁰

According to Swinton, 'each project began with the blackening and the gilding and the opening of a new bound album.'¹⁵¹ The Large Notebooks/Workbooks are, in fact, photo albums whose covers Jarman customised before filling them with 'pasted and drawn images, snatches of dialogue, scored revisions, the typed pages of his latest screen play draft'¹⁵² over the course of each project. 'They were the generators of his work,'¹⁵³ Swinton writes, which corresponds to the notion of performing publications generative texts, both generated *by* and generative *of* performance. Swinton also describes the notebooks as

¹⁴⁷ Jarman, D. (1976 – 1993) [Blue] ACE-1-25. London: BFI National Archive Special Collections. Available at: <http://collections-search.bfi.org.uk/web/Details/ChoiceArchive/110074902> (Accessed 10 March 2020).

¹⁴⁸ Farthing, S. and Web-Ingall, E. (2013) *Derek Jarman's Sketchbooks*, p. 18.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 19.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 18.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 19.

¹⁵² Ibid. p. 18.

¹⁵³ Ibid. p. 19.

externalisations of Jarman's inner creative processes writing: 'Each of Derek's sketchbooks is as close a thing to manifest evidence of the inner workings of his head as I can imagine.'¹⁵⁴

While looking at Jarman's notebooks from the BFI National Archive Special Collections, in a short promotional video by Thames and Hudson for *Derek Jarman's Sketchbooks*, the host suddenly remarked, 'I wonder if he ever had these on set, who did see them? A couple of people did mention remembering them on set, others said I never saw him with a book.'¹⁵⁵ Karl Johnson, the actor who played Wittgenstein in Jarman's 1993 film of the same name, recalls 'he had a huge tome, which was his journal, he was carrying everywhere while he was making the film.'¹⁵⁶ Indeed, behind-the-scenes footage taken during the filming shows Jarman writing in his notebook while on set, both during rehearsals and in between shoots. While there are conflicting accounts whether Jarman worked from his notebooks, workbooks or sketchbooks on set, I think it is telling that something about them prompted the host in the Thames and Hudson video to even bring up the question.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 18.

¹⁵⁵ Thames & Hudson (n.d.) *Inside Derek Jarman's sketchbooks*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFEfBP_5Qbk (Accessed 3 March 2020).

¹⁵⁶ *Wittgenstein* (2007) [DVD]. BFI.

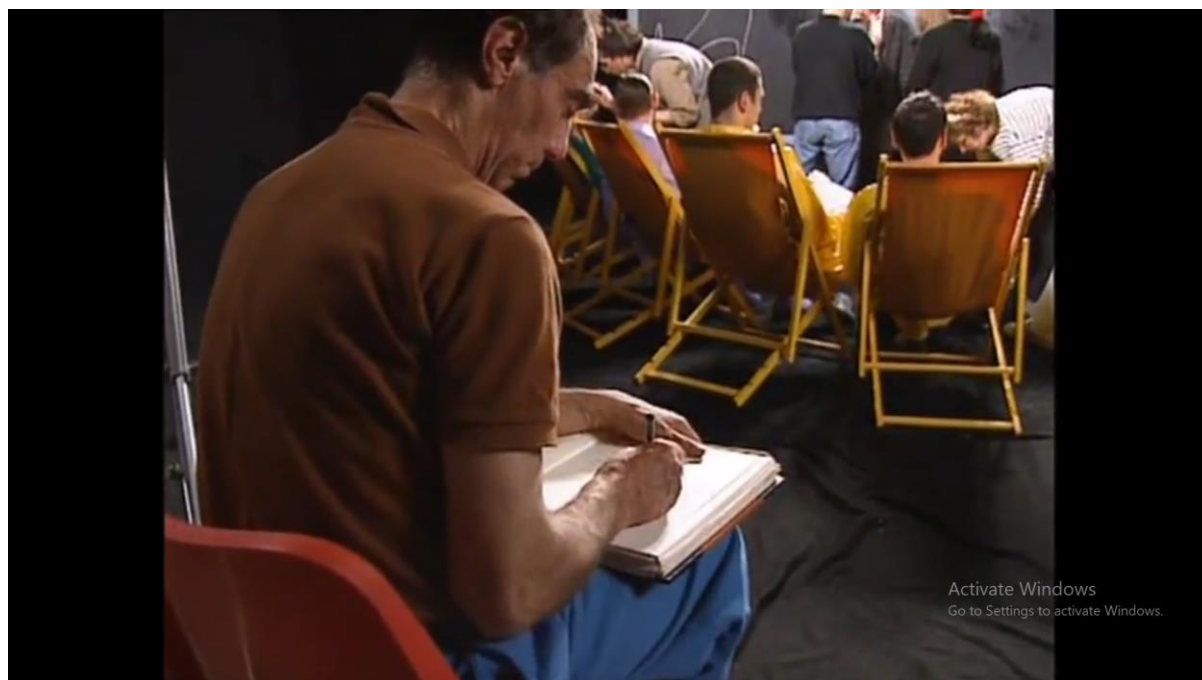


Figure 19 Derek Jarman writing in his notebook on the set of *Wittgenstein* (1993). This is a screen grab from *Behind the Scenes of Wittgenstein*, included as a special feature in the 2007 BFI DVD release. (Image: Artist)



Figure 20 Derek Jarman writing in his notebook on the set of *Wittgenstein* (1993). This is a screen grab from *Behind the Scenes of Wittgenstein*, included as a special feature in the 2007 BFI DVD release. (Image: Artist)

3.11 Performing, Publishing, Exhibiting and Broadcasting *Blue*: The Storytelling Experience

So, what is it about Jarman's notebooks that suggests they might have been used on set to direct a film in the manner I have described performing publications are used on the stage to direct a performance? Is it the same thing that first suggested to me that the *Blue* film might have been a performance?

The distinctive thing, I am suggesting, is the notion that they might be, in fact, performing publications. Performing publications are present as texts in all the incarnations of *Blue* before it was a film – in the notebooks, workbooks, sketchbooks and at the concerts. They appear backstage and on stage at the concerts, off and on the set of the films, in the pre-production and production stages, in the pre-published and published stages of the film script, and something of their presence survives in the final film. Their presence appears

to be prompting us in the direction of performance as a legitimate form of publishing, i.e., the notion of publishing staged as a performance event.



Figure 21 Blue postcard, designed by Big-i for Channel 4 and BBC Radio 3, 1993.
(Image: © Neil Del)

The nature of the exhibitions, screenings and broadcasts of the film since its release, all of which foreground “performance event” aspect of *Blue*, also seem to support this view. In 1993, Channel 4 and BBC Radio 3’ simulcast *Blue* as an uninterrupted television broadcast shown without pause for commercials and as a radio broadcast accompanied with blue postcards distributed to listeners so that they could view the blue postcards while listening. Both sought to replicate the live listening and viewing experience of *Blue*. Additionally, the finalised film script was published as a softcover book to accompany the simulcast also in 1993.¹⁵⁷ The limited-edition artists’ book Jarman produced alongside

¹⁵⁷ The softcover publication containing the transcript of the film was published by Channel 4 Television and BBC Radio in 1993 to coincide with the simulcast. Jarman, D (1993) *Blue*. London: Channel 4 Television and BBC Radio, Donlon Books. Available at: <https://donlonbooks.com/products/blue-by-derek-jarman-1> (Accessed: 4 April 2020).

Blue, released in 1994, is a large blue box containing a large-format hardbound blue book in which the final film script is published and similarly features a blue screen print, enabling readers to view the blue while reading.

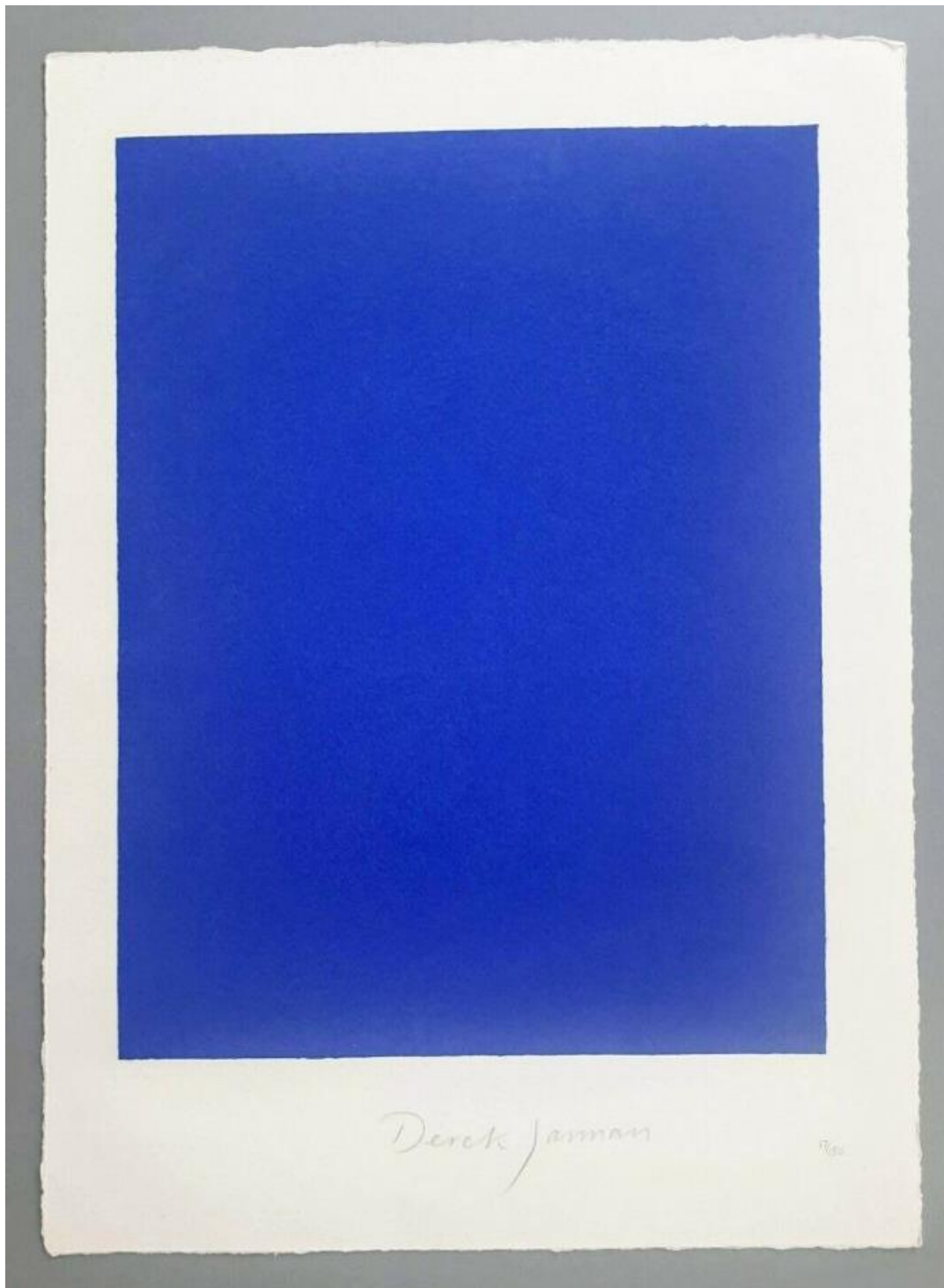


Figure 22 Blue screen print featured in the artists' book *Blue* (1994) by Derek Jarman.
(Image: © Greg Allen)

In 2014, Chelsea Spaces mounted an ambient exhibition of Jarman's handwritten and hand-painted Blueprint for Bliss notebooks entitled *Almost Bliss: Notes on Derek Jarman's Blue*.¹⁵⁸ *Almost Bliss*, 'Bliss' being the working title of the film that would become *Blue*, was a blue lit, immersive installation displaying Jarman's original sketchbooks, research books, notes and other ephemera related to the film in vitrines, while framed facsimiles of pages from the two Blueprint for Bliss notebooks covered the walls. The exhibition's windows and lights covered in blue gels and a specially made soundtrack (including Klein's *Monotone Symphony* that featured in the first concert and film) was played throughout, creating an ambient environment in which to contemplate and reflect on the film.¹⁵⁹

What is interesting about these and other incarnations of *Blue* is not only their commitment to recreating the immersive storytelling experience of the film but also that fact that they retain the spirit of the storytelling performance that went into the making of the film. This is the effect of performing publications: while they themselves may not survive, something of their spirit survives in future incarnations, inspiring other performative publishing modes, including publishing material from Jarman's notebooks, whether as reproductions or as postcards, screen prints, artists' book, softcover books intended to re-create the immersive storytelling experience as an event. Thus, the publishing events that followed from *Blue* take the storytelling form and adapt the basic elements that went into the making of the film (blue screen, narration, soundtrack) in order to find new performative ways to publish the story.

3.12 Jarman's Performing Publications

The notion of performing publications as the performer's version of the text perfectly illustrates why performing publications are often misinterpreted and miscategorised as

¹⁵⁸ *Almost Bliss: Notes on Derek Jarman's Blue* (2014) [Exhibition]. Chelsea Space, London, UK. 29 January – 15 March 2014. Available at: <http://www.chelseaspace.org/archive/bliss-info.html> (Accessed 15 March 2022).

¹⁵⁹ To see a video tour of the exhibition, see the vodcast on Vimeo. ed. webb-ingall (2014) *Almost Bliss: Notes on Derek Jarman's Blue*, curated by Donald Smith [Vodcast]. Available at: <https://www.citethemrightonline-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/sourcetype?docid=b-9781350927964&tocid=b-9781350927964-94> (Accessed 15 February 2020).

performance ephemera rather than recognised for what they actually are: performance-enabling texts, the performance of which constitutes a one-off, time-limited act of publishing staged as an event. Unsurprisingly, performing publications pose problems, for publishing and for performance. When they appear on stage, they surprise us with their unconventional presentation, leaving us unsure as to how reconcile their performance modes of production, dissemination and reception in either publishing or performance terms. Although they share characteristics with other performance-enabling theatre elements such as scripts, props, scenography, even costumes and are often mistaken for one or another of them, they are distinct from them in several respects all of which have to do with the fact that they are, in fact, forms of publishing enacted on the stage.

First, they are not detailed instructions for a performance, but directions for a performance that their authors have devised for themselves, according to their own performance processes. They do not apply an existing organising principle of story structure or established system of performance but develop out of the processes and practices arrived at independently by their authors-performers. Because they are tailor made by their author-performers for a particular performance, they are often hybrids of the other theatre elements and appear in many guises. In the case of Jarman, they appeared as notebooks.

Stephen Farthing offers an insight as to why this may have been the case for Jarman:

He was somebody who was working both with text and visually and these books really are the record of it. I wouldn't have thought it was typical of a filmmaker to keep books like these, it's much more typical of the way an art student is taught to marshal their thoughts and so he's a very very unusual person and it gives these books a very unusual status.¹⁶⁰

Second, they are time-limited performance text that, while indispensable to the performer the time of the performance and are necessarily present on the stage, they are often discarded after the fact since they have served their purpose. Jarman, however,

¹⁶⁰ Thames & Hudson (n.d.) *Inside Derek Jarman's sketchbooks*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFEfBP_5Qbk (Accessed 3 March 2020).

preserved them in the form of notebooks, workbooks and sketchbooks likely because he practiced taking them on set and, probably, on the stage.

Third, since their publishing is entirely dependent on the performance event, relying on the presence of particular performers and specific performance conditions in order to be published. At the concerts, especially the earlier ones, Jarman and Swinton appear to have been the core performers. After the fact of the performance, any reading of them is entirely dependent on their being contextualised within the performance that generated them and was, at the same time, generated by them.

Finally, they are also particular to the author-performer and rely on that particular performer's presence in order to be enacted before an audience. Their publishing by way of performance is entirely reliant on their author-performer – their storyteller. This is partly due to the fact that they are only partially scripted performance texts, and partly due to the fact that they have been rendered in their author-performer's idiosyncratic performance writing system. Jarman's notebooks are beautiful art objects, but this should not detract us from the fact that, to him, they were also functional objects, as Swinton noted when she compared them to a "movable brainbox". This is the reason they "read" differently to scripts and are, at least partially, "unreadable" by anyone other than their author-performer, especially outside of the context of their particular performance. It is also the reason why they do not have the status of scripts that, by definition, are a set of instructions that can be read and performed by anyone. In publishing terms, they are not publishable in any conventional sense – in this case, other than as a performance event.

The notion that performing publications are used to publish the unpublishable gained additional significance in my analysis of Jarman's performance texts for *Blue*. Although they are clearly legible and readable in his *Blueprint for Bliss* notebooks, they have invariably been performed, even staged as performance events – before, during and after the film was made. Through them, *Blue* was and has been repeatedly published both on-and-off the page and the stage. Analysing the texts from the perspective of his performance storytelling practice has shed light on the entanglement of performance and publishing in Jarman's practice.



Figure 23 Derek Jarman in front of a projection of *Blue* (1993). (Image: © Basilisk Communications Ltd)

3.13 The Storyteller

Commenting on the posthumous 1996 Derek Jarman retrospective exhibition at The Barbican, the critic Brian Sewell concluded 'Without the alchemist himself there can be no alchemy,'¹⁶¹ suggesting that Jarman's work won't endure without his presence. Most commentators, including biographer Peake agree that Jarman's presence and persona is an indelible part of the appreciation of his work, which is ultimately autobiographical and of a very personal nature. Writer John Savage concluded the 1994 BBC Radio 3 programme with these words about *Blue*, 'Quite apart from the quality of the work, it's a fantastic story.'¹⁶² And so, at the end, we return to the notion of Jarman as, above all, a performance storyteller.

¹⁶¹ Sewell, B. (2014) 'Queer without fear: Brian Sewell on influential film-maker Derek Jarman', *Evening Standard*, 7 February. Available at: <https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/exhibitions/queer-without-fear-brian-sewell-on-influential-filmmaker-derek-jarman-9063355.html> (Accessed 5 May 2020).

¹⁶² Savage, J. (2020) *Free Thinking – Derek Jarman: Manchester Art Gallery* [Podcast]. Available at: <https://soundcloud.com/manchester-art-gallery/free-thinking-derek-jarman> (Accessed: 30 May 2020).

Chapter 4 Hans Christian Andersen: Performance Storyteller, Papercutter, Publisher of the *unpublishable*?

4.1 Introduction

He enchanted party guests of all ages with improvised stories as he snipped away, unfolding the sheet at tale's end, a souvenir for some lucky young listener.

—Ayun Halliday¹⁶³

'Although he is remembered primarily as a writer, through his life Andersen also used scissors and paper as an outlet for his creative talents.'¹⁶⁴ In her book, *The amazing paper cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*, author Beth Wagner Brust writes that Hans Christian Andersen 'cut wonderful pictures from pieces of paper. These paper cuttings enchanted everyone who saw them.'¹⁶⁵ Importantly, the papercuts Andersen made were also used as visual aids during his storytelling performances, the significance of which has hitherto been overlooked by scholars. Not only do the papercuts reveal his fantastic imagination in visual form but also attest to his ingenuity as a performer in improvising and combining visual and verbal elements into a compelling and memorable storytelling performance. This chapter will focus on Andersen's development of an idiosyncratic form of storytelling performance that, having begun as a blending of oral storytelling and paper cutting, later became a fully developed performance system: Andersen's highly original take on what we would today term performance storytelling.

¹⁶³ Halliday, A. (2021) 'The Exquisite, Ephemeral Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen'. *Open Culture*, 1 March. Available at: <https://www.openculture.com/?p=1087180> (Accessed: 15 March 2021).

¹⁶⁴ Wagner Brust, B. (1994) *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*. New York: Ticknor and Fields, p. 14.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 11.

The term performance storytelling implies that the emphasis is on the performance of the story, rather than the story itself. Today, it encompasses storytelling practices that expand the possibilities of performance beyond merely reading or reciting a story and may also incorporate simple or elaborate performance enabling visual aids and/or visual memory aids. Although this is not always the case, it was the case with Andersen. In Andersen's case, the performance storytelling event consists of not only of his orally composed stories but also his paper cutting, which together comprise his performance storytelling system. As Wagner Brust writes 'Andersen usually made his cuttings while people watched, often while he was telling a fairy tale aloud.'¹⁶⁶ The telling of the tale and the paper cutting together, I am arguing, comprise his performance storytelling system, which is a form of publishing as performance. Thus, this case study is an analysis of Andersen's use of papercuts as performance enabling visual aids and/or visual memory aids as part of his performance storytelling system. Since this research project proposes that performance storytelling systems that utilise such visual aids are forms of publishing as performance, I will be especially focusing on the visual aids Andersen used, i.e., his papercuts, arguing that they belong to the proposed category of performing publications.

Andersen, like contemporary performance storytellers who use performing publications, uses them much as traditional oral storytellers used visual aids: as prompts in their storytelling performances in which their function is to either trigger memorised story material (i.e. visual memory aids) or enable the performer to improvise new story material (i.e., performance enabling visual aids) and, sometimes, both. As we shall see, the use of visual memory aids and/or performance enabling visual aids during storytelling performances originates in oral storytelling cultures. However, it is their deliberate use as part of a performance system where the performance storytelling event is conceived as the only form of publishing of that particular story material, in that particular way and on that particular occasion, that they become performing publications. Andersen, I am arguing, used his papercuts as performing publications during his storytelling performances.

The difference between performing publications and other publications – even publications that are produced specifically for use before, during and after a performance – is the particular use they are put to: they are used to generate the performance and the performance, in turn, is used to generate them. In other words, performing publications are generated *by* and generative *of* the performance event. As such, they are processes

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 12.

not products of performances. Or, as Davis argues of all products of generative performance, performing publications should not be conceived of as products but rather 'as the performances themselves'.¹⁶⁷

Performing publications cannot be published other than as performance, meaning performance is their only means of publishing. It is precisely for this reason that performing publications often remain unpublished (other than as part of a performance event) and I will use Andersen's papercuts to account for the "never published" status of Andersen's performing publications. At the close of this chapter, I will be arguing the papercuts Andersen produced during his storytelling performances are performing publications and that they were, in fact, published during his storytelling performances.

4.2 Performance Storytelling

Contemporary performance storyteller Vayu Naidu is 'credited with having coined the term "Performance Storytelling"'.¹⁶⁸ It is certainly a term that can be applied retrospectively to Andersen's storytelling performances. While it is an emergent term, it is still instructive because it capable of grouping a range of storytelling performance practices, traditional and contemporary, that cannot be categorised as either theatre or performance art, as we understand these terms today. Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris specifically use the term 'performance storytelling' already in 2008 to differentiate it from other performance practices in their comprehensive three-year study of contemporary performance practices.¹⁶⁹ The related term 'performance poetry' is similarly in used to differentiate it from other forms of contemporary performed poetry, though a precise definition has not been offered to date.¹⁷⁰ What is more, the terms are often used interchangeably, probably

¹⁶⁷ Davies, D. (2004) *Art as Performance*, p. x.

¹⁶⁸ See interview with Vayu Naidu.

Naidu, V. (2016) 'Weaving Words, Telling Tales', *The Hindu*. Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/Weaving-words-telling-tales/article16071184.ece> (Accessed: 15 December 2020).

¹⁶⁹ Aston, E. and Harris, G. (2008) *Performance Practice and Process: Contemporary [Women] Practitioners*, p. 2.

¹⁷⁰ In the introduction to a collection of contemporary oral poetry, editor Sarah-Jane Lovett writes, 'Call what's collected here performance poetry, spoken word, street rap or stand up. Call it what you will. The terms are inadequate, the work far from it.'

as a result of the cross-fertilisation of the genres of spoken word poetry and oral storytelling in performance practice over the past three decades. Writing in 1999, Sarah-Jane Lovett observed that poets are ‘breaking new ground, and are excelling in their idiosyncratic storytelling, indicating the interchangeability of the two terms—poetry and storytelling—in oral performance that persists to this day.¹⁷¹ But, it is her descriptive term, “idiosyncratic storytelling”, that is most insightful for that is what two terms—performance poetry and performance storytelling—have in common. Their idiosyncratic nature makes them difficult to define and it is my contention that it arises out of the extraordinarily diverse approaches to performance storytelling taken up by individual practitioners because it is the result of their independently arrived at performance storytelling systems. While all have pronounced interest in the staging of their storytelling as a performance event above and beyond a mere reading or a reciting of their story material, their individual approaches are very diverse. What they all have in common, however, is a decidedly performative modality, which informs their entire practice starting with the production process and ending with the presentation mode of their performance storytelling. Thus, the term performance storytelling suggests that it is, or it is beginning to be recognised, as a separate practice that has evolved alongside theatre and performance practices and continues to evolve today. The term also suggests that although performance storytelling can be traced back to both Eastern and Western oral storytelling traditions, it is also a thoroughly contemporary phenomenon.

Even though performance storytelling might have been informed by Eastern and Western theatre and performance practices, whether traditional or contemporary, it has a different starting point and a different trajectory, both of which have to do with the fact that ‘the art of storytelling’¹⁷² is at its core—specifically, oral storytelling. Andersen, for his part, might today be cast as one of its antecedents not only because of his shared central concern with the art of storytelling but also because of his innovation of the oral storytelling tradition through his use of visual aids, i.e., the papercuts, as part of his storytelling performances. Furthermore, I am arguing, it is not Andersen’s papercuts themselves, but his paper cutting performance and his idiosyncratic use of the papercuts during his storytelling performances, as performing publications, that is truly innovative.

Lovett, S.-J. (ed.) (1999) *Oral: Poems: Sonnets, Lyrics and the Like*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, p. xii.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p. xii.

¹⁷² Benjamin, W. (1936) ‘The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov’, in Arendt, H. (ed.) (1969) *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, pp. 83-109, p. 87.

Though an emergent term, performance storytelling appears to be describing a type of storytelling that is not simply oral storytelling but innovative oral storytelling. It describes a highly original form of storytelling performances and a range of performance systems that have been uniquely developed by the performance storytellers. I reserve the term performance storyteller for authors-turned-performers, so author-performers, meaning authors who turn to performing in order to publish their original story material as performance storytelling events.¹⁷³ Andersen, I am claiming, is a performance storyteller. Of course, applying the term performance storytelling to Andersen's storytelling performance practice is only possible in retrospect, because of our greater theoretical and practical understanding of performance storytelling, which is still an emerging field.

Andersen's practice has much in common with the practices of contemporary performance storytellers such as Naidu who stated in an interview that the *Ramayana* as one of her favourite stories 'to listen to and to tell,'¹⁷⁴ and that she uses 'folk tales from around the world to influence my stories.'¹⁷⁵ Both these statements – the retelling of stories heard and the rewriting of folk tales – apply to Andersen, as his first published collection of fairy stories, *Wonderful Stories for Children*, published in May 1835, confirms. The collection consists of retellings of known folk tales into fairy tales written in Andersen's style, including 'The Tinderbox'. In comparing the characteristics the oral folk tale (or *Zubermärchen*) in relation to Andersen's fairy tale 'The Tinderbox', biographer Jack Zipes demonstrates how closely Andersen adhered to the patterns of the folk tale tradition.

¹⁷³ In traditional forms of storytelling performance, for instance *wayang beber*, where there is an established tradition of a particular type of storytelling and the repertoire of stories has been more or less set, the performers do not author the stories, but instead learn to perform them from master storytellers. While these performers often develop their individual style and, in a sense, author their performances by improvising with the available story material, they do not truly innovate the performance storytelling system itself. However, there are cases of contemporary interpretations of traditional storytelling performance forms that do succeed in innovating an existing storytelling system. For instance, *wayang listrik* is a contemporary form of *wayang beber* that incorporates new stories and new technologies.

¹⁷⁴ Naidu, V. (2016) 'Weaving Words, Telling Tales', *The Hindu*. Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/Weaving-words-telling-tales/article16071184.ece> (Accessed: 15 December 2020).

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

Generally speaking, the protagonist is downtrodden, oppressed, the youngest member of the family, or a small person; but he is always clever and knows how to make use of his abilities. Once the protagonist is assigned a task or cast into the world, he usually has three encounters with gift-bearing creatures (giants, dwarfs, animals, fairies), and it appears that he will triumph easily. At the peak of his first rise in fortunes, however, there is a sudden fall, or peripeteia, and the hero must call on his friends and his own resources to renew his rise to power and riches.¹⁷⁶

Andersen, like Naidu, retold the stories he had heard. If we can take his autobiography at face value, we can glean from it that Andersen took to performing in the street from an early age, reciting or reading stories or poems he had either learned or written.

Andersen's autobiographical writings confirm that he practiced retelling the stories he had heard from about age thirteen. He continued this practice into his adulthood as one account confirms. According to Zipes, Andersen:

seized every opportunity to recite his poems and stories in public. Once, in Rome, he intruded on a dinner party in a small restaurant and insisted on reading 'The Ugly Duckling' to a group of people he barely knew. When they politely suggested that he might enjoy himself more by sightseeing than by reading stories in a restaurant, he answered that he would prefer to entertain them in this way. Then, without further ado, he pulled a manuscript from his pocket and read.¹⁷⁷

Naidu states 'The skill of a good storyteller lies in taking an alien story to an unknown audience, and making them feel it as if it is their own.'¹⁷⁸ Andersen certainly had this skill and put it into practice, as Zipes' account of his impromptu storytelling performance to an unknown audience in Rome confirms.

Of course, there is an important distinction to be made between his performance storytelling involving papercuts and his reciting or reading of his stories in manuscript form, such as 'The Ugly Duckling' as a storytelling performance. The distinction lies in his aims in doing so, and they lead to different outcomes. For instance, the telling of 'The Ugly Duckling' story was an occasion to practice and refine the story he was already writing through a storytelling performance, whereas his performance storytelling was an occasion

¹⁷⁶ Zipes, J. (2005) *Hans Christian Andersen: The Misunderstood Storyteller*. New York and London: Routledge. p. 32.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. pp.13-14.

¹⁷⁸ Naidu, V. (2016) 'Weaving Words, Telling Tales', *The Hindu*. Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/Weaving-words-telling-tales/article16071184.ece> (Accessed: 15 December 2020).

to “write” improvised stories using his voice and, importantly, visual aids i.e. the papercuts. Although there are no records of the stories Andersen told during his performance storytelling, only accounts of them, the papercuts he produced alongside them can help us further articulate this distinction between his storytelling performances in general and his performance storytelling practice in particular.

Performance storytelling is situated at the intersection of folklore and performance fields of study. As such, my analysis of Andersen’s performance storytelling system is informed by approaches developed by folklore performance theory, which emerged in the 1970s. As Patricia Sawin and Milbre Burch have noted,¹⁷⁹ starting in the 1970s, two strands of folklore performance theory emerged: the study of traditional storytelling traditions in specific cultures and contemporary practice-based engagement with storytelling by artists and scholars. The first approach applied performance analysis, a combination of empirical observation and critical analysis from the perspective of the audience while the second approach was anchored in practice from the perspective of the practitioner. In this chapter, I will be applying the first strand to Andersen’s practice and attempt to reconstruct it from the first-hand and second-hand accounts of his audience and from the surviving papercuts. At the same time, I will be drawing on insights gained from my own paper cutting practice to interrogate it further, providing a contemporary practice-based perspective on Andersen’s practice. Since, ‘Performance as an approach to the study of folk and fairy tales investigates what happens when someone tells a story orally to an immediately present audience,’¹⁸⁰ I felt it was the most appropriate approach to adopt in the analysis of Andersen’s performance storytelling practice. In particular, I have been guided by Richard Bauman’s formalist and functionalist approach to folklore performance theory. Bauman’s approach encourages analysts take into account what the performance storytelling experience does for both the storyteller and the audience, while at the same time analysing the formal features of the story and how it is manipulated by the storyteller during the performance. In this chapter, I take up Bauman’s functionalist approach, but I have elected to focus primarily on the effect of Andersen’s storytelling

¹⁷⁹ Sawin, P. and Burch, M. (2018) ‘Performance’, in *The Routledge Companion to Media and Fairy-Tale Cultures*. Greenhill, P., Terry Rudy, J., Hamer, N. and Bosc, L. (eds.). New York: Routledge, pp. 56-64.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 56.

performances on the author-turned-performer and his audience. I have chosen to do so for several practical reasons, the first being that there are no comprehensive records of the stories Andersen told during these performances. Since only first-hand and second-hand accounts survive, it is not possible to subject the story text itself to a formalist analysis. The second reason is that, even if it were possible, a formalist analysis of his story text would only be useful from the perspective of how they fit into the effect they produced in combination with the papercuts. A functionalist analysis of their combined effect foregrounds the experiential dimension of his storytelling performance, which is more appropriate for the study of Andersen's performance storytelling practice because it is a blending of verbal and visual modes of storytelling.

Fortunately, there is an abundance of accounts describing the experience of having attended Andersen's performance storytelling event and this is the third reason for selecting the functionalist approach. The fourth reason is that many of Andersen's papercuts have survived and, even if they were not produced as part of his storytelling performances, it is possible to identify similar ones – the ones made using the one-fold papercutting technique to which I return and develop later in the chapter, which Andersen most likely used during his performance storytelling – and subject them to a functionalist analysis as an alternative story "text". For, in reconstructing how the papercuts were used as part of his tale telling and papercutting performances, I was able to determine that they were a component part of the story text, albeit in visual, rather than verbal, form. Thus, in working back from the papercuts themselves, I discovered that it is possible to perform a functionalist analysis of Andersen's combined verbal and visual performance storytelling system.

4.3 Andersen's Performance Storytelling

As Wagner Brust observes:

Andersen never explains in his writings how he became so skilled at making paper cutting. Although he wrote constantly—diary entries, plays, poems, novels, travel books, an autobiography, and thousands of letters—he on rarely mentions paper cutting. Most of what is known about the cuttings comes from what other people wrote about Andersen and from what can be learned by looking at the paper cuttings themselves.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Wagner Brust, B. (1994) *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*, p. 12.

Nevertheless, there is one exception. Andersen's first original story, 'Little Ida's Flowers', includes the first written reference to paper cutting directly and, indirectly, to Andersen's storytelling performances incorporating papercuts. As such, it is an invaluable source when trying to reconstruct Andersen's performance storytelling practice and how the two components, the verbal storytelling and the visual papercuts, related. In the story, Andersen mentions a college student making papercut figures to amuse a little girl. Andersen writes, 'She was very fond of him because he knew the most lovely stories and could cut out such amusing pictures – hearts with little dancing ladies inside them, flowers, and great castles with doors that opened.'¹⁸² Later in the story, papercuts are mentioned again when Andersen writes about the student 'cutting out those comical pictures – sometimes it was a man hanging from a gibbet, with a heart in his hand because he was a stealer of hearts; sometimes an old witch riding on a broomstick, with her husband perches on the bridge of her nose.'¹⁸³ Interestingly, the description of the papercuts closely corresponds to the certain surviving papercuts made by Andersen (see Figure 24 and Figure 25). Finally, Andersen reveals in the story that the purpose of the stories and the papercuts was to 'amuse' and he also establishes a direct relationship between the two activities, the telling of the stories and the paper cutting, that together comprise his performance storytelling system.

¹⁸² Ibid. p. 31.

¹⁸³ Ibid. p. 32.

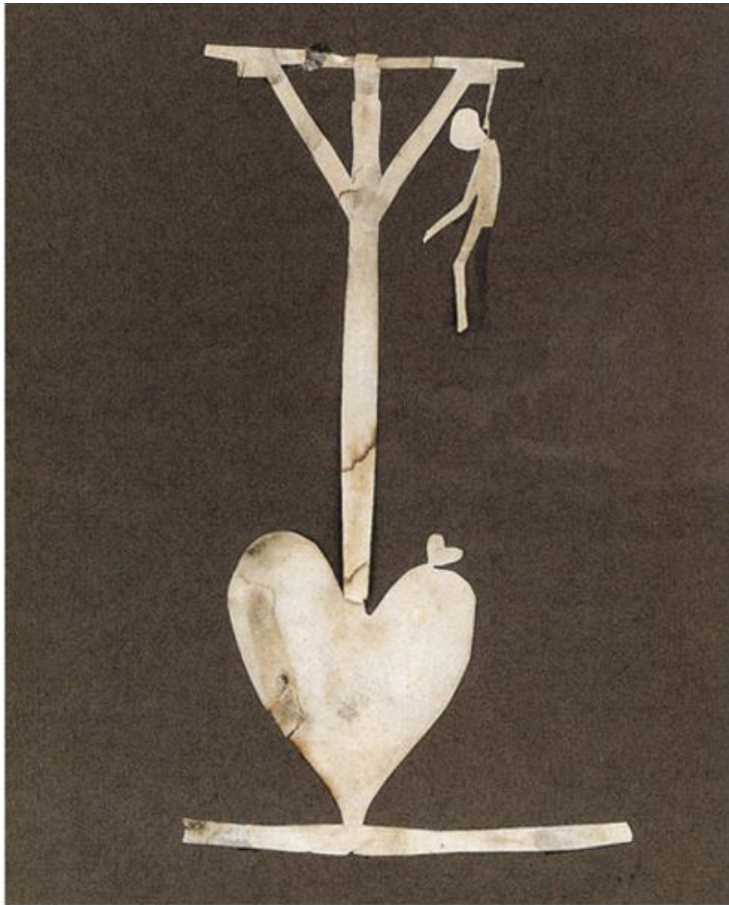


Figure 24 Hans Christian Andersen's papercut of a man hanging from a gibbet with a large and small heart at the base. (Image: used with permission of [Odense City Museums](#) in accordance with a Creative Commons License)



Figure 25 Hans Christian Andersen's papercut of a house with open doors framed by palm trees, dancing ballerinas, swans and a man hanging from a gibbet. There is an additional figure, perhaps 'an old witch', from whose nose another man, perhaps 'her husband', hangs and atop whose head another dancing ballerina perches. (Image: used with permission of [Odense City Museums](https://www.odensecitymuseums.dk/) in accordance with a Creative Commons License)

The Origins of Andersen's Performance Storytelling System

Oral Storytelling Component

Wagner Brust, like the majority of Andersen's biographers, draws on autobiographical detail when arguing that Andersen's childhood experiences of having been read aloud the *Arabian Nights* tales, of listening to his mother and grandmother tell religious and folk stories, of making a puppet theatre and acting it out together with his father and so on, had a decisive influence on his later writings and his storytelling performances, not only in terms of their content i.e. structure, themes, imagery, characterisation, etc., but also in

terms of their production process and their presentation, which is decidedly performative in its modality.

From first-hand and second-hand accounts, Wagner Brust describes Andersen's storytelling performances thus:

He would arrange his audience of children and adults around him in a circle, either sitting or standing. When everyone was quiet, he would begin.¹⁸⁴

Wagner Brust writes that Andersen then 'told his stories aloud with lively gestures'¹⁸⁵ which is typical of oral storytellers. Edvard Collins, the son of Andersen's benefactor and friend Jonas Collins, similarly describes in a first-hand account how animated Andersen's storytelling performances were:

He didn't say, 'The children got into the carriage and then drove away.' No, he said, 'They got into the carriage—"good-bye, Dad! Good-bye Mum!"—the whip cracked smack! smack! and away then went, come on! gee-up!'¹⁸⁶

Instead of using descriptive language, Andersen would use dialogue, onomatopoeic sound effects and repetition to engage his listeners. These devices are typically found in oral storytelling traditions and Edvard Collins' account provides us with a rare glimpse into the oral component of Andersen's performance storytelling, which was not written down otherwise.

Indeed, Andersen had no intention of having the oral stories he told as part of his performance storytelling written down or, indeed, published—at least not in the conventional sense. When he did write them down, as was the case with 'Little Ida's Flowers', he wrote them other than how they were performed, and they were print published as they were written. As scholar Michael Alexander points out, writing down orally composed stories 'inhibits the characteristic oral style'.¹⁸⁷ In not writing down or publishing the stories he orally composed as part of his storytelling performance, it is my contention that Andersen intended to preserve not only their characteristic oral style but also their performative mode of publishing. Andersen ensured that the only form of

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 33.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 12.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 34.

¹⁸⁷ Alexander, M. (1966) *The Earliest English Poems*. Translated by M. Alexander. 2nd Edition, 1977. London: Penguin, p.14.

publishing of his storytelling performances was the performance storytelling event itself. Andersen's possible reasons for doing so is something I will return to later in the chapter.

4.4 Paper Cutting Component

Curiously, Wagner Brust suggests that his papercutting, which later became part of his storytelling performances, might also have originated in another childhood activity. According to Wagner Brust, 'Cutting out puppet clothes helped him develop the skills he later used for his paper cuttings.'¹⁸⁸ His early experiences of fashioning his own puppet theatre might also account for the fact that 'many of his paper cuttings include stages, dancers, or theatre clowns.'¹⁸⁹ (Figure 26) As a child, Andersen often 'played with his little theatre [...] and read plays.'¹⁹⁰ When, at about twelve years old, Andersen discovered the plays of William Shakespeare, he recalled in his autobiography, 'I immediately acted out Shakespeare's plays on my little puppet theatre'.¹⁹¹ Then, sometime between ages fourteen and sixteen, he took up making a puppet theatre again and the pieces he invented for his puppet theatre would eventually be the basis for his first play, 'Love at St Nicholas' Tower', staged on 25 April, 1829 at Copenhagen's Royal Theatre.

We know from first-hand accounts that Andersen not only cut out but also animated his papercuts during his storytelling performances, in the manner of puppets. For instance, painter Wilhelm von Kaulbach, whom Andersen had visited during a trip to Germany, later recalled one of the storytelling performances with papercutting:

When he had finished his tale, he would spread a whole string of ballet dancers in front of us. Andersen would be delighted with the success of his work.¹⁹²

This is significant not only because it ties in with accounts of his early engagement with both oral storytelling and with puppet theatre but also because this blended practice casts him in the role of a performance storyteller, using not only his voice and lively gesticulations but also visual aids during his storytelling performances and, importantly,

¹⁸⁸ Wagner Brust, B. (1994) *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*, p. 12.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 20.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 20.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. p. 20.

¹⁹² Ibid. pp. 35-36.

Chapter 4

using them in an innovative way. As Wagner Brust writes, 'When telling stories and making paper cuttings he was doing the two things he did better than anyone else he knew.'¹⁹³

Thus, Andersen's early encounter with oral storytelling and with puppetry led to Andersen coming up with his own performance storytelling system, combining his paper cutting with his oral storytelling. But, for our purposes here, the pertinent question is why?

¹⁹³ Ibid. p. 36.

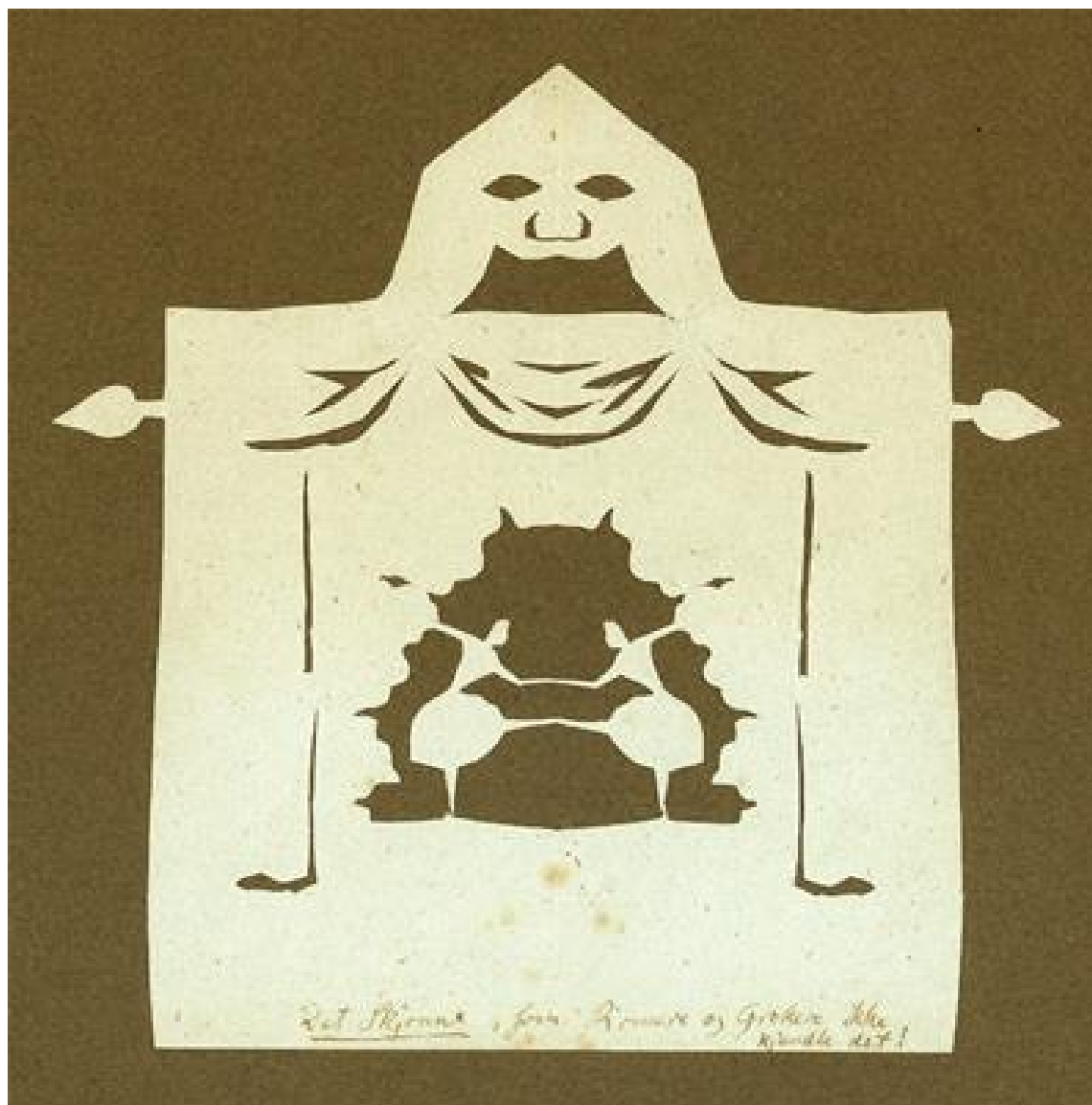


Figure 26 Hans Christian Andersen's papercut of a theatre scene complete with a stage, curtains, dancing ballerinas and a large mask. (Image: used with permission of [Odense City Museums](#) in accordance with a Creative Commons License)

4.5 Andersen's Performance Storytelling System

For the remainder of this chapter, I will be arguing that Andersen's invented his performance storytelling system for several reasons, the most important – in terms of the main aim of this research project – being to facilitate a performative form of publishing

staged a performance storytelling event. However, in imposing a “publishing as performance” driven interpretation of Andersen’s performance storytelling system, I am conscious of the danger of overlooking the other reasons that Andersen might have used it. Therefore, I have selected a number of speculative reasons that serve my main argument, and, at the same time, I have tried to present them in a way that leaves them open to further interpretation.

4.6 Andersen’s Performance Storytelling System: Why?

4.6.1 To write

...to cut, it's the first

beginning of the Poetry...

—Hans Christian Andersen in a letter to Dorothea Melchior, July 21, 1867

As I have already mentioned, in the course of my research I have discovered that performance storytellers are most often also the authors and not only the performers of the performed story. Performing his stories, as opposed to simply writing them, was a significant part of Andersen’s writing practice. This is confirmed by the fact that many of the stories he initially performed were later incorporated into his published writings. The aforementioned first original fairy story by Andersen, ‘Little Ida’s Flowers’, is one such case.

‘Little Ida’s Flowers’ began as an orally composed story, which was subsequently written and published in his first collection of fairy stories, *Wonderful Stories for Children*. Like Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures Underground*, Andersen’s oral composition of ‘Little Ida’s Flowers’ was prompted by a real-life encounter with a girl called Ida Thale, the daughter of one of Andersen’s friends. Wagner Brust summarises the encounter:

The story was Andersen’s answer to a question the little girl asked him one day when he was visiting the family. Why had her beautiful flower faded overnight? Andersen explained that the flowers had been dancing the night before and had stayed out very late, which made them tired and faded.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 30

Thus, the fairy story 'was originally told to Ida Thale'¹⁹⁵ and only subsequently written and published.

When, in a letter in July 1867, Andersen wrote, 'Paper cutting is the prelude to writing,'¹⁹⁶ the assumption is that he meant a prelude to his published writings. But, seeing Andersen's storytelling performances as merely a means to an end – as a preparatory step towards writing and publishing his stories – is to miss the point. The different aspects of his practice – performing, writing, paper cutting – fed into one another and further fuelled his creativity. Which is not to say that either aspect was more important than the other, quite the opposite. Each aspect served a particular function and as equally as important as the others, but this is not obvious from the written and published stories alone.

For instance, in her article about Andersen's papercuts, Ayun Halliday writes, 'The cuttings bring fairy tales to mind, but they are not specific to the published work of Andersen.'¹⁹⁷ Andersen scholars agree that there is no direct correlation between his papercuts and his published stories, which is taken to mean that his papercuts did not influence his writing. An entry on Andersen's papercuts on the website of the Odense Bys Museer, which holds the most comprehensive collection of Andersen's papercuts, is telling:

In the memoirs that H.C. Andersen's acquaintances have written, his paper clip art is rarely overlooked. However, there is no direct connection between H.C.

Andersen's paper clip art and his writing, nevertheless, are both united in the same creative energy: While the poet was paper cutting, he gladly told a fantastic story, which he ended when the clip was completed. As a finale, he could, as the point of the story, unfold his enigmatic paper and reveal its contents.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 28.

¹⁹⁶ See Petra Lambeck's interview with Detlef Klein.

Lambeck, P. (2018) 'Hans Christian Andersen's lesser-known talent: paper cutting', *DW*, 19 October. Available from: <https://www.dw.com/en/hans-christian-andersens-lesser-known-talent-paper-cuttings/a-45924839> (Accessed: 10 January 2021).

¹⁹⁷ Halliday, A. (2021) 'The Exquisite, Ephemeral Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen'. Available at: <https://www.openculture.com/?p=1087180> (Accessed: 15 March 2021).

¹⁹⁸ See Odense Bys Museer website.

This entry is revealing for several reasons. On the one hand, because Andersen's papercuts are not illustrations of his written stories, there is a tendency to dismiss them as having anything to do with his writing. On the other hand, the entry suggests that his papercuts, as part of his performance storytelling system, are connected to his writing process since they were produced in the course of telling the story and their completion brought the story to an end. In fact, later in the same entry, the papercuts are referred to as a separate visual language:

Some of the clips are just and bare rebuses, others are icons that in a linguistic context reveal a symbol. This dual meaning, which is present in H.C. Andersen's paper clippings, gives a picture of the poet's way of thinking. The clippings reveal the poet's absolutely modern state of mind - namely that language is not a medium, but a material for thinking and meaning.¹⁹⁹

However, beyond their use as a 'material for thinking and meaning' I would further suggest that Andersen's was already 'writing' with his papercuts: writing with images.

4.6.2 To write with images

Don't you think Andersen's fairy tales are very beautiful? I am sure he must draw illustrations as well.

–Vincent Van Gogh²⁰⁰

In an insightful observation, Wagner Brust writes, 'Just as Andersen broke new ground when he wrote his fairy tales in the language of daily life, he ignored the paper-cutting styles of his day and invented an informal, striking style.'²⁰¹ From my own practice-based engagement with papercutting and my experiences as a performance poet and storyteller, I suspect that their idiosyncratic style is likely the direct result of the constraints Andersen

'H. C. Andersen's Paper Clippings', *Museum Odense*. Available at: <http://andersen.odensebymuseer.dk/klip/billedstart.asp> (Accessed: 3 March 2021). [My translation]

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Heltoft, K. (1977) 'Letters to an Artist – From Vincent Van Gogh to Anton Ridder van Rappard, 1882, 1883', in *Hans Christian Andersen As An Artist*. Translated by D. Hohen. Copenhagen: Christian Ejlers' Forlag, 2005. pp. 11-12.

²⁰¹ Wagner Brust, B. (1994) *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*, p. 59.

imposed upon himself in making them during his storytelling performances. Presumably, they needed to conform to the demands of the performance itself, first and foremost. For instance, it would not have been possible for him to make an intricate papercut of the type he sometimes made as gifts – for example, the papercut made for Dorothea Melchior (Figure 27) – for that would have required considerably more time to produce. Additionally, the mental concentration and physical agility needed to produce a complex papercut is considerable and, from my own experience of papercutting, I strongly suspect an elaborate papercut would have been too demanding to produce alongside the telling of the story during the course of a performance – even a long performance. Instead, the papercut needed to be produced in tandem with the telling of the story and in time to be able to be presented at the story's end. Of course, the story 'ended when the clip was completed', as the Odense Bys Museer entry above indicates. Thus, the story's end was dictated by the completion of the papercut so that it is the paper cutting, rather than the telling of the tale, that set the duration for the performance storytelling event. The papercuts themselves also needed to relate to the story being told, even if in a tangential way. Most importantly, they needed to produce the surprising effect upon the audience that so many recalled and reported—the significance of which I will elaborate on in due course.



Figure 27 Hans Christian Andersen's papercut for Dorothea Melchior. This late papercut was one of last and most elaborate he produced and it shows many of the motifs from his repertoire: millmen, harlequins, ballerinas, swans, hearts, dancing dervishes, umbrellas, trees, mask-like faces and, there is a new addition in the form of two skulls. (Image: used with permission of [Odense City Museums](#) in accordance with a Creative Commons License)

Even the context of his performance storytelling, Andersen scholars agree that the papercuts are not straightforward illustrations of the stories being told. This claim is supported by first-hand accounts that the images did not correspond to the stories in any obvious way. But, is it possible that Andersen did use the physical action of paper cutting itself as a prompt for his verbal performance? While neither the audience nor Andersen could not see the image was paper cutting until the paper was unfolded and the image revealed at the end, he would have had an approximate idea of what the final image would look like. As he was telling the story, he must have had the image he was paper cutting simultaneously in mind. Was he using the act of paper cutting itself “material for thinking and meaning” and the papercuts as a “language”, as the Odense Bys Museer entry suggests?

The very simultaneity of the verbal and visual components in his performance storytelling system indicates that they were interrelated and perhaps even influenced one another in real time as the performance unfolded. Untangling how, precisely, the two were related may not be possible to ascertain with absolute certainty, at least not after the fact of the performances themselves. But it is possible to imaginatively reconstruct, from surviving accounts, the conditions of the storytelling performances and place the verbal and visual components into relation once again, to imagine them playing out and speculate on the different functions they might have served within the performance event itself. We know that the papercuts were not mere visual aids for the performance, i.e., illustrative visuals that helped audiences enter into the story being told. If anything, they detracted from the story being told. Appearing at the very end, they were “the last word” of the storytelling performance: forming the last and, according to first-hand accounts, the most lasting impression.

In tactically combining the paper cutting with the telling of the tale, it becomes clearer that Andersen most likely intended for the papercuts not to be improvised drawings with scissors, but improvised writing. In combination with the diegetic function of his oral narration and the dramatic function of his scenic rendering of the events and character’s speech and behaviour, Andersen strategically deployed the papercuts in the service of the narrative by using them as a device to build anticipation in the audience and to hold their attention until the moment of reveal at the very end. From a narratology perspective, the

papercuts served an important function. According to Aristotle's formulation of what constitutes the fundamentals of narrative, a narrative has a beginning, a middle and an end. Andersen's revealing of the papercut was the final act in his performance storytelling event. But, Andersen was not merely writing an end with his papercuts, his paper cutting was building towards an ending, a means of ensuring that his audience was waiting for the end. Moreover, he was using the papercut to reinforce the narrative structure of his performance storytelling as well as to underscore the nature of narrative itself, which hinges on the ending, since:

the end occupies a determinative position because of the light it sheds (or might shed) on the meaning of the events leading up to it. The end functions as the (partial) condition, the magnetizing force, the organizing principle of narrative: reading (processing) a narrative is, among other things, waiting for the end, and the nature of the waiting is related to the nature of the narrative.²⁰²

In laying out how the verbal and visual components were used as part of his performance system, it becomes clear that Andersen decidedly intended to use them in combination with the other. What is also clear is that the papercuts functioned as a visual counterpart to the verbal story being told and vice versa. But, instead of the visual component serving as an illustration of the verbal component and vice versa, each component served a separate generative "writing" function. I use writing here because Andersen's performance storytelling system actually prevented him from merely reading his tales from a manuscript as he had done in Rome when he read 'The Ugly Duckling' aloud to an unsuspecting audience. Aside from the fact that reading aloud is a very different activity to writing aloud, i.e., oral composition, on a very practical level, reading would have occupied Andersen's hands and eyes, preventing him from engaging in paper cutting at the same time. Instead, in order to perform his paper cutting, it is my contention that Andersen would have had to at least recite the tales he was telling or make them up as he went along, most likely a combination. This detail is often overlooked in the description of his storytelling performances where writers assume that Andersen 'read' his stories and produced the papercuts at the same time.²⁰³ Such accounts are a conflation of the different storytelling

²⁰² Prince, G. (1987) *Dictionary of Narratology*. Reprint. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003, p. 26.

²⁰³ In an online article, Harmen Liemburg writes, 'Andersen was the darling of the European royalty, entertaining his hosts by *reading* [my emphasis] stories. On these occasions, he often wielded—according to several accounts—his enormous pair of scissors, cutting improvised party decorations to his guests' astonishment and pleasure.'

performances Andersen engaged in, but they help articulate that there is a difference between his storytelling performances and the performance storytelling system I am describing, which is a system that combines the verbal and visual elements and decidedly excludes reading. In this sense, I would argue, that Andersen's performance storytelling system was a method of simultaneously generating verbal and visual 'writing' through performing.

4.6.3 To perform

As Wagner Brust observes, Andersen's performance storytelling served several functions:

Andersen sometimes used these occasions to try out new stories or to improve stories he was preparing for publication, but some tales he told over and over again because they were so popular. Making a paper cutting at the same time kept him from being bored.²⁰⁴

The need to entertain yourself while entertaining your audience is an essential part of oral storytelling, not least because performing, for all its improvisation, necessarily involves repetition. While Wagner Brust is right to point out that Andersen's paper cutting not only entertained his audiences, but also himself, I would make the further claim that it was also a way of introducing variation into his story material, an innovative way of writing not only with words but also with images or, to put it more precisely, of composting verbal and visual stories. So, when Wagner Brust writes, 'Making paper cuttings while telling stories entertained Andersen, along with his audience,'²⁰⁵ I would interpret it to mean that being entertained by his own performance storytelling was important to him not for its own sake but for the sake of his practice as a performance storyteller.

To ignore the part of Andersen that was a gifted performer, a teller of tales typical of earlier oral storytelling traditions and a paper cutter extraordinaire, is to miss an opportunity to study how his performing influenced these seemingly disparate practices:

Liemburg, H. (2022) 'Hans Christian Andersen's Paper Cuts', *Maharam*. Available at: https://www.maharam.com/stories/liemburg_hans-christian-andersens-paper-cuts (Accessed: 3 March 2021).

²⁰⁴ Wagner Brust, B. (1994) *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*, p. 39.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p. 39.

writing and paper cutting. Performance storytelling, I am arguing, was a particularly important part of his practice for he had developed a system of performance with which he could uniquely showcase, as Wagner Brust rightly observed, “the two things he did better than anyone else he knew” – telling of tales and papercutting. Appraising Andersen’s practice from a performance perspective is also an opportunity to consider the enabling role performance played in Andersen’s multifarious practice. It is my contention that performance is the organising principle of Andersen’s multifarious practice and that his performance storytelling system is its realisation. In placing the focus of appreciation on performance, it is possible to see performance mediate his other practices and how the other aspect of his practice invariably circle around performance.

Much is made of Andersen’s innovation of the folk and fairy story genres. As writer Maria Popova notes, ‘Not only were his stories authentic culturally, they were also largely his own — also unlike the Grimms, who retold existing tales, historians estimate that only seven of Andersen’s 200 tales were borrowed.’²⁰⁶ In oral storytelling traditions, invention is thought to be the result of the improvisation and ingenuity of the storyteller in varying his story material.

Given that we know that the original stories Andersen wrote, such as ‘Little Ida’s Flowers’, were often anticipated by his oral storytelling performances, this might explain why so few of Andersen’s fairy tales were retellings or rewritings of borrowed folk and fairy tales. But Andersen’s innovative style applied equally to his papercuts. Returning to Wagner Brust earlier remark about Andersen having “invented an informal, striking style” of papercutting that was entirely original and to my speculation that the style was likely original because it was invented in response to the demands of the performance, I wonder...

Might Andersen’s performance storytelling system itself be the source of his innovation? If so, what possible functions did his papercuts serve?

4.6.4 To memorise

‘Although most of his cutouts were based on things he had imagined rather than on things he had seen, Andersen occasionally used his skill with scissors like a camera, in order to

²⁰⁶ Popova, M. (2013) ‘How Hans Christian Andersen Revolutionized Storytelling, Plus the Best Illustrations from 150 Years of His Beloved Fairy Tales’, *The Marginalian*, 18 November. Available at: <https://www.brainpickings.org/2013/11/18/taschen-the-fairy-tales-ofhans-christian-andersen/> (Accessed: 5 March 2021).

capture the scene that he wanted to remember.²⁰⁷ The camera was still in the process of being invented when Andersen made his papercuts, some of which appear to have been a means of documenting “things he had seen”. For instance, in 1833 while in Rome, Andersen made a papercut documenting a portrait painting session by artist Horace Vernet. The papercut is remarkably similar to the artist’s finished portrait of the sitter, sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen. Both Andersen and Vernet had been in the same studio, seeing the same sitter and had produced similar impressions, on paper and on canvas respectively. (Figure 28)

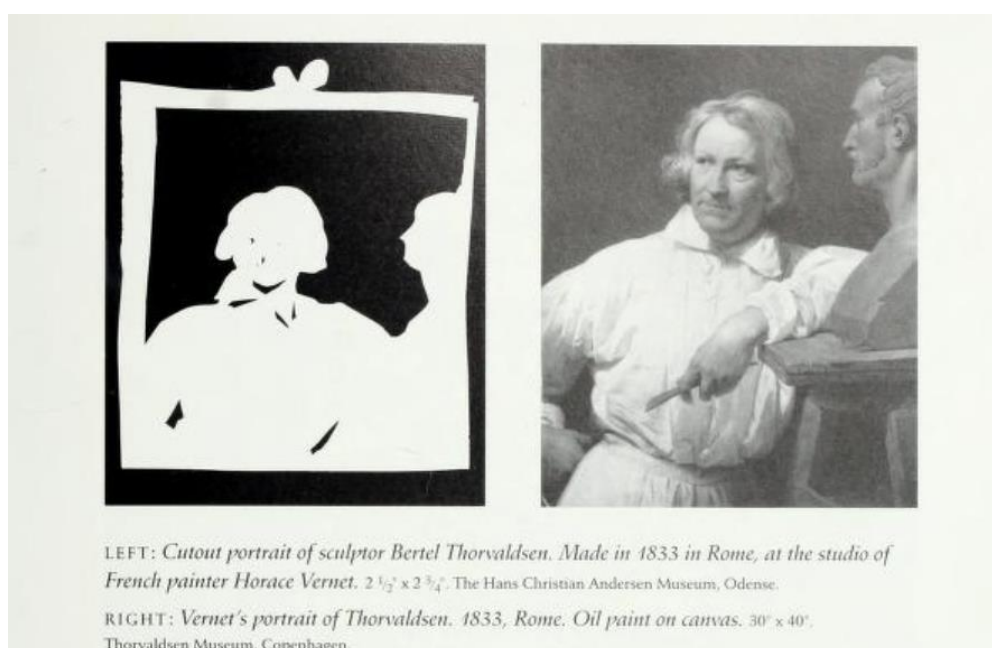


Figure 28 Reproduction of a page from Wagner Brust’s *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*. It shows, on the left, Hans Christian Andersen’s papercut portrait of sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen made in 1833 in Rome, at the studio of painter Horace Vernet and, on the right, Vernet’s portrait of Thorvaldsen, 1833, Rome.

We know from accounts that Andersen took his scissors with him wherever he went, including on his travels. Wagner Brust calls them his ‘travelling scissors’²⁰⁸ and like

²⁰⁷ Wagner Brust, B. (1994) *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*, p. 42.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 42.

travelling storytellers everywhere, we can assume that they were part of his mobile performance storytelling toolkit. As, Wagner Brust suggests, the papercuts were initially a means of capturing scenes and impressions that intrigued him while he was travelling, which might later be written into his stories or told as part of his storytelling performances. An account by a fellow traveller, Sir William Ainsworth, seems to confirm this. Ainsworth recalled Andersen showing one of his papercuts – of whirling dervishes he had seen in Turkey earlier on his travels – to other travellers with whom he was unable to speak in a common language. Thus, in that particular case, the papercut was a initially a visual means of capturing an impression and, subsequently, it served as a memory aid with which Andersen was able to share his impression with his fellow travellers, albeit by visual means alone.

But Wagner Brust's claim that Andersen used his papercuts "in order to capture the scene that he wanted to remember," can also be interpreted to mean both things he had actually seen and things he had seen in his imagination. After all, as she rightly observed, most of his papercuts were based on things he had imagined. The papercuts might have been a visual means of memorising scenes, regardless of whether the scenes were real or imagined. These scenes could be later retrieved and incorporated into his storytelling performances or his writings. In that sense, Andersen's use of the papercuts as visual memory aids is similar to Ong's description of how, before the invention of writing, storytellers in oral-aural cultures used 'striking visual symbols'²⁰⁹ as mnemonic devices to encode scenes they wanted to remember, which could later be recalled and orally composed into coherent stories. The use of visual memory aids as triggers for oral composition of stories, according to Ong, was the first step towards writing. As Ong points out, before the invention of writing, some oral-aural cultures embedded visual memory aids in the physical environment:

An oral-aural culture can take a variety of steps toward writing: stone monuments, totem designs, property marks, various primitive types of pictography, and so on. These and similar steps, insofar as they are not merely magical, serve as aide-memoires.²¹⁰

Later, after the invention of writing, oral storytellers could still commit stories to memory from a single hearing by using visual cues in the physical environment in which the

²⁰⁹ Ong, W. J. (1967) *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, p. 26.

²¹⁰ Ibid. p. 35.

storytelling performances were staged to construct, in effect, memory palaces. By arranging visual memory aids ‘in carefully contrived spatial patterns, often distributing them imaginatively around the interior of a specific building,’²¹¹ they could recall and retell the story they had heard with astonishing accuracy, but never verbatim.²¹² This is because visual memory aids originated in oral storytelling traditions that rely on improvisatory oral composition and not in literary storytelling traditions that rely on reading and reciting. As such, visual memory aids, Ong writes ‘encode little. The information storage remains almost entirely in the heads of those who use such creations, which are much more triggers than storage devices.’²¹³

Andersen’s paper cuttings might have served a similar function, a visual memory aid for a stored impression to be retrieved at a later date. Irrespective of whether the scene was real or imagined, one of the purposes of Andersen’s papercuts appears to have been to capture impressions or scenes in the form of a visual memory aid. Indeed, Andersen described himself as a hoarder of stored impressions, “I have heaps of material”, he said once, “it often seems to me as if every hoarding, every little flower is saying to me, ‘Look at me, just for a moment, and then my story will go right through you’, and then, if I feel like it, I have the story”.²¹⁴ Like oral storytellers that came before and after him, Andersen appears to have valued memory and developed mnemonic devices to aid it. What is intriguing, is that Andersen resorted to a visual means in order to do so: papercuts.

²¹¹ Ibid. p. 26.

²¹² Walter J. Ong draws on the research conducted on Yugoslavian epic singers by Albert B. Lord in his book, *The Singer of Tales*, Milman Parry and others that have demonstrated from recordings of these singers that “never is an epic sung by either the same singer or by different singers in exactly the same words”. A trained singer does not memorise the words verbatim, even if he is able to “repeat from memory an epic of hundreds of lines even though he had never heard the particular epic at all before” after having heard it only once. While the story – the main incidents and narrative structure—is accurately recalled from one telling to another, the words are variable.

Ibid. p. 25 and p. 24.

²¹³ Ibid. p. 35.

²¹⁴ See Jackie Wullschlager’s essay ‘Hans Christian Andersen’, from the illustrated exhibition guide to the Hans Christian Andersen 20 May – 2 October 2005 exhibition at the British Library.

Wullschlager, J. (2014) ‘Hans Christian Andersen’, *British Library*, 19 November. Available at: <https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20141119115826/http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/feature/andersen/homepage.html> (Accessed: 5 March 2021).

4.6.5 To improvise

In Andersen's paper-cuts you see

His poetry!

A medley of diverting treasures

All done with scissors.

—Hans Christian Andersen, handwritten inscription in his picture book he made for Astrid Stampe in 1853

Performance storytellers who use visual aids during their improvised storytelling performances – i.e., as part of their performance storytelling systems – use them in one of two ways: either as performance enabling visual aids or as memory aids to prompt their performances. Often, they two ways of using visual aids are combined, which explains why they are often simultaneously generated *by* and generative *of* the storytelling performance event. This property of being both generative *by* and generated *of* performance is what makes certain visual aids performing publications. So, are Andersen's visual aids performing publications?

To begin with, Andersen appears to have used his paper cutting in the “generated *by* performance” sense, as performance enabling visual aids. In other words, Andersen's papercuts were not merely improvised drawings with scissors, but a form of improvised “writing” with images. In order to properly articulate this distinction, it is necessary to once again situate Andersen's paper cutting and the papercuts he produced in the course of his storytelling performances within his performance storytelling system. With that in mind, I turn to Rigmor Bendix account of how the papercuts were made:

Without any special effort he cut out the most marvellous figures, and their expression was always striking. He never drew them, but whilst he was sitting talking to us he folded the paper together, and without the slightest thing to go by, he merrily cut away—and there was the idea, true to life.²¹⁵

It is widely assumed that Andersen's paper cutting might have been influenced by silhouette cutting, which was a popular artform in Europe in his time. In fact, some

²¹⁵ Wagner Brust, B. (1994) *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*, p. 59.

scholars still refer to Andersen's papercuts interchangeably as silhouettes.²¹⁶ However, it is my contention that any resemblances between silhouette cutting and Andersen's paper cutting are superficial. First, silhouettists used black paper on a white background, while Andersen used white (or occasionally coloured) paper and did not have a background. Second, Andersen's papercuts did not have a background because they were intended to be loose pieces of paper to be manipulated and animated during his performances, in the manner of paper puppets. As, historian Detlef Klein observes, 'You could often bend the figures a little, blow at them and then move them across the tabletop.'²¹⁷ We know from first-hand accounts that the papercuts were also passed around the audience who manipulated them precisely in the manner Klein describes.²¹⁸ Third, the most striking difference between silhouettists and Andersen is that the former usually drew a pattern before they began cutting whereas Andersen cut straight into the plain piece of paper, in effect improvising a drawing with his scissors. Harmen Liemburg, who is a graphic designer, printmaker and journalist, speculates on the manner in which Andersen's papercuts were made:

The paper cuts were often based around a single fold in the paper, providing a vertical axis for the shape to come. Strategic cuts around this axis—in effect, drawing with the scissors—yielded a symmetrical form when the paper was unfolded. This technique was often used to create figures and heads.²¹⁹

In her description, Liemburg identifies the final way in which Andersen's paper cutting technique differs from that of silhouettists, which is that he cut into folded pieces of paper. What Liemburg is describing is the one-fold paper cutting technique whereby a single

²¹⁶ Lambeck, P. (2018) 'Hans Christian Andersen's lesser-known talent: paper cutting'. Available from: <https://www.dw.com/en/hans-christian-andersens-lesser-known-talent-paper-cuttings/a-45924839> (Accessed: 10 January 2021).

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ As a child, Baroness Bodild von Donner witnessed Andersen's performance storytelling involving the simultaneous telling of the tale and paper cutting. She later wrote: 'When I was a child I was delighted when he cut out chains of little dolls in white paper that I could stand on the table and blow so they moved forward.'

Wagner Brust, B. (1994) *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*, p. 54.

²¹⁹ Liemburg, H. (2022) 'Hans Christian Andersen's Paper Cuts'. Available at: https://www.maharam.com/stories/liemburg_hans-christian-andersens-paper-cuts (Accessed: 3 March 2021).

sheet of paper is folded once before being cut into, producing a symmetrical image when unfolded. Cutting into a folded piece of paper to create an image that is only revealed once the paper is opened up is already impressive. However, it is especially impressive in the context of the performance: Andersen could not see the final image he was paper cutting until he unfolded the paper at the end. Thus, each paper cutting performance was a calculated risk, a partly controlled and partly chance-based undertaking that always produced a surprising outcome for everyone present, including Andersen. It is important not to underestimate the impact of the moment of the reveal of the papercut at the end of his storytelling performances on the audience, precisely because it is the result of an improvised paper cutting performance. Or, indeed, to not appreciate Andersen's considerable skill and artistry in producing a papercut under performance conditions.

Andersen produced papercuts using three paper cutting techniques: a flat-paper technique, a one-fold technique and a two-fold technique. They range in complexity from the simple flat-paper technique to the more complex one-fold technique to the most complex two-fold technique. By closely scrutinising his papercuts, it is possible to determine which technique he used. While Andersen did produce some flat-paper cuttings, meaning he cut into flat pieces of paper without folding them (see Fig. 5), he mostly used the folded paper cutting techniques. Most of his papercuts are "double cuts", meaning the paper was first folded in half before the cuts were made. Andersen occasionally used the two-fold technique, folding the paper twice before cutting into it and he must have used a vertical multi-fold technique to produce the "chains of little dolls" that Baroness Bodild von Donner recalled.

Andersen used each of the techniques to achieve different effects, since the flat-paper, one-fold, two-fold and multi-fold techniques set different parameters and produced different outcomes. The flat-paper technique was the least symmetrical and most closely resembles drawing since Andersen could see the image he was cutting. The flat-paper cutting has a single section. The one-fold technique was the most symmetrical and most efficient since Andersen could cut one half of the image and the other half of it would appear when the paper was unfolded. The one-fold paper cutting has two sections. To produce a two-fold papercut 'Andersen folded the paper twice, making four sections that meet in the center. In some of these two-fold cuttings, Andersen made the same image appear in all four sections, but often he folded the paper, cut, then refolded the paper at

different points and cut again to vary the images in the four sections.²²⁰ Finally, there is the multi-fold technique which produced chains of the same image. Of the four techniques, the two-fold was the most complicated and time consuming to produce, and Andersen reserved it for his most elaborate papercuts, such as the aforementioned papercut made for Dorothea Melchior (Figure 27).

The one-fold technique was Andersen's preferred technique for his storytelling performances and there are several, strategic, reasons for this. The one-fold technique suited symmetrical forms, which meant that he could render the mostly symmetrical figures and the settings he needed for his stories. As Wagner Brust observes, 'He used this one-fold technique for heads, human figures, theater stages, buildings with doors in the middle, linked figures like a pair of dancing girls or boys, and so on.'²²¹ The one-fold technique also enabled him to not reveal of the image until the end of the story, producing the surprising effect he wanted to achieve. The efficacy with which Andersen could produce images using the one-fold technique must also have been a decisive factor when it came to selecting which of the three techniques to use for performance purposes. Of the four options, it was neither too simple (e.g. multi-fold "chain" technique) nor too complex (two-fold "elaborate" technique) to execute in a performance context. In selecting the one-fold technique, Andersen must have weighed up the options and calculated that it was the most balanced one, both in terms of the effort it required to produce on the one hand and the effect of "surprise" it needed to achieve on the other. Given Andersen's self-imposed criteria for the performance, the one-fold technique was the most economical means of satisfying both. Of the four options, it was the most suited to performance context in which Andersen needed to produce an interesting image within a limited amount of time, which related to the story in a recognisable way and necessarily preserved the element of surprise.

Andersen's one-fold papercuts are not his most ambitious pieces, at least not in terms of his artistic achievement in the realm of visual art. An appraisal of this papercuts from a visual art perspective would confirm that he produced much more elaborate papercuts using his two-fold technique, which display a masterful paper cutting technique beyond

²²⁰ Wagner Brust, B. (1994) *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*, pp. 63-64.

²²¹ *Ibid.* p. 63.

any he achieved with his one-fold technique. As Wagner Brust notes, of the four options, 'The two-fold technique enabled Andersen to make some of his largest and most beautiful paper cuttings.'²²²

Hans Christian Andersen's papercut (Figure 29) for Ingeborg Drewsen (daughter of his benefactor and friend Jonas Collin), was made using at least the two-fold paper cutting technique (consisting of horizontal and vertical fold) and, more probably, a three-fold technique (consisting of a further diagonal fold) visible where the gnome's hats meet. The vertical fold is visible in the image and shows up clearly across the two hearts. The horizontal fold is implied, though not clearly visible, in the horizontal symmetry of the forms. The third fold is also implied in diagonal symmetry of the gnome figures, which could not have been achieved without the addition of the diagonal fold. The multi-fold technique is detectable in the overall radial symmetry the papercut assumes when two or more folds are used in a multi-directional way, rather than the simple multi-fold that is one directional and produces "chains". The papercut shows a number of motifs from his repertoire: harlequins, gnomes, ballerinas with angel wings, swans and hearts.

²²² Ibid. p. 64.

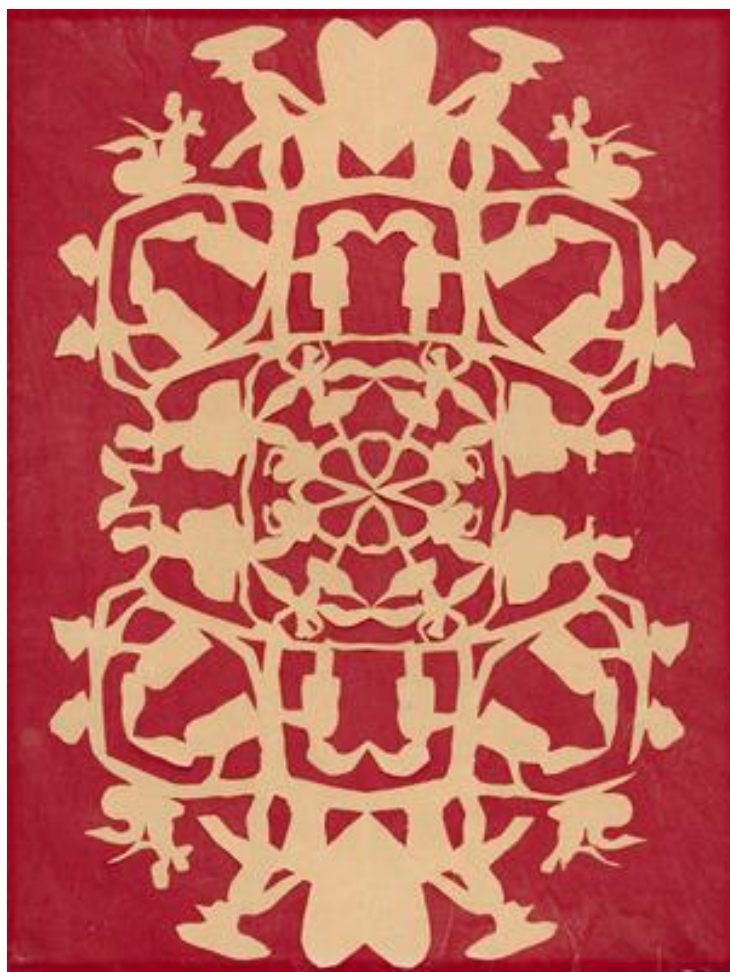


Figure 29 Hans Christian Andersen's papercut for Ingeborg Drewsen (daughter of his benefactor and friend Jonas Collin). (Image: used with permission of [Odense City Museums](#) in accordance with a Creative Commons License)

In the realm of performance, however, the one-fold papercuts are arguably his most ambitious pieces. By shifting our focus of appreciation from visual art to performance, we are able to account for their “striking” features – features that arise out of Andersen’s decidedly performative modality. In other words, their impressiveness and importance is only made apparent once we are made aware of performance context for which, and in which, they were produced. Although they were produced for and by the performance, to evaluate them only or merely as the products of the performance is misleading. Their evaluation and, ultimately, their value arises out of our understanding of their functioning within the performance and of the calculated risks Andersen made in selecting this

particular technique and not the others specifically for use during his performance storytelling.

Andersen's one-fold paper cutting technique is complex and it must have required considerable mental and physical dexterity to execute, even without the added challenge of the oral storytelling component of the performance. One could even turn the dominant understanding of Andersen's performance storytelling on its head and make a claim that it was a paper cutting performance, rather than a storytelling performance. Viewed from that perspective, Andersen's storytelling could be seen as diversionary tactic to distract the audience while he made the papercut. But, given the available evidence, I would suggest that the most likely interpretation is that both activities were diversionary tactics for the other. And this is the ingenious part of Andersen's performance storytelling system. In strategically improvising with the oral storytelling element and the paper cutting elements simultaneously, he ensured that he could continue to produce original storytelling performances again and again. It is at the point Andersen applies strategy to his improvised paper cutting that the papercuts assume the function of performance enabling visual aids.

Because Andersen's performances were at least partly improvised, we can assume that both the oral storytelling component and paper cutting component within Andersen's performance storytelling system were, in some way, generated *by* the performance. But, were the papercuts also generative *of* performance? In other words, were they also used as visual memory aids? I speculate that for Andersen, as the performance storyteller, the papercuts served as performance enabling visual aids in the first instance, meaning that they were generated *by* the performance. At the same time, it is possible that they were also used as visual memory aids during repeated performances of popular stories, in which cases they were also generative *of* the performance. This is supported by a number of surviving papercuts that seem to be variations on the same theme (See Figure 30 and Figure 31), which leads me to speculate that the stories that accompanied them were likewise variations of the same story? In that case, the similarity of certain papercuts might point to the similarity of certain stories told. In any case, we know that Andersen retold popular stories during his performance storytelling events. Might he have also re-cut the papercuts to suit, especially if the combination of a particular story with a particular papercut produced a desirable effect?



Figure 30 Hans Christian Andersen's papercut of a millman. The figure has two arms, one of which is holding a walking cane and two pens with nibs protruding from behind. There is a ladder leading up to a door that opens in the torso propped up on two legs and feet that have pointy slippers on them. There are two buttons and two love hearts on his coat and a square hat on his head resembling a flat roof. (Image: used with permission of [Odense City Museums](#) in accordance with a Creative Commons License)



Figure 31 Hans Christian Andersen's papercut of a millman. Like the figure in the previous image, this figure has two arms, one holding a walking cane, two pens with nibs protruding from behind. There is a ladder leading up to a door that opens in the torso propped up on two legs and feet that have rounded slippers on them. There are two buttons and two love hearts on his coat and a slightly different hat on his head also reminiscent of a roof. (Image: used with permission of Odense City Museums in accordance with a Creative Commons License)

Given the available evidence and operating on these reasonable assumptions as regards the possible uses Andersen might have put the papercuts to during his performance storytelling events, I must conclude that Andersen's papercuts are, indeed, performing publications. As I have stated at the beginning of this chapter, some performance storytellers use performing publications as part of their performance system. Having established that Andersen is one of them, what remains to be answered is why? Why papercuts, specifically?

4.6.6 To entertain

By all accounts, Andersen was a gifted performer and improvised storytelling performances were a form of entertainment at private gatherings at a time when people ‘talked, read aloud, and told stories.’²²³ As Zipes notes, ‘Of course it was expected that Andersen would perform for his hosts and display his genius: and he did, often without their asking. Not only did he recite his work, but he was also fond of making unusual paper cuts to amuse his hosts and their children.’²²⁴ In combination with the telling of the tale, Andersen simultaneously engaged his audiences with paper cutting. The papercuts he produced during his storytelling performances were, by all accounts, as entertaining as the stories he told. Wagner Brust speculates on the purpose of the papercuts within Andersen’s performance storytelling:

Making a paper cutting while he was telling a story kept his audience even more riveted to his performance. Not only did they want to know how the story ended, they wanted to see what the cutting would look like. When Andersen would open up the folded paper to reveal elves and swans or pixies and clowns, his audience was always thrilled.²²⁵

Often, Andersen’s paper cutting was even more entertaining than the stories he told. And, importantly, more memorable, as the following three first-hand accounts attest. “The baroness Bodild von Donner was ten years old when she first heard Andersen tell his fairy tales and saw him make his cuttings at her family’s home in Denmark. She recalled as an adult, “It was a mystery to me how he could cut out such dainty, delicate things with his big hands and those enormous scissors.”²²⁶

Rigmor Bendix, Andersen’s goddaughter, listened to his stories and watched him make his paper cuttings on many occasions. ‘She later wrote, “While Andersen was talking he would fold a piece of paper, let the scissors run in and out of curves, then unfold the paper, and there the figures were.”²²⁷

²²³ Ibid. p. 12.

²²⁴ Zipes, J. (2005) *Hans Christian Andersen: The Misunderstood Storyteller*, p. 15.

²²⁵ Wagner Brust, B. (1994) *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*, p. 35.

²²⁶ Ibid. p.13.

²²⁷ Ibid. pp. 13-14.

Finally, the painter, von Kaulbach, also recalled, in relation to the aforementioned “string of ballet dancers” papercut Andersen produced during his storytelling performance in Germany, that, ‘He [Andersen] enjoyed our praise of it more than the impression made on us by his story.’²²⁸ To which Wagner Brust asks, ‘Why would such a successful writer care more about people’s reactions to his paper artwork than about their reactions to his stories?’²²⁹ She speculates Andersen wanted to demonstrate his ‘skilful handling of scissors and paper.’²³⁰ While I agree that Andersen wanted to demonstrate his skill, I propose that it was not his skill as a paper cutter but as performance storyteller that he was showcasing. And I would further suggest that Andersen’s ‘will to please and his desire to perform,’²³¹ was motivated by his desire for his performance storytelling to be not only entertaining but also memorable.

Andersen was concerned with the total effect his performance storytelling had on the audience rather than the effect each component had individually. In other words, the telling of the story or the paper cutting were inseparable components of his performance system, and they produced a combined effect. The combined effect that Andersen achieved through his performance storytelling can be summed up in word: surprise.

In speculating on the possible reasons Andersen’s papercuts did not illustrate his stories, Wagner Brust comes to the same conclusion:

In his cutting and his stories many of the same subjects appear: dancers, swans, elves, storks, palm trees, ballerinas, castles, devils, cupids, angels, mermaids, witches, and mosques. Yet Andersen never used the cutouts to illustrate his stories. When he told a story about a mermaid, for instance, he might cut out a picture of a theater stage. Perhaps he knew that the cutting would be even more intriguing if it was a surprise.²³²

And the purpose of the surprising effect? I would suggest that one reason is that Andersen wanted to ensure his storytelling performances were memorable. The fact that so many enthusiastic and evocative first-hand accounts of his performance storytelling survive to this day is evidence of Andersen’s achievement in this respect. When Andersen

²²⁸ Ibid. p. 36.

²²⁹ Ibid. p. 36.

²³⁰ Ibid. p. 36.

²³¹ Zipes, J. (2005) *Hans Christian Andersen: The Misunderstood Storyteller*, p. 14.

²³² Wagner Brust, B. (1994) *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*, p. 14.

was developing his performance storytelling system, I strongly suspect that he was conscious of the fact that the effect of surprise he wanted to produce could only be achieved through performance and, more specifically, through his particular performance storytelling system. Beyond his storytelling performances being memorable, I would further suggest that the surprising effect ensured that the tales he told and the papercuts he made as during those performances were, ultimately, memorised.

4.6.7 To be memorised

The immediate effect the performance storyteller is trying to achieve through a storytelling performance is to entertain. If the storyteller succeeds in telling an entertaining story, it will also be memorable, i.e., it will survive in the memories of the audience after the storytelling performance has ended. This is precisely the effect Andersen's storytelling performance had on their audiences. As Wagner Brust notes:

Many of his listeners, especially the children, were so impressed by him that they remembered Andersen's paper cuttings and stories all their lives. Several of them wrote about Andersen and his amazing paper cutting when they became adults.²³³

But the more important and more lasting effect of the entertaining storytelling performance is, according to Walter Benjamin, to create a community. Storytelling performances have the effect of creating temporary communities who gather around the storytelling event itself. If the storytelling performance is memorable and the story told is memorised, the community of speakers and listeners can lengthen the life of the story and the life of the community through repeated telling of the memorised story or of the memorable storytelling event itself.

In his 1936 essay, 'The Storyteller', Benjamin calls for the restoration of the communal art of storytelling to contemporary audiences. At the time, he observes 'the art of storytelling has become rare'.²³⁴ He further proposes that this can only be achieved through reinstating participatory communities of speakers and listeners engaging in storytelling performance.

²³³ Ibid. p. 12.

²³⁴ Benjamin, W. (1936) 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', in Arendt, H. (ed.) (1969) *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, pp. 83-109, p. 89.

In the essay, Benjamin argues that instead of timely information, contemporary audiences need is timeless meaning. Moreover, we need meaningful connection and he suggest that storytelling performance can restore it because it is through the storyteller's words that 'soul, eye, and hand are brought into connection.'²³⁵ Might Andersen have been such a storyteller? The Odense Bys Museer entry on Andersen's papercuts seems to suggest so:

The paper clippings themselves were not only intended to please the eye, they were also a challenge to the spirit. Often there was a deeper meaning in the paper clippings, in the same way as in the poet's fairy tale, which superficially entertains, but which in the deeper gives something to the thought.²³⁶

Storytelling, Benjamin writes, is participatory and communal by its very nature. "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale."²³⁷ The story of how Andersen's fairy tale 'Little Ida's Flowers' originated comes to mind.

When Benjamin writes about the communal art of storytelling, he is referring to a type of unmediated storytelling typical of oral storytelling traditions, in which the relationship between the author, the audience and the text is immediate, intimate and immaterial. Traditionally, in oral forms of storytelling, publishing consists of and is constituted in the unmediated relationship between author, audience and text that takes place during a storytelling performance. Benjamin claims that the art of storytelling was in decline due to successive mediating technologies, beginning with the invention of the printing press and including all media that had been invented since. But, specifically, he focuses on the effects of print publishing had on oral storytelling performance and uses the novel, a product of print publishing, as the case in point. Thus, what Benjamin had in mind when writing about the effect of mediating technologies on storytelling was, in fact, the effect of mediating technologies on oral forms of publishing. He was writing about all media—from print media to broadcast media—specifically in relation to their transformative effect on earlier, oral means of publishing of stories. The cumulative effect of successive mediating technologies Benjamin claims is an indication 'that the art of storytelling is coming to an

²³⁵ Ibid. p. 108.

²³⁶ 'H. C. Andersen's Paper Clippings', *Museum Odense*. Available at: <http://andersen.odensebymuseer.dk/klip/billedstart.asp> (Accessed: 3 March 2021). [My translation]

²³⁷ Benjamin, W. (1936) 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', in Arendt. H. (ed.) (1969) *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, pp. 83-109, p. 87.

end,²³⁸ in the sense that it is impoverishing everyday speech with the result that, 'Less and less frequently do we encounter people with the ability to tell a tale properly.'²³⁹

The notion of performance storytelling as an ephemeral form of publishing is intriguing and it has many advantages over print publishing. The main advantage being that it permits the performance storyteller to improvise with the text: to endlessly evolve it, elaborate on it, and adapt it to the particular audience and particular set of circumstances in which its publishing as performance is taking place. The purpose of such publishing, as I have previously stated, is to publish text which cannot be published by any other means. In a sense, the memory of the audience is where such publishing is ultimately realised, and the ultimate goal of such publishing is to be memorable and thus memorised.

Richard Schechner uses a printing press analogy to distinguish two types of performance: "transportations" and "transformations", where the former effects an immaterial change and the latter a material change upon the audience. According to Schechner, in a combination transportation-transformation performance:

When the performance is over the transported have been returned to their place of entry and the transformed have been changed. The system is analogous to a printing press, where information is imprinted upon a piece of paper as it is fed through. The performance—and the training leading up to it—are points of contact between the 'press' (transported) and the 'paper' (transformed).²⁴⁰

To borrow Schechner's printing press analogy, performance storytelling is perpetually in the "press" mode of publishing; it does not produce imprints on paper, in fact, it defers it indefinitely. As a result, it does not transform the performer or the audience, but merely transports them into the temporary realm of publishing of that which would otherwise remain unpublishable. After this time-limited form of performative publishing, all involved are "returned to their place of entry". In contrast, in transformation performances there is a

²³⁸ Ibid. p. 83.

²³⁹ Ibid. p. 83.

²⁴⁰ Schechner, R. (1981) 'Performers and Spectators Transported and Transformed, *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 3, no. 4, Autumn 1981, pp. 83–113, p. 95. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/4335238 (Accessed: 15 May 2021).

'decisive contact between the transported and the transformed.'²⁴¹ It takes the form of some type of material imprint upon the transformed, 'What the transported imprint upon the transformed at that point of contact is there to stay'²⁴², i.e., it is material and permanent. In transportation performances, however, any change is temporary and can only be preserved in the memory of the audience, i.e., it is immaterial and impermanent.

As Ong has pointed out, traditional oral performers are skilled at memorising the performances of other performers after only one hearing, but this is not a skill most audiences of performances today are expected to bring to the performance. If a contemporary oral performer wants to effect a transformation upon the audience, this change is realised by producing memorable moments. In that sense, the 'information is imprinted'²⁴³ only upon the memories of the audience members. Thus, the main effect of transportation performance is not to affect a lasting change, but to temporarily transport the audience to a "performance world" from which pieces may be brought back to the "real world" after the fact, but only in the form of memories. While performers may succeed in making an impression upon the memory of the audience that outlast the performance event itself, this is not the main aim of transportation performances. On the contrary, they are meant to be transportive and time-limited; they and their effects are real, but ultimately temporary. They resist the permanence of publishing, but nevertheless they persist in publishing the unpublishable. However, their impermanence also means that what is published as performance is inevitably destined to disappear, even from memory.

Although Andersen engaged in this ephemeral form of publishing during his storytelling performances, his papercuts, mitigate this somewhat. And here is where the innovation of Andersen's performance storytelling system comes into play again, this time in relation to innovation in publishing. Returning to Schechner's printing press analogy, what I wish to suggest is that Andersen's performance storytelling system points the way to a hybrid form of publishing, somewhere in between the impermanent and the permanent "imprint". In other words, Andersen's performance storytelling system is a blending of a transportation performance (i.e., the immaterial tale telling, destined to disappear from memory) and transformation performance (i.e., the papercuts as material reminders and remainders).

²⁴¹ Ibid. p. 95.

²⁴² Ibid. p. 95.

²⁴³ Ibid. p. 95.

Precisely how many of Andersen's papercuts have survived is not known. At the time of writing her book on Andersen's papercuts, Wagner Brust noted:

Although no one knows how many paper cuttings Andersen made, he created them from the time he was an adolescent until his death. Of the hundreds or perhaps thousands of cuttings he made, only about 250 have survived.²⁴⁴

More recently, historian Detlef Klein has estimated that there are almost 400 surviving papercuts.²⁴⁵

Nevertheless, Andersen's papercuts are very fragile. As Wagner Brust points out, 'They were made of whatever paper was around, usually thin, white writing paper.'²⁴⁶

Furthermore, the paper cutting process itself made them even more fragile. Thus, if Andersen's intention was to use to papercuts as a means of ensuring that his audience had something else other than their memories to remember his performance storytelling by – a memento – then why did he use such an ephemeral material?

Or, as Moy McCrory puts it:

Andersen knew that his written work would outlast him: he was famous and successful, as were his tales. Yet he continued to work in these transient materials, their cheapness and availability making them of no value apart from their appeal to sentiment...Why work in a form that ought to have left no traces?²⁴⁷

4.6.8 To gift

In answer to his own question, McCrory speculates:

I suggest that this showed how Andersen reacted to his fame, and to his own sense of being forever on the margins of the lived life. He moved amongst the

²⁴⁴ Wagner Brust, B. (1994) *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*, p. 14.

²⁴⁵ Lambeck, P. (2018) 'Hans Christian Andersen's lesser-known talent: paper cutting'. Available from: <https://www.dw.com/en/hans-christian-andersens-lesser-known-talent-paper-cuttings/a-45924839> (Accessed: 10 January 2021).

²⁴⁶ Wagner Brust, B. (1994) *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*, p. 56.

²⁴⁷ See Moy McCrory quoted in:

Halliday, A. (2021) 'The Exquisite, Ephemeral Paper Cutting of Hans Christian Andersen'.

educated and the famous, was friendly with Dickens, was patronized by nobles, but was outside those circles. His education was gained at some pains to himself, years after the usual dates for these activities (he would not even pass nowadays as a “mature student”, since his completion of elementary school only took place when he was a young adult). He was always placed outside the normal bounds of the society he kept.²⁴⁸

But, I would suggest Andersen worked “in form that ought to have left no traces” because his papercuts were, first and foremost, gifts. What is more, they were offered as part of gift-giving performances, i.e., Andersen’s performance storytelling. As Wagner Brust observes, ‘Although his stories were a type of gift, the cuttings could be left as tangible tokens of his affection for his hosts and their other guests.’²⁴⁹ But, as Wagner Brust’s observation indicates, the papercuts were not only mementos of his performance but also a means of strengthening social bonds through their gifting. In other words, *the papercuts were not meant to be durable mementos, but enduring ones.*

From first-hand and second-hand accounts, we know that Andersen gifted the papercuts to the audience as part of his performance storytelling. It was such an important part of his performance storytelling that Wagner Brust included it in the summary on her book’s dust cover: ‘Often he made the cuttings while he was telling a fairy tale, then gave them to the children listening to him.’²⁵⁰ But, it is important to understand that the gift-giving of the papercuts was not only a social gesture but also an artistic one. Moreover, it has been my aim throughout this chapter to compellingly argue towards the notion that it was, first and foremost, a publishing one. It is my contention that the gifting of his papercuts was an essential part of Andersen’s performance storytelling system in which this particular gesture is a gesture towards publishing the unpublishable.

Andersen’s papercuts, which are gifted as part of his performance storytelling system enact a form of publishing conceived as a gift-giving performance. When the focus of appreciation is placed on the production of the text as a performance, rather than on the text as the product of the performance, we can see that it was the gifting itself, and not the gift that is a form of publishing. In other words, Andersen’s paper cutting (i.e., the production of them as part of the performance), rather than his papercuts (i.e., the

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Wagner Brust, B. (1994) *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*, p. 56.

²⁵⁰ Summary text on the dust cover of the book *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen* by Beth Wagner Brust.

Ibid.

products of the performance), once appraised as part of his performance system, is the gift. It is also the reason that we need to analyse Andersen's paper cutting as a performance, rather than analysing the product of his performance, the papercuts, in order to properly evaluate whether his storytelling performance system is, in fact, a form of publishing the unpublishable.

But, what does publishing the unpublishable look like? How can we ascertain if an author has published the unpublishable? I would suggest that it is possible to detect both through certain effects it produces upon the audience, which are only possible to produce in an audience during the performance event itself. The singular effect produced in Andersen's case can be summarised in one word: surprise. And, by surprise I not only mean the surprise and delight that his audiences reported but also the surprising form the publishing and the publication took. Recalling all the accounts of Andersen's performance storytelling, including the notion that his stories were immaterial gifts while his papercuts were material gifts, but most especially recalling the effect of surprise at the reveal of the papercuts, I would venture to suggest that Andersen's storytelling performances are a gesture towards publishing the unpublishable.

4.7 Conclusion

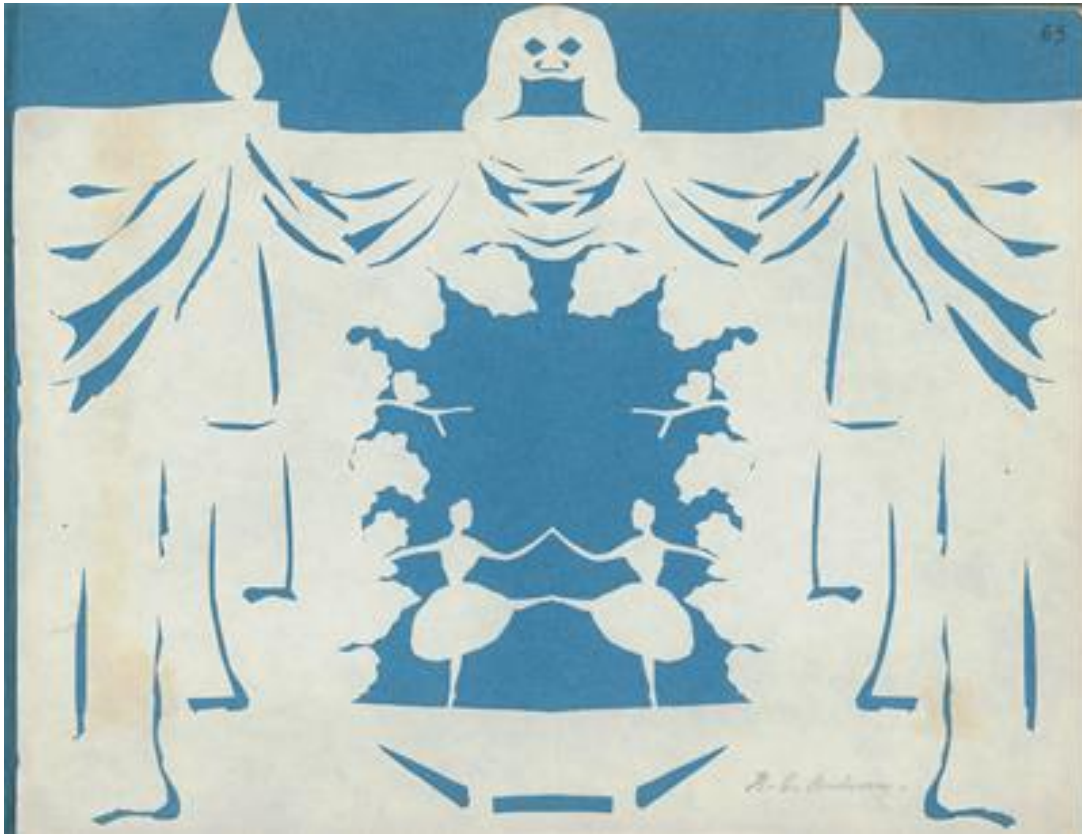


Figure 32 Hans Christian Andersen's papercut of theatre stage, with curtains, scenery, a theatre mask and two dancing ballerinas. (Image: used with permission of Odense City Museums in accordance with a Creative Commons License)

The different aspects of Andersen's practice as a performer, an artist and a writer are often interpreted with a writing and print publishing bias. Given that Andersen is mostly known as a published author, rather than as a performance storyteller, this is perhaps unsurprising. However, it is important to note that all these aspects were synthesised, by Andersen himself, in his performance storytelling system. This, I am contending, is significant and intentional. I suspect that Andersen was aware that performance storytelling was a way of enriching both his oral storytelling and paper cutting practices. I would argue that Andersen came up with his idiosyncratic system of performance storytelling because it enabled him to combine his oral storytelling and his paper cutting practices into a doubly intriguing form of writing that brought the verbal and visual strands of his practice together. While each component served a particular purpose, together they produced a combined form of writing that could not be written or, indeed, published by any other means than as performance.

Thus, Andersen's performance storytelling was not only a way of generating verbal and visual material that might later lead to writing and publishing but was also an opportunity to publish his story material as performance. The significance of Andersen's performance storytelling system lies in the fact that Andersen, for one reason or another, must have felt that performance was the most appropriate, perhaps the only appropriate, medium for their telling and means of their publishing. I would argue that Andersen's performance storytelling is a significant part not only of his writing but also his publishing practice, even if the stories he told and the papercuts he made were not written or published in the conventional sense.

Curiously, publications related to performance that nevertheless remain unpublished is one means of identifying potential performing publications. As a researcher, whenever I discover a publication that, despite having been published as performance, has never been print published, my immediate response is to ask why not? And more often than not, the answer is because it is, in fact, a performing publication.

Performing publications are not to be confused with other publications related to performance, which might be produced either before, during or after the performance event itself. The difference between performing publications and other publications – even publications that are produced specifically for use before, during and after a performance – is the particular use they are put to: they are used to generate the performance and the performance, in turn, is used to generate them. Thus, the main difference between performing publications and other publications is that performing publications cease to “perform” outside of the performance event that produced them and was, in turn, produced by them. Once their “performing” function ceases, they cease to function as publications.

Having established the category of performing publications, the main aim of this research project is to use them to evidence an alternative history of publishing that can only be staged as performance, which, I am arguing, has existed before and alongside print publishing and continues to exist in our era of post-digital publishing. This research project is a step towards developing a theory of publishing that incorporates performance theory and practice in order to account for the enduring presence of forms of performance publishing in the past, the present and, hopefully, the future. Firstly, it is my hope that this theory of

publishing will be able to account for the enduring presence of performing publications, which are themselves the result of the confluence of two fields: performance and publishing. Secondly, I hope that this theory of publishing will account for a wider trend that, I am arguing, has been tending and continues to tend towards something approaching a theatre of publishing. With this notion of a theatre of publishing, evidenced by performing publications, I hope to bring the two fields, performance and publishing, into closer relation if only to prompt further interdisciplinary dialogue by demonstrating that, in practices such as Andersen's, they already are.

In subjecting Andersen's papercuts to a functionalist performance analysis, in situating them in the performance context to which they originally belonged, in restoring and reconstructing the conditions of their production as part of a performance, my aim in this chapter has been to demonstrate that they were once performing publications. As part of Andersen's performance storytelling system, the papercuts were performances in their own right and, moreover, they were performances of publishing – perhaps even of publishing the *unpublishable*, a further tentative step towards a theatre of publishing.

Chapter 5 Practice-led Case Study: *A thread without end, Act I, Act and Act III*

5.1 Introduction

performance is by no means limited to dialogue only and consists of multifarious material components, or the *signalling matter*, composed of live and inanimate substances, movements and gestures, words, light and sound, creating all sorts of relationships with each other in innumerable proportions and combinations. These become the material vehicles of signs; since they are composed of sundry substances, often in striking, occasionally shocking, combinations, the spectators try to bring logic and sense to what they see and hear. Thus we begin to realize that everything on the stage means more than just itself: it also begins to mean something that is not visible or audible, something we can only imagine [...] each of these systems in isolation, such as language, dance, music, painting, film, poetry, video, scenography, installations, can be recognized and described, but during the performance they intermingle and coalesce, creating compound configurations, heterogenous conglomerations, amalgams of higher order, unique for the particular productions. Through this, they generate new relationships, hence meanings; they undergo transmutation, evading formal classifications and description [...] thus creating configurations not to be found outside theatre. –Jerzy Limon²⁵¹

This chapter centres on my ongoing performance storytelling piece *A thread without end* (2017–) in which I stage acts of publishing as theatrical events using three distinct visual aids – a paper scroll, a tiled paper map and a papercut theatre – as performing

²⁵¹ Limon, J. (2010) *The Chemistry of Theatre: Performativity of Time*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 6. [Original emphasis]

publications. The serialised piece comprises three discrete acts to date, *Act I* (2017), *Act II* (2018) and *Act III* (2021), which will be the focus of this practice-led case study into my performance storytelling practice. However, *A thread without end* is envisioned as a potentially endless series of performances featuring all manner of performing publications. My vision for the piece includes many more acts, installed in a theatrical space with a tailor-made structure capable displaying performing publications of various formats – scroll, tiled map, papercut theatre and, soon, a storytelling “speaking costume” (*Act IV*) and a series of storytelling fans (*Act V*) – that I can select from and perform at will. *Act IV* and *Act V* are in development and have not been included as part of this research project. However, they are part of my continuing investigation into different forms of performing publications and reflect my methodological approach whereby each is a pointed practice-led interrogation into specific properties of performing publications and means of testing them against the characteristics and criteria of the proposed category. Furthermore, practice-led insights that have emerged out of the process of creating and performing them are elaborated across the three acts, whereby each successive act builds upon insights gained from the previous one, delving deeper into a particular insight, pursuing a particular line of investigation and developing in a distinct direction.

The practice-led component is intended to offer insights into a contemporary performance storytelling practice from the inside, revealing the backstage processes involved in creating and staging the performing publications from a practitioner’s perspective. This is a critical contribution since my research strongly indicates that performing publications are products and productions of backstage performance processes that appear to have been spontaneously brought onto the stage; processes that are rarely made available and appraised – and even more rarely from a practitioner perspective. While the Derek Jarman and Hans Christian Andersen case studies necessarily relied on historical reconstruction of performing publications as they originally appeared on the stage, here I offer a first-hand account of their development from page to stage, pointing to additional insights that might shed light on the performance processes of other practitioners using performing publications.

The methodology I have adopted for the practice-led component of this research project focuses on the theatrical event as an interpretative model and integrated method of both performance practice and performance analysis. I have adopted this methodology for all the reasons Jerzy Limon raises with his description of the theatrical event at the opening

of this chapter. I have adopted the theatre event and related notion of theatricality as an integrated model of both performance practice and performance analysis as a means of both concentrating and containing the arguments and aims pertaining to my practice. At the same time, I recognise the challenges posed by applying any performance analysis system to performance practice, since, as Pavis has noted, once the principles and possibilities of any performance analysis are applied, “the performance text becomes an object of knowledge, a theoretical object substituted for the empirical object the performance itself once was.”²⁵² Nevertheless, this approach seemed the most promising theoretical and practical method of synthesising performing publications, the “theoretical objects”, and the performances they appeared in, the “empirical objects”, into an analysable model. In applying the model of the theatrical event, my aim is to firmly situate my practice within that frame and further clarify aspects of my practice that are decidedly theatrical, specifically in relation to performance storytelling as a form of performance publishing in which visual aids are used as performing publications to stage acts of publishing.

In addition to exploring different elements that constitute the theatrical event and theatricality as manifested in my performance storytelling practice, I will be focusing on the role of the visual – the purposes of visualisations, the uses of visual language and visual narrative – in my performing publications in relation to the processes of memorisation, memorability and even memorialisation of the storytelling performances. My practice-led research indicates that visual aids are mnemonic devices not only for the author-performer but also for the audience – although this manifests differently in relation to production and reception processes respectively. Since performance storytelling is an ephemeral form of publishing, this insight into the role that visual aids play as mnemonic devices becomes central to the notion of publishing as an immaterial imprint or impression that endures beyond the theatrical event only as memory, again registering differently by the author and by the audience. Walter J. Ong’s key observation that, in oral or orally-influenced storytelling traditions, the visual is construed as an orally, rather than visually, apprehended phenomenon, has been instrumental in my practice-led research, since my

²⁵² Pavis, P. (2003) *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance and Film*, p. 11.

approach to the visual in my performing publications for *A thread without end* is embedded in the oral tradition of publishing, meaning that not only the text but also the visuals are composed for the purpose of performance.²⁵³ Although I had arrived at this insight independently through my practice, Ong's observation was enlightening for it enabled me to account for the curious visual characteristics of other performing publications and suggested that they can be better understood once they are reconsidered and reevaluated as renderings of an orally rather than visually processed reality. It also enabled me to reconceive performing publications as an audio-visual phenomenon under which diverse performance storytelling practices that use visual aids could be grouped together, regardless of whether the audio-visual was realised in analogue, mechanical or digital media.

5.2 Description: *A thread without end*, Act I, Act II and Act III

*I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
Something else is alive
Beside the clock's loneliness
And this blank page where my fingers move.*

*Through the window I see no star:
Something more near
Though deeper within darkness
Is entering the loneliness:*

*Cold, delicately as the dark snow
A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;
Two eyes serve a movement, that now
And again now, and now, and now*

*Sets neat prints into the snow
Between trees, and warily a lame
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
Of a body that is bold to come*

²⁵³ According to Ong, a picture in oral cultures was understood 'not as a visually apprehended reality but of an orally processed one', meaning that pictures were used figuratively rather than literally, as symbolic rather than realistic representations.
Ong, W. J. (1967) *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, p. 53.

*Across clearings, an eye,
A widening deepening greenness,
Brilliantly, concentratedly,
Coming about its own business*

*Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox
It enters the dark hole of the head.
The window is starless still; the clock ticks,
The page is printed.*

–Ted Hughes, 'The Thought Fox'²⁵⁴

A thread without end Act I, Act II and Act III was staged as a solo exhibition at DUM Project Space, Ljubljana, 27– 29 July 2021. The visual aids and the costume were installed as an exhibition at which a different act was performed twice on each evening: *Act I* on 27 July, *Act II* on 28 July and *Act III* premiered on 29 July. A detailed description, photographic and video documentation of each of the three acts is included as Appendix A, B and C respectively in place of an exhibition of the practice-led component of this research project. Additionally, *Act II* and *Act III* are made in collaboration with Tychonas Michailidis who provided the sound design, digital interfaces and interactive features for the performances as well as editing the aforementioned videos.

The performance storytelling piece *A thread without end* is an investigation into a type of performance publishing that uses visual aids to stage theatrical events. Across a series of three storytelling performances (*Act I, Act II and Act III*), I guide the audience through different forms of visual aids – turned performing publications through their staging – which have been tailor-made for the performances, while narrating and performing an original creation story in verse. The visual aids are an analogue hand-painted large-format paper scroll (*Act I*), a digitally augmented graphite drawing in the shape of tiled paper map (*Act II*), and a digitally augmented papercut theatre (*Act III*).

²⁵⁴ Hughes, T. (2003) *Collected Poems*. Edited by P. Keegan. London: Faber and Faber.



Figure 33 Visual aid for *A thread without end, Act I* (2017) (Image: Jaka Babnik)

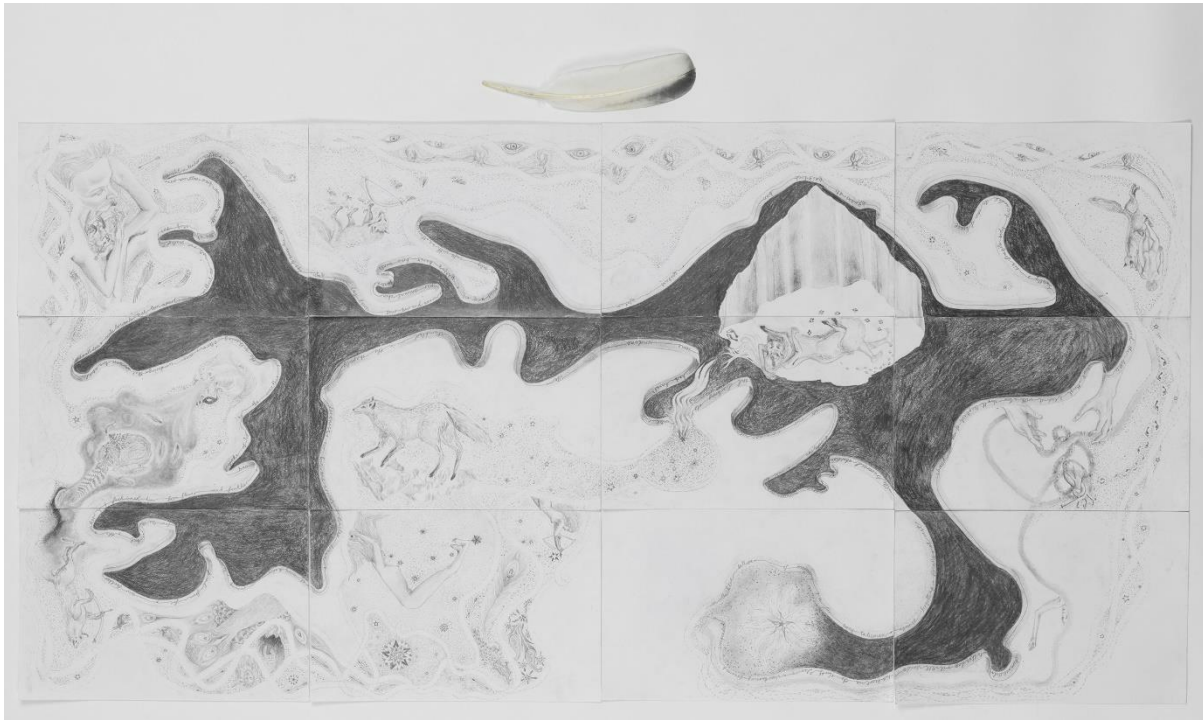


Figure 34 Visual aid for *A thread without end, Act II* (2019) (Image: Jaka Babnik)



Figure 35 Visual aid for *A thread without end*, Act III (2021) (Image: Jaka Babnik)

With the help of visual aids I narrate and perform an original story in verse. The story, an origin myth written in the lyric style, centres on two mythological characters: a woman, the protagonist, and an anthropomorphised fox,²⁵⁵ the interlocutor, who is variously portrayed

²⁵⁵ The fox character in *A thread without end* is a recurrent figure in a series of my poems, simply referred to as “he”. I envision him in similar terms to Ted Hughes’ “thought fox”, immortalised in his poem ‘The Thought Fox’, as a source of poetic inspiration and interlocutor. Hughes first wrote about an enigmatic half-man and half-fox figure appearing to him in a dream as a “guide” in a short autobiographical piece titled ‘The Burnt Fox’. When I had learnt of it, I was delighted because the fox figure in my poems also appeared to me in a dream. But, more importantly, Hughes’ poem describes my own understanding of the relationship between the fox figure and poetry: ‘It is also one of the most celebrated poetic accounts of the act of writing poetry, or rather, more accurately, trying to write poetry and the arrival of inspiration.’

Tearle, O. (2016) ‘A Summary and Analysis of Ted Hughes’ ‘The Thought-Fox’, *Interesting Literature*, September. Available at: <https://interestingliterature.com/2016/09/a-short-analysis-of-ted-hughes-the-thought-fox/> (Accessed: 2 August 2022).

as a deity, a spirit guide, a figment of her imagination and a real entity with whom she interacts in different amorphous and metamorphosing settings.

Each visual aid in *A thread without end* is an exploration of different text and image combinations that can be used to tell and show a story. For each visual aid, the texts and images are created concurrently, whereby each component informs the other during the process of composing the story and creating the visual aid. This process is aided by preparatory material in the form of a repository of images (pencil drawings, pen and paintbrush drawings, papercuts.) and a repertoire of poems (made using the cut-up method). These are combined into different configurations to form different constellations of potential meanings and readings through the productive meeting of text and image. Typically, the preparatory story material – both texts and images, numbering in the tens or hundreds – accumulates over many months, and I use this stage of the process to identify the main themes and establish the setting and atmosphere of the story. The selection stage of the process consists of identifying verbally and visually striking images from the preparatory material before arranging and rearranging them into a provisional story – a process that generates a plotting rather than a plot. The “story map” that emerges out of this plotting process consists of a series of scenes that are gradually aggregated and consolidated into an act. However, this process is very flexible and fluid, and the final composition only emerges in the process of creating the visual aid itself, at which point the preparatory material is set aside, some of it having been synthesised and incorporated into the visual aid. My aim, in creating the visual aid, is to develop an idiosyncratic visual language specifically for it – a language that evolves with each act. Each visual aid is a distinct materialisation of the particular visual language in the paper medium, drawing on an iconography of my own devising. There is no storyboarding *per se*, instead the story emerges in a processual manner as a result of cumulative decisions – some intuitive, others analytical – and through the opposing processes of elimination and elaboration. These processes are interdependent and contingent, and this is reflected in the episodic structure of the scenes in relation to the acts, and of the acts in relation to the entire piece – a structure that enables me to tell a story that unravels like a thread without an end. My aim with *A thread without end* is to maintain these production processes and, indeed, the entire performance system that has been set in motion – indefinitely.

The visual aids, serving as visually encoded story maps, are indispensable components in the storytelling performances in which they are used as both mnemonic and illustrative devices. However, in using the visual aids as memory aids, on which story maps are

physically realised in the medium of paper, my additional aim was to enhance the memorability of the performances for the audience. I hypothesised that by engaging audiences in the sensory possibilities offered by the paper medium and by rendering a visualisation of the story content in a material form – a paper scroll, a paper map and papercuts – I could further encourage audiences to commit aspects of the performance to memory by creating conditions conducive to mental mapping processes.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, in using visual aids as performing publications, my intention was to investigate whether story maps are made more “tangible” and “memorable” through additionally being staged at theatrical events. I hypothesised that in realising what is essentially a mental phenomenon (my mental map of the story) in a physical form (the visual aid containing the story map) and then applying it to a real-life situation (the theatrical event), the memorability of the storytelling performance would be considerably enhanced by the experiential nature of its theatrical presentation.

The experiential possibilities of storytelling are explored further in *Act II* and *Act III* with the strategic use of digital tools and technologies that enhance the performance beyond conventional storytelling to include soundscapes triggered by touch (*Act II*) and changes in movement and lighting levels (*Act III*), elements that are mapped onto the visual aids themselves. The digital interfaces are not mapped onto the visual aids after the fact but are integrated into their design from the beginning, guiding and shaping their development and decidedly influencing not only their functionality but also their appearance. The digital interfaces manifest in different ways in the visual aids for *Act II* and *Act III*: In *Act II* I use graphite as a conductive material in conjunction with a circuit (Makey Makey) programmed to sense conductivity and in *Act III* I use motion tracking software (Max 8) programmed to detect movement and changes in image intensity thresholds, both of which are

²⁵⁶ The notion that memorisation, the retention and recall of text, is enhanced through mental mapping if content is realised in a physical form has gained traction in recent times. For an early, pre-digital media, study see:

Kulhavy, R. W. *et al.* (1992) ‘Using Maps to Retrieve Text: A Test of Conjoint Retention’ *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, Volume 17, Issue 1, pp. 56-70. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0361476X92900462> (Accessed: 2 August 2022). For a summary of recent neuroscientific findings regarding the relationship between memorisation and the experiential dimensions of publishing in the physical versus digital media see: Dooley, R. (2015) ‘Paper Beats Digital In Many Ways, According to Neuroscience’, *Forbes*, 16 September. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rogerdooley/2015/09/16/paper-vs-digital/?sh=72b45c3a33c3> (Accessed: 2 August 2022).

additionally connected to sound programmes (Ableton Live 11 and Max 8). While both are used to trigger soundscapes, the two different digital interfaces influenced the content and form of the visual aids and, consequently, of the performances themselves in different ways. Through the combined elements – image, text, sound and performance – the storytelling performances are transformed into analogue (*Act I*) and digitally augmented (*Act II* and *Act III*) audio-visual theatrical events.

The central idea behind *A thread without end* is that certain story content cannot be published other than as a performance, after which its publishing remains in the memory of the audience. At the same time, it points to possible ways of turning towards new, digitally augmented performance storytelling forms and alternative ways of publishing as performance. The piece re-imagines digital technologies as an extension and enhancement of performance storytelling and fosters new forms of performance publishing that takes place on the stage rather than the page. The piece further seeks to re-frame the relationship between author, text and audience, bringing them into closer relation while re-defining conventional notions of publishing to include storytelling performances that stage acts of publishing as theatrical events.

5.3 The Theatrical Event and Theatricality

In this practice-led case study, I compare and contrast three of my performance storytelling pieces, *A thread without end Act I* (2017), *Act II* (2019) and *Act III* (2021), specifically focusing on the visual aids in furtherance of my investigation into the notion that performing publications are both products and productions of performance publishing staged as theatrical events. More than mere performance-enabling story maps, the visual aids are examined in relation to the role they play in my performance storytelling practice as performing publications: as self-sufficient portable theatres containing all the instructions and ingredients for staging a theatrical event and, potentially, a theatre of publishing. The three acts comprising *A thread without end*, although very different in appearance, deployment and design – by which I mean the different lines of investigation they are designed to develop – overlap in many ways. For instance, all are endeavours to expand the experiential possibilities of storytelling, all are enactments of ephemeral forms of publishing and, in instrumentalising the performing publications as pointed investigations into notions of the theatrical event and theatricality, all are efforts to establish whether certain theatrical objects can be said to possess the quality of theatricality in and of themselves. Or, as Josette Féral and put it: ‘does theatricality pre-

exist its manifestation in the theatrical object, with the object becoming the condition of its emergence?’²⁵⁷ The category of performing publications would suggest that this is a strong possibility. In fact, it is the only plausible explanation for their existence as objects, and my aim in this case study is to demonstrate that they are “theatrical objects” through and through.

According to Hans-Thies Lehmann’s decidedly postdramatic definition of theatricality, performing publications and the performance storytelling practices associated with them, precisely because of their reliance on text and on representation, would not be considered theatrical. Lehmann defines theatricality, above all, in opposition to the ‘literary’²⁵⁸ and the representational, thus placing performance storytelling traditions that use performing publications outside of the realm of theatre.²⁵⁹ But I disagree precisely on the grounds that performing publications, although both literary and representational, are inherently theatrical objects: they do not manifest in their entirety other than through a properly theatrical presentation. In other words, their entire purpose as objects is to be performed under conditions that are decidedly theatrical. This turns performance storytelling practices that use performing publications, mine included, into theatrical events. Furthermore, in relation to publishing, contrary to conventional notions of publishing as ‘fixed in the space and time of the printed page’,²⁶⁰ the publishing of performing publications is strictly spatiotemporally situated within the time and space of theatrical event to produce a one-off, time-limited instances of publishing. For this reason, performing publications are both products and productions of the stage, rather than the page. Lehmann nevertheless concedes that, in staging a text, which is the case with

²⁵⁷ Féral, J. and Bermingham, R. P. (2002) ‘Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language’, *SubStance*, Vol. 31, No. 2/3, Issue 98/99, Special Issue: Theatricality (2002), pp. 94-108, p. 95. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3685480.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A73a14f28fc2d3838ffbb1e6f528dc33c&ab_segments=&origin=&acceptTC=1 (Accessed: 2 May 2022).

²⁵⁸ Lehmann, H.-T. (2006) *Postdramatic Theatre*. Translated from the German by K. Jürs-Munby. Oxon: Routledge, p. 51.

²⁵⁹ Lehmann defines postdramatic theatre in opposition to dramatic theatre where the latter is based on the primacy of the text and on representation. Dramatic theatre, according to Lehmann, is not properly theatrical because it is subordinated to the text and to representation in which ‘the staging largely consisted of the declamation and illustration of written drama.’ *Ibid.* p. 21.

²⁶⁰ Ludovico, A. (2015) ‘Post-Digital Publishing, Hybrid and Processual Objects in Print’, p. 4. Available at: http://post-digital-culture.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ludovico_2015_post-digital-publishing.pdf (Accessed: 30 August 2022).

performing publications, the text needs to be considered ‘from the perspective of theatrical reality,’²⁶¹ since ‘in theatre the text is subject to the same laws and dislocations as the visual, audible, gestic and architectonic theatrical signs.’²⁶²

But what does it mean to consider the text “from the perspective of theatrical reality”? Does theatrical reality refer to the combined processes of production and reception of the theatrical event, process that enable the theatrical event to exemplify or somehow express the property of theatricality? What is theatricality? And how does it relate to the staging of the text? Does a text become theatrical through being staged, or can a text possess the quality of theatricality in an of itself? If so, does that text somehow embody the staging, or even the stage? Is the stage a defining element of the theatrical event and of theatricality? These are the research questions that underpinned my practice-led investigations in the *A thread without end* case study.

5.4 Staging the Text

Judith Butler’s seminal essay ‘When Gesture Becomes Event’, in which she develops the notion of performativity, provided me with a critical definition of theatricality – a definition that I have adopted and placed at front and centre of my research. It has to do with the stage or, more specifically, with ‘the unification of text and stage’,²⁶³ which *A thread without end* embodies – both in theory and practice. Writing about relationship between text and “performance”, rather than text and “theatre”, Butler speculates that all sorts of “platforms”, “supports” and “surfaces” are nevertheless surreptitiously ‘assuming the status of the stage.’²⁶⁴ As literal supports for the performance the visual aids in *A thread without end* – transformed into performing publications in their staging as theatrical events – assume the status of the stage. The performing publications in *A thread without end* articulate the dialectical tension between performance and theatre, especially regarding the staging and the status of the text, which Butler alludes to with her literal and figurative evocation of the stage, and with her further speculation that ‘Perhaps when the proscenium does move, or withdraw, or turn up in spaces or surfaces where it is not expected, we are already in the orbit of performance studies without having left theatre

²⁶¹ Lehmann, H.-T. (2006) *Postdramatic Theatre*, p.18.

²⁶² Ibid. p. 17.

²⁶³ Ibid. p. 154.

²⁶⁴ Butler, J. (2017) ‘When gesture becomes event’, in A. Street, J. Alliot, & M. Pauker (eds.), *Interviews in performance philosophy: Crossings and conversations*, pp. 171-191, p. 172.

altogether.²⁶⁵ And yet, performing publications, including mine, are decidedly theatrical. What is more, they articulate their theatricality through the manner in which the text is not only composed (i.e., with a view to being staged as a theatrical event) but also staged and, thus, published.

But, first, I should say something about how I am interpreting and using the term “text” in relation to my practice. In contemporary performance and theatre theory, “text” can mean many things. For instance, Lehmann offers a broad interpretation: ‘The theatre performance turns the behaviour onstage and in the auditorium into a *joint text*, a “text” even if there is no spoken dialogue on stage or between actors and audience.’²⁶⁶ As this example shows, text is often considered from a performance analysis point of view, focusing on the reception of text, and often incorporates structuralist and poststructuralist interpretations. I am using text in the most basic sense, as words strung together into sentences, into paragraphs – into the text. For my purposes here, it refers to the textual elements in the piece and the textual component of my practice – invariably poetry. However, in rendering the text visually, in giving it a physical form in the paper visual aids, in vocalising it, I am also engaging with the notion of text as a material entity, for I am conscious of the fact that, as D. F. McKenzie has observed, ‘the material form of texts crucially determines their meanings.’²⁶⁷ McKenzie’s approach to text as a “material form” expands the definition of text considerably: ‘I define “texts” to include verbal, visual, oral, and numeric data, in the form of maps, prints, and music, of archives of recorded sound, of films, videos, and any computer-stored information, everything in fact from epigraphy to the latest forms of discography.’²⁶⁸ In *A thread without end*, text appears in textual, visual and vocal form. It is materially manifested as a map or a mapping – directly relating to the process of plotting the “story map” embedded in the visual aid – and realised in the paper medium. Because of the emphasis placed on the text’s material form across the entire *A thread without end* piece, it is perhaps useful to consider the text in terms of its etymological meaning, which incorporates its materiality and, more importantly for my purposes, its performability: ‘We can find in the origins of the word “text” itself some

²⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 172.

²⁶⁶ Lehmann, H.-T. (2006) *Postdramatic Theatre*, p.17.

²⁶⁷ McKenzie, D. F. (1999) *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, p. i.

²⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 13.

support for extending its meaning from manuscripts and print to other forms. It derives, of course, from the Latin *texere*, “to weave”, and therefore refers, not to any specific material as such, but to its woven state, the web or texture of the materials.²⁶⁹

In *A thread without end*, the emphasis is not only on the visual aid’s visuality or textuality, which are obviously important, but also, and even more so, on its performability. What is intriguing about all visual aids used in performance storytelling, mine included, is that they do not entirely function as either readable, or readily understandable, texts or images when viewed in isolation: they gain relevance and readability only through being performed. This is proved by the fact that even the most elaborate visual aids, such as the painted screens of *pardeh khani* or the emaki (hand picture, a painted hand scroll) of *etoki* performance storytelling traditions, when encountered in isolation, outside of the context of the performance and without the performer to tell and show their story, are invariably met with incomprehension. The notion that visual aids are “unreadable” texts further nuances the definition of text I am engaging with in *A thread without end*, since the text undergoes a transformation during its staging as a theatrical event. The text temporarily transforms from a material construction, “the web or texture of the materials” or the “story map” that is the visual aid, into a performing publication in which the text is brought to life as a story – textually, visually and vocally – through the storytelling performance staged as a theatrical event, after which it instantly reverts to its former state. Performance is, not coincidentally, its only means of being published, since the text is “unpublishable” other than as a performance. Their irreducible interdependence on the performance is a defining feature of all performing publications. In that sense, each performing publication can be thought of as a readymade theatre, containing any or, in the case of *A thread without end*, every element necessary for staging a theatrical event – scenography, script, score, notation, even the stage. Every element, that is, aside from the performer. It is only when the performer steps onto *its* stage and enacts the performing publication that an act of performance publishing takes place, and it is decidedly a theatrical event.

Performing publications are weird, in the same sense Bhaskar means when he writes ‘Publishing is weird.’²⁷⁰ What I mean to say is that performing publications, like all publications, are ‘experiential phenomena’,²⁷¹ but they are rather trickier to define precisely because of their entanglement with the theatrical event and notions of

²⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 13.

²⁷⁰ Bhaskar, M. (2013) *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network*, p. 2.

²⁷¹ Ibid. p. 2.

theatricality. For instance, they seem to embody Butler's flexible redefinition of the stage as a literal support and surface. When Butler further proposes 'Indeed, why not understand the proscenium as itself a roving or moveable element?',²⁷² she means it both figuratively and literally, and this is precisely what performing publications *do* and *are*.

In enabling the staging of acts of publishing as theatrical events, performing publications are necessarily entangled in the spatiotemporal specificity of the theatrical event, directly engaging with Bhaskar's question of all publishing: 'Is publishing a tangible moment?'²⁷³ And if it is, can it be pinpointed – not only in time but also in space? Operating in-between the page and the stage, performing publications as "texts" are situated in the slippery space in-between the backstage and the stage of the theatrical event. They traverse the territory in-between, simultaneously inhabiting the offstage and onstage space. So, in an additional sense, a performing publication is, indeed, a "roving or moveable element".

5.5 The Stage Space

With *A thread without end* there was an overarching consideration that held the piece together: the available space of the visual aid – which, through its staging and, thus, transformation into a performing publication, becomes the space of the stage. The space, according to the logic of my process, needed to be filled with story content, both visual and textual. But not any amount or type of content, rather a precise amount and type of content that corresponded to the economy of means I was trying to achieve with each of the acts and in different, specific, ways. The notion that the visual aids should be supremely economical in content and form was another central consideration because it relates to their functionality as memory aids. It was imperative that the visual aids embodied the 'economy of storage'²⁷⁴ Ong writes of, in relation to memory aids used by oral storytellers, in order for me to be able to memorise not only the story but also the

²⁷² Butler, J. (2017) 'When gesture becomes event', in A. Street, J. Alliot, & M. Pauker (eds.), *Interviews in performance philosophy: Crossings and conversations*, pp. 171-191, p. 172.

²⁷³ Bhaskar, M. (2013) *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network*, p. 1.

²⁷⁴ Ong, W. J. (1967) *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, p. 30.

way it should, or could, be performed. Thus, their “economy of storage” relates directly to their performability.

To this end, I was inspired by the ingenuity and economy of means employed by ancient Egyptian scribes when faced with the task of decorating tomb walls of variable dimensions and designs with prescribed funerary texts and images – a type of problem solving of which there are many examples.²⁷⁵ I refer to this exotic example as I realised that I viewed the physical space of the visual aid, in much the same way: as a material given, as just so much available space to tell and show a story. William Blake’s illuminated poetry was another source of inspiration in this respect. Blake’s use of the “illuminated printing” technique to produce his combined text and image plates meant that he, too, was constrained to working within the given space (a print plate) to convey a story. While these examples may seem arbitrary, they are not, especially given the fact that both renderings of text and image seem to have served a performance function: the performance of funerary rites and, likely, the performance of poetry respectively.²⁷⁶ At any rate, I was conscious of the fact that the available space in all its materiality would influence the form and content of the visual aids considerably, and it did – in the end even more than I anticipated. In other words, I knew that by prioritising the available space early on in the process as a primary consideration or, more accurately, as a constraint, I would be forced to invent a different visual aid specifically suited for each act. And while the medium is paper in all three acts, each visual aid is significantly different and led to different results. In *Act I* the available space was set by the length of the paper scroll; in *Act II* it was set the dimensions of the map comprised of four columns and three rows of paper tiles; and in *Act III* it was set by the dimensions of the workspace, the “stage”, on

²⁷⁵ *The Book of the Dead*, the standard repertoire of funerary texts in ancient Egypt, has been rendered in different configurations on numerous surfaces. As well as tomb walls, it appears on papyrus scrolls, sarcophagi, mummies shabti dolls, heart scarabs, etc. The rendering of the *Book of the Dead* texts on the tomb walls of Queen Nefertari (QV66) is a representative example that perfectly illustrates my point.

For photographs of Queen Nefertari’s tomb see:

Earth Trekkers (2022) ‘Inside the Tomb of Queen Nefertari – A Photo Tour’, *Earth Trekkers*, 4 July. Available at: <https://www.earthtrekkers.com/tomb-of-queen-nefertari-photos/> (Accessed 8 August 2022).

²⁷⁶ Here, William Blake’s illuminated poetry might provide some additional insights. I strongly suspect that William Blake’s illuminated books of poetry are another example of performing publications, for there are accounts of Blake singing his poetry while he was producing the plates using his “illuminated printing” technique that seamlessly blends text and image. He is also known to have sung his poetry, which he termed “songs”, throughout his life, and gave poetry readings at private gatherings. However, there are no detailed accounts of what his performances might have entailed and whether he used his illuminated poetry publications as visual aids in his performances. Still, we can be sure that Blake performed his poetry.

which the papercuts were arranged and rearranged into a papercut theatre. With each different available space, or stage, I was testing out a different type of performing publication, which also meant exploring different ways of making it and interacting with it – and, ultimately, performing with it.

5.6 Author-Performer

A privileged practice-led insight crucially enabled me to make a distinction and demonstrate the difference between “performers” and “author-performers” of performing publications.²⁷⁷ Seymour Chatman insists, from the perspective of narratology, that ‘we must distinguish between the narrator, or speaker, the one currently “telling” the story, and the author, the ultimate designer of the fable’.²⁷⁸ While both are storytellers who enact acts of authorship and publishing, the author-performer is additionally the author of not only of the story but of the entire system of performance that brings it to life as a theatrical event. This performance system is embodied in the visual aids, turned performing publications through their staging as theatrical events. However, performing publications, where the author is also the performer, compound the author and the performer (the narrator, in Chatman’s terminology) into one: the author-performer.

In performance storytelling traditions the performer is always also an author, but not necessarily an author-performer. What I mean to say is that even if a performer is performing a story that has been composed by another author, their performance of the performing publication is another composition, another act of authorship, since it is their particular interpretation of the story. The author-performer, however, for my purposes here, is conceived as the author of the entire performance system from beginning to end, a system that is, first, encoded and enacted in the creation of a performing publication and, second, decoded and enacted in its staging as a theatrical event. Performing

²⁷⁷ In the early stages of my research, I had identified these two categories of performer but was not able to articulate the difference until I considered it from the perspective of my own practice. For example, I realised that my performing publications were specific to me, and that other author-performers might have come up with different ones given the same story material and might have performed them differently. I also realised that other performers, if given my performing publications, would also perform them differently than I do.

²⁷⁸ Chatman, S. (1978) *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Reprint. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980, p. 33.

publications are thus twice-performed products and productions of a performance. They are material manifestations of Richard Schechner's fundamental definition of performance as 'twice-behaved behaviour'.²⁷⁹ But, what makes my performing publications explicitly "theatrical"? It starts with me assuming the author-performer role and with the authorial intention to make it so.

5.7 Theatrical Intention

My visual aids are both literary and representational renderings of a story and, therefore, on both counts, at least according to Lehmann's definition of theatricality, they would not be considered theatrical. However, through their eventual staging as theatrical events in which they assume the status of the stage and are transformed into performing publications, they are theatricalized. In staging them, I aim to establish a relation between the author, text and the audience that is decidedly theatrical. But, as Féral has noted, 'theatricality appears as a result of the performers' affirmed theatrical intention.'²⁸⁰ And, it is with this "affirmed theatrical intention" that I approach the creation of the visual aids in the first place. In other words, it is with my intention, as the author-performer, to stage the visual aids as theatrical events that the theatricalization of the text begins.

²⁷⁹ Schechner, R. (1993) *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 1.

²⁸⁰ Féral, J. and Bermingham, R. P. (2002) 'Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language', pp. 96-97. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3685480.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A73a14f28fc2d3838ffbb1e6f528dc33c&ab_segments=&origin=&acceptTC=1 (Accessed: 2 May 2022).

5.8 Tracing and Looking



Figure 36 A documentation photograph of me rehearsing *A thread without end, Act I* (2018) (Image: Artist)

For me, and I suspect this is true of other author-performers of performing publications, the process of producing theatricality begins long before the theatrical performance is staged before an audience. The process begins with the creation of the visual aid itself, which is the first performance. Performing publications are unusual in the sense that they are not only a record of a performance that has happened, the original performance of their creation, but of all subsequent performances that may happen because all potential performances have been encoded in it. Performing publications record their own process of creation as a trace, and all the performances that arise thereafter are retracing that trace. Any description of the process I undergo when creating a performing publication

thus has to begin with the blank paper object that is not yet a performing publication but will be, and thus also with my theatrical intentionality when creating it. I am aware that I am creating a theatre object that is simultaneously a product of a performance and the support, surface, stage on which future performances will be produced. John Berger's elegant description of drawing as a performance and process that involves both intentionality and imaginative projection on the part of the author, which are registered as traces, encapsulates my approach to making the visual aids:

One has to imagine the world as a sheet of paper and the creator's hand drawing, trying out objects which don't yet exist. Traces are not only what is left when something has gone, they can also be marks for a project, of something to come.²⁸¹

Performing publications are the partial instructions, encoded as traces, for that "something to come": a storytelling performance before an audience, at which point it also an act of publishing staged as a theatrical event. In my *A thread without end* performances, the author-performer and the audience are engaged in the same activity of looking for something and trying to find it, although at the beginning of the performance it does "not yet exist". This process is facilitated by the performing publications as much as it is by the author-performer: it is a co-production. One way to describe the process is mutual directing: I direct the performing publication as much as it directs me. The directing involves continuous action and movement, of that looking for something that does not yet exist, which creates the momentum that generates the performance. But this process begins long before it is staged; it is set into motion at the time of the creation of the visual aids. It begins with the process of composition, which is itself a performance – one that I was able to repeat without repeating, to trace and retrace again and again. Schechner's notion of "playing" as a "processual template" describes the process I literally and figuratively set into motion: 'Playing – the processual template – is a continuous blending, twisting, and looping of ... that for which I can find no appropriate name, so 'action' will have to do.'²⁸²

Although performing publications are real, functional theatre objects, they are capable of producing fictional objects of the imagination through multiple and mutual acts of looking when they are staged. As for their function, it is to engage the author-performer in a

²⁸¹ Berger, J. (2001) *The Shape of a Pocket*. New York: Random House, p. 144.

²⁸² Schechner, R. (1993) *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*, p. 39.

process of discovery of their potential, which is to endlessly generate storytelling performances and they do so by providing traces of that “something to come” that “don’t yet exist”. Thus, when I am staging them, I am involved in a process of retracing, rather than repeating, for there are different story paths to take or the same paths to be taken differently. This process of tracing and retracing is entangled with the process of looking and re-looking for that something as yet to come. And yet, the theatrical event is, in a sense, a continuation of the original performance and process of tracing and looking, which was set not motion at the time of the creation of the visual aids.

5.9 Backstage

When I am creating the visual aids, I alternate between composing the texts and the images. It is a process that “works” for me; I find that the productive tension between the texts and images prevents me from getting “writer’s block” or “blank page” anxiety and, ultimately, “stage fright”. By the time I have made a visual aid, I feel confident enough in its content and form to attempt to perform it. Working on one scene at a time, I am able to gradually construct enough scenes into an act, which also means filling the available space, with no more and no less text and image content than are required for that particular visual aid to function as an aid to telling and showing a story. Restricting myself to the available space of the visual aid is also a way of eventually putting an end to the performance and process of making it, which, once set in motion, is potentially endless. Schechner description of “play” closely approximates my own performance and process involved in creating the visual aids, and he articulates my own practice-led insight that it is potentially unlimited in its productive capacity, writing: ‘Playing... in the preparatory phases of constructing a performance (the training-workshop-rehearsal phases) [...] is unfinishable.’²⁸³ This is because, according to Schechner, ‘Playing left to itself would go on forever.’²⁸⁴

As with preparations for other theatre events, which involve performers engaging in trainings, workshops, rehearsals on a real stage, I engage similar processes – only they take place on the stage that is the visual aid. It begins with the “play” involved in

²⁸³ Schechner, R. (1993) *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*, p. 39.

²⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 39.

composing the text and image content of the story for each of the visual aids, and includes the “provisionality,” the unsteadiness, slipperiness, porosity, unreliability, and ontological riskiness of the realities projected or created by playing,²⁸⁵ of which Schechner writes in relation to play. This plays out in different ways in the three visual aids produced, the traces of which are preserved in their eventual visual appearance (the ‘real object’) and in their staging (the ‘artistic object’).²⁸⁶

5.10 Story Map

Through my performance storytelling, my intention is to share in the imaginative space I have created with the audience. According to Oliver Ford Davies, in theatrical performance ‘The actor is out primarily to awaken the audience’s imagination, to link their imagination to his.’²⁸⁷ With my storytelling performances, I am similarly appealing to the audience to use their imaginations. But in order to that, I must first create a convincing imaginative environment they can enter into, and I must maintain that imaginative space for the duration of the performance. I must also imaginatively step into the physical, mental and emotional space of the performance myself and performing publications are an aid in that process, functioning as props and prompts as well as providing complete scenic environments I can inhabit and animate – as a performer would on an actual stage. In a sense, the performing publications function as two-way interfaces, providing entry points into the storytelling performance for both myself and the audience – they mediate the staging of the theatrical event. But they are more than that. Functioning as story maps, they are also a means of navigating the performance, providing strategically positioned reference points along the story path that enable me to bring the audience along with me through the storytelling performance as it unfolds.

In *Act I* and *Act II*, I use two schemas to embed the text – the script for the performance – into the respective visual aids: a continuous line of handwritten text, or “text thread”, and “ribbon text”. In both cases, the text is rendered visually and is arranged spatially to meander around the visual aids with two outcomes: it establishes a tight relation between

²⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 39.

²⁸⁶ According to Seymour Chatman: ‘The real object is the thing in the outside world – the piece of marble, the canvas with pigment dried on it, the airwaves vibrating at certain frequencies, the pile of printed pages sewn together in a binding. The aesthetic object, on the other hand, is that which come into existence when the observer experiences the real object aesthetically. Thus it is a construction (or reconstruction) in the observer’s mind.’

Chatman, S. (1978) *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, pp. 26-27.

²⁸⁷ Ford Davies, O. (2007) *Performing Shakespeare*. London: Nick Hern Books, p. 158.

the images and the text, which together set the scene, and it further sets the tempo and timing of the delivery of speech, the vocalisation of poetry, during the performance – an important point I will return to and develop later in relation to movement and speed, and to momentum. Thus, the text and image elements in the visual aids are both solved visually, in spatial terms. But, always already with a view to their functionality as memory aids and, thus, to their performability.

5.11 “A Picture Tied to a Text”

The relationship between the text and images is subtly different across the three acts. Although I had set out to achieve a balance between the text and images across the three acts, I was also interested in seeing what would happen if I let one or the other lead me in the process of composing of the story. One of my aims, across the three acts, has been to investigate if it is possible to approach something like “writing with images” – alongside the text. To that end, I engaged with different notions of illustration, from the most rudimentary to the most tangential, conscious of the fact that, as John Harthan points out: “Illustration serves many purposes.”²⁸⁸ I was guided by Harthan’s elementary definition of illustration that incorporates the notion of a thread: ‘Illustration proper implies “a picture tied to a text”’²⁸⁹, and I wanted to test the robustness of that thread.

5.11.1 A Picture Tied to a Text: Act I

In *Act I*, I let the images lead the writing, in *Act II* and *Act III* the text, even though, in *Act III*, the text is not actually included in the visual aid itself. In *Act I*, I felt it was important to set the scene in which the story is taking place, establish the characters involved, the events, the themes – in short, the entire story world of *A thread without end*. Thus, leading with images seemed the most appropriate solution. Harthan’s observation that illustrations function as ‘explanatory pictures or visual aids’,²⁹⁰ was instrumental. Additionally, the text for *Act I* had not been written at the point that I started composing the story and creating the visual aid. While this is true of all the acts, the cut-up poetry I used as source material

²⁸⁸ Harthan, J. (1997) *The History of the Illustrated Book: The Western Tradition*. London: Thames and Hudson, p. 12.

²⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 12.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 12.

for the text for *Act I* was used only as inspiration and not directly incorporated as the performance text. For instance, *Your poem against the sky* (2017) (Figure 37) is one of the cut-up poems as I used as inspiration. It introduces the imagery of a poem written against the sky, which I rendered visually, not textually, in visual aid.

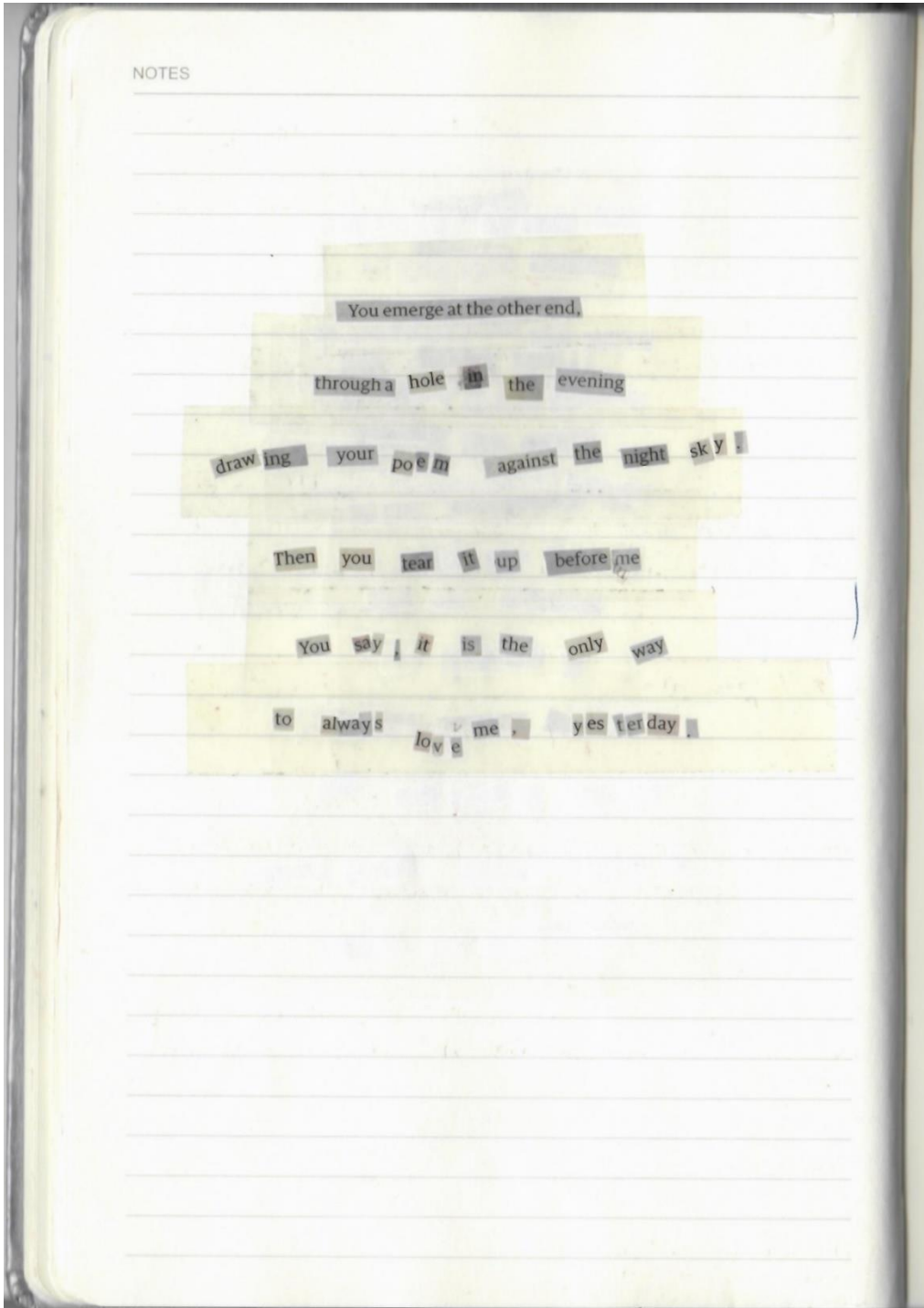


Figure 37 *Your poem against the sky* (2017) cut-up poem used as inspiration for the text in *Act I*. (Image: Artist)

In *Act I*, alongside telling a story through text, I wanted to see whether it was possible to tell a story through developing a visual language or, in Ong's terminology, "picture writing". To this end, I set out about devising a set of images – a vocabulary of visual symbols – arranged into clusters, in the manner of "drawing [a] poem against the sky". According to Ong, since 'picture writing does not at root work from words as sounds,'²⁹¹ and since 'it is not directly representative of words themselves for it does not directly represent sounds,'²⁹² it lacks the precision of script. While Ong refers to the history of picture writing in which it is seen as a 'limitation'²⁹³ and an obstacle to the development of true script, he also points out some features of picture writing that were advantageous for my purposes when, first, creating the visual aids and, later, staging the storytelling performances using the visual aids as performing publications. For instance, picture writing is more arbitrary, in terms of the selection of images and their symbolism, and it is based on variability whereby a constant rearrangement of images can be used to generate multiple meanings and readings. This is the manner in which I used images in *A thread without end*, exploiting their capacity to indirectly picture concepts at play and their variability, especially in *Act III* in which I specifically set out to investigate the variability of a fixed set of images – the papercuts – through a process of constant rearrangement – a constant fixing and an unfixing, from scene to scene.

Act I establishes a fixed set of images, a repertoire, a visual vocabulary, that would be repeated and elaborated on across the acts: the woman and the fox characters; their footprints; the four elements (earth, air, fire and water) variously rendered as mountain, island, forest, sky, wind, breath, fire, lake and sea; body parts (heart, eyes, hands) weapons (sword, arrow, dagger), "thread" (ribbon, rope); cosmos (moon, sun, stars, comets). The vocabulary emerged processually, in the performance and process of creating the visual aid, which I will elaborate on in due course. For my purposes here, it is important to point out that the images were used as the lead element in composing the story and that I composed the text around the images. One of the outcomes of this

²⁹¹ Ong, W. J. (1967) *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, p. 37.

²⁹² *Ibid.* p. 36.

²⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 36.

investigation is that in *Act I*, the text appears as though it is illustrating the images and not the other way around, which is itself a reflection of the performance and process of composing and creating the visual aid.



Figure 38 Visual aid for *Act I*, Scene III showing the text crisscrossing and encircling the images. Although I use the images to illustrate the text in the performance, the spatial arrangement of the text also illustrates the images by drawing attention to them. (Image: Artist)

The text for Act I, Scene III reads:

Deep in incoherent dream

I sought him out and found

I was always two steps behind

the (silent) child of night.

Teary eyed and lost for words

I wondered blindly through his woods.

The text for Scene III, as with all the other scenes in *Act I*, was written literally and figuratively around the images. The image of the fox character, caped and standing on his hind legs (Figure 38), for instance, inspired the lines “the (silent) child of night”, where “silent” is an optional performance text, visually rendered as a looped thread of text – a visual way of introducing optional text that may or may not be voiced during the performance, depending on the moment (see text to the upper right of the fox character in Figure 38). The “two steps behind” line was inspired by the image of the footprints. The line “Teary eyed and lost for words” was inspired by the image of the woman character, as was the line “incoherent dream”, for it seemed to me that the woman character, depicted with eyes on her palms, was having a vision or a dream, and so on.

5.11.2 A Picture Tied to a Text: *Act II*

In *Act II*, the text was written but not yet fixed. At this point, I hadn't yet fully developed a systematic way of weaving the cut-up poems together with the images, so the cut-up poems I used for *Act II* were a “web of words” rather than a fixed text.

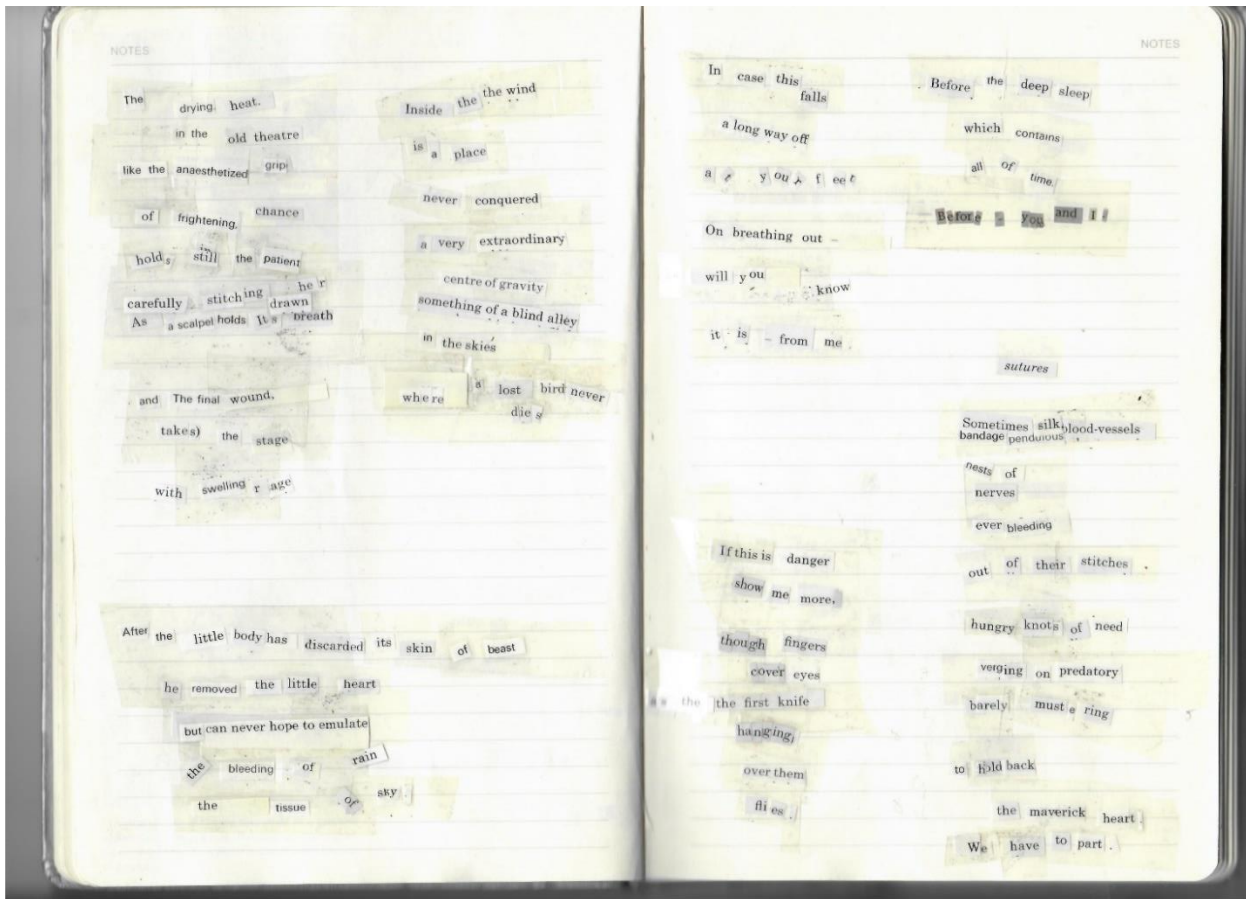


Figure 39 Cut-up poetry used as source material for the text in *Act II*. (Image: Artist)

I weaved the text together by taking fragments from the cut-up poems and writing around them. For instance, the text for *Act II*, Scene III was composed from fragments of the cut-up poems, including *Spell* (2018) (Figure 40) from which the line “I’ll fashion you”, adapted to “I fashioned him” in final text, and the line “and speak of you to the ground”, adapted to “and spoke of him to the weather” in the final text, were drawn.

NOTES

Spell

I'll fashion you
out of a cloud,
and speak of you
to the ground,
and wish up on
your secret name,
for forever and a day.

For all the knotted stories told,
from Sisyphus' lot
to Midas' gold,
the one that thrills me
most of all,
began the day
you were born.

Figure 40 The top cut-up poem, *Spell* (2018), was used as source material for the text in *Act II*, Scene III. (Image: Artist)

The resulting text for *Act II*, Scene III reads:

I fashioned him from flower and feather,

and spoke of him to the weather,

the gathering storm,

ever wondering,

that we were torn asunder

and, all alone, made to wander.

The same text is rendered visually as a twisted ribbon text, meandering across the paper tile corresponding to Scene III. Since the text leads in *Act II*, the images are made to fit into the available space around the text. In the visual aid for *Act II*, the illustrative image is on the outer side of the ribbon text while the a “lake” of graphite is on the inner side of the ribbon text. The graphite lake is a functional feature related to the digital interface: it is a means of further illustrating the text with soundscapes, which are triggered through touch using the conductivity of graphite – a feature I will return to and describe in greater detail in due course. However, it became the most striking visual “image” in the visual aid as whole, representing the “primordial sea” in which the story of *A thread without end* is set.



Figure 41 Visual aid for *Act II*, Scene III. The text, rendered as ribbon text, on the paper tile. (Image: Artist)

Later, in *Act III*, I had built on the insights gained from *Act I* and *Act II* and composed the cut-up poems specifically for each scene of the act – but always allowing for slight alterations to the source text if it improved its memorability and, thus, performability.

While composing the text and images for each visual aid, I would also perform it – voicing it as well as tracing it with my right hand – in the manner of a rehearsal, at which point I would make alterations if needed. I consistently found that certain words or phrases made sense on the page but not on the stage, as it were. At any rate, the process of writing the cut-up poems for specific scenes had already started in *Act II* in which, for instance, I used the *Your secret* (2018) (Figure 42) cut-up poem as the source text for *Act II*, Scene V. It is nearly identical to the final performance text but for the alterations made for reasons of performability.

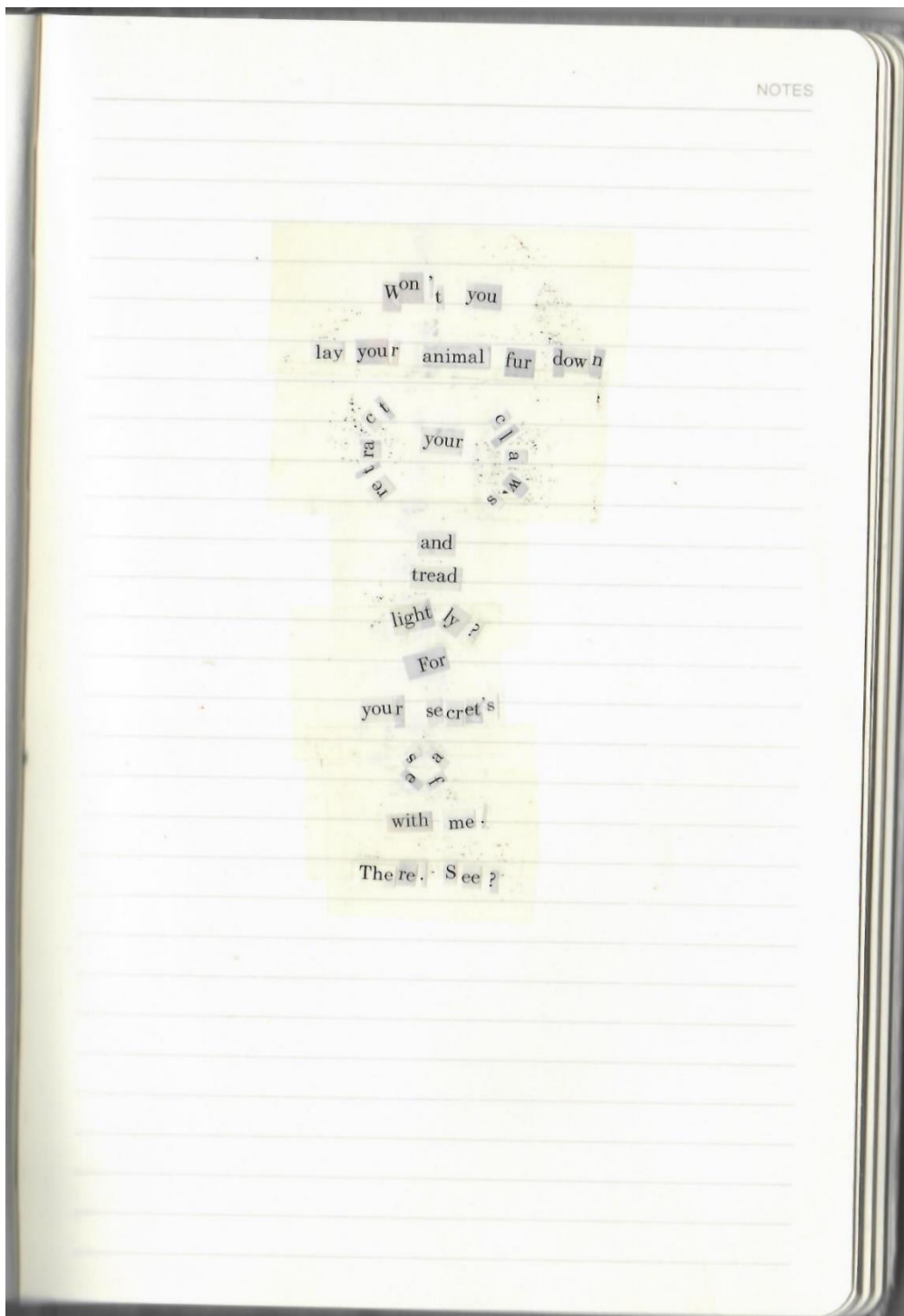


Figure 42 *Your secret* (2018) cut-up poem used as source material for the text for *Act II*, Scene V. (Image: Artist)

For comparison, I have bolded the altered words that appear in the final text for *Act II*, Scene V but are not in the source text, the cut-up poem *Your secret*:

Act II, Scene V

*Won't you lay down your **bow and arrow**,*

*your animal **skin**,*

*retract your claws and tread **softly**,*

*for your **heart is only** safe with me.*

There see?

The text for the following scene, Scene VI of *Act II*, for instance, was taken from the last line of another cut-up, *Early evening* (2018) (Figure 43) poem that ends with the line “doubting its beauty”.

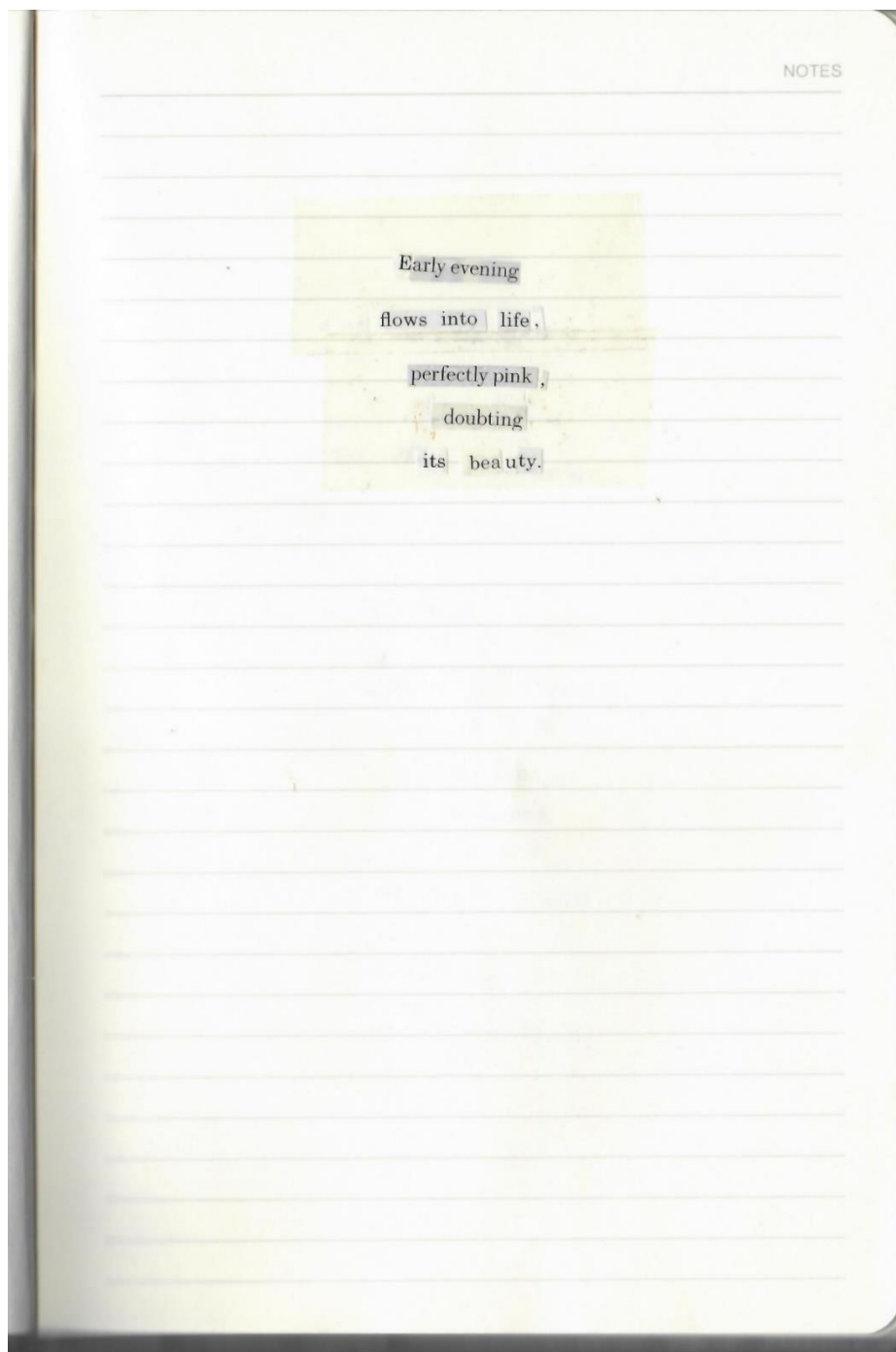


Figure 43 *Early evening* (2018) cut-up poem used as source material for the text for Act III, Scene VI. (Image: Artist)

The text for this scene reads:

Mutely beating,

and doubting its beauty.

The “mutely beating”, an alteration, is made to relate to the mention of the “heart” in the previous scene, belonging to the fox character. But more important is the way these two scenes were rendered visually: as an undulating, criss-crossing “border” of “hearts” and “eyes” (Figure 44), which were a means of illustrating the soundscape of a beating heart that accompanied Scene VI. During the performance, in this scene I trigger the soundscape of a beating heart by touching the graphite “lake” area with my left hand and then repeatedly point to either to individual hearts or eyes arranged in a row, in time with the rhythm. The two scenes are depicted visually across two paper tiles like so (from right to left):

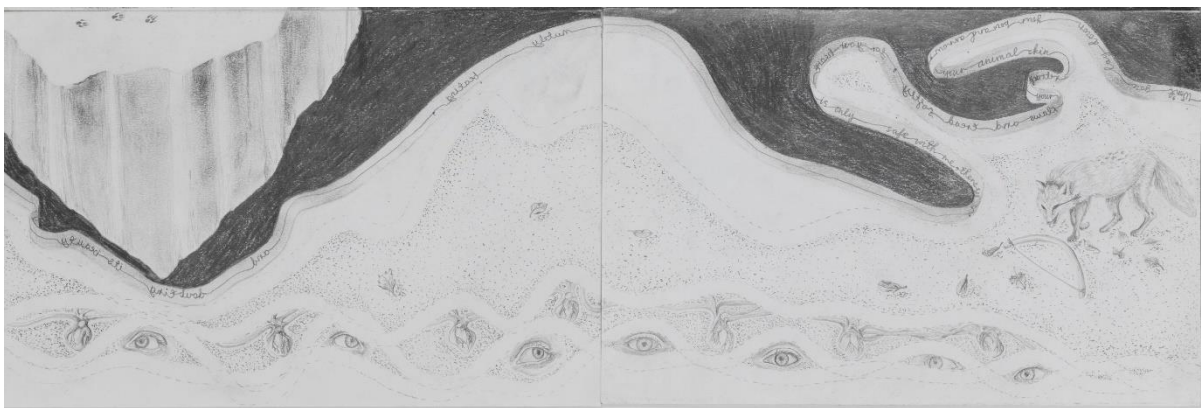


Figure 44 Visual aid for *Act II*, showing Scene V (right paper tile) and Scene VI (left paper tile). The border of hearts and eyes runs along the bottom of the paper tiles across both scenes. (Image: Jaka Babnik)

5.11.3 A Picture Tied to a Text: *Act III*

In *Act III*, where the text is not incorporated into the visual aid itself, as it has been in *Act I* and *Act II*, but is set to the side of the visual aid, the same tight relationship between the text and image is nevertheless maintained.

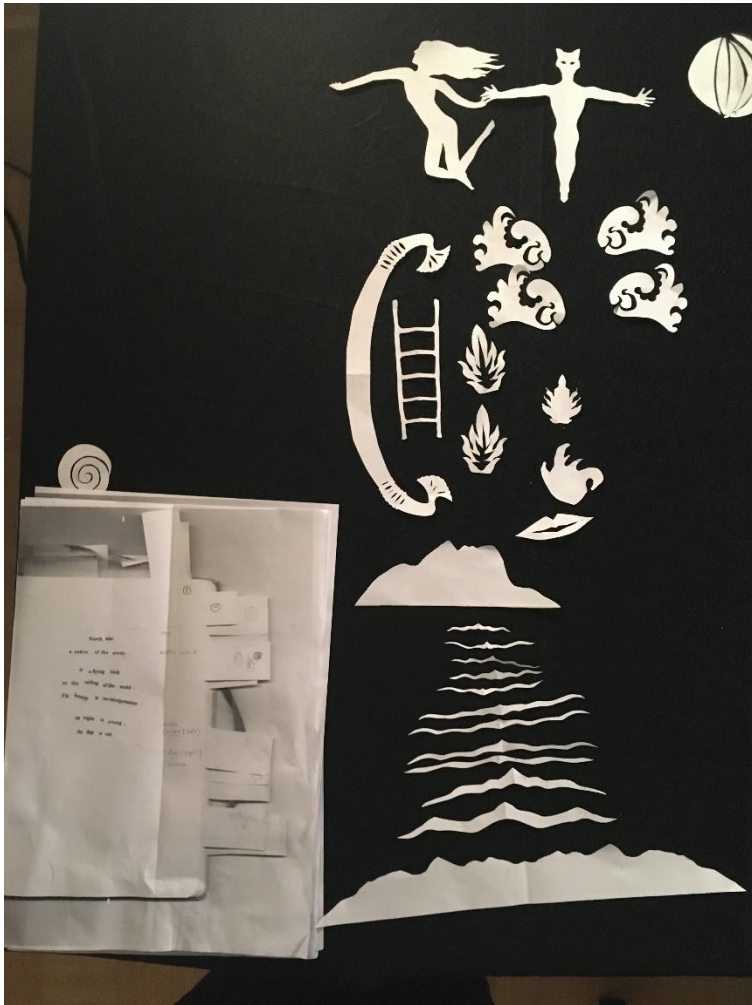


Figure 45 Photographic documentation of the setup of *Act III* showing the cut-up poetry text to one side of the visual aid. The text did not appear on the papercut theatre “stage”. (Photo: Artist)

As with *Act I* and *Act III*, the shape of the cut-up poems that comprise the text sets the tempo and timing of its spoken delivery and there is likewise a relationship between the shape of the individual paper-cut poems and the papercut images. Rather than writing around the images, in *Act III*, the text shapes the images. For instance, the cut-up poem corresponding to Scene IV of *Act III*, *Wake up* (2019) (Figure 46), in which the text “your mind – is a kite” is rendered in the shape of a kite was the inspiration for the “kite papercut” that appears in that scene. Likewise, the “ring of fire” line was rendered visually through the arrangement of several papercuts into rays in the shape of a “ring” and was also the inspiration for the inclusion of two “fire papercuts”.

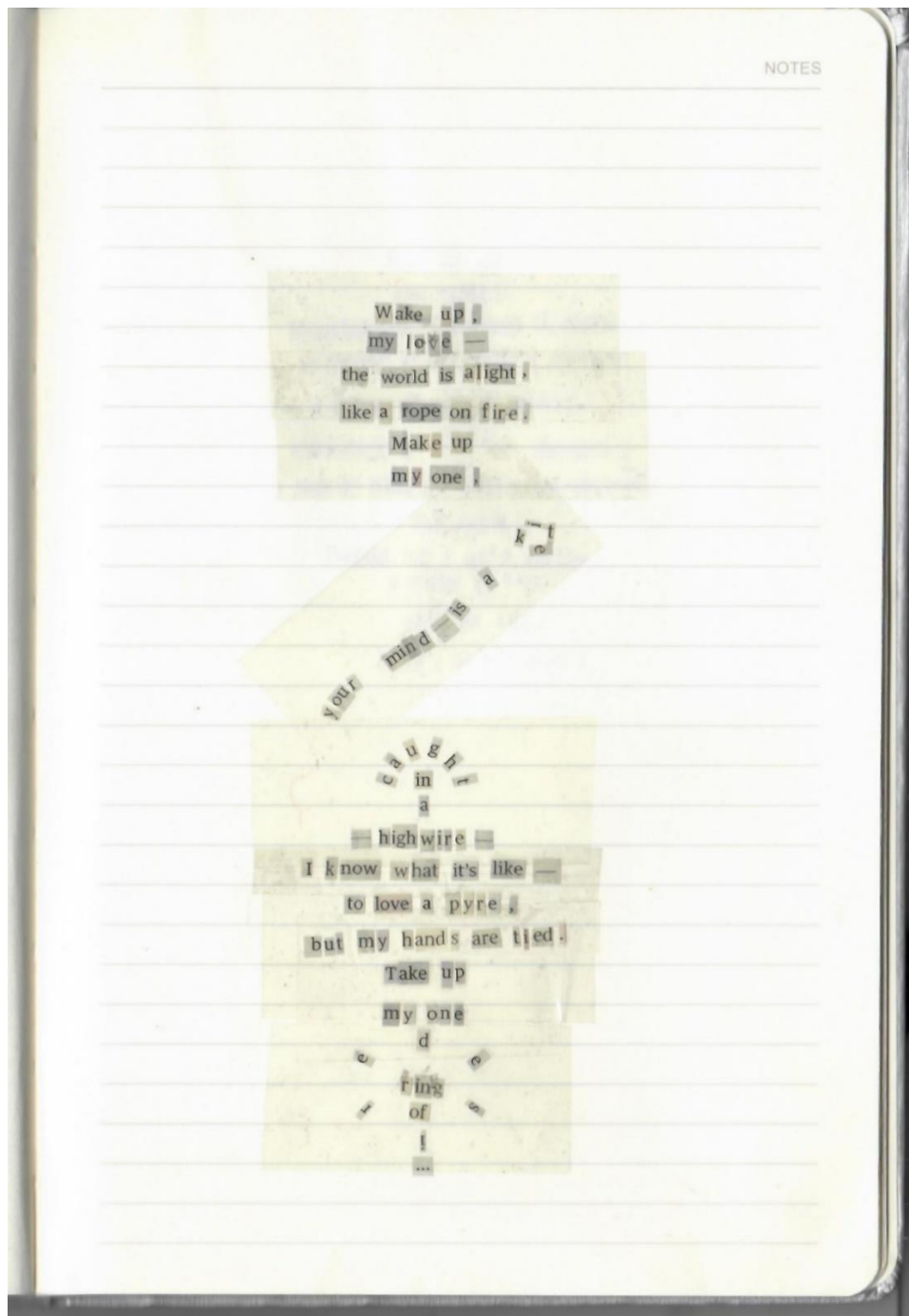


Figure 46 *Wake up* (2019) cut-up poem used at the source material for the text for Scene IV, *Act III* showing the words arranged into a kite (middle centre) and into a ring (bottom centre). (Photo: Artist)

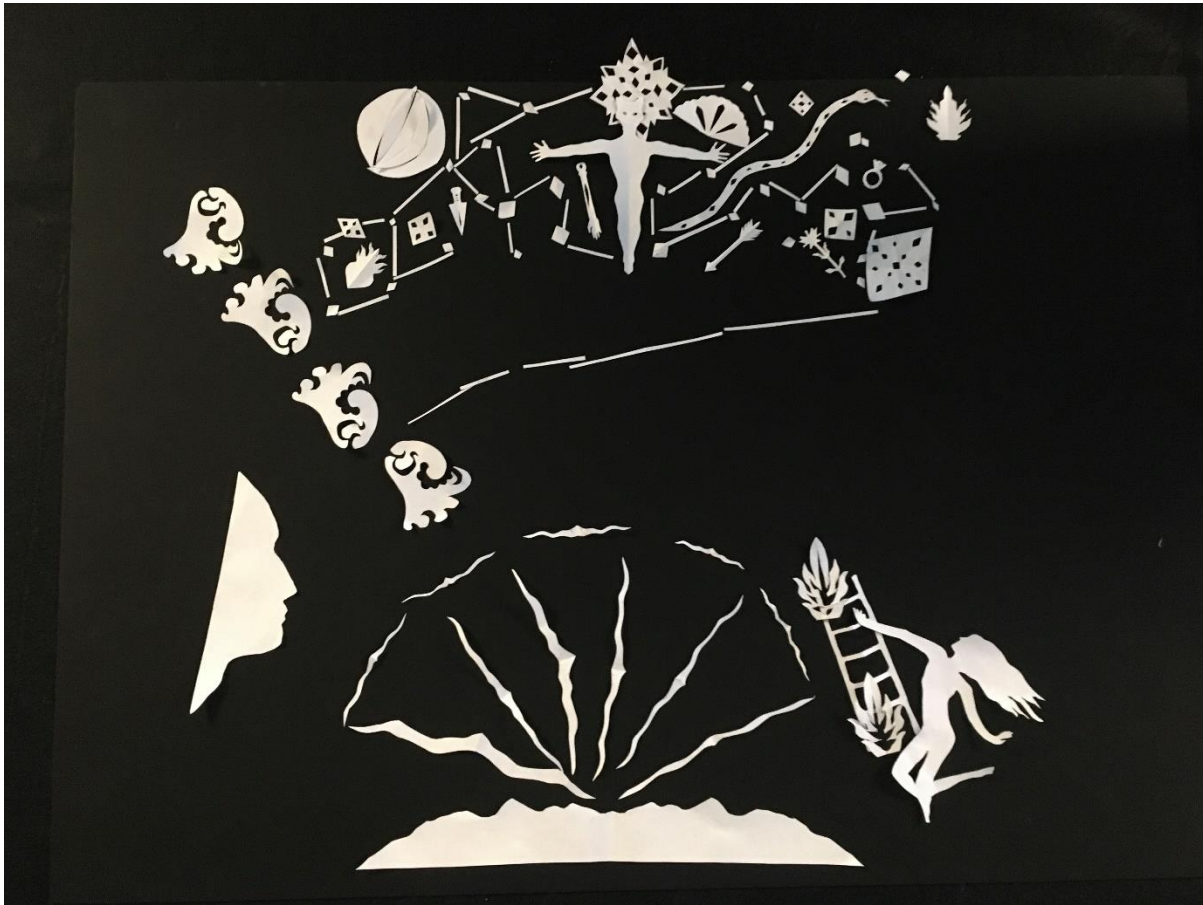


Figure 47 Visual aid as it appeared during Scene IV, *Act III*. (Image: Artist)

The visual aid for *Act III*, as it appears in Scene IV, shows the striking resemblance between the “kite papercut” (middle right) and the words arranged into a kite in the cut-up poem. The kite papercut is an amalgam of a diamond shaped papercut with several thin papercuts arranged into a line to represent a rope. The scene also shows the two “fire papercuts” on either side of the “ladder papercut” (bottom right) and papercuts arranged in a “ring” of rays (bottom centre). There is a clear correspondence between visual appearance of both the cut-up poem and the visual aid, including with respect to the relative position of the text (in the cut-up poem) and the papercut images (in the visual aid). Thus, in the visual aid for *Act III*, the paper-cut poems are the source of the papercut images and in a very literal sense shape them. So, even though the source text is not explicitly included as an image in the visual aid for *Act III*, as it has been in *Act I* and *Act II*, the tight relationship between the text and the images, the cut-up poems and the papercuts, is preserved. While this insight is not made available to the audience, remaining backstage, as it were, it nevertheless manifests in the performance. And, crucially, it does so for reasons of memorability and performability.

5.12 The Tie: William Blake

One of the aims of *A thread without end* was to find out if “picture writing” is a form of writing at all? My practice-led research indicates that it provides a code through which it can be decoded, read and, in my case, performed. But the reading of pictures is an altogether different enterprise from reading true script. Alberto Manguel tries to untangle this enterprise in his book *A History of Reading*, in a chapter dedicated to the subject entitled ‘Picture Reading’. Manguel remarks that while attempting to read a book written in a language he is unfamiliar with fails to produce any meaning, ‘if a book is illustrated, even if I can’t read the captions I can usually assign a meaning – though not necessarily the one explained in the text.’²⁹⁴

What Manguel highlights is the extent to which picture reading relies on the ‘readers’ creative skill,²⁹⁵ and imagination, and the of protean capacity of any pictorial language to generate multiple meanings and readings. This is something I have been investigating with the visual aids for *A thread without end* in a sustained way, and my practice is increasingly moving towards a more pointed investigation into the narrative possibilities of pictorial language and towards something like “writing with images”. It is still under investigation, but some insights have already emerged. For instance, pictorial language, described by Ong as ‘devious and cumbersome by comparison with the alphabet’,²⁹⁶ while less precise than true script, is also less fixed than script because it is essentially combinatorial and variable. In relation to narrative, which necessarily relies on readers or audiences to imaginatively fill in gaps in a story,²⁹⁷ the slippery nature of pictures, their refusal to be pinned down to a definitive meaning or a definitive reading, is an advantage in the type of performance storytelling I am staging. At any rate, the picture writing I am

²⁹⁴ Manguel, A. (1997) *A History of Reading*. London: Flamingo, an imprint of HarperCollins, p. 96.

²⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 96.

²⁹⁶ Ong, W. J. (1967) *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, p. 37.

²⁹⁷ According to Seymour Chatman, ‘Whether the narrative is experience through a performance or through a text, the members of the audience must respond with an interpretation: they cannot avoid participating in the transaction. They must fill in gaps with essential or likely events, traits and objects which for various reason have gone unmentioned.’

Chatman, S. (1978) *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, p. 28.

engaging with is always “tied” to text, overtly or covertly, thus, my visual aids are still in the realm of “illustration proper”, as Harthan terms it.

Pictures and stories have a long and entangled history, existing alongside one another long before illustration, the most compelling manifestation of their interconnectedness, made that entanglement explicit. According to John Harthan, ‘illustration has a continuous history of over two thousand years,’²⁹⁸ tracing the earliest examples of “book illustration” back to ancient Egyptian papyri. As mentioned already, my approach to composing the text and images in *A thread without end* was partly inspired by ancient Egyptian examples. In contrast to the codex, which ‘imposed a more stringent discipline’²⁹⁹ upon illustration, Harthan describes the way illustrations were treated in papyri in these terms: ‘In papyrus rolls the illustrations had been added haphazardly, without frames, sometimes in strips, sometimes interrupting the text.’³⁰⁰ Harthan’s description reminded me of my own visual aids – for *Act I* and, especially, for *Act II* – and of Blake’s illuminated poetry, in which images likewise interrupt the text, but I suspected Blake’s illustrations, like mine, were not “added haphazardly”, but served an altogether different purpose, namely as visual aids in another type of storytelling performance.

Although commonly ‘we think of illustration as signifying pictures which elucidate and decorate a page of printed text’, Harthan claims that ‘the first illustrations were utilitarian rather than decorative in purpose.’³⁰¹ Intriguingly, Ong makes the same claim about writing.³⁰² The visual aids for *A thread without end*, as functional theatre objects whose sole purpose is enable performance storytelling events, provide concrete examples of primarily utilitarian illustration. In his analysis of religious medieval manuscripts, specifically liturgical books that were similarly used as visual aids during church services, in which illustration served ‘primarily a liturgical function, emphasising particular parts of the service’³⁰³ Harthan suggests that such utilitarian illustrations tend to be more literal. To the extent that such pictures are more literal, such pictures can be construed as forms of picture writing. Due to their utilitarian performance-enabling function, the images and text in my visual aids for *A thread without end* tend to be literal: emphasising the “tie” between

²⁹⁸ Harthan, J. (1997) *The History of the Illustrated Book: The Western Tradition*, p. 12.

²⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 12.

³⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 12.

³⁰¹ Ibid. p. 12.

³⁰² According to Ong, writing ‘first served practical social and economic purposes almost exclusively. Its literary use came later.’

See Ong, W. J. (1967) *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, p. 54.

³⁰³ Harthan, J. (1997) *The History of the Illustrated Book: The Western Tradition*, p. 34.

the images and text aids in their memorability and performability. What if the combination of images and text serves to mutually illuminate one another through their “tie”? And, what if the utilitarian purpose of text and image in Blake’s illuminated poetry, like in my visual aids, is, ultimately, performance? So, what if that tie, that common thread, is performance?

The most succinct example of this notion I have come across is La Monte Young’s *Composition 1960 #10* (1960) a performance instruction for a composition that simply reads: “Draw a straight line and follow it.” Young’s piece, it seems to me, unifies text and image through the line – the common thread between writing and drawing³⁰⁴ – and further unifies it with performance through the instruction. For my purposes here, however, I am interested in more elaborate, if less elegant and precise, manifestations of the same phenomenon. In her description of the *etoki* tradition of performance storytelling, which similarly involves the improvised performance of a text in combination with an image – specifically an *emaki*, a hand picture or painted scroll, which is a visual aid used as a performing publication during the storytelling performance – Barbara Ruch remarks that it is a form of ‘embellished literature’.³⁰⁵ Blake’s illuminated poetry, like the visual aids in *A thread without end*, I am suggesting, are representative examples of “embellished literature”.

A thread without end is a sustained investigation into what happens to texts and images when they are written specifically for performance. Setting to one side, for the moment, that my performances are additionally staged as theatrical events for the purposes of enacting a form of performance publishing, here I will focus on visual aids as illustrations – *for* and *of* performance. It seems that in such cases the notion of illustration is turned on its head as, for instance, in the visual aid in *Act I*, where the texts illustrate the images and not the other way around. In *Act II*, a mutual illustration occurs in the visual aid. This is

³⁰⁴ I came across the notion that the line may be the most basic “tie” between writing and drawing in Laurent Jenny’s writings on Henri Michaux in which he claims that Michaux’s aim was to ‘reconcile drawing and writing, which after all are both attributes of the same line’. Jenny, L. (2000). ‘Simple Gestures.’ In De Zegher, C. (ed.) *Untitled Passages by Henri Michaux*. London and New York: Merrell Publishers Ltd, pp. 187-198, p. 187.

³⁰⁵ Ruch, B. (1977), ‘Medieval Jongleurs and the Making of National Literature: Towards the Reconstruction of a Theoretical Framework’, in Whitney Hall, J. and Takeshi, T. (eds.) *Japan in the Muromachi Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 279-310, p. 286.

also the case in *Act III*, though it is only manifests through the performance. In all three visual aids, however, the illustration is only fully realised through the storytelling performance, which amplifies it further. Once I noticed the visual resemblance between the visual aid for *Act II* and Blake's illuminated poetry, I wondered if Blake's approach to "illustration" was also one of mutual illustration of the text and images? And, furthermore, I wondered if the visual appearance of his illuminated poems had something to do with the performance of creating them, perhaps even with a view to performing them?

One definition of illustration is the conveying of a story by pictorial means, which is essentially a sort of picture writing. What is interesting about a history of illustration is that it preserves many different types of illustration, serving many different functions. Harthan's survey provides examples that can also be found in performing publications, the difference being that the former are solutions to the problems of illustrating written or printed text whereas the latter are solutions to the problems of illustrating performance texts or, more accurately, illustrating how performance texts should or could be performed. However, some illustrations in books that were used for performance purposes – such as in Psalters, Gospel-books, sacramentaries, lectionaries and pericopes, which had a liturgical function – serve the same purpose as performing publications. This can be seen, for example, in the more elaborate historiated initials, those that are 'filled with powerful images which provide visual equivalent of figures of speech'³⁰⁶, such as in the *St Albans Psalter*. Such picture writing can also be found in performing publications because they are also used to convey by pictorial means how a speech might be performed. Performing publications instruct the performer in the performance of the text, similar to the historiated initials, which are actual visual equivalents of the text. Nevertheless, Harthan emphasises that even these literalised pictures were only perceived to be literal by those able to read them. He writes: 'Esoteric symbolism of this kind can have been intelligible only to a professed and trained religious person.'³⁰⁷ This is no less true of performing publications, which are only intelligible to their author-performers or those specifically trained to read and interpret their singular, seemingly unintelligible pictorial language.

Blake's illuminated poetry books have been compared with illuminated manuscripts, largely due to their visual resemblance, but I would suggest that this additional performance function may be another reason for the resemblance. While records indicate that Blake performed his poetry, his "songs", whether he used his illuminated books as

³⁰⁶ Harthan, J. (1997) *The History of the Illustrated Book: The Western Tradition*, p. 39.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p. 39.

visual aids during those performances is not known.³⁰⁸ For this reason, I am not including them in the category of performing publications. Nevertheless, the process and performance Blake engaged in to create his illuminated poetry overlaps in several pertinent ways with my own in creating the visual aids, especially for *Act II*, with the result that there is a striking resemblance between the ways the text and images intertwine. Beside the presence of the crucial element of performance, the thought first occurred to me when I noticed a resemblance between his illuminated poetry and the visual aid for *Act II*, specifically the spatialised treatment of words and images on the pages of his publications *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1789-94). I was encouraged further when I familiarised myself with his illuminated printing technique, which confirmed that the words and images were relief-etched onto the plate simultaneously, as my text and images had been painted (in visual aid for *Act I*) and drawn (in the visual aid for *Act II*). My suspicion was finally confirmed when I discovered an example of an early work, *Tiriel* (before 1789) which Blake began before he invented his illuminated printing technique but left unfinished and unpublished in his lifetime. The words and images that make up the unfinished *Tiriel* manuscript were not created simultaneously and thus throw further light on the role simultaneous composition of text and image played in Blake's compositional method once he had invented his illuminated printing technique.

Tiriel, consisting of a fifteen-page manuscript of eight numbered sections as well as three sketches and twelve completed drawings (three of which have been untraced since 1863), remained unpublished during Blake's lifetime. Blake had completed the poems but not the

³⁰⁸ John Thomas Smith, an acquaintance of Blake's, noted that Blake 'wrote many ... songs to which he also composed tunes,' and that 'he would occasionally sing [them] to his friends'. According to John Thomas Smith, an acquaintance of Blake's, 'One of Blake's primary venues for these occasional performances was a literary salon hosted in the mid-1780s by Mrs. Harriet Mathew, a London "Bluestocking" who offered minor patronage to various talented artists and musical composers. During the course of an evening Mrs. Mathews and her guests sometimes joined together to sing popular songs, and on these occasions it was not unusual for Blake to entertain the room with his own musical compositions. An eyewitness to these performances, Smith wrote: "I have often heard him read and sing several of his poems. He was listened to by the company with profound silence, and allowed by most of the visitors to possess original and extraordinary merit".'

Hutchings, K. (2007) 'William Blake and the Music of the *Songs*', in *Érudit*, Number 45, February. Available at: <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/ron/2007-n45-ron1728/015815ar/> (Accessed 3 May 2022).

accompanying pictures and it appears that Blake was unable to synthesise the text and image elements in *Tiriel* during his lifetime and hence the manuscript remained unfinished and unpublished. What is interesting is that, even in its incomplete state, the manuscript indicates that there is a clear correspondence between the poetry and the images. Had he completed it, it is likely that Blake would have arranged the poem and picture pairs into a set sequence as he had with his other published books. As it is, the poems and the pictures remain separate. One interesting outcome of the unpublished materials is that the poems and pictures can be experienced separately and individually. Although this was not Blake's intention, it does give the pictures a rather strange quality: isolated from their text companion pieces, they appear strikingly stark and entirely mysterious. We are left with the impression that something is missing, which makes more sense if we imagine that the pictures were originally intended to sit alongside the poems in Blake's interconnected way. The eight-part narrative, in which there are strong echoes of the Bible, Greek drama, and Shakespeare's *King Lear*, is as obscure in meaning. Some scholars have dated *Tiriel* at least two years earlier than 1789, meaning it predated Blake's invention of his illuminating printing relief etching technique that enabled him to etch the text and images on one copper plate. The technique transformed Blake's style into the signature one recognised today but, more importantly, the technique provided Blake with a means of synthesising the textual and visual elements integral to his poetic vision, bringing them into closer relation than ever before. If true, it may explain why Blake never managed to finalise the manuscript for *Tiriel*, for it may be that the text and image content for *Tiriel* were made in a style that predated his printing technique and he simply could not adapt them in his new style. But more than mere style, what is at stake here is a shift in Blake's creative process and, I would suggest, performance. Blake's new style is an expression and an extension of his creative process, which is revealed to be informed by a performance modality, a desire to not only 'create a world which seems to possess a reality, a coherence, a climate and an atmosphere all of its own'³⁰⁹ but also to stage it for the reader in a vivid textual and visual language of his own invention.

Blake's illuminated poetry is interesting because it forces the reader to take the images into account when reading and interpreting his poems, precisely because they are not separate entities but a symbiotic ensemble. The symbiosis is the result of his relief etching technique which enabled him to engrave images and the text *at the same time*. In my visual aids, the text and images are similarly intertwined, because they are composed –

³⁰⁹ Raine, K. (1970) *William Blake*. Reprint. London: Thames and Hudson, 1971, p. 7.

on and off the paper medium that is the visual aid – at the same time. While the image and text components have different functions and operate differently and independently of the other, they are made to be thoroughly intertwined in the visual aids for *Act I* and *Act II*, as they are within the space of the same engraved, printed and painted page of Blake's illuminated poems. However, it is only relatively recently that the significance of the interdependent relationship between images and text in Blake's illuminated poetry has come to be appreciated and his poetry re-evaluated in its original presentational form alongside the images. Kevin Hutchings summarises this subtle but seismic shift in scholarly attitudes towards Blake's illuminated poetry:

During the first half of the twentieth century, indeed, readers commonly considered only Blake's written words when interpreting his poetry, and whole books of academic criticism were written containing hardly a reference to the visual and verbal designs that are such crucial parts of the illuminated writing. But in the past thirty years or so [...] Blake scholars have come to insist that the poetry must be read in its original engraved and painted form rather than in the barren typescript versions still presented in many literary anthologies.³¹⁰

Everywhere in *Songs of Innocence* and *Song of Experience* the images set the scene and invite the reader to enter the space of the illuminated poems. In a similar way, my visual aids stage the story for the audience, inviting them into the literal and figurative space of the story that has been rendered visually as a story map on the visual aid. Through the seamless integration of the text and images, Blake similarly provides a setting for the poem and thus overtly emphasises not only its temporal but also its spatial dimension, which is rendered on the page as though it were a stage. While all poems committed to the page alert the reader to both dimensions, Blake's illuminated poems foreground it to the point that it is their main feature. The images and text are so tightly interwoven that there is literally hardly any space in between them on the page itself, almost as though the text and the images are merging into a third entity.

³¹⁰ Hutchings, K. (2007) 'William Blake and the Music of the *Songs*'. Available at: <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/ron/2007-n45-ron1728/015815ar/> (Accessed 3 May 2022).

The visual aid for *Act II*, more than any other, fuses the text and images into an inseparable entity – visually. Of the three visual aids produced, the visual aid for *Act II* most closely approximates a conventional publication in the sense that it can be read as an illustrated book or picture book without instruction or input from me as their author-performer. This is because the images and the text are presented in their entirety, without variable story paths (as in *Act I*) or variable image combinations (as in *Act III*). The text and images in the visual aid for *Act II* are fixed because the variability is introduced through the storytelling performance, when it is staged as a theatrical event. My aim with *Act II* was to emphasise the notion that I am simultaneously telling and showing literally the same story only differently with every performance. For this reason, it was essential that the images and text in the visual aid complemented one another to a greater degree than in the other visual aids and together form a unified vision, which I could inhabit and improvise with. I was also interested in sharing that vision with the audience in a way that they could comprehend, with only the barest of guidance from me. I wanted the story to be available to them in its most literalised form that would enable them to connect the text and image components for themselves. Since, unlike in *Act I*, the audience in *Act II* was no longer directly involved as participants in the storytelling performance, since they no longer literally had a hand in it, I needed to devise a different means of involving them and so turned to the literal notion of “a picture tied to a text” to simultaneously tell and show a story. In a similar way, ‘Blake’s designs often tell a complementary story, and the two visions must be combined in the reader’s mind to comprehend the meaning of the work.’³¹¹

In Blake’s illuminated poetry, the pictorial elements guide the eye, leading it along flowing lines that unfurl like arabesques in and around the text. Various rendered as delicate tendrils of plants, tree branches swaying in the wind, licking flames, tumultuous waves, gathering clouds, animated human figures, a menagerie of animals, a bestiary of fantastical creatures and so on, the pictorial elements all but engulf the text and yet their ‘controlled freedom accompanies and surrounds the script in so harmonious a way.’³¹² Sometimes they conveniently single out words, phrases and lines and, at other times, they frame entire passages of a poem, or are used to separate out the stanzas of a poem, such as in the illuminated poem ‘The Tyger’ in *Songs of Experience*, thus reinforcing the pauses by visual means (Figure 48).

³¹¹ Bentley, G. E. (n.d.) ‘Blake as a Poet’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Blake/Blake-as-a-poet> (Accessed 3 May 2022).

³¹² Raine, K. (1970) *William Blake*, p. 21.

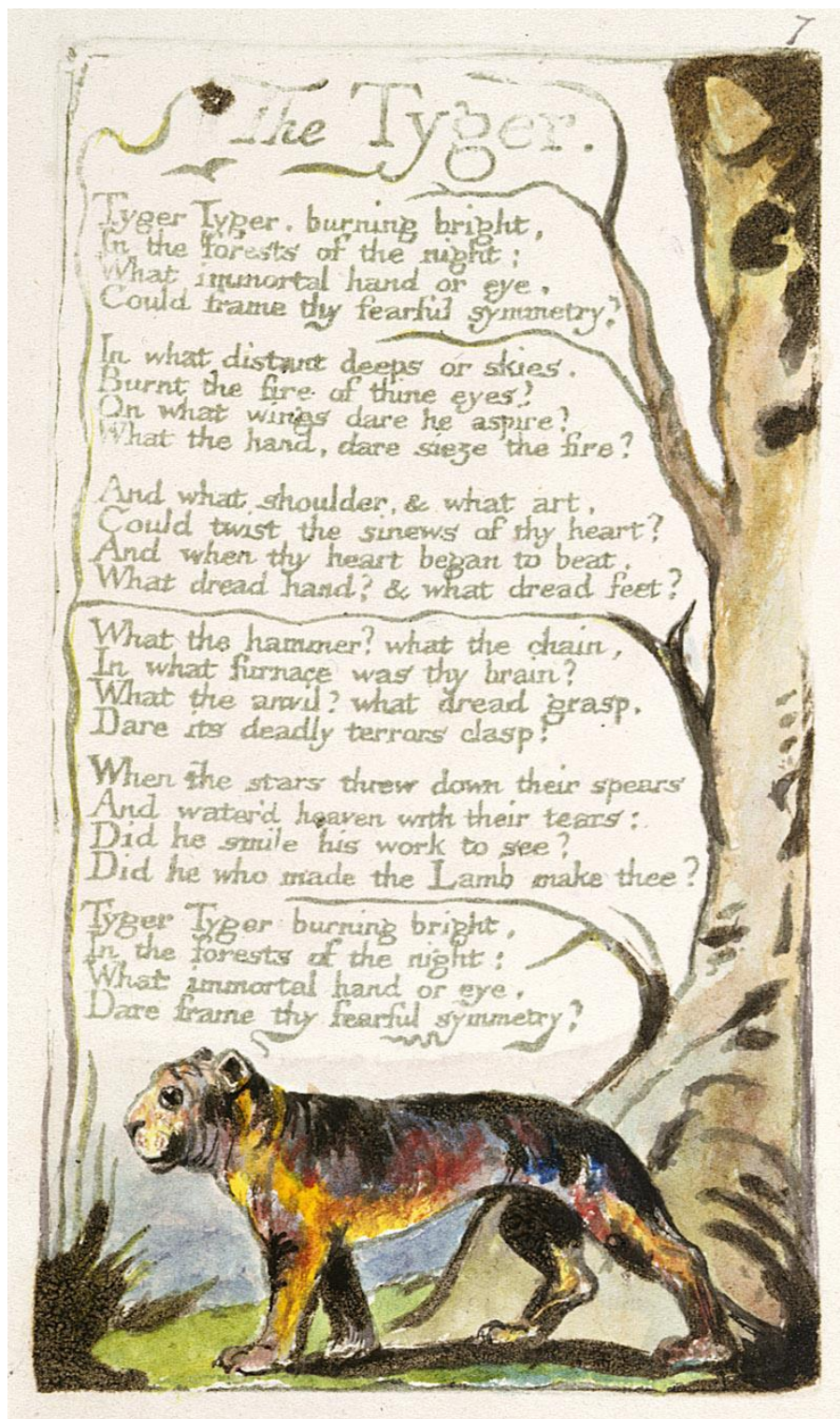


Figure 48 A scan of the plate 'The Tyger' from *Songs of Experience* designed after 1789 and printed in 1794 by William Blake, held by the British Museum. (Image: Wikipedia)

In the visual aid for *Act I*, and especially in *Act II*, the images likewise interrupt the text – engulfing it from all sides in *Act II*. The ribbon text in the *Act II* visual aid is surrounded by images – the graphite “lake” on the inner side and illustrative images on the outer side – so that they fill up every part of the visual aid, including in the spaces created by the undulating ribbon text. When I am performing, the images are ever-present in my peripheral vision, almost intruding on the ribbon text. This a strategic device: it enables me to keep the images in sight as well as in mind so that I can use them to intone the delivery of my speech. Additionally, in rendering the text visually inevitably has the effect of slowing down or speeding up my reading of the poems. While setting the pace of reading is the primary purpose of rendering the text as a ribbon, it is also a visual feature: a literal materialisation of Ong’s notion of the visual as an “orally processes reality”. What I mean here is that the twisting and turning of the ribbon also manipulates the text on the ribbon, which also means that it is a visual rendering of the twisting and turning of the text when spoken during the performance. In the visual aids for *Act I* and *Act II*, the text thread and ribbon text respectively are rendered visually, twisting and turning in all directions: right side up, sideways and upside down. In the visual aid for *Act II*, in which the ribbon text loops around and returns to the beginning at the end, encircling the graphite “lake”, in some areas the text is written, for the first time, in reverse.



Figure 49 Visual aid for *Act II*, showing Scene III in which, due to the twisting and turning ribbon, the text is written (from top left to bottom left) upside down, in reverse, sideways, right side up and upside down. Scene III also shows the graphite “lake” on the left of the ribbon text and the encroaching illustration on the right. (Image: Artist)

These strategic devices force me to slow down or speed up my reading during the performance, setting the tempo and timing of delivery of my speech as well as inflecting it. For instance, in the visual aid for *Act II*, as the ribbon text meanders across the paper tiles, in some areas it unfurls and undulates and in other areas it tightly twists on itself, with the effect of decreasing or increasing the speed of my speech. At the same time, the different levels and types of attention needed to read the text introduces varying levels and types of tension to the performance. The twisting and turning text also forces my body to likewise twist and turn, to lean in or lean away, and the directionality of the text forces me to take the images that surround into account for they are directly in my line of sight alongside the text. The text is thus mediated by the images or, rather, my reading of the

text is mediated by the combined effect of the interwoven spatial arrangement of text and images – just as in Blake’s illuminated poems.

In Blake’s illuminated poetry, there is similar push-pull dynamic as the reader’s attention is divided between reading the text and the images. It is also an active-passive dynamic, which gives the poems an altogether different sense of rhythm deriving not only from the text but also from visual rhythm set up by the interaction of the pictorial elements with the text on the page. The visual aids for *A thread without end* similarly foreground this dynamic between the text and images, where each reinforces the rhythm of the other – a feature that enhances their performability during the storytelling performance. The dynamic not only directs my speed and movement when reading the text but also my momentum. In Blake’s illuminated poetry, this dynamic is enhanced by the forceful presence of the pictorial elements, whose ‘tendrils creep into whatever space they can find’.³¹³ By modulating the text and image dynamic within his illuminated poems, Blake is able to elicit different levels and types of attention from the reader in the same way I do from the audience by modulating the visual and verbal dynamic during the storytelling performance.

Far from being mere illustrations, the pictorial elements in Blake’s illuminated poems direct the reader as to how to perform the reading, for example, by creating pauses in between stanzas or lines, by picking out a word, phrase, line or passage, by intervening into the layout of words and thus creating obstructions or interruptions. This is strikingly similar to the dynamic between the text and images in the visual aid for *Act I*, and even more so for *Act II*, since the visual layout is specifically designed to instruct me in the performance of the story. In Blake’s illuminated poetry, the fact that both the text and image are rendered visually likewise sets the speed (tempo and timing) of reading of the poem. Through the spatialisation of the text and image elements, Blake is able to manipulate the reader’s perception of time on the page as I do the audience’s on the stage. The visual aids for *Act I* and *Act II* similarly direct the temporal dimension of the performance as they visually score the speed of the performance through, for example, the text thread or ribbon text and through the images that demand more or less attention be paid to them during the performance. A way to illustrate this point is to imagine stretching out the text thread (in the visual aid for *Act I*) or the ribbon text (in the visual aid for *Act II*) into a straight line; it would change not only the speed of the performance but also the duration. What I mean to say is that, depending on how faithfully I follow their encoded instructions,

³¹³ Ibid. p. 21.

the visual aids even set the approximate duration of the performance. The visual aids are thus material manifestations of not only just so much space but also just so much time to tell a story. Removing the images from the visual aids has a similar effect, in terms of directing the spatial dimension of the performance, altering the available space and the manner in which the story is shown. Together, the spatialisation of the text and images within the visual aids directs the spatiotemporal dimension of the storytelling performance. While this is true across *A thread without end*, the visual aids for *Act I* and *Act II* make the connection between text and images explicit in visual terms.

Blake's illuminated poems create an entire scenic environment for the poems whereby the pictorial elements set the atmosphere of the poems. Blake also uses the pictorial elements to enhance the experiential dimension of the poems, as though he was staging a theatrical experience on the page. The pictorial elements lend a sense of theatricality to the poems, complete with obstacles to be overcome and revelations to be discovered. Reading the poems without the pictures really brings all these points home (See Figure 50 and Figure 51).

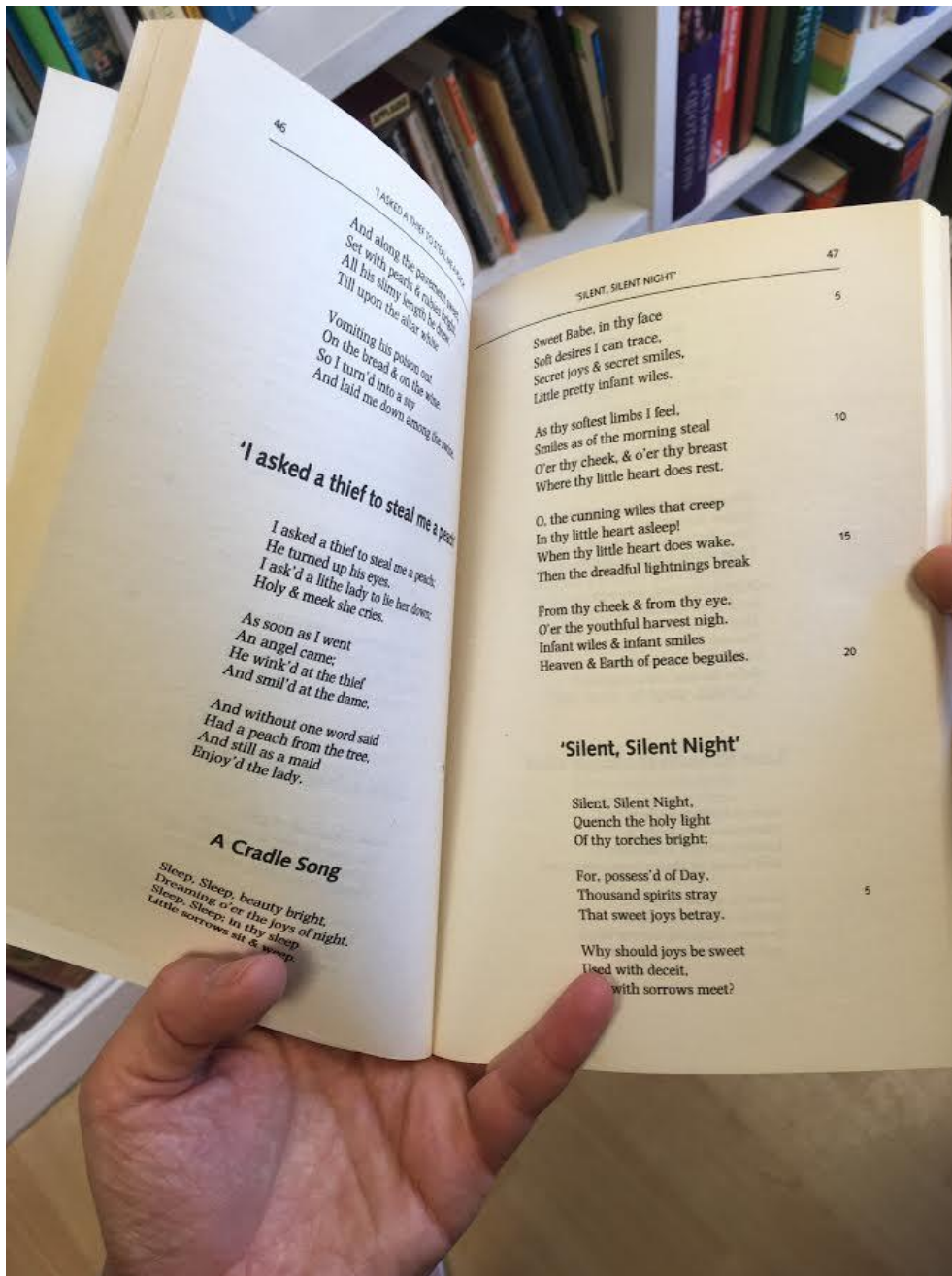


Figure 50 Page spread from Everyman’s Poetry book of selected poems by William Blake showing the typographic layout for ‘A Cradle Song’ showing the text without its original, accompanying image. (Image: Artist)



Figure 51 William Blake's print showing the original, interwoven text and image layout for 'A Cradle Song' from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, copy AA, 1826 (The Fitzwilliam Museum). (Image: Wikipedia)

Similarly, in *Act II*, the text could have been performed without the accompanying images. The soundscape for the visual aid would also have functioned without the graphite “lake”, which is demonstrated by the preparatory soundscape map I used to test the soundscapes out. The eleven graphite elements around the edge of the map correspond to eleven areas of the graphite “lake” in the visual aid. This visualisation of the soundscape map would have functioned as a visual aid, but I came up with a more visually appealing and suggestive way to integrate the functionality of this feature within the final visual aid produced. (Figure 52)

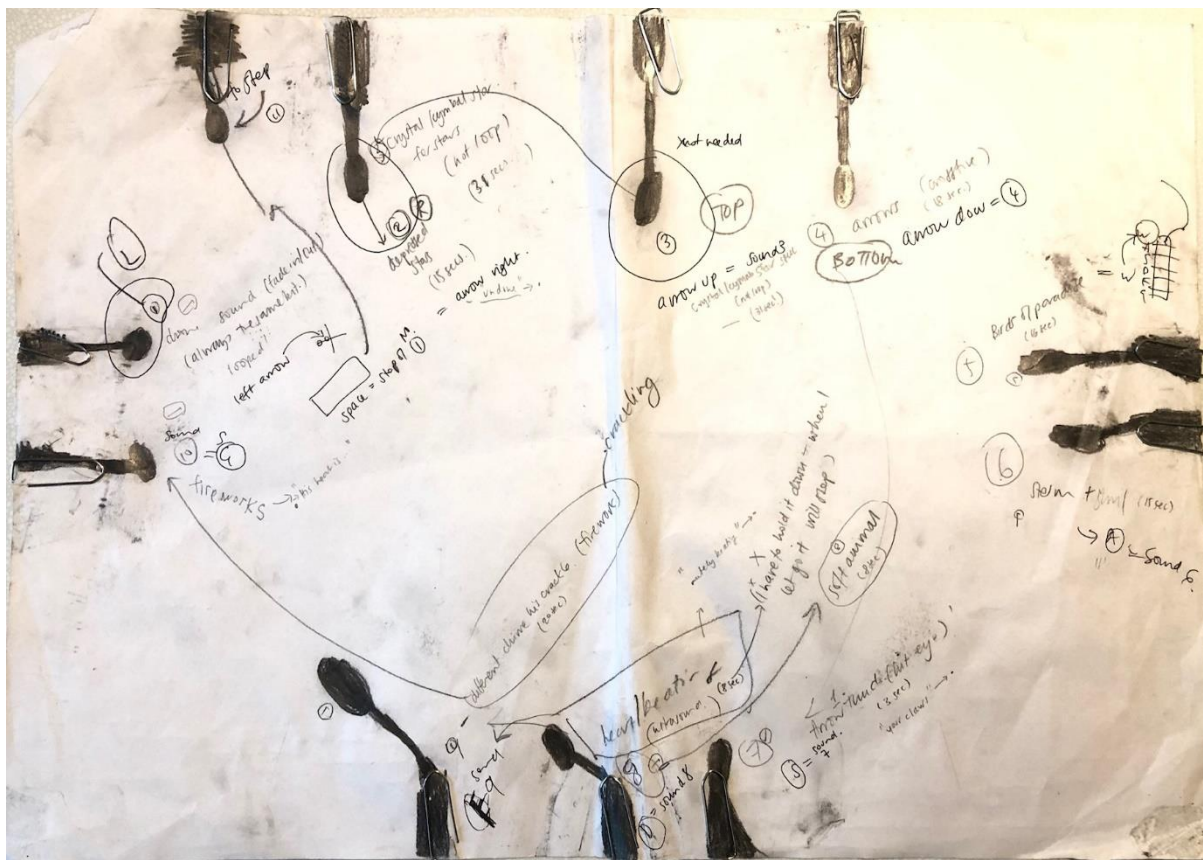


Figure 52 The preparatory soundscape map I used to test the soundscapes out for *Act II*. (Image: Artist)

And yet, the graphite “lake” is a striking visual presence, as are the intricate images that encroach on the ribbon text from all sides. Their presence ensures that the text and images are mutually illuminating not only for myself as their author-performer but also for the audience. Together they are intended to transport all of us into the story word that is

staged on the visual aid as a story map. Through their visual appearance, the visual aids in *A thread without end* facilitate what Schechner terms ‘transportations’, meaning that audiences are transported elsewhere for the duration of the performance before being returned to reality.³¹⁴ Transportation performances, according to Schechner, are typically associated with theatre as opposed to with ritual in which ‘transformations’³¹⁵ typically occur, meaning the audiences experience some sort of transformation as a result of the performance. And it is in their theatrical staging that the visual aids in *A thread without end* depart from Blake’s illuminated poetry, which is confined to the page. Although both are “transportive”, the crucial difference between the experience of readers and audiences is articulated by Katherine Young, Patricia Sawin and Milbre Burch:

listeners are moved out of their usual life space and transported into the “taleworld” by a well-told story. Reading and listening are experientially distinct because authors close the border between taleworld and ordinary reality while storytellers play back and forth across an open boundary.³¹⁶

The visual aids in *A thread without end* facilitate this “play” by assuming the status of the stage, which, unlike the page, is “an open boundary”.

5.13 From Page to Stage

The “transportation” that occurs on the stage through the staging of text and images as a theatrical event is very different to the one that occurs on the page. This is because the theatre stage has historically been a meeting point of orality and literacy – a meeting facilitated by performance. Robert Henke, writing of Renaissance theatre specifically, observes that ‘theatre provides particularly salient examples of interactions between oral

³¹⁴ Schechner writes, ‘I call performances where performers are changed “transformations” and those where performers are returned to their starting places “transportations.” “Transportation” because during the performance the performers are “taken somewhere” but at the end, often assisted by others, they are “cooled down” and reenter ordinary life just about where they went it’. Schechner, R. ‘Performers and Spectators Transported and Transformed’, p. 91.

³¹⁵ Ibid. p. 91.

³¹⁶ Sawin, P. and Burch, M. (2018) ‘Performance’, p. 57.

and literate modalities.³¹⁷ In my performing publications, and I suspect this is true of performing publications in general, the oral modality is entangled with the “aesthetic object” – the staging of performance storytelling event – whereas the literary modality is entangled with the “real object” – the visual aid. Chatman, after Roman Ingarden, illustrates the difference between a real object and aesthetic object through the example of a conventional publication:

the material book (or whatever) is not “a literary work, but only a means to ‘fix’ the work, or rather to make it accessible to the reader. To a certain point, the physical condition of a book (or other artifact) does not affect the nature of the aesthetic object fixed by it³¹⁸

Performing publications, mine included, defy this fixity on the level of both the real object and the aesthetic object, for although they are real objects they are only partially fixed and are thus only partially accessible to the reader, who, for my purposes here, is actually the author-performer. What I mean to say is that the author-performer is their primary reader and the audience is their secondary reader, since the audience’s reading experience is mediated by the author-performer during a performance storytelling event – even in the most literal and readable performing publications such as the one I created for *Act II*. Performing publications are peculiar hybrids of a real object and an aesthetic object; peculiar in the sense that the material object already partially embodies the aesthetic object, so much so that there arises a confusion as to their status as objects. For example, a performing publication’s material form might be, in my case, a painted paper scroll, a drawn paper tile map, a papercut theatre, but its aesthetic form is invariably a story or, rather, a storytelling performance. The issue of its status is further compounded by the fact that its aesthetic form cannot be realised – at least not to its full potential – other than through the performance of the story: through its enactment by their author-performer during a storytelling performance staged as a theatrical event. So, it is a hybrid object that is also a partial object. And the story is, in fact, a multitude of stories staged through multiple storytelling performances. The stories are thus only partially contained in the real object and the aesthetic object, the other part is contained in the mind of the author-performer. In relation to visual aids (of all sorts) in oral cultures, Ong writes:

³¹⁷ Henke, R. (1996) ‘Orality and Literacy in the *Commedia dell’Arte* and the Shakespearean Clown’, *Oral Tradition*, 11/2, pp. 222-248, p. 222. Available at: https://journal.oraltradition.org/wp-content/uploads/files/articles/11ii/7_henke.pdf (Accessed 3 May 2022).

³¹⁸ Chatman, S. (1978) *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, p. 27.

They encode little. The information storage remains almost entirely in the heads of those who use such creations, which are much more triggers than storage devices.³¹⁹

Because they sit on the more elaborate end of the spectrum – and it is a broad spectrum – of visual aids, my visual aids encode considerably more than the simple example Ong sites.³²⁰ Still, it is I, as their author-performer, who must mentally construct (rather than reconstruct) the story with each storytelling performance staged as a theatrical event – together with the audience.

As Chatman notes, ‘The aesthetic object of a narrative is the story as articulated by the discourse’³²¹, meaning the aesthetic object of narrative is the combination of the story and the manner of its articulation in a given medium. At the same time, narrative, like story, according to Chatman is ‘independent of any medium.’³²² While my visual aids, as real objects, might materially manifest in many different paper media, as aesthetic objects their medium is always performance – hence performing publications. But, with performing publications, since the aesthetic object of narrative, which brings together the story and the medium of its articulation, is only a partial object it is entirely dependent on the medium, on the performance storytelling event, for its articulation. It is thus entirely dependent on its author-performer, who is the other, indispensable, part of the aesthetic object of narrative and whose activity is necessary for its realisation and its attainment of what is only a temporary status of fixity, a momentary completeness, which it achieves when it is performed. The performance is, importantly, confined within fixed time and space of the theatrical event. The medium then is not only the theatrical performance but

³¹⁹ Ong, W. J. (1967) *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, p. 35.

³²⁰ Ong gives this example of a simple visual aid: ‘This can be seen in one of the more intriguing aide-memoires, the Inca quipu, a stick with suspended leather thongs which could be knotted at intervals with other leather strips of various colors to record information, for example, about the stores of maize in a granary. What was recorded was actually minimal. For different quipus the Incas had to have separate quipu-keepers to remember and explain to others what this particular quipu meant.’
ibid. pp. 35-36.

³²¹ Chatman, S. (1978) *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, p. 27.

³²² Ibid. p. 20.

also the author-performer, who assumes the role of a “medium” or, more accurately, a mediator.

5.14 The Mediator

In *A thread without end*, the roles and rules of the interaction – indeed, the triangular relationship between the author (author-performer), the text (the story map) and the receiver (the audience), which Julian Hilton identifies as the distinguishing feature of all performance³²³ – is established through the mediating presence of the performing publication, which instructs me, as their author-performer, in how to mediate the interaction. It might be that performing publications in general evidence an earlier moment of oral-literal entanglement when writing for performance of a narrative in which the author-performer was, first and foremost, a mediator.

From the perspective of theatre theory and practice, the notion that theatre ‘began to distance itself from text’,³²⁴ at the turn of the last century, beginning with avant-garde theatre and the ‘*entry of theatre into the age of experimentation*,’³²⁵ as Lehmann puts it, is generally accepted. However, paradoxically, theatre’s new ‘emancipation from any necessary relationship with a “text”,’³²⁶ as Hilton has pointed out, was a return to earlier (pre-mid-16th century) models of theatre, ‘in which the performer and what was performed were the end and the beginning of performance’³²⁷, a time before theatrical works were primarily transmitted as texts. Hilton thus also traces the notion that theatricality relied, above all, on the performer and, in many cases, the author-turned-performer, to theatre traditions of the early-modern period that Henke describes. Henke further points out that the earlier *commedia improvvisa*, *commedia italiana*, and *commedia a braccio* instantiations of the *commedia dell’arte* ‘emphasize acting and performance rather than

³²³ Hilton observes ‘Strangely, the most obvious cultural medium in which the triangular relationship between author, text and receiver is to be found, performance, has been the medium most neglected by theorists of culture.’

Hilton, J. (1993) *New Directions in Theatre*, p. 2.

³²⁴ Féral, J. and Bermingham, R. P. (2002) ‘Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language’, p. 94. Available at:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3685480.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A73a14f28fc2d3838ffbb1e6f528dc33c&ab_segments=&origin=&acceptTC=1 (Accessed: 2 May 2022).

³²⁵ Lehmann, H.-T. (2006) *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 50.

³²⁶ Hilton, J. (1993) *New Directions in Theatre*, p. 6.

³²⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 5-6.

the literary text.³²⁸ The distancing of the theatre from the text in more recent times is thus a return to earlier forms of theatre in which the theatricality began and ended with the performer. It also meant that, once again, ‘the text was no longer able to guarantee the theatricality of the stage.’³²⁹ Theatricality needed to define itself in relation to something else: ‘the theatrical act itself’.³³⁰

In her analysis of theatricality and theatrical language, Féral identifies the performer as an indispensable element of ‘stage-related theatricality.’³³¹ The staging of performing publications necessarily relies on the author-performer, the mediator, and on the “theatrical act” and theatrical actions performed. This theatrical act, I am suggesting, entails, among other things, the mediation of the text by the author-performer in the staging of the theatrical event. At the same time, the mediating nature of performing publications, the fact that they function as interfaces that mediate the relations between the author, the text and the audience, means that it is not only the author-performer but also the performing publication which together co-mediate the staging of the theatrical event. Like the actor, the author-performer, ‘is simultaneously the producer of theatricality and the channel through which it passes.’³³² The author-performer is thus both the source and conduit of the theatricality – acting as a mediator, even “a conductor”. According to Féral, the actor (or for my purposes here, the author-performer) produces theatricality by encoding it and inscribing it ‘with signs within symbolic structures on stage that are informed by his subjective impulses and desires.’³³³ Theatricality is thus produced by a subject involved in a process, and this process involves a degree of improvisation – an indispensable part of theatricality. The intentional outcome of this process is the theatricalization of everything that appears on the stage, including the text.

³²⁸ Henke, R. (1996) ‘Orality and Literacy in the Commedia dell’Arte and the Shakespearean Clown’, p. 6. Available at: https://journal.oraltradition.org/wp-content/uploads/files/articles/11ii/7_henke.pdf (Accessed 3 May 2022).

³²⁹ Féral, J. and Bermingham, R. P. (2002) ‘Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language’, p. 94. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3685480.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A73a14f28fc2d3838ffbb1e6f528dc33c&ab_segments=&origin=&acceptTC=1 (Accessed: 2 May 2022).

³³⁰ Ibid. p. 94.

³³¹ Ibid. p. 100.

³³² Ibid. p. 100.

³³³ Ibid. p. 100.

5.15 Plotting the Plot

In *A thread without end*, the theatricalization of the text began long before it was staged. It begins with the improvised process and performance of composition of the visual aids, with the tight relationship established by the way the spatialised text and images interweave – with a view to their performability. More accurately, the relationship was constructed through a process of constant rearrangement of the two elements, where each arrangement was performed, in the manner of a rehearsal, as a means of testing it out. As well assuming the role of the author-performer, of the mediator, at times I was also the director of the performing publications, with “directorial” or “editorial” input occurring at different points in the production process.³³⁴ What I mean to say is that I engaged in a collaborative process of co-production with the visual aid itself. Although this might sound strange at first, I found that at some point in the process the visual aids were directing me as much as I was directing them, ‘but before they have been fully realised as a performance,³³⁵ – another “backstage” practice-led insight. In other words, the visual aid was already becoming a performing publication.

Once I was satisfied with a particular arrangement of text and images in one scene, I moved to another, conscious of the fact that the arrangements needed to complement one another and maintain a sense of logical progression from scene to scene. I proceeded incrementally, accumulatively, composing one scene after another without a precise plan in place ahead of time. Instead, I let one scene lead me to the one after and I composed the scenes by prioritising their memorability, performability and, finally, according to effects each produced, all the while balancing the tension between text and image components.

Leading also relates to causation, in the narratological sense of the term, where events are said to have cause and effect. Traditionally, it has been argued that ‘events in narratives are radically correlative, enchainning, entailing. Their sequence, runs the traditional argument, is not simply linear but causative. The causation may be overt, that is explicit, or covert, implicit.³³⁶ However, I made a conscious choice to make the barest use

³³⁴ Elaine Aston’s and Geraldine Harris’ study reveals backstage practices involved in developing contemporary performances, including different directorial and editorial strategies used by performers, who are also often the authors.

Aston, E. and Harris, G. (2008) *Performance Practice and Process: Contemporary [Women] Practitioners*, p. 4.

³³⁵ Ibid. p. 5.

³³⁶ Chatman, S. (1978) *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, p. 45.

of causation in the narrative sense. Instead, I wanted the story of *A thread without end* to hang together by a thread – by the cumulative effects of weaving the images and text together. Since one of my aims with *A thread without end* is testing the robustness of a combined visual and verbal narrative, a loose plot seemed to me the most effective way to test the essentials of story and to foreground the text and image components. I approached the composition and creation of the visual aids as though I was creating a scenario, which, appropriately, is a term ‘first used of the loose plots of the *commedia dell’arte*’.³³⁷ A scenario seemed a term that could accommodate the different elements of a loose plot: a visual and verbal outline of the story as well as details of individual scenes within it, a visual rendering of possible story threads, or storylines, to be traced, and a setting – all of which were being brought together as a story map on the stage that is the visual aid whose main purpose is to enable a storytelling performance to be staged as a theatrical event.

Approaching the visual aid as a scenario enabled me to bring together the effects I wanted to produce, which were embedded in visually and verbally articulated scenes, and the plot gradually emerged as more scenes accumulated, eventually culminating in an act. The plot thus emerged as a by-product of the plotting of the story map onto the visual aid. I developed the plot processually, scene by scene: the first scene (in narrative terms the “beginning”) established the basic logic of the piece and each subsequent scene reinforced that logic (through to the “middle” and right up to “end”). A coherent plot was thus generated cumulatively as a result of the accumulation of logical choices. This processual development of the plot functioned as a narrowing of possibilities for the plot. The suspected that the plot progression in performance storytelling traditions is the result of an accumulation of choices that ‘become more and more limited, and the final choice seems not a choice at all, but an inevitability.’³³⁸ This is certainly the sense that I had while creating each of the acts: the beginning scenes eliminated certain possibilities, a few scenes in, by the middle of the plot, the possibilities narrowed even more and I found that I understood the logic of the entire piece and suddenly knew how to proceed to the ending. The Aristotelian division of plot into beginning, middle and end is a convention of

³³⁷ Law, J., Pickering, D. and Helfer, R. (2001) *The New Penguin Dictionary of Theatre*. London: Penguin, p. 538.

³³⁸ Chatman, S. (1978) *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, p. 46.

narrative and story. I use it because it a convenient means of discussing the process through which the plot eventually emerged in the acts that comprise *A thread without end*. In reality, there was no predetermined plot. Instead, I was interested in finding out what holds a narrative together in place of a plot. I wondered, as Chatman has, if there is no plot, no plan, no evident causality between events in a story, 'what does hold these texts together?'³³⁹

Turning my attention to the performing publications produced for *A thread without end* to see if there were other organising principles or structures that could stand in for a plot, I invariably found that it was the performance system itself. My performance system is comprised of different functional (covertly or overtly functional, but functional nonetheless) components, which appear as a result of cumulative choices that are themselves solutions to problems that are specifically performance related. In analysing the performance systems I created, it became clear to me that all of the components can be explained away through their primary performance-enabling and, indeed, performance-generating function. This practice-led insight leads me to suspect that the performance systems of other performance storytellers who use performing publications similarly emerge out of an accumulation of resolved problems of performance and probably also in a cumulative and processual manner – by way of a plotting rather than a plot. It also prompted me to wonder if the plots that emerge out of these performance systems are categorically different to other plots that do not.

Regarding the plotting involved in the devising of performance systems in oral storytelling traditions, Ong writes: 'Oral singers are likely to favor striking visual imagery, Eric Havelock explains in his *Preface to Plato*, not merely because these are aesthetically pleasing but also because they serve as storage and recall devices – the ocular equivalent of verbal formulas.'³⁴⁰ Although I similarly use striking visual and verbal images as an aid to recall, the 'fantastically organized memory systems'³⁴¹ of which Ong writes, the mental maps, are further given physical form in the visual aids themselves and, thus, transferred from immaterial mental maps to material story maps. The visual aids are thus externalisations of internal memorisation operations – both verbal and ocular. This, in turn, enhances their performability since, in externalising my mental maps, I am making space to store more story content mentally and, at the same time, ease my mental load during a

³³⁹ Ibid. p. 47.

³⁴⁰ Ong, W. J. (1967) *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, p. 25.

³⁴¹ Ibid. p. 26.

performance, which enables me to improvise. I had discovered very early on in the process and performance of creating the visual aids, during my “rehearsals”, that holding a mental map in mind, so to speak, when performing greatly increases my cognitive load as a performer. But it also removes me from the immediacy of the performance itself, decreases my ability to improvise and, surprisingly, dampens the sensorial and the experiential dimension of performing – elements I most wanted to preserve and share with the audience. I found that in order to perform, I first needed to see a physical version of the story map, one that would provide the right stimuli, to which I could then respond, in real time as though I was seeing it for the first time – hence the visual aids. I found a clue as to why this may be the case – perhaps only for me, but perhaps for other performers also who use visual aids in their performances – in an improbable place: a geography paper in which Yi-Fu Tuan’s analyses the use of mental maps in relation to spatial navigation and spatial behaviour. Attempting to articulate the difference between internalised mental maps and externalised images of them, Tuan writes:

A mental map is a special type of image which is even less directly related to sensory experience. An image which is a mental map rather than a "picture" is obviously a construct. In fact, no percept or image is a mere photograph of reality. A percept is not only the registering of current environmental stimuli but also an imaginative effort produced under the needs of the moment. To see is to create. An image is doubly a construct: it originates as a percept, and then suffers further transformation under the pressure of the occasion that prompts its recall.³⁴²

Thus, in externalising my internal memorisation operations, the great mental task of memorising – the recall of striking visual images, whether by verbal or ocular formulas – is somewhat eased during a performance. When I am performing, I am no longer searching for the striking visual and verbal images in memory but looking for that something as yet to come that arises out of improvisation with the story map already realised in the visual aid. As Tuan notes: “To see is to create.” Thus, while the visual aid provides me with

³⁴² Tuan, Y.-F. (1975) ‘Images and Mental Maps’. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, June, Vol. 65, No. 2, pp. 205-213, p. 209. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2562082.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A9aba0ee5c585edac6e622f6ac0ef69ca&ab_segments=&origin=&acceptTC=1 (Accessed May 3 2022).

precise cues, instructing me how to perform it, which in turn produce effects in a way that is predetermined, it nevertheless leaves some room for improvisation and variation. I strongly suspect that the ability, the necessity, of improvising with the visual aids, encoded at the time of their creation and decoded at the time of their staging, is a factor that permits their author-performers to also produce surprising plots – plots that could not have been arrived at other than by way of performance and the entire performance system behind it.

For instance, the formulaic nature of my poetry for *A thread without end* is a reflection of the process involved in writing for performance or, rather, the performance of writing that creating the text for the visual aids entails. What I mean to say is that, when writing for *A thread without end*, I engage in a type of writing that is intended to be performed as a theatrical event. The poems rely on visually striking images, on stressed rhythm and rhyming schemes and on a set of characters, themes, settings that are specific to the story I am telling with *A thread without end*. For instance, I am not able to incorporate contemporary references into the text, simply because it does not fit into the story. This also means that the text, the poetry, I write specifically for *A thread without end* is 'relatively rigid or typical,'³⁴³ not only because it is easier to memorise and, thus, perform, but also because it needs to be balanced with the images – the other crucial component in the composition of the story. The images themselves are types, for the same reason of memorisation: *A thread without end* is structured around repertoire of images, on a visual vocabulary that is consistent across the three acts. The characters – a woman and a fox character – are also character types³⁴⁴ and they are repeated, as images, throughout the visual aids, across the acts. The characters were established already in *Act I*, Scene I, and they reappear across the three acts, regardless of whether the characters are drawn in graphite pencil (*Act II*) or cut into the papercut "fox" and "woman" characters (*Act III*). They recall the visual aids in the *pardeh khani* storytelling traditions in which the painted scroll-screens, which act as memory aids prompting the performer during long form storytelling performances, are filled with repeat images of the main characters, types, arranged into different configurations and "performing" different actions related to the story.

³⁴³ Ong, W. J. (1967) *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, p. 30.

³⁴⁴ Ong notes that the "economy of storage" used for the purposes of memorisation by oral storytellers necessitates that 'characters themselves become types'.
Ibid. p. 30.

The text and images in my visual aids are additionally arranged into themes. Thematic arrangement is a further aid to memory, which corresponds to Ong's observation that oral storytellers, 'dealing with still urgent problems of oral performance'³⁴⁵ relied on "thematic memory" in oral composition of their improvised storytelling performances. Even after the invention of writing, which enabled performers to rely on verbatim memory, storytellers preserved the oral tradition of storytelling by using 'thematic memory (memory of things)' rather than 'verbatim memory (memory for words)'.³⁴⁶

My visual aids, which are externalised story maps of internalised mental maps, literalise this process by turning the texts and the images into "things" realised in the medium of paper. According to Ong, some oral storytellers have resorted to the same strategy by projecting their mental maps onto physical objects or by encoding them by some other visual means:

They also make use of the striking visual symbols fostered by epic poetry as just mentioned, but they develop these by calculating iconographic elaboration, freighting images of gods and goddesses, signs of the zodiac, and so on with the most bizarre associations in fantastically organized detail. They also arrange these figures in carefully contrived spatial patterns, often distributing them imaginatively around the interior of a specific building.³⁴⁷

The image and text components in my visual aids are spatially arranged as though on a stage. Each text and image component is an inseparable thematic "thing", that is arranged along with other things into scenes, another thing, and the scenes are arranged into acts, so the entire story map is, in the end, a thematic thing. I found a more contemporary reference for the compositional strategy I was employing in the practice of the Split Breeches collective. Quoting the Split Breeches collective, Aston and Harris write that they 'use fantasy as a "*structuring device*,"'³⁴⁸ but that fantasy has a relationship to concrete "things" and, so, their composition process emphasises "these things rather than narrative, detail instead of action and on putting different "moments" together instead of

³⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 26.

³⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 26.

³⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 26.

³⁴⁸ Aston, E. and Harris, G. (2008) *Performance Practice and Process: Contemporary [Women] Practitioners*, p. 104.

being concerned with [character or plot] progression.³⁴⁹ In the visual aids for *A thread without end*, similarly sting moments together, but this does not mean that the text and image “things” that contain the moments are fixed.

5.16 Improvisation and Failure

My practice-led research into performing publications is based on the notion that they are a singular category of performance publishing: singular, because they are both generated *by* and generative *of* performance. In the course of my practice-led investigations, I discovered that in order for performing publications to truly be generated *by* and generative *of* performance – which I am claiming is their main characteristic – they must remain unfixed texts, or at least not fixed in the sense of the fixed text of print publishing. While the visual aids in *A thread without end* might be fixed texts and images (*Act I* and *Act II*) or a fixed sequence of text and images (*Act III*), their potential to be performed in ever renewing ways remains unfixed – indefinitely. This is entirely due to the fact that improvisation is a constitutive element of performing publications.

Nevertheless, the visual aids are only a guide, and I can still improvise around the set pace to some degree if I feel that, in the moment of the performance, I need to alter the pace to enhance an effect that is already embedded in the visual aid. For instance, for added urgency, I might speed through a portion of text even more or I might introduce a longer pause to create added suspense or to create a deeper calm, thus slightly deviating from the instructions that have been, in a sense, scored by the performing publication. But I never deviate from it too much, since each visual aid is calibrated at the precise speed I intentionally orchestrated for the storytelling performance.

Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow describe improvisation as a ‘creative process’³⁵⁰ that is fundamental to all performance. Frost and Yarrow define improvisation as:

the skill of using bodies, space, all human resources to generate a coherent physical expression of an idea, a situation, a character (even, perhaps, a text); to do this spontaneously, in response to the immediate stimuli of one’s environment, and to do it *à l’improviste*: as though taken by surprise, without preconceptions.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 103.

³⁵⁰ Frost, A. and Yarrow, R. (1990) *Improvisation in Drama*. Reprint. Edited by J. Hilton. London: Macmillan, 1993, p. 1.

³⁵¹ Ibid. p. 1.

I stage my performing publications under similar improvisational conditions in which improvising is a “creative process” and includes “even, perhaps, a text”. During the storytelling performances, the instructions embedded in the performing publications regulate the uncontrollable elements that improvisation and variation necessarily introduce into the theatrical event. But they are only able to do so because they themselves are products of an improvisatory performance in the first place: the first performance of creating the visual aid. This is not to say that all the creative decisions made as a result of improvisation are arbitrary or even of the moment – although, sometimes, some are. As Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris have noted:

the years that go into acquiring skills and the creative know-how for performance-making, alongside the gestation of ideas that are not necessarily the inspiration of a moment, but often the product of long periods of consideration and experimentation on the artist’s part. The painstaking and, at times, painful process of finding out what does and does not “work” demands a high degree of self-reflexivity and self-criticism.³⁵²

And yet, by anticipating and mitigating elements that might possibly “fail to perform” as expected, the embedded instructions also, paradoxically, preserve the possibility that they might. As their author-performer, I am very familiar with the intricacies of my performing publications and I try to navigate their instructions to the best of my ability, accepting that the instructions also necessarily entail improvisation and variation, which also means that failure is always a possibility. But, what if, beyond improvisation, the source of the possible failure lies in the attempt to stage text and images themselves in the first place? What if, as Lehmann and other have claimed all along, narrativity and representation are themselves antithetical to theatre and theatricality?

Nicholas Ridout, in his analysis of the Féral’s writings on theatricality, identifies ‘representation and narrativity’ as precisely the ‘things in theatre that seem not be part of its theatricality’.³⁵³ Ridout, who argues that the potential or actual failure of theatre to perform is constitutive of theatricality, claims that things that lie on the margins of theatre

³⁵² Aston, E. and Harris, G. (2008) *Performance Practice and Process: Contemporary [Women] Practitioners*, p. 6.

³⁵³ Ridout, N. (2006) *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems*, p. 13.

and threaten it with evidence of its own failure, including representation and narrativity, are, in fact, constitutive of theatre. Féral, in her analysis, places these things on the margins of theatre, meaning in the realm of performance, rather than theatre proper, but insists that theatre and theatricality are, in fact, built upon them:

Performance can be seen, therefore, as a storehouse for the accessories of the symbolic, a depository of signifiers which are outside of the established discourse and behind the scenes of theatricality. The theatre cannot call upon them as such, but, by implication, it is upon these accessories that theatre is built.³⁵⁴

Ridout's interpretation of Féral's claim is that 'performance has opened up some kind of backstage space in which theatre can keep these things in the darkness, and feed off them'.³⁵⁵ And yet, Ridout claims, these things, which trip up theatre by revealing its backstage workings, such as narrativity and representation, 'allow us to see theatre as itself, by showing it turning itself inside out and revealing its operational guts'.³⁵⁶ It is my claim that performing publications – as products and productions of backstage performance processes that appear to have been spontaneously brought onto the stage – *are* and *do* precisely that.

Despite the very real possibility of failure entailed in staging *A thread without end* as a theatrical event for all these reasons – its embeddedness in narrativity, representation and improvisation – my aim has been to conduct a practice-led investigation into the backstage processes of theatre that, although apparently anti-theatrical, I strongly suspected actually are constitutive of theatre and theatricality. Despite my reservations, I pursued these lines of investigation throughout *A thread without end*, confident that some insights would emerge out the process and performance of creating the visual aids itself and in staging them as performing publications. The key is to trust the performing publications themselves, to follow the instructions I have left myself, to allow myself to be directed by them even as I am directing them, to retrace the original trace, to plot a path that I have already plotted.

Ridout summarises my attitude towards the risky endeavour of creating and staging *A thread without end* not as a performance but as a theatrical event, knowing that I am

³⁵⁴ Féral, J. (1982) 'Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified'. Translated by T. Lyons. *Modern Drama*, Volume 25, Issue 1, March 1982, pp. 170-181. Reprinted in Murray T. (ed.) *Mimesis, Masochism, and Mime: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997, pp. 289-300, p. 297.

³⁵⁵ Ridout, N. (2006) *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems*, p. 13.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 13.

engaging with notions of theatricality and, in the full knowledge of the ever-present possibility of its failure due to the apparently anti-theatrical, anomalous, elements it not only features but also foregrounds:

That we might look for [...] and value these “anomalies” in spite of the fact that they appear to offer meagre returns for the rational investor. Theatre’s “misplaced ineptitude” may lie in its over-investment in that which it “represents”, while its properly placed ineptitude, its wrongplaced rightplacedness, might lie in an under-investment in mastery, technique, and perfection and a counter-investment in some kind of failure to master the techniques of perfect representation. It may have something to do, then, with the space between representation and its failure.³⁵⁷

5.17 The Performance System

Approaching the creation of the visual aids as a scenario seemed to me the most effective since I was also dealing with a loose plot, which I was developing without a preconceived plan. In place of a plot, I engaged in a sort of plotting – of the text and images – the story map. Plot, after all, is ‘story-as-discoursed’,³⁵⁸ where discourse corresponds to ‘the expression plane of the narrative’, the ‘surface structure’ of narrative, and there is more than one way of telling and showing, indeed, representing, a story.³⁵⁹

In *A thread without end*, I wanted to develop three distinct ways of expressing a story, where story is defined as the ‘deep structure’ or the ‘underlying structure of narrative’.³⁶⁰ I think it is significant that I did not elect to express the same story differently across the three acts, but rather elected to tell a different story in each act – and to tell it differently each time. It signals to me that I was less interested in foregrounding the “expression plane” of the story and the entire performance system behind it, than in finding the right “expression plane” and performance system for the particular story I was trying to tell and show. Thus, although I was approaching the composition of the visual aids as a scenario,

³⁵⁷ Ibid. pp. 32-22.

³⁵⁸ Chatman, S. (1978) *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, p. 43.

³⁵⁹ Prince, G. (1987) *Dictionary of Narratology*, p. 93.

³⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 18.

what emerged out of the process of creating them was the performance system – in fact, three different performance systems for the three different acts.

As *A thread without end* evolved across the three acts, it became apparent to me that the story was at least as important as the way it was told and shown. At the same time, however, I cannot imagine telling the story of, say, *Act I* using the performance system specifically devised for either *Act II* or *Act III*, even if I were to, say, create another visual aid for *Act I* in the performance “style”, for lack of a better term, of *Act II* or *Act III*. The different stories and performance systems across the three acts are not interchangeable. The critical practice-led insight gained here is that, in my practice at least, the story and the performance system are inseparable because they were created in way that is mutually generative. It is impossible to say which of the two – the story or the performance system – generated the other. It is more accurate to say that each was generated *by* and generative *of* the other. However, I can say that the entire process begins with the “material form”, the “available space” – with “the stage” that is the visual aid on which the story and performance system unfolds.

It is intimidating, to set the first image or text down onto the paper (*Act I* and *Act II*) or make the first cut into the paper (*Act III*), knowing that the visual aid will eventually be a performing publication. At this early stage, I am motivated by the materials themselves – the paper, the paint, the graphite pencil and scissors – and by the process and performance of creating a visual aid. The storytelling performance that will be staged as a theatrical event is at the forefront of my mind from the first moment, from the first encounter with the materials, so the process and performance of the first tracing and first act of looking is always already an investigation into not only what the materials *are* but also what they *do*. Seen from the perspective of performance theory, writing is, first and foremost, a performative act – a fact that has a bearing on the narrative and, in the case of performing publications, on how it performed and, thus, published.

In the chapter entitled ‘The performance turn in narrative studies’, Eric E. Peterson and Kristin M. Langellier claim that ‘performance turns up in narrative studies at the confluence of two ways of understanding narrative; that is, narrative as both a making and a doing – both *poesis* and *praxis*’.³⁶¹ I treat the visual aid – the paper scroll, the paper tiled map, the papercut theatre – that is not yet a performing publication as the site of both *poesis* and

³⁶¹ Peterson, E. E. and Langellier, K. M. (2007) ‘The Performance Turn in Narrative Studies’, in Bamberg, M. (ed.) *Narrative - State of the Art*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 205-213, p. 205.

praxis: it is the stage on which the storytelling performance will be enacted, for the first time during its creation, and time and again through its staging as a theatrical event. But even this process of creating the visual aid is a performance, of tracing and looking, of which the storytelling performance staged as a theatrical event is a re-tracing and a re-looking. I approach the staging of the performing publications in a similar way to Adam Chodzko, whose works are staged in public spaces:

My art is not just about looking, but *about* looking *for* something; searching for something that is missing at present. This notion of “looking for” takes place partly in public space but also in interior space: the imagination of the inhabitants of that public space.³⁶²

When staged as theatrical events, performing publications are treated as a public space during the storytelling performance, during their publishing, which only lasts for the duration of the theatrical event. Like Chodzko, I approach each performance storytelling event as though I am “looking *for* something”, for stories, that ‘don’t not yet exist.’³⁶³ And, in a sense, they don’t. In other words, when I am creating the visual aids, I am not remembering a story. Instead, I am writing – or, rather, improvising – the story but already in order to remember it so that I can perform the improvised writing of it again. In a sense, all performances after the first one are also re-writings of the story. And, it follows, that every performance thereafter is also a re-publishing, but only because it is staged, publicly, as a theatrical event.³⁶⁴ Thus, the function of improvisation in each of the

³⁶² Chodzko, A. (2009) ‘Out of Place’, (extract from ‘Out of Place’, in John Carson and Susannah Silver, eds., *Out of the Bubble: Approaches to ‘Contextual Practice’*, London: The London Institute and Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, 2000, p. 32; revised by the artist, 2009) in Doherty, C. (ed.) *Documents of Contemporary Art: Situation*. London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, pp. 65-66, p. 65.

³⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 65.

³⁶⁴ I use the term publicly here because theatre scholars invariably conceptualise theatre audiences as a “public”. Moreover, the theatre audience is a specific public, one that is spatiotemporally situated within the theatrical event. Therefore, when a theatrical event is staged before a theatre audience, it can be assumed that it is, indeed, published. Paradoxically, staging a theatrical event enacts the most fundamental definition of publishing, “to make public”, which is something that print publishing cannot claim, let alone enact. This is because publishing that takes place on the stage has an actual audience, a public, whereas print publishing operates on the assumption that it has an audience, a public. In other words, print publishing presupposes a potential public, which may or may not be there. Bhaskar puts it this way: ‘If I leave manuscripts lying around in public, does that in some way constitute publishing?’

performance systems I have devised is to enable me to generate multiple stories *and* multiple acts of publishing from each performing publication whenever it is staged.

It seems that whenever performing publications appear on the stage – which they must, in order for their performance to be considered an act of publishing – they bring elements of the backstage process and performance along with them, improvisation being one element. But, there is a further curious characteristic of performing publications, resulting from this backstage element being brought onstage. It has to do with partial concealment of a certain portion of their workings not only from their audience but also from their performers, even author-performers who are their creators. Performing publications are only ever partially on view, not only in the sense that they are only displayed during a storytelling performance but also in another important sense: they offer a partial view of the story to be performed. They are incomplete – similar to draft performance texts, such as, for example, Jarman’s “script drafts” mentioned in Chapter 3 – even when staged. In other words, they are neither self-contained narratives nor standalone publications in and of themselves – even the most literal and readable of them, such as the performing publication for *Act II*. This partial concealment of their workings, paradoxically, applies to both the audience and the author-performer. I suspect this reflects the fact that performing publications are materialisations of aspects of the backstage process and performance that have been brought onstage. Backstage is where we typically encounter draft performance texts that invariably rely on improvisation for their realisation, as Pamela Howard has pointed out. So, it is not surprising that when they appear onstage, they are once again realised through improvisation, resulting, perhaps inevitably, in a partial realisation. I suspect this is the reason their workings are also partially concealed from the author-performer who is improvising the storytelling performance from cues provided by the performing publication. As Frost and Yarrow have observed, improvisation is part of the act of performance itself: ‘In the act of performance the actor becomes an improviser.’³⁶⁵

See Bhaskar, M. (2013) *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network*, p. 15.

³⁶⁵ Frost and Yarrow make a subtle distinction here between an “actor” and an “improviser”, indicating that the former is transformed into the latter during “the act of performance”. Here, the implication is that acting is less improvisatory than performing. Their statement is insightful for it foregrounds the tight relationship between improvising and performing I have been describing, having observed it in my practice in the process of creating and staging my performing publications. I strongly suspect this tight relationship is present in other performance storytelling practices that similarly feature performing publications.

Frost, A. and Yarrow, R. (1993) *Improvisation in Drama*, p. 1.

This last, surprising, insight emerged out of my practice-led investigations in *A thread without end*. I had initially underestimated the autonomy of the performance system behind the performing publications, specifically its ability to conceal certain mechanisms, even from me, the author-performer. I only arrived at this insight through sustained performance analysis. Even then, I suspect that different performance analysis methods to mine would reveal still more hidden mechanisms, especially those that are hidden from the author-performer. I also suspect that improvisation is responsible for all manner of witting and unwitting concealments that performance systems engender.

Performing publications, as theatre objects that enable improvisatory performance, evidence this process. They point to the improvisatory nature of their realisation in their visual appearance, already in the guise of visual aids, but even more so in the guise of performing publications when they are publicly staged before an audience. They do so through partial concealment of their content, which, for example, is literalised and ritualised in the *wayang beber* performance storytelling tradition, where one scroll in the set, the most sacred one, is never revealed either to the performer or the audience. However, even when performing publications are literally displayed before the audience and the performer, on the public stage, they are never really entirely on view. Or, rather, they never reveal the entirety of their content, because a part of their content is provided by the performer. Because performing publications are aids to improvisatory performance, the performer, even the author-performer, is never able to perform the same story in the same way twice. This is precisely the point of performing publications: with every performance, their content is only ever partially revealed, the story is only ever partially told.

5.18 The Publishing System

This has interesting implications for publishing, for performing publications seem to suggest that, under certain conditions, it is possible to publish content partially, temporarily and contingently. Performing publications even suggest that publishing can be an improvisation. When we consider what performance publishing is and does, we see that it provides these conditions, and it does so more readily and immediately than any other form of publishing. Because performance publishing occurs live and in situ, it is the

least mediated form of publishing and so can readily accommodate partial, temporary, contingent and even improvised content. Although this contradicts conventional notions of publishing, in which publishing is typically associated with the page rather than the stage and, thus, with readers rather than audiences, my theoretical and practical research into performance publishing indicates that performance should be regarded as a modality and, indeed, a medium of publishing. As Bhaskar has observed, ‘we need to go beyond book publishing to the spectrum of “publishings”, and ask what this multimedia status implies.’³⁶⁶

The enduring presence of performing publications in the historical record pointedly indicates that we need to broaden our definition of publishing to include performance as one of its media. In order to do that, firstly, we need to resituate performing publications within their performance publishing contexts, meaning the conditions under which they emerged in the first place. Although, historically speaking, different performing publications emerged at different times and in different places, it seems that they emerged under similar conditions. As I have already indicated, the earliest performing publications originate in oral performance storytelling traditions that, at a certain point, found themselves at the crossroads of oral and literate culture, absorbing influences from both, which, in turn, put them on the same developmental path as the fields of theatre and publishing, which were likewise reconciling oral and literate influences, each in their respective ways, albeit coming at it from opposing directions. Performing publications are, in some sense, the products of a collision between these two influences and between these two fields, which seem to coincide at the precise point performing publications emerge at different times and in different places. It is not surprising, then, that residues of this early enmeshment of orature and literature, of theatre and publishing, have survived in performing publications to this day. Performing publications appear to have absorbed and reconciled these two opposing influences and fields on both the page and the stage, as Ruch’s research into the *etoki* performance storytelling tradition, which uses emaki as performing publications, clearly demonstrates. As such, performing publications are compound objects/events that defy easy categorisation as products/performances of either orature or literature, theatre or publishing. Nevertheless, returning to Bhaskar’s statement above, performing publications easily sit on the performance end of the “spectrum of ‘publishings’”. So, what does that status imply?

³⁶⁶ Bhaskar, M. (2013) *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network*, p. 14.

In order to find out we need to, secondly, reconceptualise them, meaning we need to restore to performing publications the two cultural frames, namely publishing and theatre, out of which they emerged, which would enable us to make sense of their hybrid status as, simultaneously, objects/events and products/performances. Once we have done that, we can begin to engage with ‘transhistorical and transmedia conceptions of publishing,’³⁶⁷ which are clearly evidenced by the performing publications themselves. For instance, Bhaskar has noted that one definition of publishing, the recorded use of which dates to 1921, refers to publishing as an immediate and unmediated performance. This particular definition ‘refers to publishing as projecting an act or emotional state directly – there is no sense of an intermediary.’³⁶⁸ It speaks to a ‘near unmediated sense of publishing’.³⁶⁹ And yet, as Bhaskar notes, whenever we encounter publishing, we encounter mediated content – even if its “near unmediated” content. According to Bhaskar, ‘Part of the issue with “making public”, perhaps the most commonly understood definition of publishing, is that it doesn’t bring mediation to the fore – the act of making public is almost assumed to just happen, as if it didn’t require a medium, or the process behind that medium, through which it happens.’³⁷⁰

So, who or what is mediating the content in performance publishing? In my practice the mediator is the author-performer, the mediating object (the “real object”) is the visual aid turned performing publication (the “aesthetic object”) when staged through the process of co-mediation I described earlier, and the medium itself is performance. I suspect this is also true of other performance storytelling practices that similarly use performing publications to publish their content. But, as Bhaskar points out, we also need to account for “the process behind that medium”, for the “activity” that is publishing. Publishing, according to Bhaskar, is an activity, ‘if anything, it is some kind of activity, a role to be played.’³⁷¹

In fact, Bhaskar proposes a paradigm of publishing in which publishing is envisioned as a piece of machinery, a “content machine”, consisting of four processes or, more accurately,

³⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 34.

³⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 16.

³⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 18.

³⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 18.

³⁷¹ Ibid. p. 105.

four mediating activities: ‘framing and models, filtering and amplification.’³⁷² Without these mediating activities, Bhaskar argues, we would simply be dealing with the medium itself, not the mediation that constitutes publishing. Describing how the four activities that constitute publishing work, Bhaskar writes, ‘Filtering and amplification occur *through* frames *according* to models.’³⁷³ And yet, it is still not clear what “kind of activity” publishing is for the backstage workings of what he describes as “the system of publishing”, according to Bhaskar, tend to be partially hidden from view even from those performing the activity.

What Bhaskar is referring to is the backstage processes of publishing that, similar to the backstage processes of performance I have been describing in *A thread without end*, are partially hidden not only from the public but also from those who are performing the activity. Describing one of these processes, filtering, which, according to Bhaskar, is one of the four indispensable activities of publishing, he writes: ‘Filtering happens automatically, systematically and so the extent of filtering is partially hidden to those doing the filtering.’³⁷⁴ It is as if the partially hidden aspects of the publishing system, like the partially hidden aspects of the performance systems behind each of the acts in *A thread without end*, are somehow constitutive of both activities, namely publishing and performance. This certainly appears to be the case in my own practice, which conflates the two systems. Since the performance system behind each of the acts in *A thread without end* is solely in place to enable me to stage acts of publishing as theatrical events, it can also be regarded as a publishing system. Thus, in my own practice “the performance system” is identifiably conflated with “the publishing system”.

Bhaskar describes publishing as four mediating activities whereby content is framed (how content is presented to an audience) according to a model (why content is presented to an audience). Framing and models provide publishers with the *how* and the *why*, respectively, of filtering and amplification. In Bhaskar’s publishing paradigm, filtering is selection, the activity of selecting *what* content is published, and amplification is the multiplication of content from a single instance to multiple copies. According to Bhaskar, the model is why you amplify, and framing is the means by which you amplify, content. Although Bhaskar does not indicate this, from his publishing paradigm, I came upon the notion that amplification it is the *when* of publishing. In other words, we can be sure that

³⁷² Ibid. p. 6.

³⁷³ Ibid. p. 104.

³⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 109.

something has been published when content is made available to an audience. This subtle emphasis on the time of publishing means that it is possible to argue that amplification occurs when multiple instances rather than multiple copies of content are made available to an audience. If we accept this interpretation, performance publishing adheres to Bhaskar's publishing paradigm on all four counts.

With *A thread without end*, I aimed to stage three forms of performance publishing, each of which engages with a performance modality, medium and system of publishing. With the practice-led component of my research, my aim was to "stage" the argument that performance is a form of publishing. I reasoned that the argument is more compelling if such acts of performance publishing occurred on the stage, which is where public space and, according to Ricoeur, 'public time'³⁷⁵ are also staged. As mentioned before, the stage may be an actual stage or any support surface that stands in for a stage, as Butler noted. In *A thread without end*, the performing publications assume the status of a stage, at which point they set the entire theatrical apparatus into motion, signalling to the audience that they are attending a theatrical event. Thus, what I aimed to stage with *A thread without end* is precisely the fact that, when acts of performance publishing are staged as theatrical events, the audience, the public, is spatiotemporally situated within the publishing event itself. This properly theatrical notion of publishing has potentially profound implications for the practice and theory of publishing.³⁷⁶ To begin with, it suggests that it might be possible to stage something like a theatre of publishing.

³⁷⁵ Ricoeur, P. (1980), 'Narrative Time', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, No. 1, On Narrative, Autumn, pp. 169-190, p. 175. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343181?seq=17#metadata_info_tab_contents (Accessed 20 May 2022).

³⁷⁶ For instance, Bhaskar insists that, in the first instance, 'A definition of publishing needs a better sense of what becoming public really involves.' To that end, when he asks, 'Is being public a state of being – the state of being public in itself – or is it epistemological, the state of being know, or even being known to have been published?', the theatrical notion of publishing I am proposing offers possible ways of thinking through this subtle distinction between what being public and becoming public involves. Through staging acts of publishing as theatrical events, for instance, we can be sure that content is "known to have been published". What is being staged, then, is the subtle but important shift from content simply being public to becoming public in real space and real time before a real public.

See Bhaskar, M. (2013) *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network*, p. 19.

5.19 To Begin With

I will end this chapter by returning to the beginning. Scene I, in each of the acts, is the most important as it sets the processual template for the rest of the scenes and is thus representative of the entire process and performance entailed in creating each of the visual aids. The first scene, crucially, also establishes the entire performance system and, thus, the publishing system. This is what I will be focusing on in this final section. My aim is to demonstrate how this first improvised performance, the first trace, encoded in the visual aid, is decoded and retraced in the storytelling performance in which an act of publishing is staged as a theatrical event. At the same time, I had Brian O’Leary’s “container model of publishing”, whereby publishers fill “containers”, or books, with content³⁷⁷ in mind. I wondered what it might mean for the theory and practice of publishing if the container is not a conventional publication but a performing publication instead? I also wondered if another model of performance publishing might emerge out of my attempts at staging acts of publishing as theatrical events through performing publications? Might this model³⁷⁸ enable me to publish the unpublishable? Might it enable me to stage something like a theatre of publishing?

5.20 The First Scene: Scene I

In *Act I*, the paper scroll format of the visual aid presented certain options from which I immediately had to make a selection. This selection process started with the blank paper scroll, even before I began filling it with story content – the text and images. Thus, before a scenario, I was presented with a panorama – albeit an empty one. In theatre terminology, a panorama is: ‘A length of painted canvas, depicting a distant landscape of other view, which is unfurled across the back of the stage between two cylinders so as to present a continually changing scene.’³⁷⁹ In *Act I*, I envisioned the empty scroll before me – the not yet visual aid – as part panorama (a theatrical reference to scenery and to the stage) and part story scroll (a reference to literature and to one of the earliest formats of a

³⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 15.

³⁷⁸ Bhaskar defines “model” as ‘the why of publishing’. Content is published according to established models, but underlying any model is a motivation, “the why of publishing”. My practice is modelled on performance storytelling traditions that use performing publications to stage acts of publishing as theatrical events. But, in the history of performance publishing, there are many other models.

³⁷⁹ Law, J., Pickering, D. and Helfer, R. (2001) *The New Penguin Dictionary of Theatre*, p. 453.

publication). A panoramic story scroll seemed to be an appropriate means of investigating the possibilities of staging the story as a theatrical event.

The notion that story is “content” and that it needs an appropriate “container” for its staging had already occurred to me when reading Benjamin’s essay ‘The Storyteller’ (1936). Even though he does not use the term “container”, everywhere in the essay Benjamin approaches storytelling in terms the appropriateness of story content in relation to story form as though form were a container. David Ian Rabey, however, defines the term container to mean form: ‘Phenomenologically speaking, form is the *container* that holds the content of the actual story.’³⁸⁰ And this is how I approached the creation of the all the visual aids and their staging as performing publications in *A thread without end*: my intention with each was to create an appropriate container for the content.

For *Act I*, I had obtained a roll of paper. The plain paper scroll itself suggested the notion of a “continually changing scene”, through the mechanism of scrolling. As a result, it did not make sense to unfurl it entirely before filling it with content. Instead, I wanted to engage with the paper medium itself – as is. That is to say, I knew I would perform with the “real object”, the visual aid, but I needed to decide how to interact with it and how to interact with the audience through it during the performance, as the “aesthetic object”, the performing publication.

I placed the scroll on a table and partially unfurled it. I first selected a progression from one end of the scroll to the other, specifically left to right. That led to the decision to select a horizontal as opposed to vertical orientation and, finally, as a result of these cumulative choices, I decided that placement on a horizontal surface, such as a table, as opposed to vertical surface, such as a wall, would be most appropriate way to approach filling the scroll with content. These series of decisions meant that the visual aid would eventually be viewed from above, as though a map, during the storytelling performance. But, initially, it simply suited my purposes, since I envisaged the visual aid would contain the text and images – subdivided into scenes, each scene corresponding to a poem – in the form of a story map.

³⁸⁰ Rabey, D. I. (2016) *Theatre, Time and Temporality: Melting Clocks and Snapped Elastics*. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, p. 179.

The same story map principle would be applied to the visual aid for *Act II*, only this time it was elaborated into a digitally augmented interactive map whereby the conductivity of the graphite drawing enabled me to trigger digital soundscapes during the storytelling performance.

Because I needed to essentially map not only the text and images but also the sound components onto the visual aid, the only way to do so was to physically embed them into it one paper tile at a time. When I began drawing the first paper tile, the first scene, for the visual aid for *Act II*, I didn't know where this tile would eventually be positioned in the map or the shape the map would eventually take. But, because I knew that the ribbon text would be one continuous path from beginning to end, I simply proceeded from one scene to another, using the meandering ribbon text as a guide, eventually resolving that it must loop around at the end back to the beginning.



Figure 53 The visual aid for *Act II* showing the position of the first paper tile (outlined in red) within the map. From this first paper tile, I proceeded right, then up, then down, then along the bottom and back up and, finally, right again to the last paper tile (outline in blue). (Image: Artist)

The resulting visual aid gradually took on the appearance of a large map consisting of twelve hand-drawn paper tiles, each of which had an area where graphite was applied heavily enough to be conductive upon being touched and each of which was additionally

wired up in precisely that area. The visual aid was thus transformed into a digitally augmented interactive map. The wires were connected to a circuit board, placed to the side of the visual aid, which was in turn plugged into a laptop running a sound programme. By touching the areas of graphite in the wired-up visual aid, I was able to introduce soundscapes into the performance.



Figure 54 The visual aid for *Act II* showing how each of the twelve paper tiles were wired up in the graphite areas. Touching any part of the graphite “lake” in each paper tile triggers a soundscape associated with that tile. (Image: Artist)

The soundscapes, of differing character and duration, were specifically designed to complement the textual and visual elements to which they directly corresponded. I was able to incorporate this digitally interactive feature in *Act II* because of an insight gleaned from *Act I*, which is that not only the story but also other digital features can be mapped onto the visual aid if it is approached as “map”. This was elaborated even further in the

visual aid for *Act III*, in which a digital map similarly enabled me to introduce digital soundscapes into the storytelling performance. Using a motion tracking programme to monitor changes in movement and lighting in ten sections of the visual aid, I was able to use the digital map superimposed onto it to control the release of soundscapes in these ten sections at specific moments during the storytelling performance.

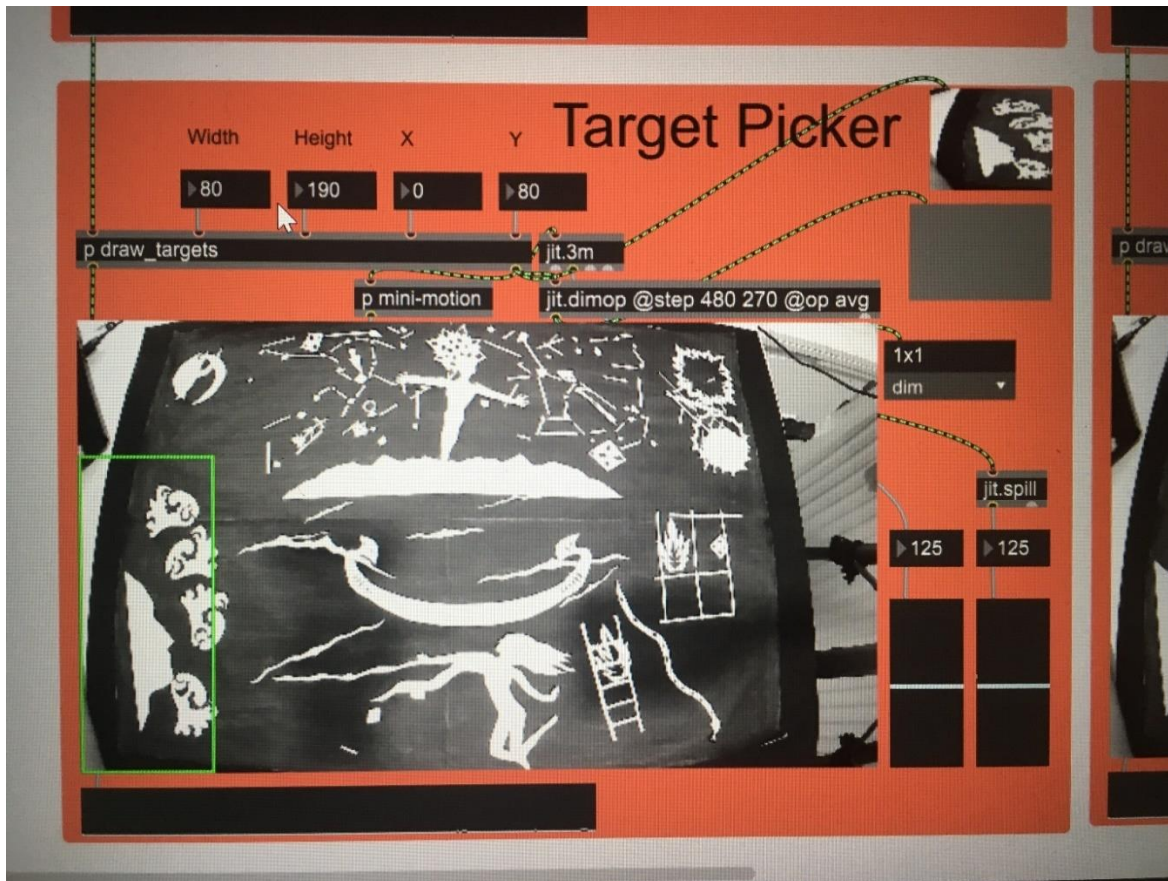


Figure 55 A screenshot of the motion tracking programme showing one of the ten sections of the virtual map (green rectangle on the bottom left) which was imposed over the visual aid for *Act III*. Each section corresponds to a soundscape, which is triggered by movement and changes in lighting in that section.

Returning to the visual aid in *Act I*, as I pried the scroll apart, it immediately suggested that the scroll needed to be handled, and since the performance would require me to use both of my hands – one tracing the text and the other pointing to the images – I realised that the handing of the paper scroll needed to be performed by someone else: I decided it would be the audience. Initially a practical decision, the fact that the scroll would be physically handled and manipulated by the audience would become an indispensable

part of the performance and one its defining features. In the end, this decision enabled me to stage an immersive and intimate form of performance storytelling, one in which the audience participated both figuratively and literally in its unfolding. The decision to physically handle the visual aid, I would discover later, would also foreground the sensorial dimension of the performance – though activating the senses of touch and hearing. During the performance, which begins with me tracing the text thread with my right hand and the with participants' scrolling in time with my reading of it, we engage in a shared haptic experience that lasts – uninterrupted – for the duration of the performance. The action of tracing and scrolling additionally generates a pleasant papery hum that provides an analogue soundscape. Although entirely unanticipated, I discovered that the soundscape additionally functions as a sonic aid for me during the performance: based on the sound of the participants' scrolling I am able to hear changes in the speed at which they are scrolling and adjust the timing and tempo of my narration to suit. At other times, I speed ahead of the scrolling, setting the timing and tempo, and the audience follows suit by scrolling faster. Another unanticipated effect produced by the soundscape, which I only discovered through performing the visual aid with the participants, is that it encourages attentive listening: the performance invariably produces a pin-drop silence. The audience seems to be incredibly attentive throughout, most especially those who are participating in the scrolling. Touch and sound would be entangled from this point on in all of the *A thread without end* performances: touch as a means of introducing soundscapes, not only the digital soundscapes but also the very subtle analogue soundscapes that are produced by the touch of a feather against the paper visual aid (*Act II*) or by the sliding into position of a papercut where the two paper surfaces brush against one another (*Act III*).

The physical handing of the visual aid, in *Act I*, also brought to the fore the bodily aspect of the performance. Since all involved are standing very close to the visual aid, viewing it from above, from all sides of the table on which it is displayed, we necessarily gather closely around it and become aware of our bodily presence. The tactile nature of the visual aids in all three acts also adds a bodied dimension to the performance. This is especially foregrounded in *Act I*, where the participants are also “in touch” with the visual aid. However, the bodied dimension is present in the visual aids for all three acts because touch is an indispensable component of the storytelling performances. In *Act I* and *Act II*,

by tracing the text and illustrating the images I literally “feel” my way through the visual aids and, thus, through the story. In *Act II*, this is literalised through the fact that my body, in being wired to the circuit board by means of a wrist band, becomes conductive. The conductivity of my body enables me to trigger the digital soundscapes through touching the graphite areas in the visual aid. The feather “pointer”, which I use in *Act II* to trace the ribbon text, is the only element that is not conductive – a strategic feature that prevents me from accidentally triggering the soundscapes during the performance. Using the feather pointer enables me to keep my place in the story, but it also produces a subtle sound through contact with the visual aid, which my headset microphone picks up during the quieter parts of the performance, accentuating the subtle tactility of the performance. In *Act III*, touch was foregrounded further through the tactility of manipulating the papercut pieces, which also produce a subtle papery sound. The precision involved in the continuous rearranging of the papercuts into different configurations and their careful placement in specific sections on the visual aid, corresponding to the digital map, refined and amplified the tactile nature of the performance. In her review of *A thread without end*, focusing on *Act III*, Radharani Pernarčič singled out tactility as one of the most prominent features of the performance, relating it to embodiment, ‘corporeality’, ‘presence’ and ‘authenticity’.³⁸¹ She writes: ‘this authenticity that can be caught even in the smallest gestures, when, for example, she touches a micro particle with her finger, carefully slides it into its place in the assemblage, waits patiently or presses it again for it to come off her skin, and aligns it a little more precisely.’³⁸² In her review, Pernarčič detects ‘corporeality [...] in every gesture’,³⁸³ the result of which is that ‘the performance, which could have remained nothing but the narration of mythology about the origin of the world, itself becomes an embodied thread’.³⁸⁴ Due to the embodied nature of my performance, she identifies the ‘*modus operandi*’ of the performance as one of ‘being-in-things’.³⁸⁵

As Pernarčič notes, the tactility of the performances also foregrounded my gestures. Every act in *A thread without end* has a repertoire of gestures that are specific to it,

³⁸¹ Radharani Pernarčič writes: ‘This aircraft does not have, does not need emergency exits. Namely, it has much more accessible entrances: into the representational worlds to which the stewardess not only points, but creates them herself.’

Pernarčič, R. (2021) ‘Nit brez začetka’ [A Thread Without Beginning], *Neodvisini*, 25 August. Available at: <https://www.neodvisni.art/refleksija/2021/08/nit-brez-zacetka/> (Accessed: 3 May 2022). [My translation from the original Slovenian.]

³⁸² Ibid. [My translation from the original Slovenian.]

³⁸³ Ibid. [My translation from the original Slovenian.]

³⁸⁴ Ibid. [My translation from the original Slovenian.]

³⁸⁵ Ibid. [My translation from the original Slovenian.]

gestures that are not choreographed ahead of time but emerge out the process and performance – the choreography – of creating the visual aids, which is further amplified in the storytelling performances. Across the three acts, not accidentally, my gestures become increasingly subtle and precise. This has to do with the increasing subtlety and precision of the visual aids themselves as I became more adept at creating them, each time learning from the one before what can be done and done more precisely – more economically and elegantly – always view a view to performability. In *Act III*, largely due the level of precision involved in staging the visual aid, the subtlety of the gestures really comes to the fore, but gesture is a prominent feature in all three acts. This is not to say that the less precise gestures have less merit. For instance, during the first performance of *Act I*,³⁸⁶ there was a moment when I pointed to an image in relation to the text I was narrating, and the audience spontaneously laughed at the gesture itself. Something about the incongruence of my gestural punctuation, in combination with the text and the image, had elicited a humorous response I neither anticipated nor could reproduce in later performances – it was of the moment. Evidently, there was a discord between the image and the text, on the one hand, and the timing of my gesture, on the other, which unintentionally produced a comic effect. I gleaned several insights from this mistimed gesture. First, gesture and timing are important element in performance. Second, a mistimed gesture, if used intentionally, can produce certain effects. Three, even a mistimed gesture is perceived by the audience as intentional.

Because the performances involve me touching the visual aids, tracing the text and pointing to the images (*Act I* and *Act II*) or manipulating the papercuts (*Act III*), I immediately realised I needed to be able to physically reach every part of the visual aid before me. In *Act I*, although the scroll is five meters long, the fact that it is only every partially unfurled ensured that I could reach every part of the particular portion of the scroll

³⁸⁶ The first performance of *A thread without end*, *Act I* was staged at D!NDINS, an intimate spoken word and sound art evening hosted by artist Seth Guy at his live-work studio at Acme Studios, in East London, on 1 October 2017. Most members of the audience were also performing at the evening and all participated in my performance, by scrolling the paper scroll.

To hear an audio recording see:

Guy, S. (2017), 'Ana Čavić - A thread without end: DIN DINS Art Licks Weekend 2017', *Bandcamp*, 1 October. Available at: <https://sethguy.bandcamp.com/track/a-thread-without-end> (Accessed 5 May 2022).

– that contains the pertinent text and images – open in front of me. This practical consideration had the additional side effect of foregrounding the role of my body – especially my gestures and my movements – in the performance. But it is also led to a practice-led insight that potentially sheds light on the relationship between the performer's body and the visual aid in other storytelling performances.

In the course of my research, I have noted that the scale of the visual aid used by performers is proportional to their bodies or, rather, it is proportional to how they use their bodies during the performance when interacting with the visual aid. For instance, I've noted that if a performer uses a pointer, such as in the *pardeh khani* performance storytelling tradition, the visual aid tends to be larger in scale. Nevertheless, the performer still needs to be able to reach every part of the visual aid, so one purpose of the pointer is to extend the performer's physical reach. Because I touch and manipulate the visual aids directly, as opposed to using a pointer to extend my reach, all the visual aids in *A thread without end* are proportionally scaled to my body. This insight, although seemingly self-evident, sheds some light on the scale of other visual aids which invariably tend to have a proportional relationship to the body of the performer, depending on how the performer is interacting with the visual aid.

While in *Act I*, the decision to reveal only a portion of the scroll at any one time was a practical one, it affected the scale of the visual aid and the scale of text and images that would fill it. This is true of all the visual aids, they are, for the abovementioned practical reasons, scaled to my body. However, in *Act II* and *Act III*, I additionally projected the visual aid onto a large screen. The main reason for doing so has to do with scale: I simply wanted the audience to be able to read and see the visual aid from a distance, since they were no longer gathered around it, as in *Act I*, but were seated or standing in front of it, at some distance. Another important reason for projecting the visual aids in *Act II* and *Act III*, in which the visual aid and I were physically distanced from the audience, was to, paradoxically, preserve the intimacy of the performance. With my performances, I aim to draw the audience in, towards me, rather than reaching out towards them. The technology, introduced in *Act II* and *Act III*, is strategically designed to do the same, i.e., to project my performance out so that I, as the performer, do not need to, for example, raise my voice or over-gesticulate in order to be heard and seen in the space. Because I am not acting in my performances, it becomes even more imperative for me not to overact and to 'stay temperate, subtle and truthful,'³⁸⁷ to the manner of my performance style. The self-

³⁸⁷ Ford Davies, O. (2007) *Performing Shakespeare*, p. 159.

conscious sincerity of my performance, combined with tactility and corporeality, seems to introduce a sensuality to the performance. This is something Pernarčič noted in her review, writing:

A thread without end is one such example, where this author, after an intense experience, ponders upon the importance of sensuality over pretentiousness and pose in artistic creation. About corporeal immersion, in which [the performer], in the manner of a ritual from which the theatre was born, animates in an unspectacular manner paper assemblages that are assembled into a story in the projection, and thus not only narrates about the beginning of the world, but at the same time actually creates it.³⁸⁸

Writing specifically in relation to the perceived authenticity of the performance, not despite but because of the strategic use of technology in *Act III* Pernarčič writes:

When, piece by piece, she builds, completes, tears down again and thus transforms the paper assemblage on her desk little by little, the traveller who is already completely accustomed to various technical solutions can easily get lost in the “live stream” of the emerging image, projected on the wall from a bird's eye view. But [...] despite her sovereign narration of the text she knows by heart, she allows herself to remain vulnerable and therefore takes a moment to check the pages to see if she has not left something out. These are those in-between non-performative gaps from which one can distinctively separate sovereignty from frivolous self-confidence, maturity from self-assertion.³⁸⁹

And, finally, in relation to the strategic use of technologies to preserve the authenticity of the performance in *Act III*, Pernarčič writes candidly about the potential pitfalls that were narrowly skirted, quoting the slip-ups straight from the announcement for the *A thread without end*:

³⁸⁸ Pernarčič, R. (2021) 'Nit brez začetka' [A Thread Without Beginning], *Neodvisini*. Available at: <https://www.neodvisni.art/refleksija/2021/08/nit-brez-zacetka/> (Accessed: 3 May 2022). [My translation from the original Slovenian.]

³⁸⁹ Ibid. [My translation from the original Slovenian.]

Furthermore, in my opinion, this excellence does not arise solely because of the 'alternative, hybrid' format, which integrates various digital tools and visual means (analogue and digital drawing, assemblage). Above all, I see the key in the fact that Čavić does not forget, dismiss and devalue the roots, as often happens when artists use technology more as an experiment for its own sake – something that is just "in". Calling the latter 'alternative' and 'turn to the new' is actually somewhat ridiculous, because nowadays with the dictate of digital transformation of everything, the use of digital technologies has become something typically conventional, if not even classic and traditional. But there is a thin line between the modern "de-fault" praising of technology and its meaningful use that complements live performance in the true sense of the word. This is intriguingly revealed by the announcement for the performance itself, where the awareness that these tools are only 'visual aids', 'expanded potential', 'assisted extension', and slip-ups, which with 'enrichment beyond the conventional' or 'a turn to new forms' attribute excessive value and power to technology. And yet, despite some predicted slip-ups, Ana Čavić and Tychonas Michailidis, co-creator of sound, design, digital interfaces and interactive content, pull off a completely finely balanced performance flight, as technological solutions, nothing-more-and-nothing-less, support human capabilities. Their mythological story is thus based on certain tools available today, but at the same time it does not discard, deny or displace either the tried and tested tools of the past or the fundamental fact that a human being is perfectly equipped and by far the most sophisticated "technology" that is able to think, perceive, feel and radiate.³⁹⁰

The sincere nature of the storytelling performances is itself a reflection of the visual aids, where every element of the story and how it is mediated by technology is laid bare before the audience. My intention is always to stay truthful to the material, and let it guide and direct me in my performances, and I treated the technology as another performance-enabling element – one that extends my reach but preserves the intimacy of the storytelling performances.

In *Act II* and *Act III*, the performances were additionally technologically mediated and manipulated through the use of not only the aforementioned projector (connected to a live feed camera) but also a headset microphone, speakers, a laptop running mediating programmes, a mixing desk, a circuit board and wires (*Act II*) and a web camera (*Act III*).

³⁹⁰ Ibid. [My translation from the original Slovenian.]

There were many technological elements on display, literally in the way of performance space – both the stage area itself and the visual aid functioning as another stage area. The technology, however, was not in the way of performance itself: it was in place purposefully to project the performance beyond the space of the performer and into the space of the audience. Initially, the decision to project the visual aid for *Act II* was practical: it was a solution to the problem of needing to stage the performance in a theatre before a seated audience.³⁹¹ When performing under technologically mediated conditions, I was conscious of the fact that some sort of amplification would already occur as a result of the projection of image and sound beyond the physical limits of my body. I therefore adjusted my performance – steadying my vocalisations and tempering my gestures and movements – accordingly. Since there were several different elements (analogue and digital) to operate and coordinate during the performance I felt it was even more necessary for my performance to flow as seamlessly as possible. In short, the added layer of technological mediation acted as a magnifying class, intensifying and amplifying every detail of the performance. Given that both the analogue and digital mechanics of the performance were in full view of the audience, I felt it was imperative that I should try to exert a greater degree of control over the various elements than I had in *Act I*, while simultaneously aiming for the same appearance of seamlessness and effortlessness. All these insights were incorporated into *Act III*, with the aim of achieving an even greater degree of control of the different digital and analogue elements, again, in order to perform more seamlessly.

This is not to say that I achieve my aims, or that I am even able to achieve them, every time I perform: to deliver a perfect performance or control every element the performance

³⁹¹ *A thread without end, Act II* (2020) premiered at SARDAM Interdisciplinary Literature Festival on 5 October 2019 in Limassol and was staged again on 6 October 2019 in Nicosia, in Cyprus. Both venues were small theatres. Since the performance was commissioned for a theatre presentation, I needed to create, for the first time, a performance that would function before a seated audience in a theatre setting. Knowing, from the outset, that the performance would be staged in a theatre, but still wanting to use a visual aid – proportional to the scale of my body – and, thus, preserve the intimacy, corporeality and tactility of the performance, projection seemed the best solution.

entails.³⁹² On the contrary, I only aim to do so. In other words, my aim is not to control my performance, but rather to control, to the best of my ability, all the elements that enable my performance to potentially emerge – accepting that a failure to perform is also part of the performance. In that sense, whether the elements are analogue or technological is beside the point. And yet, I suspect that the perceived sincerity and authenticity of my performances arises out the precarious balancing act I am trying to achieve with each performance: namely, between the “theatrical reality”, as Lehmann terms it, of staging a theatrical event and the “heightened reality”, the spellbinding effect that is produced by theatricalization of everything and everyone on the stage. The visual aids are vital in this balancing act. Functioning both as “real objects” and “aesthetic objects”, the visual aids turned performing publications through their staging, already bring out the tension between theatrical reality and the heightened reality whenever and wherever they are staged. Under the added scrutiny of technological mediation, which magnifies every detail

³⁹² In fact, I falter often. All of my performances to date have had some element that fails to perform as anticipated, whether through human or technological error. As I mentioned briefly earlier, my first performance of *Act I* induced, at certain points, spontaneous uneasy laughter from the audience, which was entirely unanticipated. It seems to have been caused by the mismatch in tone between the text I was narrating and the manner in which I pointed to the related image: one was humorous, the other was serious. This was a slip up in my performance, a failure, but the audience interpreted it as a deliberate intervention into the text and image – a performative flourish that isn’t in visual aid itself. I suspect that the audience intuited it was a slip up but nevertheless went along with it, accepting the fallibility of my performance as part of the theatrical experience. It also evidently endeared me to the audience, for they seem to have appreciated the light relief it provided. It punctuated the performance somehow; it was perhaps even the highlight, for it was one of the parts they remembered afterwards. From our conversations after the performance, I gleaned that they assumed it was staged for their benefit even if it wasn’t intentional. And they were correct in that respect, my instinctive response was to try to minimise the potential embarrassment and uneasiness they might have experienced as a result of the slip up through embracing the humorous outcome, which seemed to put them at ease.

Similarly, during the second performance of *Act II*, I had failed to put on the wired wrist band at the beginning of the performance, which is the mechanism through which I trigger sound effects. When, after several attempts, I failed to trigger the soundscape with which the performance begins, and eventually realised my mistake, I simply replaced the wrist band, briefly smiled at the audience by way of acknowledgement of the “false start” and began the performance again.

of the visual aids, they nevertheless seem to stand up, standing in for the stage despite the mediating effects of technology.

Other considerations, to do with scale and scaling up through the strategic use of technology, would come to mind during the process and performance of creating the visual aids, such as the readability and visibility of the text and images (in *Act I* and *Act II*) or only images (in *Act III*) as well as their directionality (towards or away from me, or the audience) – all considerations that had to do with their performability. Although these considerations were mainly directed at me, I realised that the audience would also need to be included as a consideration: they too needed to be able to see and read the images and text (in *Act I* and *Act II*) or the images alone (in *Act III*) and to hear the sounds in order to follow along with the story as it unfolded and, in *Act I*, to directly participate in its unfolding through their scrolling.

In *Act II* and *Act III*, technological mediation enabled a larger audience to see, read and hear the story, and from a greater distance. But, since the technology was built into the visual aids from the beginning, I was additionally able to strategically use it to engage audiences in different ways afforded by technological mediation. Aside from the introduction of digital soundscapes through two different mechanisms in *Act II* and *Act III*, building on insights gained from *Act II*, as regards the magnifying effect of the projected image and projected sound, in *Act III* was able refine these features slightly. The soundscapes, for instance, instead of being of a set duration (as in *Act II*), were continuous and were triggered by an entirely different mechanism that enabled me to have them come in and out at certain points in the story if I performed certain actions, and, thus, to perform – to improvise – with the sound more than before. In *Act III*, I also strategically projected image of the visual aid in another part of the space, on a wall adjacent to me, dividing the attention of the audience between viewing me perform the actions with all the technological elements on display and viewing the projected screen of actions being performed, which offered a more “theatricalized” and in a sense, idealised, view.



Figure 56 The projection screen as it appeared at the performance of *Act III* on 29 July 2022 at DUM Project Space, Ljubljana. The performance space is to the left of this view. (Image: Jaka Babnik)



Figure 57 The performance space as it appeared at the performance of *Act III* on 29 July 2022 at DUM Project Space, Ljubljana. The projection screen is to the right of this view. (Image: Jaka Babnik)



Figure 58 The audience seated in front of the projection screen at the performance of *Act III* on 29 July 2022 at DUM Project Space, Ljubljana. The performance space is to the right of this view. (Image: Jaka Babnik)

I suspected that this “twice behaved-behaviour”, to borrow Schechner’s terminology, would add to the theatricality of the performance – precisely because it staged the tension between “theatrical reality” and “the heightened reality” of it. Although some audience members perceived this precise effect, while others wondered whether it was intentional and whether they were supposed to view the real or the projected performance, Pernarčič summarises the effect thus:

Her presence is not just a “side act”, because the real charm of the performance is established only when a viewer alternately observes both, the projection and her.³⁹³

Returning to the creation of the visual aids, the partial unfolding of the scroll in *Act I* had reverberating effects on how the story was not only composed but also on how it was told

³⁹³ Pernarčič, R. (2021) ‘Nit brez začetka’ [A Thread Without Beginning], *Neodvisni*. Available at: <https://www.neodvisni.art/refleksija/2021/08/nit-brez-zacetka/> (Accessed: 3 May 2022). [My translation from the original Slovenian.]

and shown during the storytelling performance. It would also set the processual template for the rest of the acts. It necessitated that I compose one “scene” at a time, which, in turn, enforced an episodic structure onto the story – a structure I would replicate in all three visual aids. At the same time, however, the notion that the scroll was a “continually changing scene” meant that movement through the scenes and the momentum generated by it would become another defining feature of the storytelling performance. Movement, also as it relates to momentum, would be elaborated on in *Act II* and, especially, in *Act III* where continuous movement (the constant “piece by piece”, to borrow Pernarčič’s phrasing, rearranging of the papercuts) drives the momentum of the storytelling performance, rather than the meandering text interspersed with images (in *Act I* and *Act II*). The underlying episodic structure of the stories – whereby each act is subdivided into a sequence of scenes – in each of the visual aids was a useful compositional device but, in the performances, I deliberately set out to blur the lines between the scenes and instead focus on “going with the flow” of the storytelling performance, and on generating momentum.

At the beginning of each performance, I imagine myself as moving along a set path, which I will trace and retrace, with repeat performances without repeating, meaning each time moving along the same path taken slightly differently. I trust that path I have set will lead me through the performance and return me to the beginning, and that I will take the audience along with me: in that sense, with every performance, I am setting out to stage what Schechner terms a “transportations”, whereby audiences are transported elsewhere for the duration of the storytelling performance and returned to reality at the end. I approach each performance as if for the first time. I had intuited that it was important that, as the performer, I am constantly on the move, from beginning to end of the performance. And yet, I hadn’t realised the significance of momentum in my performances until relatively late in my practice-led investigation. It might be that it was so embedded in my process that it emerged as a by-product of other decisions I had made along the way – another partially hidden mechanism of the performance system.

Already in the first scene of *Act I*, in simultaneously composing the text and images, in splitting my attention between one and the other, when creating the visual aid, I had set up a dynamic between them – one based on movement and speed, leading to

momentum. What I mean to say is that, through the cumulative decisions that were made earlier in the process and performance of composition, I had encoded a set of instructions for how to perform the repertoire of gestures that directly relate to movement as well as encoding their speed, which, ultimately, generated momentum during the storytelling performance.

An unlikely analogy, the movement of nomads, presented itself when I was reflecting on my movement and speed through the visual aids from one scene to another and how it relates to momentum. I came across it in 'On Nomadology', a treatise, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In it, Deleuze and Guattari describe paths taken by nomads as the primary purpose of movement, and the points along the path, as secondary in importance: 'To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine'.³⁹⁴ In a similar way, the subdivision of the acts into scenes, which serve as the points in the progression along the story path of any one act, are not foregrounded in the performances but are made to recede into the background, as my aim is to seamlessly move from one scene to another in one continuous motion. Thus 'every point is a relay and exists only as a relay',³⁹⁵ in a continuous progression, which can be understood in terms of momentum. Similarly, the acts themselves are only points in the progression of the story of *A thread without end* which has its own momentum. I trust that the momentum, which is embedded in each of the visual aids, will manifest so long as I faithfully follow the instructions I have left for myself and that I will maintain this momentum, from scene to scene and act to act, through the entire *A thread without end* piece as it continues to evolve cumulatively and indefinitely.

By *Act II*, I had realised that momentum was a central feature of the performances, a means by which I could sweep the audience along with me, and so it became the central focus of my investigation in *Act III* – to which I will return shortly.

Moreover, I recognised in Deleuze and Guattari's description of 'movement' and 'speed' that my "movement" is similarly 'expansive', meaning it is spreading or affecting the entire area of the visual aid, and my "speed" is 'intensive', meaning it is concentrated in

³⁹⁴ Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (2009) 'On Nomadology', (extract from *Mille plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980. Translated by B. Massumi, *A Thousand Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*: Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pp. 380-382 [footnotes not included]), in Doherty, C. (ed.) *Documents of Contemporary Art: Situation*. London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, pp. 88-90, p. 88.

³⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 88.

particular areas of it.³⁹⁶ In modulating the movement and speed of my performance I am able to sustain a certain momentum. The way I am able to modulate my speed and movement is the result of the two important early decisions I had made when creating the visual aid for *Act I*, which was to, first, establish a turn-taking relationship between the text and images and, second, to assign distinct “roles” – namely, “reading” and “illustrating” – to my left and right hands respectively. As a result of these decision, text and reading with my right hand would directly relate to “speed”, while image and illustration with my left hand would directly relate to “movement”.

The cumulative effect of these two initial decisions decisively shaped how the visual aid for *Act I* would eventually be interacted with and, thus, how it would co-mediate the storytelling performance – even before I set the first word or first image down. Already in *Act I*, I had made sense of these groupings – text/reading/speed and image/illustrating/movement – by adopting the analogy of a “conductor”. I would apply the same principles to the visual aid in *Act II* and further literalise it in using the visual aid and my body as a conductive medium to trigger soundscapes and illustrate the visual aid not only visually but also sonically. In *Act III*, I would devise a different way of investigating movement and speed more pointedly by removing the text element from the visual aid and concentrating solely on “animating” the images, i.e., through the constant rearrangement of the papercuts into a papercut theatre.

Returning, once again, to the creation of the visual aid for *Act I*, which set the processual template for the other visual aids, I want to briefly touch on the turn-taking relationship between the text and images, specifically delving into how it relates my speed and movement when “reading” and “illustrating” the visual aid during the storytelling performances. As I mentioned earlier, the properties of the paper scroll implied movement from the very beginning, so I was particularly interested in drawing this out in the visual aid for *Act I* by focusing performance possibilities offered by the scroll format itself. Once I knew the audience would be, first, handling the visual aid and, second, how they would be handling it, I could finally begin to write the text and draw the images with the audience and all these considerations in mind.

³⁹⁶ In ‘On Nomadology’, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari distinguish between movement and speed in these terms: ‘Movement is extensive; speed is intensive.’
Ibid. p. 89.

As I started drawing the first image in the far left of the scroll – the first appearance of the character of the woman, depicted upside down with a bite mark on her left arm and drops of blood filling a chalice in a circular emblem – I decided that I needed a visual means of introducing the idea of a thread of text. I wanted to introduce the text into the visual aid immediately, so that the images and text would interweave from the beginning. This device turned out to be a repeat image of a chalice spilling “blood” which became the source of the text thread.



Figure 59 The visual aid for *Act I* showing the intertwining of text and images from the beginning. The establishing image of Scene I, in the far left of the scroll, simultaneously introduces the woman character and the text thread, depicted as “blood” spilling from a chalice. Once introduced, the thread of text continues uninterrupted, meandering across the entire visual aid, until the story ends at the far right of the scroll, where it terminates in another spilled chalice.

The depiction of bite and the blood, were not arbitrary but were drawn from the first line of the first poem, and scene (Scene I), of the act: “The last time he was with me, he bit me.” The text for the *Act I*, Scene I reads:

The last time he was with me

he bit me.

He drank (he drank), droplets of words so delicate

And were not his mouth mean spirited,

I would have let him have his fill.

Instead, the two of cups was spilled.

As well as beginning with a striking visual and verbal image, I wanted to introduce a tension between the two elements already at the beginning of the story. So, I interrupted the text thread with more establishing images that would both introduce the “he” of the line – the fox character – visually, thus setting up the relation between the two characters in the story and, at the same time, set the scene. So, after the handwritten text that reads “The last time he was with me” I split the text thread into two text paths.

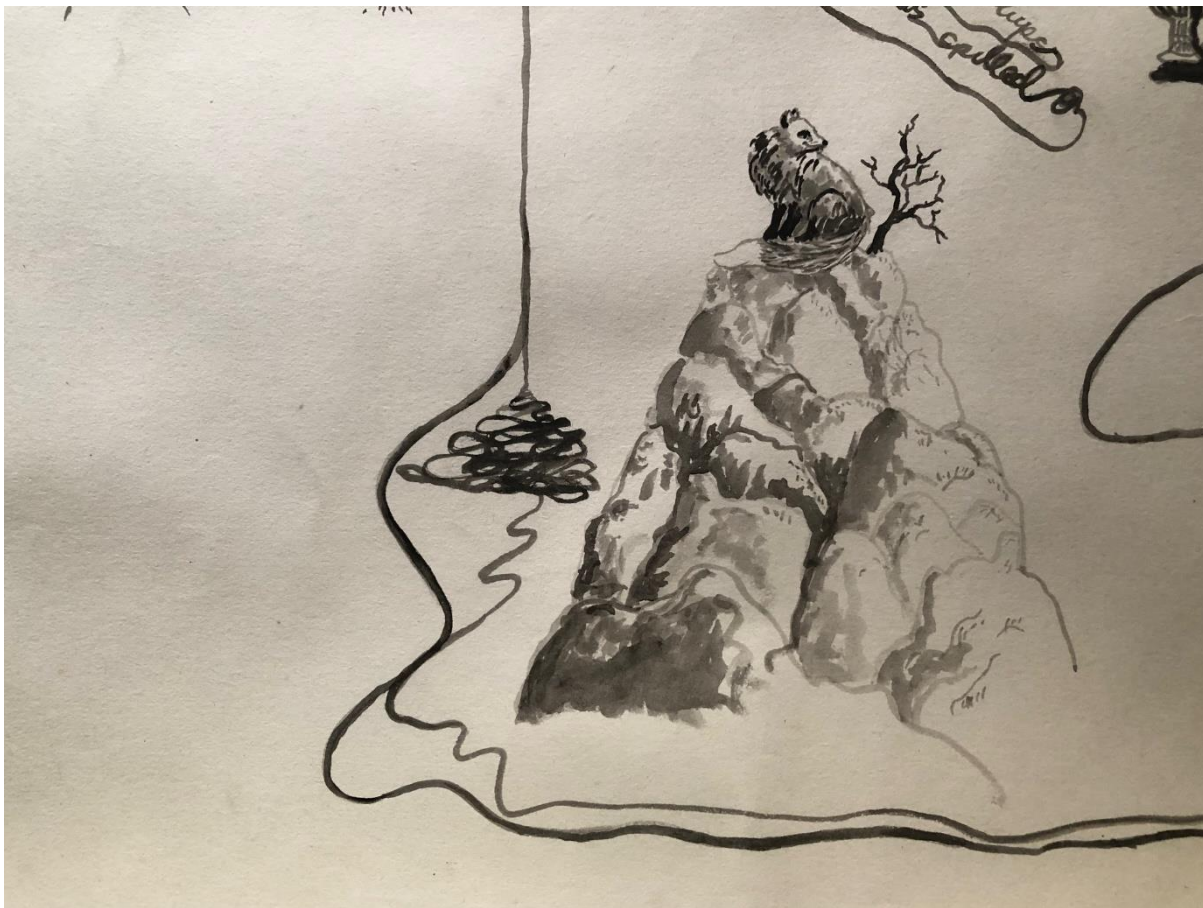


Figure 60 The visual aid for *Act I*, Scene I, showing the thread of text splitting into two paths and the establishing the character of the fox. The first path (right) is tangled immediately while the second path (left) is less tangled.

The first path is tangled in several places, a visual means of slowing down the narration, since it involves me physically tracing the path with my right hand. It eventually leads to the rest of the first line but not before it is tied around the ankles of the same female character, depicted once again as still bleeding and upside down, but now revealed to be hanging by a thread. She bleeds into another upright chalice, which is overflowing, and the blood is depicted as spilling over and spreading towards another spilled chalice. A pointing hand emerging from a cloud – a convention borrowed from both book illustration and printer's marks (or dingbats) – signals that the audience should take note of this detail, which is intended to suggest the looping nature of the story: that it starts and ends with a thread, but that it is a never-ending thread. It foreshadows the forestalling of the ending, the denouement, not only of the story in *Act I* but also the entire *A thread without end* series. During a performance, I have the option of pointing to this image with my left hand as a means of subtly illustrating the point.

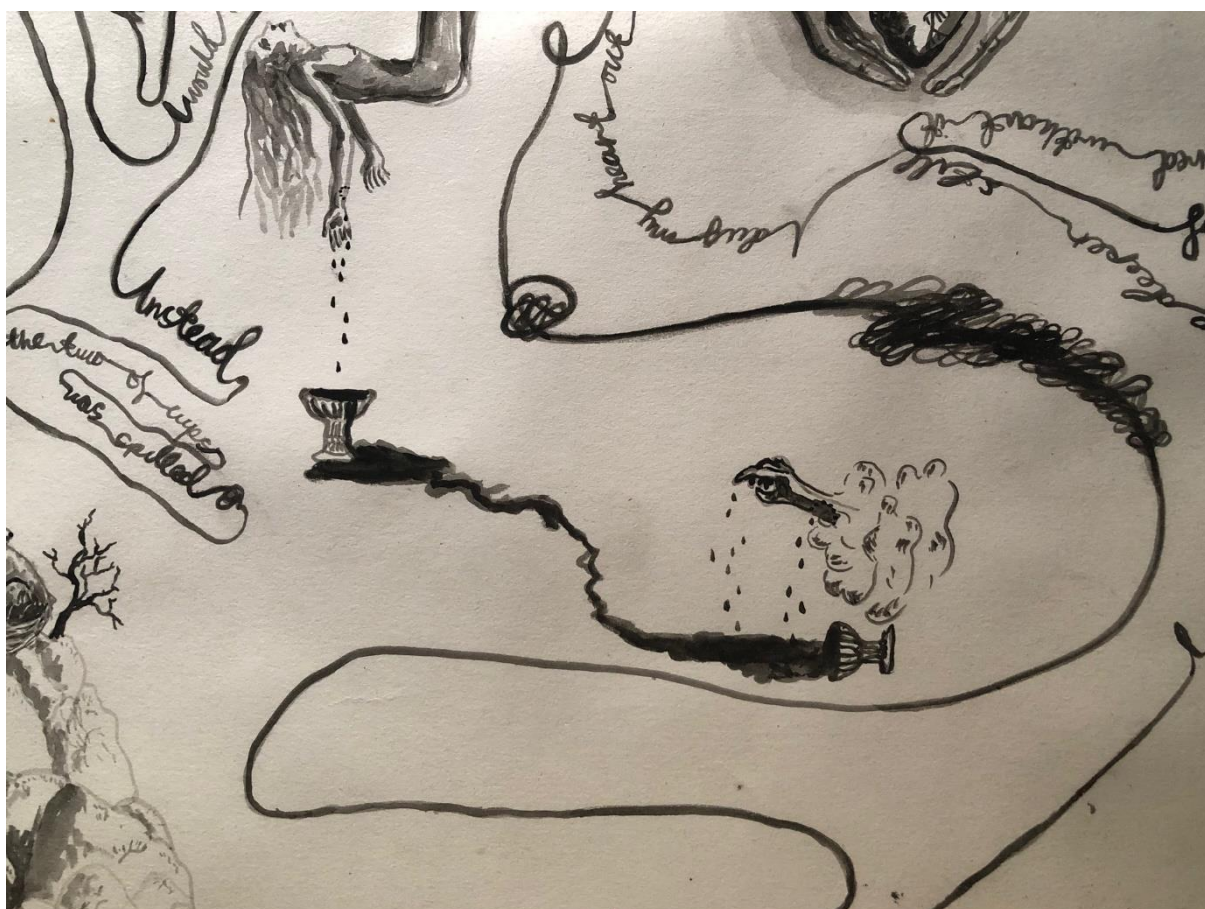


Figure 61 The visual aid for *Act I, Scene I*, showing a pointing hand emerging from a cloud. The image of the woman character is depicted as bleeding into another upright chalice, a repeat of the establishing image but slightly varied. The chalice is overfilling, and the blood is depicted as spilling over and spreading towards a spilled chalice.

Immediately after, the text thread circles around a visual representation of a sneering fox. The first line then continues through the rest of the poem at a more rapid speed until it forced to double back on itself and return to the beginning. The same line "The last time he was with me" then splits into the second path, which a way to get to the rest of the second poem and scene which begins with the same line. The text for the *Act I, Scene II* reads:

The last time he was with me

I dug deep and deeper still

I dug my heart out with both hands

let it love

where it lands

I set it aside and wondered without it

for a while.

The second path, which is still the one continuous thread of text but looped, passes by another depiction of a fox sitting atop a barren hill and looking back, towards the aforementioned pointing hand and chalices, reinforcing its significance. The fox also looks back towards what is to come in the story.

Scene I and Scene II in the visual aid for *Act I* show how the line “The last time he was with me” splits into the second path that loops around and leads to second poem and scene (Scene II), which begins with the same line. In comparison with the first thread, the second thread moves faster towards the rest of the second poem, Scene II, but when it arrives at text, the text itself loops around, in different directions, sideways and upside-down, around another drawing of two hands holding a heart.

It also shows how the text meanders, in different directions, around the images that illustrate it. The sparse or dense concentration of the thread of text, visually rendered as tangles, undulations, loops, set the pace of the narration of the text, functioning as both script and score for the performance. (Figure 62)



Figure 62 The visual aid for Act I, Scene I and Scene II. (Image: Artist)

The change of direction of the text is a visual device with a very functional purpose: it forces me to slow down my vocal delivery of the text simply because of the difficulty of reading it. I purposely built in this device, to pace myself and faithfully perform in time with the rhythm I envisaged for the second poem and scene. This applies to all the poems and their corresponding scenes in *Act I* and *Act II* of *A thread without end*, although it is visually rendered in spatialisation of the text as either a text thread (in *Act I*) or as ribbon text (in *Act II*). In *Act III* the rhythm is set by the constant rearrangement of the papercut pieces, which is a process that takes as long as it takes for the pieces to be placed in their precise positions.³⁹⁷ In *Act III* the text, which is to the side of the visual aid, is thus used to vocally illustrate the images as are the soundscapes, rather than as a visual element.

³⁹⁷ All the acts in *A thread without end* are configured in what Richard Schechner defines as “event time”, meaning the performances takes as long as it takes and have an unfixed duration. However, *Act III* has the most unpredictable duration of all three acts because the time it takes to arrange the

All the poems, likewise, already stress the rhythm and rhyme, which is amplified in the performance through vocalisation as well as through the speed of the performance, which is set by the way the text is visually rendered in the visual aids themselves in *Act I* and *Act II*. I had realised, already in *Act I*, that it was an effective visual means of punctuating and enhancing the rhythm and rhyming schemes of the poetry. It is a device that also aids in their memorisation. The stressed rhyme and rhythm of my poetry relates to the “economy of storage” and ‘economy of memorization’³⁹⁸ that Ong writes of in relation to the oral storyteller, ‘he has even more massive store of thousands of often repeated formulas [...] or formula-like elements not exactly the same but virtually so [...] all of which are metrically manageable.’³⁹⁹ Although in *Act I* and *Act II* I am effectively reading the poems during the storytelling performance, in memorising the poems beforehand I am able to focus on accentuating the rhythm and the rhyme of the poetry because I am able to anticipate it. The fact that my poems are formulaic and “metrically manageable” is an aid to memory and, ultimately, an aid to performance.

In *Act I*, the text thread, through its rendering as an image, sets the speed of the reading of the text during the performance, effectively functioning not only as a script but also as a score. This device is repeated in *Act II*, where the text is rendered as a twisting and looping ribbon text. In both cases, the shape of the text is also a measure of time, and it determines the approximate duration of the performance, which fluctuates slightly depending on other variables I introduce into the storytelling performance through improvisation. Diagrams of my movements when tracing the text in the first scenes of *Act I* and *Act II* illustrates this point.

The image below (Figure 63) is a simplified diagram showing my movement across the visual aid while tracing the text thread in Scene I (red line) and Scene II (blue line) of *Act I*. Starting from the left, the diagram shows my movement across Scene I (red line) is

papercut pieces into their precise configurations is variable. By comparison, the duration of the *Act I* and *Act II* performances is fairly predictable because it is set by the spatialised text, the text thread and text ribbon respectively, and any variation is the result of my improvisation during the performances. David Ian Rabey summarises Schechner’s definition of “event time”: ‘Richard Schechner has indicated three distinct ways by which theatre configures time: In *event time* the activity takes as long as is required for completion: application without fixed duration. In *set time* all the activity has to be completed in a given time: a fixed duration that may lead to a different sense of urgency and quality of energetic engagement. In *symbolic time* one span represents another duration. (Schechner 1969: 87–88, original emphasis)’

Rabey, D. I. (2016) *Theatre, Time and Temporality: Melting Clocks and Snapped Elastics*, p. 176.

³⁹⁸ Ong, W. J. (1967) *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, p. 25.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 25.



Figure 64 A simplified diagram of showing my movement (from left to right) across the visual aid while tracing the ribbon text in Scene I, *Act II*. (Image: Artist)

The image above (Figure 64) is a simplified diagram of showing my movement across the visual aid while tracing the ribbon text in Scene I, *Act II*. Starting from the left, the red line shows my movement the first scene, which is contained within the one tile that has been marked up. The shape of the ribbon text, around the graphite “lake” determines the speed of my movement and thus the duration of the performance.

In contrast to the first two acts, speed and duration are not incorporated into the visual aid for *Act III*. The speed is instead set by my movements across the visual aid in the act of rearranging the papercuts. To illustrate this, I have included a diagram that shows the speed of my movements when positioning the papercuts in Scene I, *Act III* through the length of the arrows, where longer arrows are faster and shorter ones are slower (Figure 65).

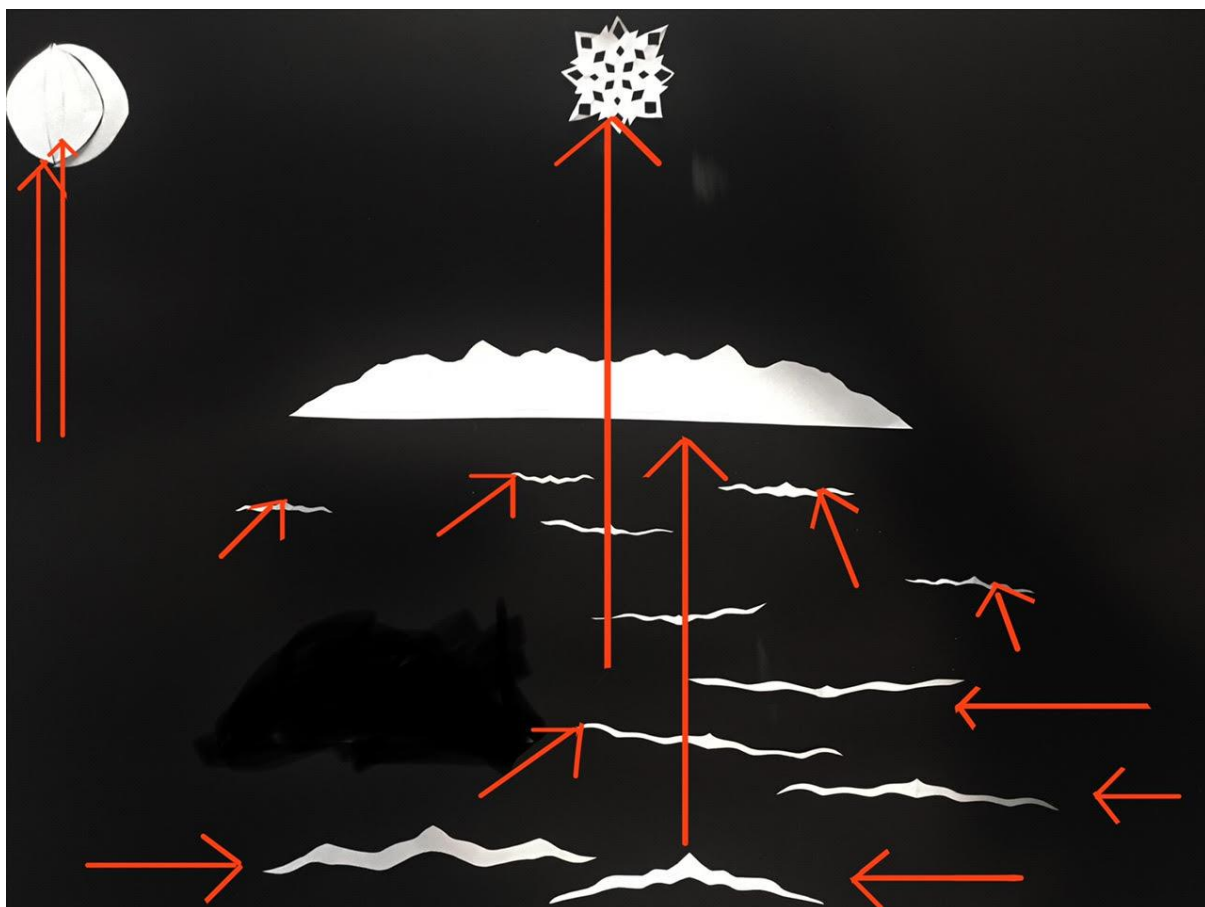


Figure 65 A simplified diagram of showing my movement across the visual aid while placing the papercuts into position in Scene I, *Act III*. The speed of my movement and the duration of the performance are variable. (Image: Artist)

Returning to *Act I* and *Act II*, in both cases, the tracing of the text with my right hand is a means of keeping not only my pace but also my place in the story. As with *Act I*, in *Act II*, along with the cues provided by the ribbon text, the visual aid contains visual cues, by way of images, which I need to illustrate the text. The images direct my movement across the visual aid: for example, in *Act II*, some scenes span one paper tile, others two or three, some are densely illustrated others sparsely. Moreover, since my movement is set by visual means – the ribbon text, which, in turn, corresponds to images spatially arranged around the ribbon text – if I stray too far from the set path, either from the ribbon text or from the images, I would not only lose my pace, I would literally lose my place in the space of the visual aid itself. Since the notion of the “stage” is literalised in the visual aids,

it is essential for me, as the performer, to turn up not only at the right time but also in the right place, in order to not lose the thread of the story. Losing my place in the visual aid is similar to a performer turning up in the wrong scene or delivering the wrong line on an actual stage.

Not wanting to lose my place in the visual aid was the main reason that I initially decided to physically trace the text thread in *Act I* with my right hand in one continuous motion, from beginning to end, without ever lifting it from the visual aid. And it is with this consideration in mind that I came upon the very practical solution to assign specific roles to my right and left hands respectively already in *Act I*, and it would be repeated in *Act II*.

I can articulate this decision through a helpful analogy: conducting. As with the conductor's hands, my right hand leads, holds the pointer (in my case a feather, *Act II*) or simply points (*Act I*). Because my right hand is assigned to the textual elements in the visual aids for *Act I* and *Act II*, the right hand also keeps my place in the text. The right hand is dominant and is *my* point of reference. The left hand, with which the conductor controls the volume and introduces interpretative flourishes to the musical instruction, is similarly used by me to introduce embellish and illuminate the text, which I do by variously pointing to one visual element or another that relates to the text (in *Act I* and *Act II*). The decision to assign the illustrative role to my left hand was inspired by the idea that was staging a form of "embellished literature", to borrow Ruch's terminology.

In *Act II*, I consciously adopted the conductor analogy, incorporating it into the design of the visual aid. I decided to make use of the conductive property of graphite to additionally trigger soundscapes, which meant that the visual aid for *Act II* needed to be a graphite drawing. For convenience, during the making process, I subdivided *Act II* into discreet scenes, each with visual, textual and sound component. I had already done this in *Act I*, but in *Act II*, I was more self-consciously conducting and decided to add a digital soundscape in place of the analogue soundscape produced by the scrolling in *Act I*, which seemed so effective in focusing the attention of the audience. While each of the digital soundscapes corresponded to a particular scene, once I had memorised the soundscapes, I was able to improvise with them, which I did more and more with each performance, thus introducing interpretative flourishes into soundscape.

The left hand is thus more spontaneous and, in a way, has more to do during a performance even though it is the subordinate hand. The left hand is primarily aimed at the audience and is the *audience's* point of reference. I discovered this directionality, the

fact that the right hand is primarily aimed at me and the left hand aimed at the audience, in the process of performing *Act I* and *Act II*. I realised that the division of roles for my hands was having different effects on me and the audience. I noticed that the left hand was the one the audience was paying more attention to, and, in hindsight, it makes sense, since the left hand is essentially “illustrating” while the right hand is “reading”. I had not foreseen the outcome of using my left and right hands in this way, but it is an insight I believe I could only have gained from the practice, though I recognise it is one solution to one problem of realising the performance and others might have come up with another. Nevertheless, I came to a deeper understanding of the role of the pointer, the stick, the baton, etc., often present in storytelling performances using visual aids as performing publications. The storyteller, rather than merely using it to point out visual elements pertinent to the story to the audience, such as in the *pardeh khani* or *etoki* (indeed, in most *cantastoria*) performances, likely also uses it as a means of keeping not only their place but also their pace in the story, especially when the storyteller is additionally conducting accompanying musicians such as the gamelan ensemble in *wayang beber* performances.

Continuing with the conductor analogy, in relation to speed in *Act I* and *Act II*, I noticed that my left hand also it is slightly behind my right hand. The right hand is not actually on time but slightly ahead of time. Like a conductor’s right hand, it anticipates not only the speed of my narration but also the timing. Only my narration is on time, trailing a little behind movement of my right hand, while the left hand trails behind both. Thus, like a conductor, in my performances I am slightly ahead of myself, anticipating what is to come in the story with the movements of my right hand, which reads the text thread (*Act I*) or ribbon text (*Act II*) slightly before I speak it. The pace of my movement along the text is predetermined by the twists and turns of the text thread or ribbon text, which meanders across the visual aids for *Act I* and *Act II* respectively. For example, a section of long undulating text sets a regular, rhythmic pace for my narration, while a twisted or looping text, where the text is written upside down, sideways or in reverse, will slow down my spoken delivery of it considerably.

In relation to movement, In *Act I* and *Act II*, the text also directs my movements across the visual aids since it is also an image. For instance, the change of direction of the text

thread or ribbon text forces my head and my body to turn and twist with the text and also to lean into the visual aid. The images strategically placed around the text encourage me to illustrate it, adding to the movement. As a result of my increased activity and animation around these portions of the text and image during the performance, there is an increased intensity to the performance in these areas – a different type of tension is established. It also calls for a different type of attention, which is elicited from both me and the audience by my movement across the texts and images in the visual aids. The right hand and the left hand together cover the “expansiveness” and “intensity” of the performances, related to Deleuze and Guattari’s definition of “movement” and “speed” respectively, the modulations of which are mapped onto the visual aids and are further amplified through performance – thus creating its momentum. Aside from the visual aids themselves, audiences in my performances tend to focus on the movement of my hands, as they are how I literally feel my way through the story map encoded in the visual aids and, thus, through the story. The movement of my hands and of my body, my gestures, is thus a focus of attention, which is significant since with my storytelling performances I am interested in not only telling but also showing the story and, as has Paul Ricoeur noted: ‘There is no story if our attention is not moved along’.⁴⁰⁰

I wanted to investigate this notion of continuous movement as a means of generating momentum further in *Act III*, and I wondered if it was possible to create a visual aid made from moveable parts that I could physically manipulate during the performance. However, since the visuals for *Act III* could not be static, I realised I would need to use both of my hands differently than in the previous acts. I could no longer simply point to the visual elements to illustrate the text but would need to handle them in some way, and through the manner of that handling, whatever it might be, achieve the same result. For *Act III*, I still wanted to conduct the performance, elaborating on the notion of conducting, including creating another soundscape to illustrate the text, as I had in *Act II*, only I wondered if it, too, could somehow be triggered by gestural movement rather than by touch. It was at this point that I looked into motion tracking technology and how it might be used to trigger soundscapes. I discovered that it was possible: I had found a technological solution that would enable me to foreground the momentum of the performance, but I first needed to incorporate movement into the visual aid itself.

⁴⁰⁰ Ricoeur, P. (1980), ‘Narrative Time’, *Critical Inquiry*, pp. 169-190, p. 174. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343181?seq=17#metadata_info_tab_contents (Accessed: 20 May 2022).

As with the previous acts, my approach to creating the visual aid for *Act III* was that of finding an appropriate container for the content. As before, the content was a series of cut-up poems, from which I needed to make a selection, and, initially, a series of papercut poems. Both numbered in the tens and were made in tandem over more than a year. Initially, I imagined I would be cutting the papercut poems while narrating the text for *Act III* – inspired by Hans Christian Andersen’s performance storytelling practice that uses papercuts as visual aids. Over the year or so, I had become adept at papercutting, developed a technique suitable for performance, and I found that it was possible to stage the papercutting performance as a theatrical event. Because I had intended to stage the papercut poems from the beginning, I developed a papercutting technique that is based on improvisation. I use scissors to cut into a folded sheet of plain white paper without a prior image in mind. I use a multi-fold paper cutting technique, including folding vertically, horizontally, diagonally and other improvised folds. I cut into the folded paper, unfold and refold the paper then cut into it again. I repeat this process until I feel the papercut is complete. The technique allows me to build up the image gradually and introduce variability that breaks the symmetry of the image which the multi-fold paper technique imposes. As with the other visual aids, my intention was to make a papercut visually intriguing, enough to suggest a “poetic” scene – hence papercut poetry.

For instance, in the papercut poem *What a Wonderful Moon* (2020) (Figure 66), I strategically use the radial multi-fold paper cutting technique to place symbols associated with the moon in orbit around it, e.g., sea salt in alchemy and magic, Artemis’ bow and Actaeon’s stag head from mythology, moths that navigate by moonlight, etc. I also wanted to evoke a timeless and spaceless atmosphere, and a sort of telescoping sense of scale: from a grain of salt to the enormity of the moon itself. The moon, and stars, in this papercut poem would eventually feature in the visual aid for *Act III*.

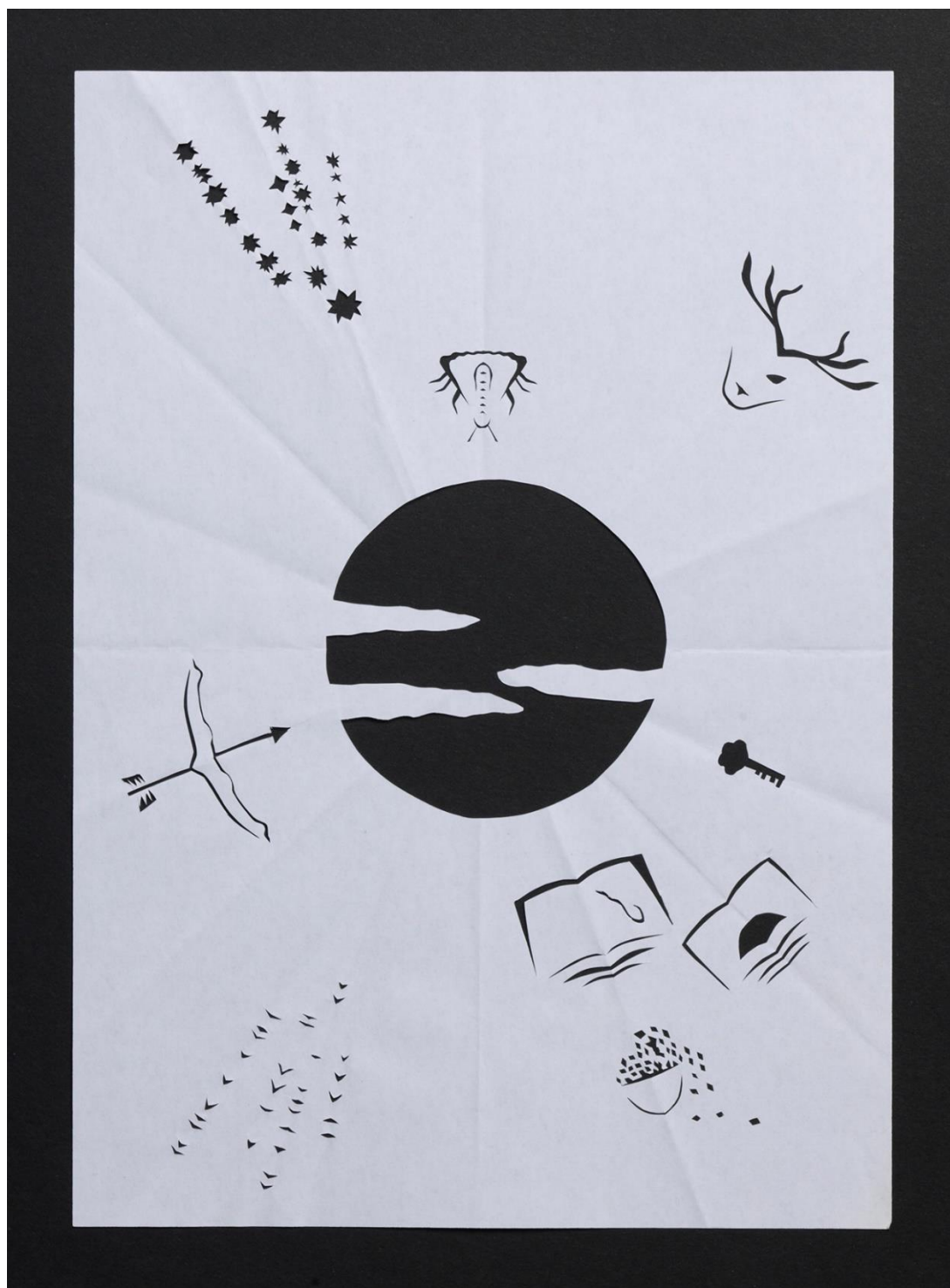


Figure 66 *What a Wonderful Moon* (2020) papercut poem. (Image: Jaka Babnik)

At the same time, alongside the papercut poems, I continued to make cut-up poetry. These two forms of poetic expression allowed me to investigate the same concept textually and visually. The idea behind making the papercuts in *Act III* was to write poems

with images, rather than illustrate the cut-up poems. This idea came the papercut poems, in which I was investigating the notion that certain concepts, difficult to capture in words, lend themselves to being captured in images. Often the concepts I was trying to encapsulate were vague or elusive, but it was a quality I wanted to preserve. Words can sometimes be too literal, images too concrete. So, when circling around a concept that I was unable to adequately articulate in my cut-up poems, I would take it up in papercut poem form, turn-taking between them until I felt I approached the concept more closely. Through this turn-taking process, I was able to create a repertoire of images and texts in preparation for *Act III*.

The *Night Magic* (2020) papercut poem (Figure 67), for instance, contains images of the moon, stars, snakes and window, which would be incorporated into the visual aid for *Act III* and *The Wheel of Fortune* (2020) papercut poem (Figure 68) features one of the first renderings of woman character from *A thread without end* in papercut poem form.

Levitating Priestess (2020) (Figure 69) features another rendering of the woman character in papercut poem form: in rendering the figure differently each time I was aiming to find the most economical and expressive papercut “shape” to represent the woman character. The *Garden of Lost Things* (2020) (Figure 70) and *Peacock Show at the Circus* (2020) (Figure 71) papercut poems, are explorations of possible scenic settings for *Act III*.

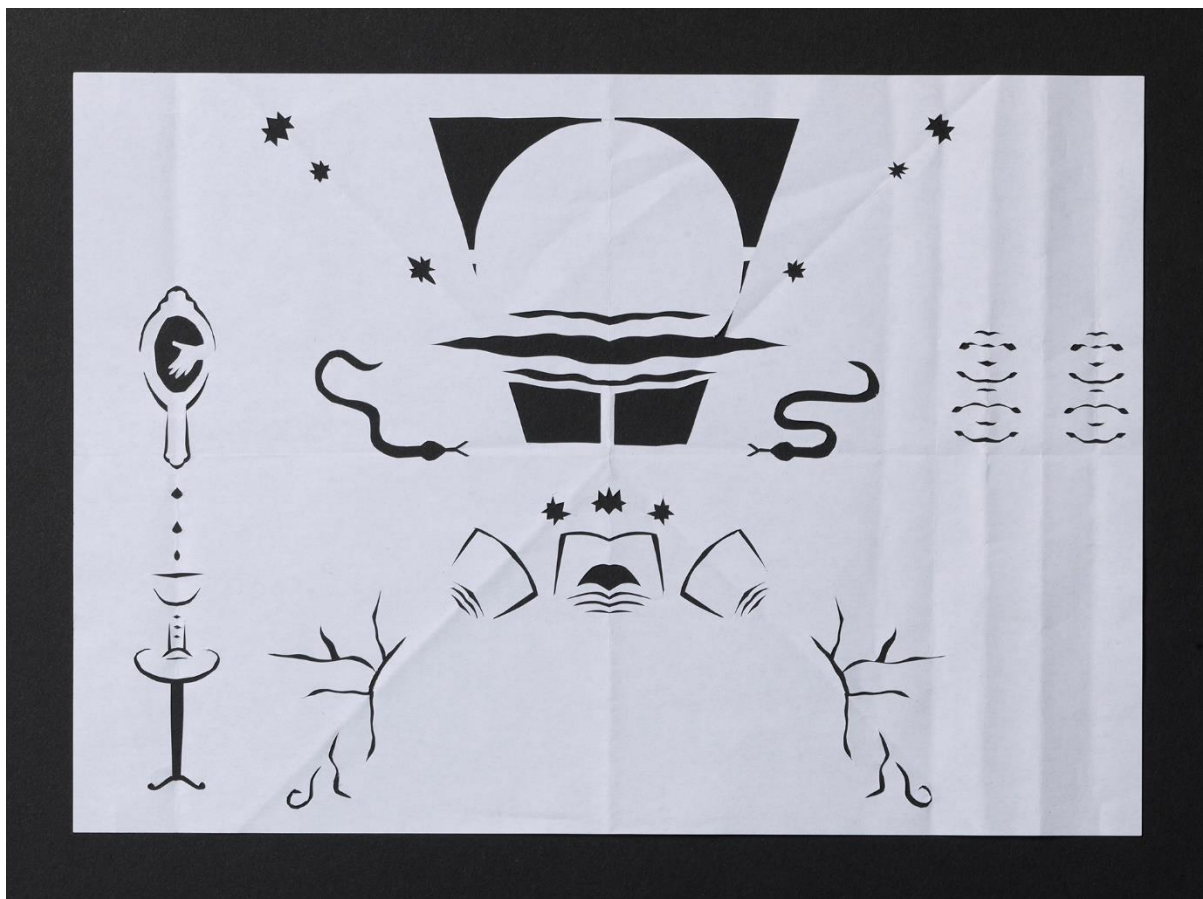


Figure 67 *Night Magic* (2020) papercut poem. (Image: Artist)



Figure 68 *The Wheel of Fortune* (2020) papercut poem. (Image: Jaka Babnik)

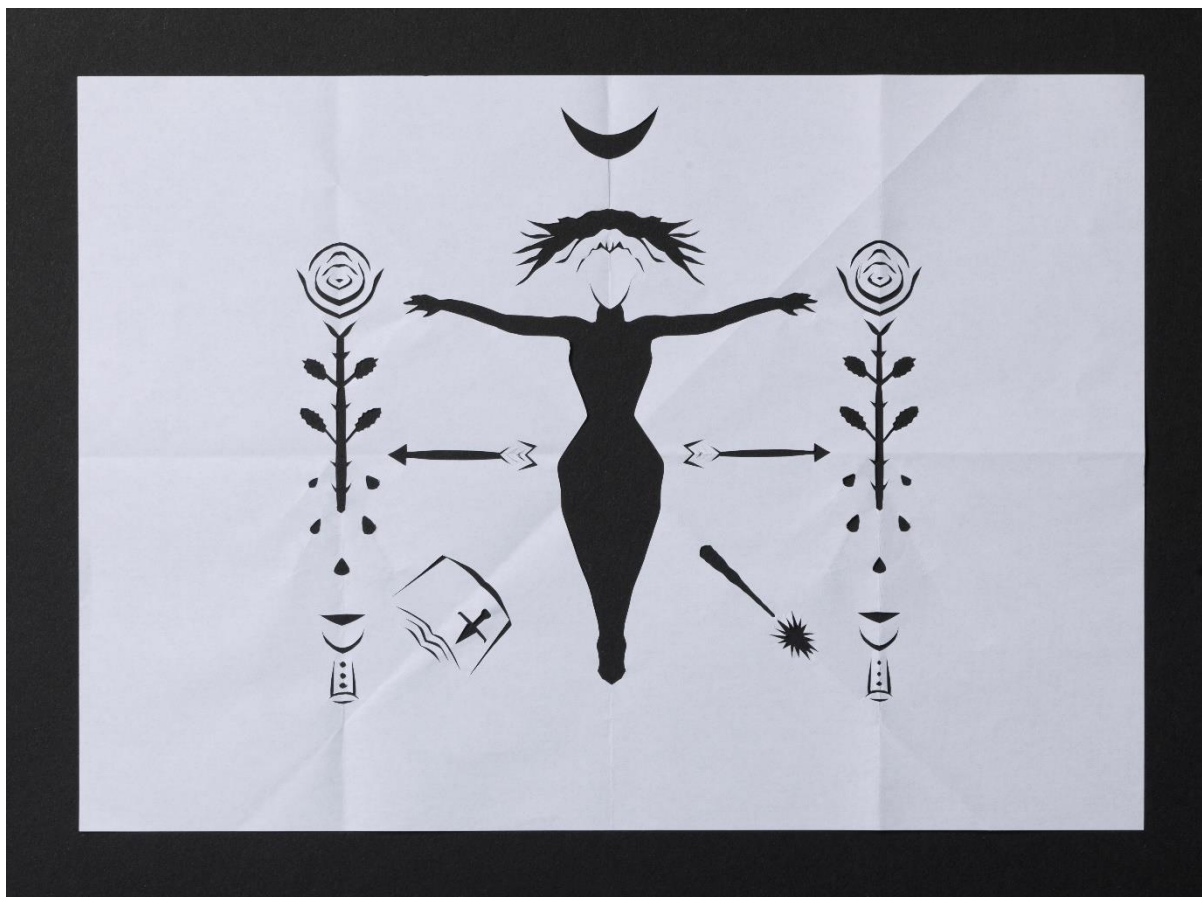


Figure 69 *Levitating Priestess* (2020) papercut poem. (Image: Jaka Babnik)

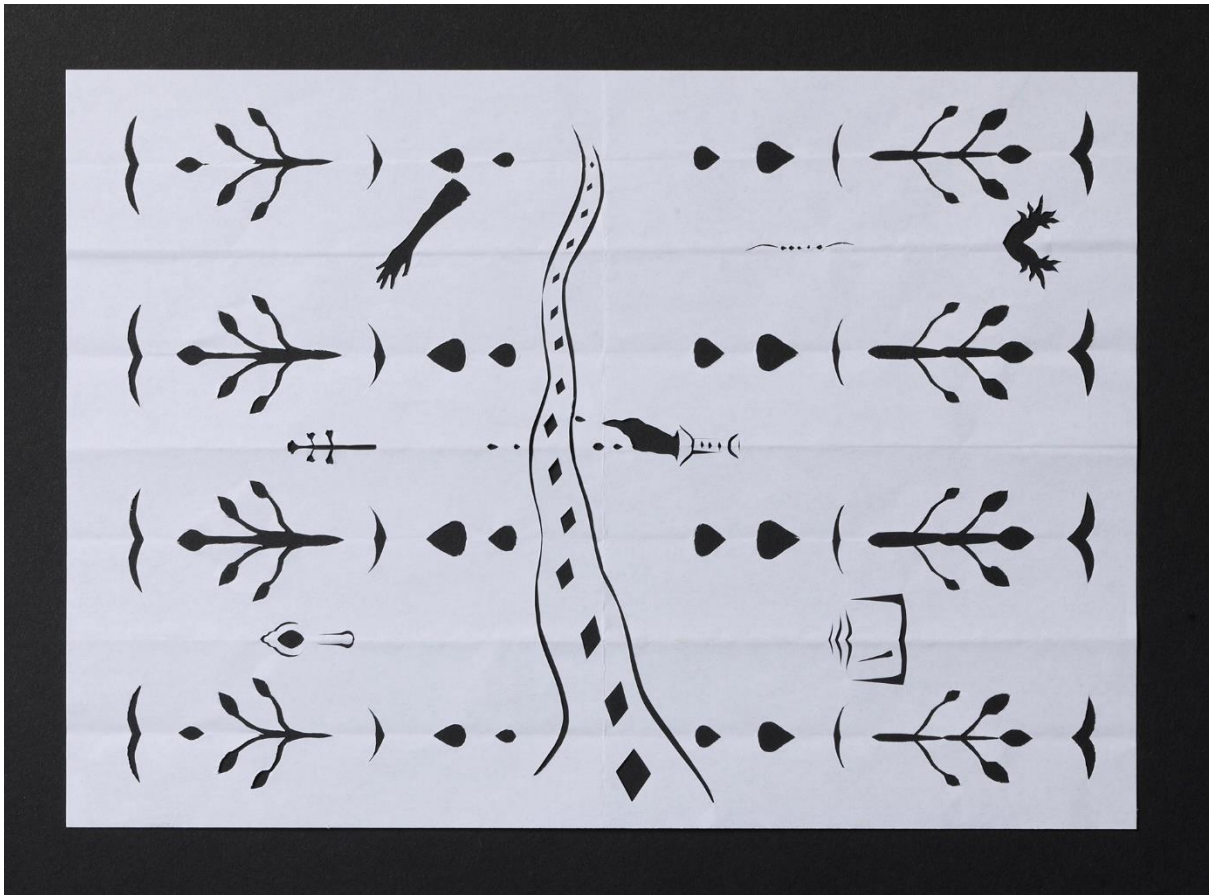


Figure 70 *Garden of Lost Things* (2020) papercut poem. (Image: Jaka Babnik)

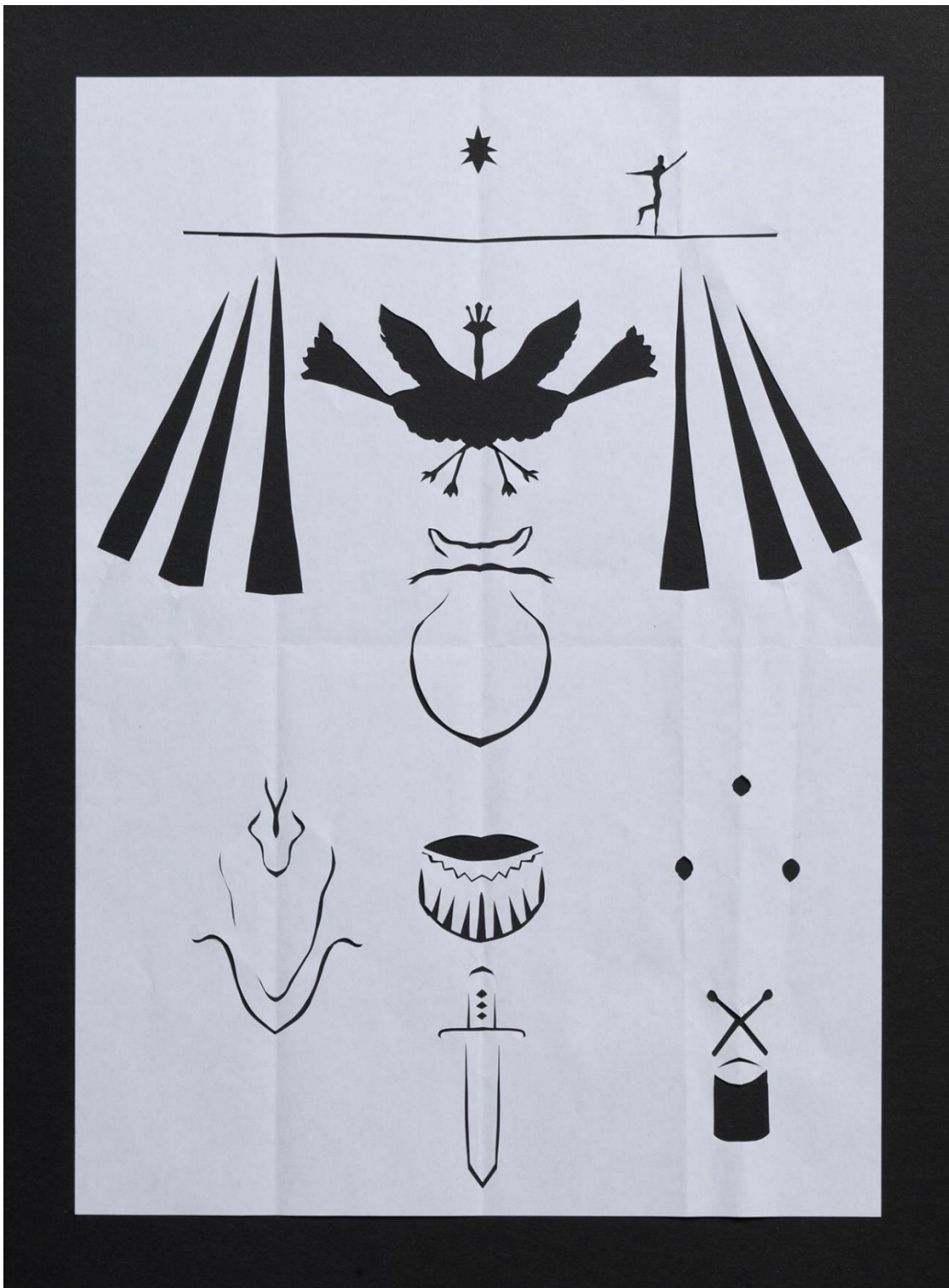


Figure 71 *Peacock Show at the Circus* (2020) papercut poem. (Image: Jaka Babnik)

Although the papercut poems were part of the preparation for *Act III*, I found I could not use them because they were too “static” for my purposes of investigating momentum. This was a crucial insight that emerged out of the process of making them: I realised I had

been making negative papercuts, but what I needed were positive papercuts. Negative papercuts (of which the papercut poems are examples) are fixed images, whereas positive papercuts are unfixed images. By way of illustrating this point, the three images below show how the same positive papercuts, in this case the sword and the hands, can be moved around and used in combination with others to produce different compositions.



Figure 72 *Witness* (2021), positive papercut. (Image: Artist)



Figure 73 *Fortune teller* (2021), positive papercut. (Image: Artist)



Figure 74 *Magic Show* (2021), positive papercut. (Image: Artist)

I discovered that positive papercuts are more suitable for the type of storytelling performance I wanted to stage for *Act III* – one that foregrounded momentum – because they are unfixed pieces that can be arranged into an infinite number of combinatory images. Because they are not fixed down in any way, I realised I would be able to

manipulate them to create the different scenes during a performance, which is when I came up with the idea to stage a papercut theatre.

I had found an appropriate container for the story content for *Act III*, and I set about making positive papercuts, eventually settling on a selection that prioritised their performability, by which I mean the papercut pieces needed to be economical: simple (“types”) but suggestive enough to be illustrative when combined into different configurations. In other words, they need to be multi-functional images for the combinatorial process of composition I had developed – the constant arrangement and rearrangement of the papercut pieces – to “work” and for the papercuts to function a visual aid in a storytelling performance.



Figure 75 A selection of the papercut pieces used for the visual aid for *Act III*. (Image: Artist)

The simplest of the papercuts, for instance, the lines (bottom left and centre) and the diamond shapes (centre) in the above image (Figure 75) are the most combinatory. They are the most figuratively and literally “unfixed” images, both the most suggestive and most amenable to being reconfigured into different arrangements and images. In contrast, the more recognisable and more “fixed” images, for instance, the snake, fan, hand pointer, arrow, heart, dagger and flower (centre right) in the same image, although suggestive in a different way, are used more literally to “tie” the images to the text in *Act III*. For instance, the snake in the same papercut image relates to the “snake charmer” mentioned in the text for Scene VIII, *Act III* in which the papercut appears (see Figure 76).



Figure 76 Scene VIII, *Act III* in which the snake papercut appears. It is held by the fox character who is the “snake charmer” mentioned in the text of the same scene. (Image: Artist)

Since I have already described the processes behind the realisation of the visual aid for *Act III* and storytelling performance itself, I would like to return, for a moment, to the notion of momentum and to the effect it had on audiences. Although, initially, I hadn’t perceived the significance of movement and speed in my performances, audiences had. They

invariably single out the significance of momentum in the performances, albeit describing it in terms of the effect it produces. For instance, I have observed that, during the performances, audiences seem to be in a receptive or contemplative state and that, immediately after the performances, need some time to return to, for lack of a better term, reality. Audiences have often described the *A thread without end* performances as “rituals”, as “spells” or “as though a spell has been cast” and have described them in such a way that I surmised they were somehow transportive or, in Schechner’s terminology, as “transportations”. Pernarčič, put it in more technical terms in her review employing an analogy of being taken on an entertaining airplane ride with a very attentive flight attendant, but the general sentiment is that audiences feel as though they have been guided through or taken on an imaginative voyage, like being taken on a magic carpet ride. This, I suspect, has to do with the momentum of the performances, which is facilitated by the visual aids themselves, especially in *Act III*, which Pernarčič must have detected for she describes the performance airplane journey:

Specifically, in *Act III* this presence is materialised in the image of a kind of “stewardess”: inconspicuously, but attentively, she waits for us in just enough associative, but not excessively explicit clothes, and, standing at her desk with a characteristically dignified attitude from take-off to landing, she leads in a completely collected manner the performative-narrative flight through the story in a completely collected manner about the origin of the world. Just like any seasoned flight attendant, she knows her protocol and has all the necessary tools carefully prepared: figurative and more abstract pieces cut out of paper, a computer, printed diagrams and text. So that even those at the tail of the plane could hear her, she is equipped with a headset microphone. Instead of plasticised cards with more instructions usually found in the pocket of the seat in front of you, this aircraft has a large video projection on her left. Anyone who has ever flown knows the procedure in principle, but the flight attendant knows something more: that the procedure must be carried out, each time again with the same presence, as if we were all on the plane for the first time. And yet she leaves something out? Already within the first five minutes of the flight, you realise that you missed when and where she pointed to the three emergency exits with a recognisable gesture of outstretched index and middle fingers. In reality, she did not really show them. This aircraft does

not have and does not need emergency exits. But it has much more accessible entrances: into the representational worlds to which the stewardess not only points, but creates herself.⁴⁰¹

Schechner, writing in relation to traditional Ramlila performances, divides the “texts” of performance into categories: ‘literary, dramatic, choreographic, ritual, religious, popular, musical, spatial, and temporal.’⁴⁰² He describes how, through the combination of the choreographic, spatial and temporal texts, Ramlila performances are ‘not a theatre of make believe but of hyperreality,’⁴⁰³ in which an imaginative reality is layered over ordinary reality. These three elements in combination alter and manipulate how space and time is perceived by the audience during the performance as well as directing their movement through it. Everything, including how the audience enters into, moves through and exits out of the performance is choreographed. These are “transportations” into hyperreal “representational worlds” as Pernarčič notes of *Act III* and they are facilitated by movement and by the momentum generated by that movement that sweeps the audience along for the duration of the ride. The aim of Ramlila performances, like my performances, is to dissolve the boundaries between the imaginary and the real, and the visual aids in *A thread without end*, acting as interfaces between the imaginary reality and ordinary reality, similarly facilitate this process of transportation for all involved. In Ramlila performances, the transportation is facilitated by literal movement from one theatrical setting to another which ‘gives specific performative actuality to this complex narrative structure.’⁴⁰⁴ In the *A thread without end* performances, the audiences are not physically but imaginatively moved from one theatrical setting to another through the story map as plotted in the visual aids themselves. The visual aids, through being activated and, thus, transformed into performing publications, introduce a hyperreality into the theatrical setting where they are performed.

The nature of the manipulation of time and space produced by the *A thread without end* performances is hinted at by Pernarčič when she imaginatively sets her review of *Act III* on an airplane – a spatiotemporal situation that is somehow separate from ordinary time and space. The visual aids, in a sense, stage this separate, theatrical, time and space. On

⁴⁰¹ Pernarčič, R. (2021) ‘Nit brez začetka’ [A Thread Without Beginning], *Neodvisini*. Available at: <https://www.neodvisni.art/refleksija/2021/08/nit-brez-zacetka/> (Accessed: 3 May 2022). [My translation from the original Slovenian.]

⁴⁰² Schechner, R. (1993) *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*, p. 133.

⁴⁰³ Ibid. p. 133.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 136.

the stage that is a visual aid, time plays a role and its timelines are plotted in the text thread (*Act I*) and the ribbon text (*Act II*) for each sets not only the speed of the performance but also its duration. In the visual aids for *Act I* and *Act II*, time, like the text and the images, is spatialised in the image of a map, the story map, which is looked at from above, as though from an arial perspective. In the visual aid for *Act III*, time courses through the spatialised story map and registers as momentum. Using the visual aids as performing publications, that is to say, to simultaneously stage storytelling performances as theatrical events is one means of actualising Rabey's notion that 'Theatre is one means, using motion in space, by which we create and present images, and unusual effects, of time.'⁴⁰⁵

Using performing publications to stage performance storytelling events as acts of publishing is a further manipulation of space and time for, as Ricoeur notes, storytelling also stages 'external public time, or we might say, the time of the public,'⁴⁰⁶ i.e., the performance storytelling event shared with the public. Through performance storytelling, not only the story but also time is published, becoming 'the time of the public.'⁴⁰⁷ After Ricoeur, I would suggest that this public is not anonymous, meaning any and all possible publics in space and time, for the performance storytelling event involves a specific public at a specific time and in specific a space – the space and time of the theatrical event. The type of publishing that is staged by performance storytelling thus creates a public that is very different from a public created by traditional publishing, which is anonymous, in the sense that a publication may be read by anyone at any time and in any space.

⁴⁰⁵ Rabey, D. I. (2016) *Theatre, Time and Temporality: Melting Clocks and Snapped Elastics*, p. 175.

⁴⁰⁶ Ricoeur's notion of "public time" is first and foremost related to narrative. According to Ricoeur, 'the time of a narrative is public time'. He then applies the notion to storytelling, writing: 'Moreover, the art of storytelling retains this public character of time while keeping it from falling into anonymity.' Ricoeur then develops the way that storytelling in some sense stages "internal public time" in the story itself (on the page, in my terminology) and "external public time" in the performance of the story (on the stage, in my terminology).

Ricoeur, P. (1980), 'Narrative Time', *Critical Inquiry*, pp. 169-190, p. 176. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343181?seq=17#metadata_info_tab_contents (Accessed: 20 May 2022).

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 176.

Through her airplane journey analogy, Pernarčič also suspends the *Act III* performance in an alternate spatiotemporal realm that creates the impression of ‘timelessness’.⁴⁰⁸ This effect, I suspect, is produced by the fact that my performances are, in Schechner’s terminology, transportation performances. According to Schechner, in a transportation performance, ‘The performer goes from the “ordinary world” to the “performative world,” from one time/space reference to another, from one personality reference to one or more others.’⁴⁰⁹ This is an accurate description of my approach to performing *A thread without end*, but, again, I am facilitated in this process by the visual aids, which are themselves transportive when they are performed – not only for me but also for the audience. The practice-led insight here, which relates to publishing, is that transportation performances, such as those in *A thread without end*, exist in the eternal present and are, thus, temporary. Although any live performance may be said to exist in the eternal present, the fact that performers and audiences in transportations are additionally returned to the beginning at the end, differentiates them from others. Thus, the visual aids, turned performing publications when staged as theatrical events, are similarly only published in the eternal present of the transportation performance – a very temporary form of publishing.

In terms of the ‘story time’⁴¹⁰ of *A thread without end*, it is set in an eternal present, in which the past and the future exist alongside the real and fictional present of the performance as a fabric from which stories about why things are the way they are can be pulled out, like a thread. In *Act II*, I had made a “prologue” to the visual aid consisting of two paper tiles that encapsulates the timelessness in which the story is set. It has never been incorporated into the actual visual aid for *Act II* because, by the time I had made it, I realised that I had set the “temporal scene”, as it were, already. In the end, the prologue was a performance for myself alone. The text for the prologue, which is rendered as ribbon text, reads:

Act II, Prologue

⁴⁰⁸ In her review Pernarčič writes: ‘Ana Čavić’s creations exude a certain timelessness.’ Pernarčič, R. (2021) ‘Nit brez začetka’ [A Thread Without Beginning], *Neodvisini*. Available at: <https://www.neodvisni.art/refleksija/2021/08/nit-brez-zacetka/> (Accessed: 3 May 2022). [My translation from the original Slovenian.]

⁴⁰⁹ Schechner, R. (1987) ‘Performers and Spectators Transported and Transformed’, p. 91.

⁴¹⁰ In narratology, story time is defined as: ‘The period of time in which the narration occurs’, as opposed to the time of narrating or the time taken to narrate the story. Prince, G. (1987) *Dictionary of Narratology*, p. 94.

The time before the last time he was with me,

he bit me.

It was before deep sleeping time,

before the weeping stars were watching over us

before there even was a was.



Figure 77 *Act II, Prologue.* (Image: Artist)

My aim with the visual aids is to stage the primordial time or dream time in which the *A thread without end* story is set. Dream time, it seemed to me, was the type of time I was describing in the poetry for the piece, and I use it because dream blurs past experiences with future experience into an amorphous, porous present. It relates to the notion the performing publications stage acts of publishing in the present – in the presentness, the liveness, of theatrical time. And, in a real sense, performing publications only exist as

publications in the perpetual present of their publishing, and only for the duration of the act of publishing itself.

By coincidence, but then again perhaps not, Schechner uses the analogy of a printing press when describing the difference between a transportation and transformation performance. He writes:

When the performance is over the transported have been returned to their place of entry and the transformed have been changed. The system is analogous to a printing press, where information is imprinted upon a piece of paper as it is fed through. The performance—and the training leading up to it—are points of contact between the “press” (transported) and the “paper” (transformed).⁴¹¹

To borrow Schechner’s printing press analogy, my storytelling performances are perpetually in the “press” mode of performance *and* publishing; they do not produce imprints on paper, neither literally nor figuratively (in Schechner’s sense when employing the analogy). As a result, they do not transform the performer or the audience, but merely transport them into the temporary realm of publishing. It is in this sense that *A thread without end* is an attempt at publishing the unpublishable, meaning that which cannot be published other than under the specific conditions produced by a particular theatrical event, a transportation. After this temporary form of performance publishing, all involved are “returned to their place of entry”, to the beginning, and the publishing event evaporates into thin air, leaving no permanent imprint upon the audience. In contrast, in transformation performances there is a ‘decisive contact between the transported and the transformed.’⁴¹² What Schechner means here is that performers who enact the transformation performances do not undergo a transformation themselves, instead they are “the transported”, whereas “the transformed” are the audience who do undergo a transformation as a result of the “decisive contact”, which leaves them with a permanent imprint: ‘What the transported imprint upon the transformed at that point of contact is there to stay’.⁴¹³ In other words, it is permanent. In rites of passage or ritual performance, for example, Schechner lists different types of permanent impressions as a result of the contact, including ‘scarring, tattooing, and so on; the giving of special clothes, ornaments, and artifacts, such as wedding bands’,⁴¹⁴ and so on. In contrast, in transportation

⁴¹¹ Schechner, R. (1981) ‘Performers and Spectators Transported and Transformed, *The Kenyon Review*, p. 95. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/4335238 (Accessed: 15 May 2021).

⁴¹² Ibid. p. 95.

⁴¹³ Ibid. p. 95.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid. p. 95.

performances any change or transformation is temporary and is usually only preserved in the memory of the audience. In that sense, in *A thread without end* the “information is imprinted” only upon the memories of the audience members.

The main effect of transportation performance is not to affect a lasting change, but to temporarily transport the audience to a “performative world” from which impermanent or immaterial pieces may be brought back to the “ordinary world” after the fact, but usually only in the form of memories. While a performance may succeed in making an impression upon the memory of the audience that outlast the event itself, this is not the main aim of transportation performances. On the contrary, they are meant to be transportive and temporary; they and their effects are real but, ultimately, temporary. They resist the permanence of publishing but, nevertheless, they persist in publishing what I have termed the unpublishable. The publishing is real, but its imprint on reality is impermanent; it is and utterly ephemeral from of publishing as performance.

Pernarčič also hints at the mechanism of how the feat of transportation and the effect of “timelessness” is accomplished through her reference to “accessible entrances”, in place of exits, which is a constitutive part of transportations as Schechner has noted. I am careful to ensure that, due to their fragmentary and episodic nature, the *A thread without end* performances are staged in a theatrical manner that is a compelling and immersive experience for the audience. It is not enough to simply invite the audience into an imaginative time and space; I must persuade them to enter it by, first, arousing their interest and, second, sustaining it. The visual aids are a means of arousing the audiences’ interest by focusing their attention by, specifically, visual means. As obvious as that sounds, *A thread without end* is an investigation into the nature of images and the related notion that certain qualities of attention are uniquely the property of visual language, indeed, of visual narrative.

One of the ways I use visual means to attract, and reattract, the audience’s attention in the visual aid itself is through repetition of images. With my use of repeat images of the woman and fox characters already in *Act I*, which I replicated in *Act II*, I had resorted to using a visual device typically found in visual aids used performance storytelling traditions, such as *pardeh khani*. I had observed it from very early on in my research but only later

identified it as “continuous pictorial narrative”.⁴¹⁵ This device is understood by scholars of visual narrative as the repeat appearance of the same principal character/s in a single visual rendering of a story, a single picture. While I hadn’t consciously set out to use this device, but rather arrived at it intuitively, the way it manifested in my visual aids produced some insights that might be useful in the analysis of other visual aids that feature the continuous pictorial narrative mode.

For instance, continuous pictorial narrative is a device that visually strings together separate episodes in a story. One of my practice-led insights is that it is, thus, an indication that a story was composed episodically, as mine were in *A thread without end*. Knowing this, in turn, can help analysts make sense of the initially confusing visual appearance of visual aids in which viewers are confronted with multiple instances of the same characters performing different actions in different settings and at different times in a single picture. Vidya Dehejia articulates the challenges viewers are faced with when confronted continuous pictorial narrative:

Each episode consists of more than one scene, and in each scene the figure of the protagonist is repeated. There are, however, no framing devices to demarcate one scene from another, or one episode from the next, and the story flows ‘continuously’ across the available space. To decipher the presentation, we must be aware that the repetition of the figure of the protagonist indicates that we are seeing him in different spaces at successive moments of time.⁴¹⁶

When viewing the entire unfurled scroll in *Act I* viewers are similarly confronted with a picture of a continuous pictorial narrative, but it is only when viewing the visual aid one scene at a time that the story, the visual narrative, can be understood as a series of episodes that have been rendered visually in the continuous pictorial narrative mode. In *Act II*, I used this insight to display the visual aid, once again a continuous pictorial narrative, before the audience in full for the first time. By *Act II*, I was confident that my performance of the visual aid one scene at a time would aid the audience to make sense of what they were seeing: a series of episodes that were visually strung together, scene by scene, into a story presented in the continuous pictorial narrative mode.

⁴¹⁵ In fact, the presence of continuous pictorial narrative was one of the primary clues for me that a picture was likely used as a visual aid in a storytelling performance, even though, in the early stages of my research, I was not familiar with the term.

⁴¹⁶ Dehejia, V. (1990) ‘On Modes of Visual Narration in Early Buddhist Art’, in *The Art Bulletin*, September 1990, Volume LXXII, Number 3. New York: College Art Association, pp. 374-392, pp. 374-375.

Another practice-led insight, which emerged by *Act III*, is that continuous pictorial narrative can manifest in different modes and that these modes, in turn, affect the way the audience “strings the story together” for themselves. Dehejia argues that how a story (the content) is presented in one or another of the visual narrative modes (the form) affects how the audience is able to piece the story together. This, in turn, creates an affect: ‘The relation between content and form is, in sum, the *affect*, leading to a consideration of reception and response’.⁴¹⁷

For instance, the visual aids for *Act I* and *Act II*, are examples of what Dehejia terms ‘synoptic narrative’⁴¹⁸, which is a subcategory of continuous pictorial narrative. Synoptic narrative is usually encountered outside of a performance storytelling context, either because it has been severed from it or because it is a visual reinterpretation of a story that once originated in a performance storytelling tradition. What is interesting about synoptic narrative is that it usually features a striking visual element that captures the viewer’s attention as a means of guiding the viewer through the story. Since the viewer is left to string the story together without the storyteller as a guide, this element provides the viewer with a way into the story in which different episodes are presented and, thus, perceived simultaneously by the viewer. The graphite lake in the visual aid for *Act II*, serves a similar purpose, for, although I do guide the audience through the story, I rely on it to hold their attention throughout the storytelling performance, also by repeatedly touching it when triggering the soundscapes. It functions as a touchstone, a way of resetting the audience’s attention and mine. Another way to think about affect is, thus, the elicitation of different types of attention from the audience, which, in turn produces certain effects, such as, providing a way in or a way through the story. As to the affect synoptic narrative produces, Dehejia writes, ‘It is the telling of the story, or stimulating the viewer into telling himself the story, that is the significant experience.’⁴¹⁹ In other words, synoptic narrative functions as a prompt to storytelling. This, perhaps the most crucial insight for me as it pertains to my practice, is something I initially gleaned through practice, which I

⁴¹⁷ Ibid. p. 376.

⁴¹⁸ ‘In the synoptic mode of narration, multiple episodes from a story are depicted within a single frame, but their temporal sequence is not communicated, and there is no consistent or formal order of representation with regard to either causality or temporality. The multiple episodes of a story generally contain the repeated figure of the protagonist’.

Ibid. p. 382.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid. p. 384.

was subsequently able to align with theory. In *Act I* and *Act II*, this is particular function of synoptic narrative applies to me as much as the audience.

Dehejia points out another interesting feature of synoptic narrative that is in evidence in the visual aid for *Act I* and, especially, for *Act II*:

The manner in which one approaches synoptic visual narrative is almost the reverse of the way one hears or reads a story. Rather than putting elements together to make a whole, a whole is given and has to be taken apart in order to be intelligible.⁴²⁰

Dehejia's observation articulates my approach to guiding the audience, scene by scene, through the visual aids for *Act I* and *Act II*, described earlier. But rather than seeing it as a feature of synoptic narrative, I would suggest it is a feature of the original performance of creating the visual aid, which has been visually rendered as synoptic narrative so that it can then be performed before an audience. Thus, what my practice-led investigation revealed here is that continuous pictorial narrative, including the different subcategories of it such as synoptic narrative, is probably a remnant of performance storytelling traditions that use visual aids. This interpretation accounts for the different features of visual aids that at first sight appear to present obstacles to storytelling but are revealed to be features that enable it, once they are resituated in their performance storytelling contexts.

Dehejia describes another feature of synoptic narrative, which I observed when performing *Act I* and *Act II*:

In addition, the viewer is obliged to enter into a much more active relationship with the content of a story. He is obliged to become a more or less active participant; the viewer is compelled to be the storyteller too.⁴²¹ (p. 384)

In my storytelling performances, this applies to me as much as it does to the audience. Earlier, I described my storytelling performances as a co-production between myself and the visual aid, turned performing publication during its staging, and the way that the performing publication is, in some sense, agentic in that process. Dehejia attributes this to the synoptic narrative mode itself, arguing that this particular visual rendering of a story compels the viewer to "enter into a much more active relationship with the content of a story". This is certainly something I have observed of myself and of the audience,

⁴²⁰ Ibid. p. 383.

⁴²¹ Ibid. p. 384.

especially in *Act I*, which is the most participatory of the performances. I described earlier how in the *A thread without end* performances, the audience and I are engaged in a process of “looking for something”, for the story to emerge, through multiple mutual acts of looking, and synoptic narrative facilitates that process.

In *Act III*, I used two different modes of continuous pictorial narrative simultaneously, “conflated narrative” and “continuous narrative”, for two different reasons. As with *Act I* and *Act II*, I intuitively came upon these modes through the practice and only later identified them through analysis and Dehejia’s research. Conflated narrative mode shares many features with the synoptic mode, ‘However, while multiple episodes of a story or multiple scenes of an episode are presented, the figure of the protagonist is conflated instead of being repeated from one scene to the next’.⁴²² This mode enabled me to centrally situate the two characters, the woman and the fox, in the papercut theatre, which is one of the main features of conflated narrative in which the protagonists are represented as participating in multiple scenes or episodes that surround them. In conflated narrative, there is a conflation of more than one episode of a story, where the protagonists are intended to be read as participating in all the episodes, so that the episodes revolve around the central conflated figures of the protagonist. And this is precisely what occurs in *Act III*. On the other hand, my use of continuous narrative suited the piece by piece building up of the scenes in one continuous motion. Continuous narrative is particularly suited to visual narratives that emphasise movement in space and time. Since *Act III* was designed to investigate momentum, this mode emerged out the practice spontaneously. According to Dehejia, in continuous narrative:

‘Consecutive time frames are presented withing a single visual field, without any dividers to distinguish one time frame from the next; however, temporal succession and spatial movement are generally clearly indicated. The comprehension of continuous narrative requires awareness that more than one moment of time is presented withing a single visual frame’.⁴²³

As well as emphasising momentum, Dehejia indicates that continuous narrative is particularly suited to the gradual unfolding of a story, which was one of my aims with *Act*

⁴²² Ibid. p. 384.

⁴²³ Ibid. p. 385.

III. This is because, with continuous narrative, there is generally more attention paid to the spatial arrangement, in terms of folds, twists and rests in the story, which can be spatialised and incorporated into the structure and shape of the object on which the visual narrative is rendered. Since the visual aid for *Act III* consists of moveable papercut parts, the precise placement and timing of which is used to compose different scenes in succession, continuous narrative emerged as the most suitable mode of visual narrative for this particular presentation of a story. It enabled me to reinforce the structure of the story through the very material realisation of the visual narrative.

A thread without end reveals how continuous pictorial narrative functions in my practice. First and foremost, it functions as a prompt to storytelling that relies on visual means to, second, elicit different types of attention from me and the audience, in order to, third, enable the telling of the story through showing it as a visual narrative. Even though I initially did not set out to recreate this device, but rather to investigate how visual language can be used in visual narrative to produce different types of attention and stimulate different effects and affects, I think it is telling that I intuitively stumbled onto these particular modes of continuous pictorial narrative. I also think it is telling that these modes repeatedly turn up visual aids in other performance storytelling practices.

My performances investigate whether it is possible to actualise not only “writing with images” but also “thinking with images”, through performance, which is informed by the notion that images are not only instruments of recognition but also of cognition, which manifests as forms of attention. By instruments of cognition, I mean the notion that, when audiences encounter unfamiliar images or encounter images in unfamiliar configurations or situations such as in storytelling performances using visual aids, they are encouraged to think around, through and with them in order to make sense of them. This process, in turn, encourages attentive looking, similar to “looking for something”, the “something to come” of which Chotzko and Berger write. In his lecture, ‘Seven Ways of Thinking About Images’, James Elkins asks: ‘What is not an image?’⁴²⁴ He provides an intriguing answer: ‘Well, nothing is not an image if the visual is conceived as a quality or form of attention, rather than as a set of formally specifiable properties.’⁴²⁵ In other words, if the image is defined as a form of attention, then nothing is not an image. This is very much my approach to the visual aids in *A thread without end*; they were created with and they, in

⁴²⁴ Elkins, J. (2018) *Seven Ways of Thinking About Images (lecture)*. 26 February. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J40B-FUFKtM&t=66s> (Accessed: 20 May 2022).

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

turn, create different levels and types of attention. Thus, when they are staged, as performing publications, they invite the audience to engage in these different levels and types of attention also.

Attention, and attentive looking, I suspect relates directly to the audience's ability memorise aspects of the performance beyond the moment of its staging and publishing. While my visual aids are performance-enabling mnemonic devices for me, for the audience they are a way of memorising the performance itself. For instance, I was impressed by Pernarčič's reconstruction of the *Act III* performance, after having seen it once, by way of an illustrative image that accompanied her review.⁴²⁶ The image (Figure 78) faithfully captures several visual components of the papercut theatre (e.g., moon, stars, ladder, island, fox) – even capturing some of its atmosphere. She accurately interpreted and reconstructed the papercut island (rendered as moss in her image), which featured prominently in the papercut theatre, and the fact that *Act III* presented a night-time scene, which she replicated through her placement of the moon and stars against an expanse of sky (rendered as stone in her image).

⁴²⁶ Pernarčič, R. (2021) 'Nit brez začetka' [A Thread Without Beginning], *Neodvisni*. Available at: <https://www.neodvisni.art/refleksija/2021/08/nit-brez-zacetka/> (Accessed: 3 May 2022). [My translation from the original Slovenian.]



Figure 78 Radharani Pernarčič's illustration for *A thread without end, Act III* in her review 'A thread without a beginning', 25 August 2021, Neodvisni. (Image: Radharani Pernarčič)



Figure 79 A scene from *A thread without end, Act III* papercut theatre that shows papercuts of the moon, stars, ladder, island and fox that Radharani Pernarčič recreated in her illustration.

However, I am also aware that most of the audience will be much less attentive than a reviewer during the storytelling performances. Some may be inattentive, even uninterested. My approach to the issue capturing the audience's attention, which is part and parcel of all performance, is to provide many different entry points – a variety of visual, verbal, sonic and haptic cues – that the audience can access in order to enter into the performance – if they are so inclined. These cues – the “accessible entrances” mentioned by Pernarčič – are embedded in the visual aids and are amplified by the performance. My approach to performance is that the audience's attention and participation is not a given but instead must be earned, moment to moment. Beyond that, however, whether audiences pay attention and participate is left entirely up to them. I agree

with Ford Davies' observation that participation is itself a relative term, for at any given theatrical performance 'Audiences are taking in more than we, or they, are aware of.'⁴²⁷ In practice, I have found that the attention and participation of audiences is often – more or less – partial.

The *A thread without end* performances are designed to split the audience's attention, in the first instance between the visual and verbal elements, and then between all the different elements and modalities that are introduced into the performances. I discovered that in dividing the audience's attention between all these different elements I could engage them in different levels and types of attention, and somewhat steer the levels of their attentiveness during the performance. I suspect that the fluctuation in the levels of attention has something to do with loosening and tightening the tension between these elements. As for the types of attention, they are split between different sense perceptions and modalities – visual, auditory, haptic – entailed in the performances – but the visual is centre stage so to speak.

With every storytelling performance, I endeavour to create a certain mythopoetic space that takes hold for the duration of the performance and aim to do so consistently across the acts. The visual aids are indispensable in this process because they enable me to give "performative actuality" to the story, not only because the instructions for how to perform it are encoded in the dynamic set up by text and image elements but also because the dynamic – the movement, which generates momentum – itself produces a layer of imaginative reality in and of itself through manipulating the perception of time and space during the storytelling performance *because* it is staged as a theatrical event.

Performing publications, mine included, are not only theatrical because they are staged as theatrical events, meaning they manifest at a specific time and in a specific space, but also because they embody temporality and spatiality in and of themselves, containing and conditioning the spatiotemporal aspects of their performance. As Schechner wrote of the texts of Ramlila performances, my visual aids similarly combine 'spatial and temporal texts' that, through their staging become a combined 'choreographic' text that creates an alternate spatiotemporal reality, a 'hyperreality', that is layered over the real space and time of the theatrical event.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁷ Ford Davies, O. (2007) *Performing Shakespeare*, p. 159.

⁴²⁸ Schechner, R. (1993) *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*, p. 133.

While the choreographic text is enacted only by me in *Act II* and *Act III*, in *Act I*, it is enacted together with the audience through their participation in the scrolling. The choreographic text, in *Act I*, further alters and manipulate how space and time is perceived by all participating because, during the performance, everything, including how we enter into, move through, and exit out of the performance, is enacted by everyone.

In *Act I*, unlike the other acts, the speed of my narration, the movement of my body, the duration and even the momentum of the storytelling performance is also manipulated by the audience through their scrolling – a feature that introduces another variable into the performance and produces an effect I had not anticipated: synchronisation. In handling the paper scroll and touching it in our respective ways, the audience and I invariably synchronise our movements. By following the subtle sonic cues, generated by the audience's scrolling and my tracing along the line of text, we use sound to synchronise our respective movements and together regulate the momentum of the performance. As I alternate between vocalising the text and pointing out the images, a rhythmic, rhyming pattern emerges, reinforcing the synchronisation further. Thus, moving in tandem, we negotiate the shifts in the speed, movement and momentum of the storytelling performance together.

My research indicates that performance publishing manipulates the space and time of publishing, however, this pointed practice-led investigation into spatiotemporal properties of publishing when it is staged as a theatrical event additionally revealed some unanticipated insights. In *Act I*, for instance, the specific spatiotemporal effect, synchronisation, is unrealisable other than through a participatory performance in which the audience literally has a hand in setting the pace at which the storytelling performance will unfold and, thus, be published. At the core of it, however, is the visual aid itself – hence the significance of performing publications, as opposed to other types of publications, in acts of publishing staged as theatrical events.

What my performing publications encode is an entire system of performance, and that they do so visually is critical, for decoding their cues necessarily involves very specific ways of, and approaches to, looking. Féral speculates that 'theatricality appears to be more than a property; in fact, we might call it a process that recognizes subjects in

process; it is a process of looking or being looked at.⁴²⁹ By introducing the idea that theatricality has to do with a process and its reception through the mechanism of mutual looking, Féral foregrounds the cognitive and perceptual aspects of theatricality, the fact that ‘theatricality appears to an almost fantastical cognitive operation set in motion either by the observer or the observed.’⁴³⁰ Everything that is on display – crucially, on the stage – during this process is thus deliberate, and it is displayed as ‘forms of narrative fiction’,⁴³¹ which the actor (or performer) ‘brings to life upon the stage.’⁴³² The audience receives these narrative fictions as ‘staged simulacra and illusions’⁴³³ and simultaneously scrutinises the performer’s proficiency, his knowledge and skills, ‘his technique, his performance, his art of dissimulation and representation.’⁴³⁴ Theatricality can thus be construed as a process in which the participants understand that an illusory activity is taking place while simultaneously and mutually suspending their disbelief in order to experience its effects and affects.

For Féral, it is essential that the audience ‘is never completely duped.’⁴³⁵ My practice-led research supports this claim: I have found that the more the audience is made aware of the workings of the theatrical performance, the more they are willing to engage with and even enjoy the illusory nature of the activity. In my view, it is precisely this paradoxical situation that sets theatricality sharply apart from performativity, and theatre from performance. In this very important respect, my practice, and the practices of others who use performing publications, is theatrical. The nature of performing publications is such that it creates this paradoxical situation in and of itself. Their author-performers exploit the fact that ‘both theatre and literature are textures which are especially dependent on the release of active energies of imagination, energies that are becoming weaker in a civilization of the primarily passive consumption of images and data.’⁴³⁶ By making those workings upon the imagination apparent to the audience through theatrical performances, author-performers encourage active engagement with the performing publications through staging them.

⁴²⁹ Féral, J. and Bermingham, R. P. (2002) ‘Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language’, p. 98. Available at:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3685480.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A73a14f28fc2d3838ffbb1e6f528dc33c&ab_segments=&origin=&acceptTC=1 (Accessed: 2 May 2022).

⁴³⁰ Ibid. p. 98.

⁴³¹ Ibid. p. 100.

⁴³² Ibid. p. 100.

⁴³³ Ibid. p. 100.

⁴³⁴ Ibid. p. 100.

⁴³⁵ Ibid. p. 100.

⁴³⁶ Lehmann, H.-T. (2006) *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 16.

Most of the confusion regarding the status of objects I have termed performing publications arises out of their visual appearance, which although very telling can also be misleading for, at least at first glance, it obscures the fact that what they are encoding is a performance system that has been rendered visually. Performing publications thus conflate a performance system with an aesthetic system. According to Victor Burgin, it is not that objects are designed, rather ‘*aesthetic systems are designed*’⁴³⁷ Aesthetic systems, according to Burgin, are ‘capable of generating objects’ and have two consequences: ‘the specific nature of any object formed is largely contingent upon the details of the situation for which it is designed; through attention to time, objects are intentionally located partly in the real, exterior, space and partly in psychological, interior, space.’⁴³⁸ Burgin’s observation helped me articulate the spatiotemporal entanglement of a performing publication with the theatrical event – “the situation for which it is designed”. Observers unfamiliar with performing publications might attempt to decipher them as purely visual objects, according to aesthetic principles and procedures applicable to visual art. But my practical and theoretical research indicates that this is only part of their story and that their visual appearance is, in fact, simply another solution to problems that have to do with their realisation as a performance and, more specifically, as a theatrical event. Their visual appearance is secondary to their primary purpose as performance-enabling memory aids used in storytelling performances to stage theatrical events. What they *are* is secondary to what they *do*.

So, to understand performing publications, it is of paramount importance to first identify them as theatre objects that have been designed with this specific purpose in mind and for this specific situation: a theatrical event that is also staging an instance of performance publishing. It is at this point that the publishing system comes to the fore, registering as a momentary flash at the precise instance when content passes from being unpublished to published. As I have developed earlier, it emerges out of the performance system with which it is conflated, which is itself further conflated with an aesthetic system.

⁴³⁷ Burgin, V. (2009) ‘Situational Aesthetics’ (extracts from ‘Situational Aesthetics’, *Studio International*, vol. 178, no 915 (October 1969), pp. 118-121), in Doherty, C. (ed.) *Documents of Contemporary Art: Situation*. London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, p. 41. [Original emphasis].

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 41.

Performing publications are contingent on the theatrical event, a situation for which they have been specifically designed and it is only through their staging that the performance system behind them becomes apparent as a process rather than an inherent property of the object itself. The notion that all art products are not, in fact, products but are instead points in an ongoing process of art production, which is itself conceived as a performance, is the main art-ontological argument of David Davis's fascinating book *Art as Performance*. In my view, storytelling performances that use performing publications to stage theatrical events actualise Davies' point in that they stage art products as productions. Though, if any object could be said to possess the property of theatricality in and of itself then a performing publication would surely be it, for it is not merely generated *by* but is generative *of* theatrical performance. A performing publication is thus less a product than a site of production of theatrical events. Viewing it from that perspective can further our understanding of crucial moments in the performance process – the performance system – that performing publications are uniquely positioned to capture.

Never-ending

A real story, according to Benjamin, 'does not expend itself'.⁴³⁹ Instead, what Benjamin calls its 'strength', its ability 'of arousing astonishment and thoughtfulness', is capable of being restored and reinstated 'even after a long time'.⁴⁴⁰ In that sense, a real story may be said to be never-ending or eternal – even if the storytelling experience itself is ephemeral, as is the case with *A thread without end*. According to Benjamin, for a real story to persist though time, it must persist in the memory of the audience, and it must also be repeated: 'For the art of storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stores are no longer retained.'⁴⁴¹ But Benjamin makes it clear that it is not the story itself but rather the storytelling *experience* that is repeated.

As Benjamin noted, 'every real story... contains, openly or covertly, something useful'.⁴⁴² The storyteller must have "something useful" to share with the audience, not only "having counsel"⁴⁴³ but also seeking counsel from the audience through the telling of the story. The storyteller thus endeavours to create a rapport with the audience through sharing "something useful": that something useful is the experience itself. In my performances, I

⁴³⁹ Benjamin, W. (1936) 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', in Arendt, H. (ed.) (1969) *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, pp. 83-109, p. 90.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 90.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid. p. 91.

⁴⁴² Ibid. p. 86.

⁴⁴³ Ibid. p. 86.

adopt a similar approach: I aim to be somehow useful to the audience, and I proceed as if I am there to serve the audience for the duration of the performance – as a “stewardess” in Pernarčič terminology – and to assume the role of a “mediator”, even a “conductor”, of proceedings. Since, during a performance, I am essentially enacting a set of instructions encoded in the performing publications, my author-performer role recedes as I assume the role of a “mediator”. As a mediator, I facilitate a storytelling experience, the instructions for which are embedded in the performing publication – including instructions for establishing the relationship between myself, the text and the audience. In other words, my role as a performance storyteller is to mediate an experience. Thus, everything I do is aimed at facilitating the storytelling experience, which includes creating the relations and conditions conducive for the telling and showing of the story.

Moreover, a real story, according to Benjamin, cannot be forced on the audience. Instead, it must be received, interpreted and understood by audience members according to their own experiences, to which the present storytelling experience is adding. Benjamin repeatedly reinforces the notion that the art of storytelling is a craft that manifests as a shared experience. This experience is created by the storyteller whose task is to induce a certain receptiveness in the audience through not only the story but also through the manner in which it is told and, thus, shared. The important thing is, as Ford Davies has pointed out, ‘to *share* the story with the audience.’⁴⁴⁴

As a performer, I have a deep respect for audiences and a sense of responsibility towards them. I am conscious that we are entering into a relationship with every performance, which for me means meeting a set of overt or covert expectations entailed in that relationship. Defying expectations is one thing, defying what is expected of the performer-audience relationship is another thing altogether. While certain forms of performance and theatre are defined by the testing of the limits the performer-audience relationship, for all sorts of legitimate reasons, my style of performance follows in the footsteps of other performance storytelling traditions. By his I mean that I am interested preserving a certain relationship between the performer and audience that has been established within the oral storytelling tradition, which places the onus on the storyteller to create the conditions that

⁴⁴⁴ Ford Davies, O. (2007) *Performing Shakespeare*, p. 157.

could foster the formation of a temporary community around the performance of the story, which is based on the notion that all involved are sharing in the storytelling experience.

A thread without end, as the title suggest, is premised on the deferral of a definitive ending: it is the motivating concept behind the piece and an approach that provides the piece with certain unexpected effects and affects by defying the basic expectation of story, narrative, theatrical performance and publishing: a definitive end. In place of a definitive end, it provides an indefinitely deferred ending. At the end of each of my performances there is what audiences have described as an “abrupt ending”. Audiences have expressed that the performances end not necessarily on a suspenseful note in the story, but in a suspenseful manner, abruptly halting at the precise point when the performance had gained the most momentum. Some audience members have expressed that they felt that the performance could, even should, have continued at the point it had ended. This effect is entirely intentional, for it is an integral part of *A thread without end*, and I have gone to great lengths to engineer the effect of an abrupt ending in each of the acts. The deferral of the ending, a device I arrived at intuitively and consciously incorporated only later, having researched its uses in narrative structure, is used by me as means of amalgamating the deliberately disparate and discreet acts that comprise *A thread without end* into a coherent entity. Hence, I am constantly deferring the sense of having come to an end in the individual acts and thus also deferring the definitive ending of the entire piece.

The effect of deferring the ending, however, means that, at the precise moment the performance should come to some sort of an expected ending, it unexpectedly disrupts the rapt attention in the audience, abruptly dislocating them from the “performance world” and returning them to the “real world”, producing what I can only describe as disorientation. I have consistently noted the audience’s initial disorientation immediately after the performance, at times there is even a delay in applause, and they appear to need some time to return to reality. It is, therefore, at the ending of my performances – paradoxically, because of their never-ending nature – that performance aesthetics meet performance ethics. I am therefore careful not to alarm the audience by, for instance, ending the performance too abruptly but only abruptly enough so as to surprise rather than startle them. I realise that by bringing ethics in to bear on the effect that indefinitely deferring the ending of *A thread without end* has upon my audiences, I run the risk of exaggerating this effect. I do so because I perceive that effect leads to affect, and that the affect the abrupt ending produces in audience at my performances has a concomitant psychological, emotional and physical impact. I am conscious of the fact that, as Simon

Shepherd has pointed out, ‘the theatre may be said to contribute to a process which not only does things physically to the bodies of its performers, but also physically bears upon its audience.’⁴⁴⁵ Thus, even when I surprise the audience with my actions – as with the abrupt ending – they are always in the service of the performance and of the story, which is staged for and before an audience who are always at the forefront of my mind as, first and foremost, persons. Benjamin similarly places an emphasis on not only the storyteller’s ability to share a story with the audience – as an experience – but also on the storyteller’s responsibility for all that entails. For Benjamin, storytelling is not only experiential in its content but also in its form, the “container”, for it is essentially based on ‘the ability to exchange experiences’.⁴⁴⁶ It is the storyteller who is ultimately responsible for how the storytelling experience is shared.

Benjamin also distinguishes the ‘miraculous’ storytelling experience from mere communication: the use – or misuse in Benjamin’s assessment – of story as a means of imparting mere information or providing an explanation. In fact, he writes, ‘it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it.’⁴⁴⁷ In *A thread without end*, the most prominent feature of the story and, indeed, the storytelling performances is the absence of a definitive ending, and it is the one feature that, even when explained, somehow remains inexplicable: for, as Ricoeur among others has pointed out, ‘a story has to be followed to its conclusion.’⁴⁴⁸

And yet, it can be explained by the performance system itself, which is designed to indefinitely defer the ending, not only of the story and of the storytelling performances of *A thread without end*. In her review, appropriately titled ‘A thread without beginning’, Pernarčič intuited the performance system behind the storytelling performance when writing, at the very beginning of her review, that although she had missed the earlier acts, having seen *Act III*, she felt confident enough to review the entire *A thread without end* piece.

⁴⁴⁵ Shepherd, S. (2006) *Theatre, Body and Pleasure*. London and New York: Routledge, p. 5.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 83.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 89.

⁴⁴⁸ Ricoeur, P. (1980), ‘Narrative Time’, *Critical Inquiry*, pp. 169-190, p. 174. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343181?seq=17#metadata_info_tab_contents (Accessed: 20 May 2022).

Her confidence, I would suggest, is placed in the performance system – although she does not articulate it in those terms. Instead, she describes the precision of the mechanics of the performance, using the airplane journey analogy, in terms of a smooth-sailing airship with a skilful and attentive stewardess at the helm. More accurately, what she describes is her *experience* of the storytelling performance and, I think, the airplane journey analogy she employs is apt – even to the extent that there is no mention of a pilot. The pilot, I would suggest, is the performance system: behind the scenes, though not by any means backstage, it is piloting the entire process and performance that *is A thread without end*.

In her review, it is clear that Pernarčič's confidence is placed, above all, on my presence and my actions during the storytelling performance, both of which contrive to create a sense of timelessness. She writes:

To begin with, this timeless, but by no means irrelevant thread could be defined as her very *presence*. A presence that I feel even in actions where I was not present, and I even dare to say that it could not exist in just one action if it did not exist in all of them. Because, at the core, it is not conditioned by what the artist does and by using this or that medium, but by the fact that she is the one who does it.⁴⁴⁹

In relation to *Act III*, she describes it as belonging to the tradition of performance, stretching far back into the distant past and, at the same time, projecting into the future. She writes, *Act III* is:

an act in which both the origin of performance-as-discipline, its point/meaning/axis, the transformation of details as well as the possible future are immanently included.⁴⁵⁰

But, everywhere in her review, in her references to the timelessness of my performance and of performance as a discipline, I can detect the never-ending nature of the performance system behind it coming through or, rather, coming through me, as it were. This is, no doubt, a privileged practice-led insight, but I am intrigued and gladdened by the fact that, somehow, it does come through.

⁴⁴⁹ Pernarčič, R. (2021) 'Nit brez začetka' [A Thread Without Beginning], *Neodvisini*. Available at: <https://www.neodvisni.art/refleksija/2021/08/nit-brez-zacetka/> (Accessed: 3 May 2022). [My translation from the original Slovenian.]

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid. [My translation from the original Slovenian.]

One of the primary purposes of this research project, which I aimed to achieve with *A thread without end* through a practice-led approach, has been to theoretically and practically engage with what “a theatre of publishing” might look like; how it might be performed for, or with, an audience; and how it might be perceived and received by that audience. Such publishing, to use Schechner’s printing press analogy, would be perpetually printing blank pieces of paper, leaving no tangible imprint but only an intangible impression – in the memory of the audience. Such publishing would be momentary, a tangible but perpetually passing moment. Such publishing would create the conditions conducive to publishing the unpublishable – the most elusive publishing of all. My practice-led research suggests that, if there is such a thing as a theatre of publishing at all, it might involve the theatrical staging of a type of performance publishing that is not only partial, temporary, contingent and improvisatory but also potentially never-ending: a type of publishing that “does not expend itself”, not unlike a “real story”.

Appendix A *A thread without end Act I*

In *Act I*, I narrate an original story in verse with the help of visual aid: a five-metre long paper scroll elaborately decorated with hand-painted words and images. The paper scroll is displayed on a table, facing me, and the audience is invited to gather around the table on all sides. The participatory performance begins with me partially unfurling the scroll and inviting audience members to assist me by holding either end of the scroll and by “scrolling” along in time with the performance. The storytelling performance consists of me narrating the story by simultaneously tracing a continuous line of text, a “text thread”, with my right hand while pointing to the images that surround it with my left hand. Because my hands are engaged in these actions, the performance is necessarily facilitated by several audience members who participate by scrolling. As soon as the participants begin their collective scrolling, they engage in a shared haptic experience that lasts – uninterrupted – for the duration of the performance. The action of scrolling additionally generates a pleasant papery hum, which provides an analogue soundscape, building anticipation in the audience and encouraging attentive listening.

The audience’s vision, in combination with touch and hearing, is likewise engaged throughout the performance. In the manner of a “story-singer” or “picture-reciter” in the *cantastoria* performance storytelling tradition, I gesture to the pertinent images on the ornate paper scroll, “illuminating” the story as I relate it. By tracing the text thread of the hand-painted poetry with my right index finger while pointing to the drawings with my left index finger, I am simultaneously “reading” and “illustrating” the story. In this way, I am able to guide the audience along the story set down on the paper scroll vocally as well as visually.

In *Act I*, I aim to accentuate the sensorial possibilities of performance storytelling by exploring the visual, acoustic and haptic possibilities offered by the visual aid in its manifestation as a paper scroll. In handling the paper scroll and touching it in our respective ways, the audience and I invariably synchronise our movements. By following the subtle sound cues, generated by the audience’s scrolling and my tracing along the text thread, we use sound to synchronise our respective movements and together regulate the momentum of the performance. As I alternate between vocalising the text and pointing out the images, a rhythmic, rhyming pattern emerges, reinforcing the synchronisation further.

Moving in tandem, we negotiate the shifts in the momentum of the storytelling performance together.

The single, continuous, meandering line of poetry, spreading across the entire scroll, is a means of exploring different narrative and performing possibilities through the spatialisation of the text – possibilities that are encoded in the visual aid itself. The spatial rendering of the words into a “text thread” enables me to take different looping paths and repetitions, introducing variability into the storytelling performance. The abundance of images also enables me to illustrate the story in different ways, by variously pointing to one or another of the images. Thus, the strategic use of the visual aid as a provisional story map, when staged as performing publication enables me to improvise during the theatrical event, ensuring the same story is never truly performed in the same way twice. By additionally inviting the audience to actively participate in the performance and by engaging them sensorially, my aim is to expand the experiential possibilities of the storytelling performance and transform it into an immersive and memorable theatrical event.

At the same time, *Act I* is an attempt at staging a type of performance publishing that is not only temporary, contingent and improvisatory but also potentially ever-renewing – like the story that it tells and shows, which is told and shown differently each time. It is a pointed investigation into a type of performance publishing that, like Walter Benjamin’s description of a ‘real story’, ‘does not expend itself’.¹ In that sense, every storytelling performance is a new re-telling and new re-publishing of the story.

Information:

The documentation video is a recording of the *A thread without end, Act III* performance that was staged at DUM Project Space, Ljubljana on 27th of July 2021 as part of the *A thread without end, Act I, II and III* solo exhibition at which the visual aids were also displayed.

Video Editing: Tychonas Michailidis

Video and Sound Recording: Toni Poljanec

Technical Support: Tomaž Pezdirc and Jasmin Pervanič (Radio Terminal)

Producer: Sektor Institute

Co-producer: DUM Association

Support: City of Ljubljana

Duration of performance: Approximately 10 mins.

Instructions:

To view the video please click on this [link](#) and **download** it to your device before viewing as streaming sites limit the length of the video to the first 15 minutes by default.



Performance documentation of *A thread without end, Act I* (2017), performance at DUM Project Space, 27 July 2021, Ljubljana (Photo: Jaka Babnik)



Performance documentation of *A thread without end, Act I* (2017), performance at DUM Project Space, 27 July 2021, Ljubljana (Image: Jaka Babnik)

Visual Aid:



Visual aid for *A thread without end, Act I* (2017) (Image: Jaka Babnik)

ⁱ Benjamin, W. (1936) 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', in Arendt, H. (ed.) (1969) *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Reprint. New York: Schocken Books, 2007, pp. 83-109, p. 90. Available at: <https://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Illuminations-Essays-and-Reflections-Walter-Benjamin-edit-by-Hannah-Arendt-Harry-Zohn.pdf> (Accessed: 1 August 2022).

Appendix B *A thread without end Act II*

In *Act II*, I narrate an original story in verse with the help of visual aid: a graphite drawing consisting of 12 paper tiles arranged into a large map, which is wired up to a circuit board to make the visual aid conductive. The paper scroll is displayed on a table, facing me, and the seated audience is gathered on the other side of the table. A camera is set up above the visual aid and a live feed of the performance is projected onto a large screen behind me, enabling the audience to view the visual aid right side up and follow the performance as it unfolds across the visual aid.

The performance begins with me connecting myself to the circuit board with a wired wrist band that enables me to trigger soundscapes by simply touching visual aid. I then take up a feather, which is the only non-conductive material and which I use as a “pointer”, in my right hand and begin to narrate the story by tracing it along the text. The text has been visually rendered as a twisting and turning “ribbon text” that meanders around and across every paper tile in the map, finally looping around to connect the end of the text to the beginning. The feather is used in the same manner a pointer is used in *cantastoria* performance storytelling traditions: it enables me to “read” and keep my place in the text, but it is also a strategic choice for it is a non-conductive material, meaning it prevents me from inadvertently triggering a soundscape – an action reserved for my left hand.

As in *Act I*, I use my left hand to point to the images and illustrate the story, but by additionally touching the images – specifically, the graphite-heavy areas rendered visually as a “primordial sea” – I can trigger soundscapes. Thus, along with the cues provided by the ribbon text, the visual aid is embedded with the visual prompts I need to illustrate the text, which I do both visually and sonically in *Act II*. Through manipulating the different elements – text, image, sound and performance – and playing with the parameters set up through the strategic use of technologies, I improvise a storytelling performance in which the story is told and shown differently each time.

At the same time, *Act II* is an attempt at staging a contemporary, technologically enhanced, version of an earlier tradition of ‘audio visual media’ⁱⁱ storytelling performance that similarly uses visual aids. In this tradition of performance storytelling, which predates print publishing, performance was the only means by which a story was published. Because the stories in such storytelling performances were themselves the products of improvised performances, they could not be published in any other way than as another

improvisatory performance. *Act II* is an investigation into the notion that improvisatory performance leads to improvisatory publishing.

In *Act II*, the combined elements – graphite drawing, poetry, sound and performance – transform a story told in verse into a hybrid audio-visual performance. The experiential possibilities of storytelling are enhanced through the strategic use of digital tools and technologies that enhance the performance beyond conventional storytelling and transform it into an immersive theatrical event. The theatrical event is further conceived as a one-off instance of publishing as improvisatory performance.

Information:

The documentation video is a recording of the *A thread without end, Act III* performance that was staged at DUM Project Space, Ljubljana on 28th of July 2021 as part of the *A thread without end, Act I, II and III* solo exhibition at which the visual aids were also displayed.

Software and Sound Design: Tychonas Michailidis

Video Editing: Tychonas Michailidis

Video and Sound Recording: Toni Poljanec, SARDAM Interdisciplinary Literature Festival

Technical Support: Tomaž Pezdirc and Jasmin Pervanič (Radio Terminal)

Producer: Sektor Institute

Co-producer: DUM Association

Support: City of Ljubljana

Duration of performance: Approximately 15 mins.

Instructions:

To view the video please click on this [link](#) and **download** it to your device before viewing.



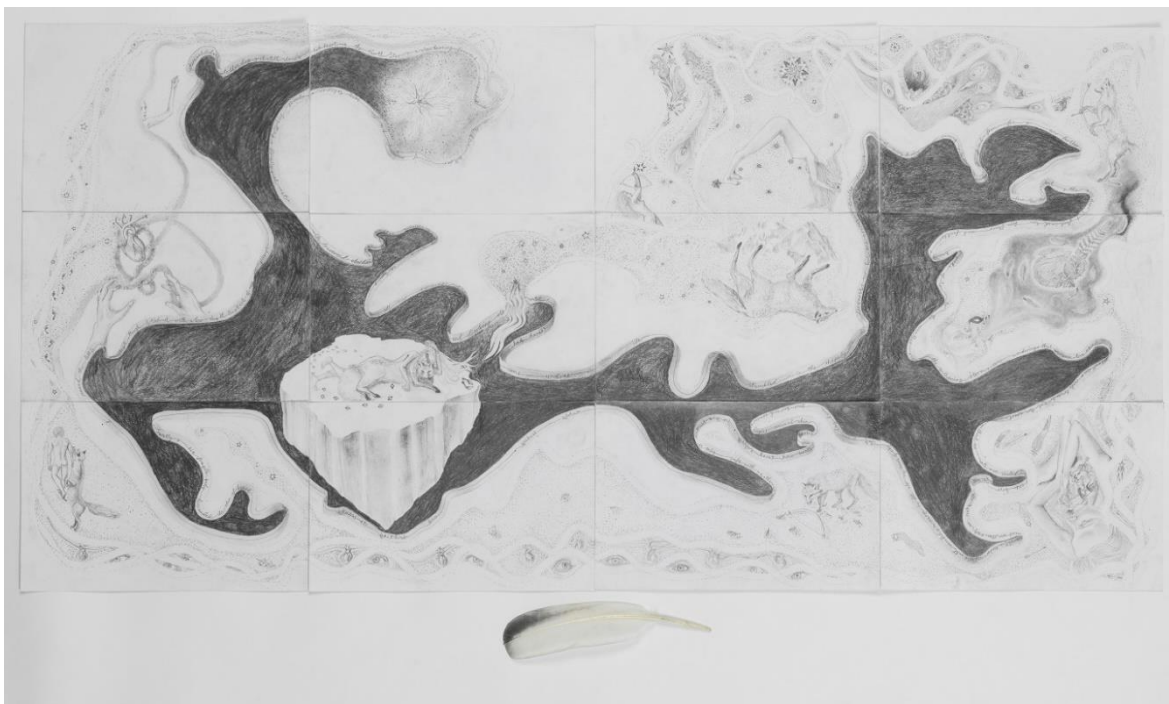
Performance documentation of *A thread without end, Act II* (2019), performance at DUM Project Space, 28 July 2021, Ljubljana (Image: Jaka Babnik)



Performance documentation of *A thread without end, Act II* (2019), performance at DUM Project Space, 28 July 2021, Ljubljana (Image: Jaka Babnik)



Performance documentation of *A thread without end, Act II* (2019), performance at DUM Project Space, 28 July 2021, Ljubljana (Image: Jaka Babnik)



Visual aid for *A thread without end, Act II* (2019) (Image: Jaka Babnik)

Appendix C A thread without end Act III

In *Act III*, I narrate an original story in verse with the help of visual aid: a papercut theatre. The visual aid is displayed on a table, facing me, and the seated audience is gathered on the other side of the table. A camera is set up above the visual aid and a live feed of the performance is projected onto a large screen on an adjacent wall, enabling the audience to view the visual aid right side up and follow the performance as it unfolds across the visual aid. In this particular set up, the audience's attention is divided between viewing the performance in the space and on the screen, a set up that was already present in *Act II* but is emphasised in *Act III* because the performer and the screen are separated out in the space.

The performance begins with me placing the first papercut onto a rectangular black ground, a workspace that serves as the "stage" on which the papercut theatre will unfold. In contrast to *Act I* and *Act II*, the papercut theatre is a purely visual aid, with no text component embedded in it. The text – a series of nine cut-up poems corresponding to the nine scenes in the act – are placed to the side of the visual aid and are consulted by me as needed in the manner of a script. I have largely memorised the text but, due to the tight relationship between the texts and images, I occasionally consult the script to ensure that I don't go too far off-script during the improvisatory storytelling performance.

The storytelling performance involves me arranging and rearranging white papercuts on a black ground into a series of scenes while reciting a series of poems. While I manipulate the papercuts, motion tracking technology – programmed to detect movement and changes in image intensity (dark-to-light threshold) through the use of an additional web camera positioned above the visual aid – is used to trigger sound, producing a one-off soundscape for every performance. The scenic arrangement of the papercuts and their sequence of scenes is prearranged, and their precise positioning corresponds to a digitally mapped grid that subdivides the "stage" into ten sections – each corresponding to a soundscape. The grid is not visible to the audience, but I can see it on a laptop screen set to one side, on which a digital version of the grid is superimposed onto a live feed of the workspace transmitted by the web camera. The digital grid is additionally mapped in a motion tracking programme that monitors changes in movement and image intensity. As I move the papercuts into position, I consult the digital grid to ensure that they are in the right section. I do so carefully for sudden movement can trigger a soundscape invertedly,

as can a dramatic change in the lighting threshold, which can be triggered by my hands hovering over a section. Thus, as I place the papercuts into position, I monitor the dark-to-light threshold displayed on the laptop screen in the motion tracking programme, which has been manually configured for each of the sections in the grid to trigger a soundscape at the precise point when a critical number of white papercuts (light) tips the light-to-dark threshold level against the black ground (dark), thus triggering the corresponding soundscape.

The tipping point corresponds to specific points in the story, enabling me to achieve a precise alignment of the verbal, visual and sonic elements in the delivery of the storytelling performance. The tipping point is also the reason that the performance starts in silence, builds into a cacophony of sounds, and ends in silence when I clear the white papercuts from the black ground in a swiping motion – the black ground is detected by the motion tracking programme as below the tipping point and registers as silence. To achieve this level of precision, the digitally mapped grid in the motion tracking programme is manually configured before each performance, with some room left for improvisation and for the incorporation of the uncontrollable elements that inevitably occur as a result of this particular – motion and lighting sensitive – set up. Through manipulating the different elements and playing with the parameters set up through the strategic use of technologies, I improvise a storytelling performance that is an immersive audio-visual experience staged as a theatrical event.

At the same time, in relation to publishing, contrary to conventional notions of publishing as ‘fixed in the space and time of the printed page’,ⁱⁱⁱ *Act III* is an attempt at staging a type of publishing that is strictly spatiotemporally situated within the “unfixed” time and space of theatrical event. Since, in *Act III*, the publishing takes place in the variable ‘event time’ of the storytelling performance, due to the combinatory and improvisatory nature of the performance, the publishing is even more unfixed than in *Act I* and *Act II*. *Act III*, more than any other act, is a pointed investigation into the notion that the texts of performing publications must remain unfixed texts or, at least, not fixed in the sense of the fixed text of print publishing. While the visual aids in *A thread without end* might be fixed texts and images (*Act I* and *Act II*) or a fixed sequence of text and images (*Act III*), their potential to be performed, and, thus, published, in ever renewing ways remains unfixed – indefinitely. For this reason, the visual aid for *Act III* – turned performing publication through its staging as theatrical event – is most pointedly a product and production of the stage, rather than the printed page.

Appendix C

The documentation video is a recording of the *A thread without end, Act III* performance that was staged at DUM Project Space, Ljubljana on 29th of July 2021 as part of the *A thread without end, Act I, II and III* solo exhibition at which the visual aids were also displayed.

Software and Sound Design: Tychonas Michailidis

Video Editing: Tychonas Michailidis

Video and Sound Recording: Toni Poljanec

Sound Editing and Production: Ida Hiršenfelder

Technical Support: Tomaž Pezdirc and Jasmin Pervanič (Radio Terminal)

Producer: Sektor Institute

Co-producer: DUM Association

Support: City of Ljubljana

Duration of performance: Approximately 15-20 mins.

To view the video please click on this [link](#) and **download** it to your device before viewing.



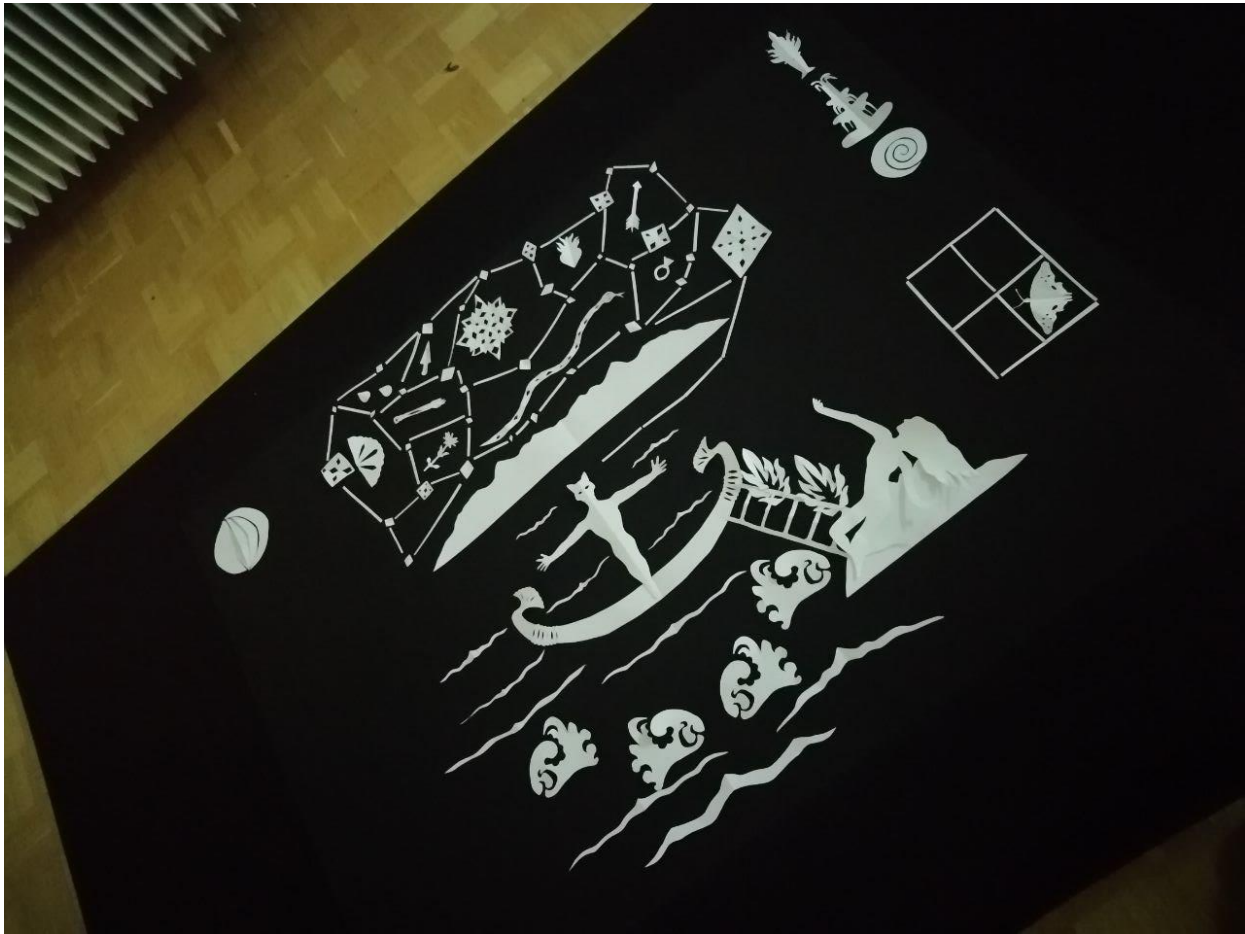
Performance documentation of *A thread without end, Act III* (2021) performance at DUM Project Space, 29 July 2021, Ljubljana, Slovenia (Image: Jaka Babnik)



Performance documentation of *A thread without end, Act III* (2021) performance at DUM Project Space, 29 July 2021, Ljubljana, Slovenia (Image: Jaka Babnik)



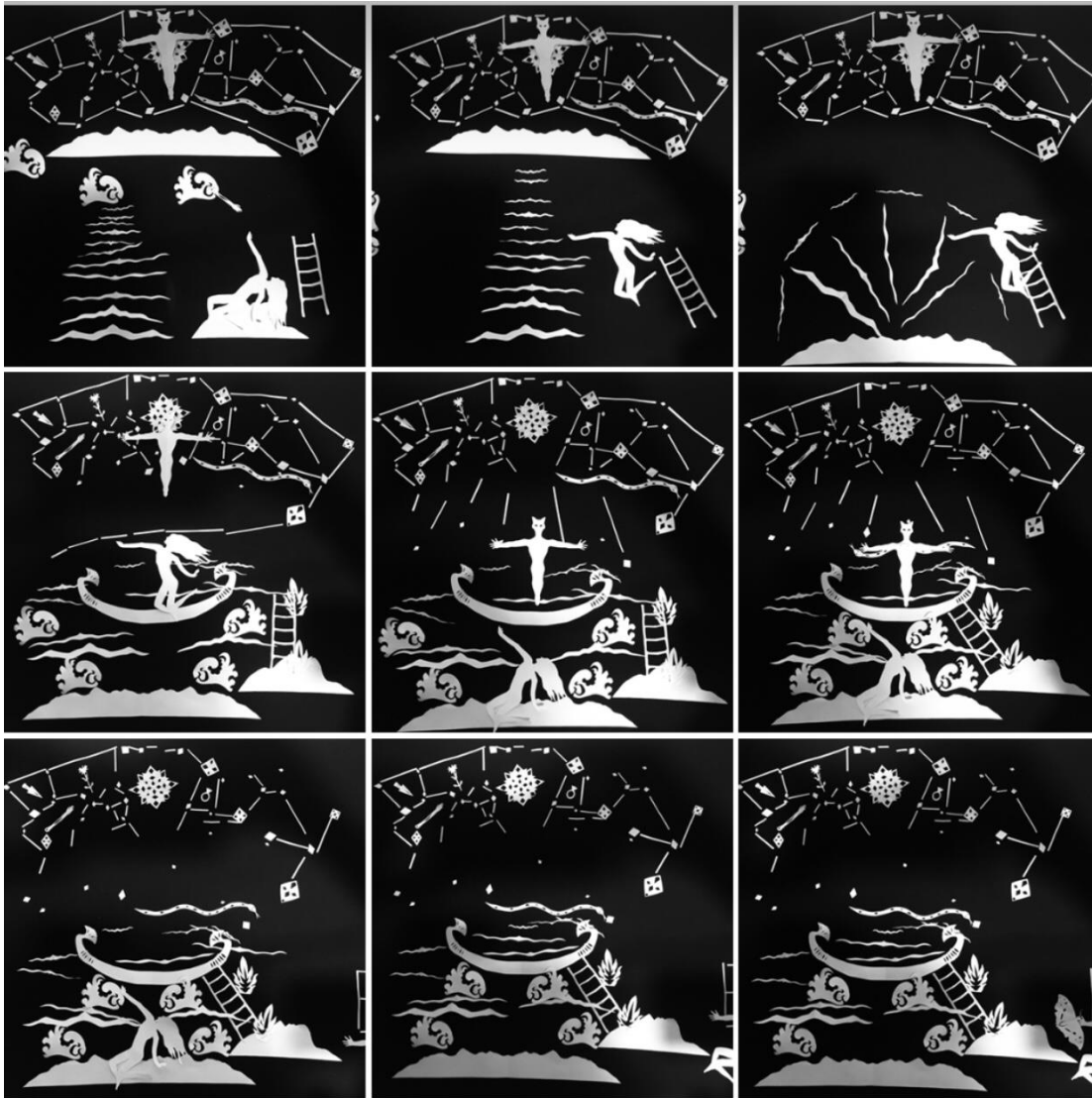
Performance documentation of *A thread without end, Act III* (2021) showing the screen on which the papercut theatre was projected. Performance at DUM Project Space, 29 July 2021, Ljubljana, Slovenia (Image: Jaka Babnik)



The visual aid for *A thread without end, Act III* (2021), as installed at DUM Project Space, 27–29 July 2021, Ljubljana, Slovenia (Image: Artist)



The visual aid for *A thread without end, Act III* (2021), as it appeared in the ninth, and last, scene of act at DUM Project Space, 29 July 2021, Ljubljana, Slovenia (Image: Artist)



A representative selection of scenes from the visual aid for *A thread without end, Act III* (2021). The sequence of scenes shows the papercuts arranged in different configurations. The papercuts were animated into a papercut theatre during the storytelling performance at DUM Project Space, 29 July 2021, Ljubljana, Slovenia. (Image: Artist)

ⁱⁱ Ruch, B. (1977), 'Medieval Jongleurs and the Making of National Literature: Towards the Reconstruction of a Theoretical Framework', in Whitney Hall, J. and Takeshi, T. (eds.) *Japan in the Muromachi Age*. Berkley: University of California Press, pp. 279-310, p. 294.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ludovico, A. (2015) 'Post-Digital Publishing, Hybrid and Processual Objects in Print', p. 4. Available at: http://post-digital-culture.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ludovico_2015_post-digital-publishing.pdf (Accessed: 30 August 2022).

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