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Codices: A Redefinition Of Readers, Writers, Books and Poetry

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Codices:

A Redefinition Of
Readers, Writers, Books and Poetry

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2012

“Language is fossil poetry.”

– Emerson, *The Poet*

In the introduction to Johanna Drucker's *Century of Artist's Books*, Holland Cotter mourns the contemporary condition of the book and its “debased status in the modern world”ⁱ. He says that we have lost our enchantment with the “conventional design of stacked and bound pages,” and no longer see its physical form as part of our interaction with the text (Cotter xi). The mass-production of machine-made paper and typed-up text have made them into “perfect things, the way eggs are a perfect food,” complete and immobile. We don't approach the physicality of a book as a contributor to its meaning, but rather a transparent and shapeless portal of access to a static text. In a challenge to this mindset, Cotter writes about the artist's book and its ability to “transform the condition of bookness and complicate it”: to ask the

reader to examine and revise her conceptions of what a book might be and require of its reader (Cotter xi). In this thesis I want to continue Cotter's work to reevaluate the meaning of the book through the media of artist's books and poetry, in theory and creation. I want to unravel and redefine our definitions of books, readers, writers, and their interactivity.

The shape of the codex has a story and comes from a particular history. It became popular in the first century after Christ, and its propagation is closely tied with the rise of Christianity. The first codex-form books were Christian texts, and nearly all early Christian texts were codex-form books. Like the religion, it was a revolution, a reaction – a refusal of the previous standard, the scroll. There are several important differences between the shape and movement of the codex and scroll, especially because of the mental shapes and movement that they mirror. A scroll is linear: unrolled from one end to the other in successive columns of text that always follow one another in the same order. A codex is a series of pages bound together in a specific order, but accessed through opening instead of unrolling. The scroll is entered through what Harry Gamble calls “sequential access,” in which you have to unroll the whole work to read any specific point, while the codex has “randomized access”: the reader can open to any page, sit the book on its spine and allow gravity to choose how the leaves fallⁱⁱ.

In his work *Books and Readers in the Early Church*, Gamble delves into the question of why the codex form arose and became so popular. He argues that the physicality of a work is an important historical field of study, as “all aspects of the production, distribution, and use of texts presuppose social functions and forces – functions and forces that are given representation, or inscribed, in the design of the text as a concrete, physical object” (Gamble 43). He presents evidence that before Christians adopted the codex as a vehicle for their religious works, it was “regarded as a mere notebook, and its associations were strictly private and utilitarian” (Gamble 44). The codex was used in the same manner that we currently use journals: as personal pages towards which the owner acted as both reader and author. This

interactive and boundary-crossing relationship characterized the early codex form, yet the reverberations of its revolutionary form are not always present in the historical or modern study of the book.

Gamble decries the “failure to consider the extent to which the physical medium of the written word contributes to its meaning,” arguing that “it is the physical presentation of the text that is most immediately evident and effective for its readers” (Gamble 42). He believes that the material form of the book, as well as textual content, can under close study reveal much about contemporary social climate. In his assessment, there are two prevailing benefits of the codex form that inspired the early Christians to adopt the form. The first Christian text to be widely published were the letters of Paul, Gamble says, which required both “transcription of all the letters in a single book so that both the number and the order of the letters could be firmly established,” a feat which the finite length of a scroll could not handle, and also “ease of reference,” or random access, so that people could read the letters at will (Gamble 63). This text was a reference book, and its readers needed to be able to open to a specific letter easily, a possibility afforded by the codex structure.

It was this seemingly contradictory match of a better-preserved order and greater freedom of random access that won the codex form its place as the modern default book-shape, though these revolutionary aspects no longer seem that innovative. Through the physical shape of the codex, work is given an order, though also written into the shape is the reader's right to ignore or subvert that order. The reader's power and interaction with the work is emphasized through her ability to randomly access the text, to choose her own path through the book's dimensions. At the same time the text's own life is reinforced through its sequential organization within the codex, which creates a dialogue between the text, the physical form and the reader. The reader takes cues not only from the content of a book, but also from its container, and during the tumultuous period when literature moved its shape from scroll to

codex, the reader would have been even more focused on the form, more aware of how the physicality of the book shaped its content.

The form of the codex was a radical change in the history of the book that emphasized the reader's agency and the book-shape's interaction with the text it contained, yet the codex book in our modern culture is thought of as a dead object, fossilized. We have accepted as normal what Gary Frost, author of *Reading by Hand: The Haptic Evaluation of Artists' Books*, calls “the immobility of libraries”ⁱⁱⁱ. There is something funerary about the way we hold modern books, as if they are corpses of a long-past thought. Not often do we approach a book with wonder, nor does its shape mean anything to us, any more than a bucket of water is the temporary mould for the shape that water may take. We have forgotten what Keith Smith reminds us, in his book *Structure of the Visual Book*: that “the physical object and turning pages become part of the context” of a book^{iv}. For us, it seems as if a book's meaning floats somewhere above the codex, to be sipped from as if from a distance through a straw.

I think that the death of the book can be largely attached to the life of machines. Somehow the printing press, the laser printers – those tools that were supposed to be symbols of concentration, greater production and wider access – have diluted books. Watered them down, inoculated us against them. When the exact same book can be printed a thousand times the exact same way, it is easy for us to forget that each of those physical entities is a codex-form container of a text which affects the reader's experience of the work: a chance to draw us inside a literature through a material door. We don't often think of books as human-made, and their physicality doesn't factor into our summation of the meaning of the text. Much of this has to do with the modern large-scale book production industry, in which the author doesn't have much say in the layout or look of the final product, but an equal amount of the gap is located in our imaginations. We don't create books often, therefore cannot identify with the process of book creation, or the idea of books as creations rather than products. We consider books as

made by machines, allowing us as readers to also become machinated. We are at a great distance from the handmade, but at an even greater distance from our ability to conceive of book-shapes as alive, as precious or interactive.

When we let the idea of books die, we fool ourselves into thinking that the information they contain is static, like ore to be scooped out. We make the reader a colossal bookworm, devouring and throwing aside husks. There is information to be gained, critique to be spoken, and the reader can achieve perfect readerhood – and therefore is expendable. Our immobile assumptions about the categories of book, reader, and writer need to be reevaluated and unfossilized, the relationships between each definition revised – and I argue that we can do this through close examination of and interaction with artist's books and poetry.

So to begin, I should attempt some definitions. These may not be conventional definitions, either in the way they describe what classifies the categories I am working with, or in their actual ability to define. As I am attempting to widen and perhaps even radically change the way I define many of these entities, these “descriptions” may themselves end up shaken and revised.

The artist's book is a category of creative output that enjoys the difficulty of its characterization. There is no formula or description that can encompass all artist's books: one might say that all works in this category contain words, or paper, or images, but these would not hold true for all things that consider themselves artist's books. The one characterization that I hold to be true about all artist's books is that they deal with the thin and moveable lines between book and art, between author and artist, and between form and content. They are a form that enjoys walking the narrow bridges, pushing our ideas of what is static and interconnected. Emily Speed, the author of the article “Books as Bridges” from the book *Hand, Voice & Vision: Artist's Books from the Women's Studio Workshop*, calls them “liminal spaces or thresholds” (Speed 30). Herself an author of an artist's book called *Unfolding*

Architecture, she realizes how “an artists' book may afford its viewer another kind of dimension,” which is the quality that I hope to tap into in order to provide a new viewpoint on authorship and readership of all books.

Poetry is a category that I find equally difficult to define, though I believe the difficulty to be integral to its liminality and boundary-crossing qualities. It is alive – not, I don't think, a particular category of output, but a intention on the part of writer or reader. I believe you can listen things into poetry. Poetry requires a limitless and incurable curiosity into sound and sense, a captivation with the endless mutation of language and meaning. If something is dead when it is written or read, it is not poetry. What is alive within us as writer or reader is touched by what is alive within the words. Poetry reclaims something lost, breathes a fire under language. Words find shape in the mouth, but they find depth and difference in poetry. A language left without the desire or intention to poetry is bleak, just like a codex that is considered the unimportant and interchangeable container of a work is dead. As Emerson says, language is fossilized poetry. It is this definition that leads me to believe that the correlate must also be true: that poetry has the ability to unfossilize or redefine.

In using poetry and artist's books to unfossilize and redefine writers, readers, and books, I find it helpful to first draw the parallels and similarities between them. Redefinition often most easily appears when we see the previously hidden bridges between two apparently separate categories. I have been interested for some time now in both the consumption and creation of both artist's books and poetry, but have not until closer examination begun to understand how the two are connected for me.

I think that poetry is a continual process, a product of an ever-changing imaginative mindflow. Maya Angelou maintains that she is still revising *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*, decades after it was published and widely celebrated. A creative work at any point in time is a cross-section of a live text, a stage in its life and growth. It says, “here is where the

mind is at now – the mind has been elsewhere, and the mind will move on”. A poem contains within its text all the forms it has previously taken, and all the revisions possible in the future. Time is integral to poetry: if poetry is a living thing, as I believe it has to be, then it is also a growing thing.

Books are also temporally based, especially the codex form. Keith Smith, a bookmaker himself, says that “bookbinding at its ultimate realization is not a physical act of sewing or gluing, but a conceptual ordering of time and space” (Smith 13). A codex binds the work inside, orders it and arranges it, informs its contents through their context. If a poem is defined by the revisions that came before and might possibly come after, a page in a book is situated between and informed by the preceding and following leaves. The codex form provides a linear structure with random accessibility: just as you can read a poem without seeing any of its past or future versions, you can read one leaf of a book without flipping to the pages on either side. The surrounding pages in a book serve as the past and future of that work as arranged in author's created temporality, as ordered in the codex.

Poetry is a temporal cross-section of the workings of a poet's mind, the electron microscope of words probing the three-dimensionality of a specimen. A book is a temporal bookmark: the word codex comes from the Latin *caudex*, or “tree-trunk” – literally, a slice from the centre of a tree, a representation of time in growth rings, a sideways look at a larger and continuing column. Each page in a codex speaks and replies to the one before and after, but is also its own stand-alone artefact, discrete. Each leaf is placed in consideration of what comes before and what comes after, even if either category remains empty. The author's choice to place the text in a specific order inside the codex is informed by the relationship between the texts on each page, and so reflected on each page as it stands on its own.

Both books and poetry are worlds – worlds with doors. They both need an author to be created, but neither can fully exist without a reader. The codex has a cover that hinges like a

door, an invitation to open and be opened. I was once given a book called *The Pageant of British Poetry* which was printed in 1901, over a hundred years before I received it. There were four pages in the middle that were still uncut, both sides bound into the spine. Until I slit the outer edge, were the words on that page poetry, or was that section of the codex a book? Poetry needs to be taken in by living beings in order to continue its life, and the book shape cannot enact its temporal ordering if it remains un-flipped-through. A reader is an interactive being: she changes in response to a book or text, but also moves and defines the poetry and the codex through her reading. The author, the work and the reader all require each other for the world inside the book and poetry to be brought into existence.

Stanley Fish reinforces this point in his book, *Is There A Text In This Class?*, in which he also shakes up the contemporary ideas of the roles of author and reader. “I challenged the self-sufficiency of the text,” he relates, “by pointing out that its (apparently) spatial form belied the temporal dimension in which its meanings were actualized”^v. A book is not simply a book, but an object to be used in conjunction with a reader to create meaning. He argues that it is the “developing shape of that actualization,” or the interaction between reader and the author's creation, “rather than the static shape of the printed page, that should be the object of critical description” (Fish 2). Fish believes that the meaning does not exist inherently in the text, but rather in the reader's response to the book as a whole, which I maintain includes their interactions with the physicality of the work. It is important, as Gary Frost relishes, that the binding often “exploits the leverage that the reader applies on the board of the cover,” turning their action into a reaction (Frost 4).

Using this concept of the necessity of readers to the author's work, I want to call out in opposition to the modern constructions that we may term *the monstrous reader* and *the monstrous writer*. I am against engorged self-importance, the illusion of control and independence, or the wish for either. I have been a monstrous writer at many times in my life

and I still often struggle to keep a cage around the length of my reach. When I write a poem, I draw a room, and while I may provide a door by which the reader can enter a possible world, I cannot run the tour. I can put up shelves but can't arrange ad infinitum the contents thereof. This is to say that the writer does not control the work she produces, does not provide to the reader a finite and particular experience. I have often had the issue in my poetry of spasming my literary muscles, attempting to clench the text around the reader. In my work this monstrosity appears as an overbearing narrator, an abundance of pronouns, adverbs describing how I wish the poem would sound actually appearing in the words of the poem. This is a futile exercise, and will only lead to a cramped and withered poem.

As the artists' book illustrates, and helps us rethink, even if the writer or artist takes pains to control the path of the reader through the work, attempting to control the reader's experience only highlights its uncontrollableness. Artist's books often humorously parody the attempts of monstrous writers to create a world that is the same for each of its readers, that pretends to require no interactivity. Several artist's books take the form or substance of a recipe book, such as Carissa Carman and Gretchen Hooker's *Good eats: sit down, relax & enjoy: it's the cook's choice: selections from an appetizing array of well-seasoned moments and finely diced tales*^{vi}. From its comically weighty title to the scrawled suggestions and comments on each recipe, the book suggests that no matter how instructions may demand to be followed to the letter, they never exactly can be. One recipe is almost entirely covered in additions and revisions, showing the outcome of the fruitless obsession with order and control, and highlighting how the need to share the exact experience of the reader with the writer is impossible.

Much of the book's text is written in second person, such as the statement that “most of your friends are vegetarians anyway”, which of course will only ring true with a certain segment of readership and alienate others. There are orders about where the food should be

eaten, such as “on the front porch with Francis” or “under Aunt Sue's lamp”, no matter if the reader's friends or relatives don't have such names. Some recipes contain exactitudes that cannot be fulfilled, such as the description of how molasses cookies should be served: “delivered on a plate covered with saran wrap, with a post-it note of good graces, an envelope of a thoughtful newspaper clipping and a warm smile and hug as sweet and warm as the whole plate of cookies”. These unrepeatable experiences showcase how the author cannot dictate the experience of the reader through the book, because the reader and the author are not machines but individual people, with separate histories, geographies, and acquaintances.

At the end of the book, Carman and Hooker present a table of alternative substitutions for products that readers may wish to omit, following it with the caveat that the authors are “not responsible for people attempting to combine all variations at once”. This statement only reinforces their awareness that the reader who tries to adhere to all the impossible orders and commands in the book will end up in a sticky situation. The monstrous author's tendency to attempt control over the reader is stubborn and implausible, and no reader will be able – or even should try – to follow the recipes to the letter. After all, this is something for which the author is “not responsible,” and a reader who could would be no more than a robot. I haven't spoken with either artist about their intentions for the book, but I think that my ability to interpret their work as substance for my argument that authors cannot control their readers' reactions only reinforces my point, especially if they did not intend to provide me with such material.

The monstrous writer is above described: one who cannot relinquish control over her creation and allow it to be taken where it will. The monstrous reader is its reciprocal and complement, yet also the opposite. A monstrous reader is one who considers herself a bucket which simply draws water from an infinite well, instead of a participant in the construction of meaning. Stanley Fish also writes much about this topic, railing against the “affective fallacy”

that a text is “the self-sufficient repository of meaning” and a reader just the “disposable machinery of extraction” (Fish 2). I don't use the word monstrous to mean unusual, or cruel, or with unkind intent, but rather a reader made into a different creature, an android, monstered from her true self.

Fish, rather densely, explains the relationship between the text of the author and the reader, as he imagines it unmonstered. Speaking about the meaning of a work, he writes, “one [can] not point to this meaning as one could if it were the property of the text; rather, one [can] observe or follow its gradual emergence in the interaction between the text, conceived of as a succession of words, and the developing response of the reader” (Fish 3). He argues that “if meaning is embedded in the text, the reader's responsibilities are limited to the job of getting it out,” a dull and undifferentiated occupation that turns both reader and text into static, boring automatons. But he counters that “if meaning develops, and if it develops in a dynamic relationship with the reader's expectations, projections, conclusions, judgments, and assumptions,” then the reader and what she does in response to the book are “not merely instrumental, or mechanical, but essential” (Fish 3). The text does not lie solely within the text, but within the reader's experience of it, which includes physical interactions.

Jacquelyn Martino, author and artist, and creator of an interactive book-arts computer installation entitled *Without A Specific Object of Worship*, explains this same redefinition of reader-text relationship in her own words^{vii}. She says that through creating her installation, which included books, she “realized they were also interactive structures” (Martino 13). She watched as “each individual would customize his or her viewing experience by approaching the book in a personal way – by turning the pages slowly or quickly, from left to right or right to left, or by setting the books on a surface to examine without touching”. Rather than a book being the object of meaning itself, it “simply acts as a point of departure” for the reader's own individual and interactive experience (Martino 13).

Just as some artist's books parody the impulses that lead to monstrous authorship, there are artist's books that expose the tendencies of a monstrous reader. The fittingly named *Monstress Activities*, an artist's book by Libby Clarke, inverts the reader's expectations of a static, dead text^{viii}. The book is in fact a cardboard box which, when opened, contains a series of discrete objects rattling around in the space inside. There is no imposed order: it is an unbound codex. Random access is highlighted here to an extreme, as the reader has to choose for herself where to start and how to continue. The contents themselves also emphasize the interactivity and responsibility of the reader, many of them asking to be written on, such as the name card, or fully realized, such as the Instant Collaborative Sculpture (a deflated balloon).

This artist's book, through its physical contents and their textual counterparts, really pushes the concept of reader and author to redefinition. The “sweet reader,” as the book calls her, is integral to the very existence of the book as book: “this art does not happen without you,” she is told. *Monstress Activities* addresses the reader gently but unexpectedly, allowing for revisions of the interactive process if she is a “non-art practitioner,” and naming her a “collaborator,” and one of a set of “fellow wanderers”, describing the equality of the creator and reader as participants in the same dynamic meaning-making process.

For a class last year, I interviewed Libby Clarke about *Monstress Activities*, and think that her responses and my interpretation of them are relevant to this current argument. She told me that she hoped her work could “validate my viewer and include him/her in on the fun,” and that she “would love to live in a world where these items were seen as normal consumables” (Hamer 10-11). Clarke's vocabulary, as well as intent, speaks to her desire to also reconsider the role of reader and author, putting them on a more equal level and making them more aware of their interactive conversation. In my previous essay, I related how, in *Monstress Activities*,

the Personal Space Delineation DeviceTM suggests that the reader use pencil when adding herself to the art, but in her written response Clarke stressed that any

collaboration on part of the reader “should be in pen, as I have plenty of extras should they need a new one”... by including herself in this way, as a source of renewable versions of the book, Clarke places herself in the same position as a reader who interprets the book in her own way, effectively renewing the book through her own lens. Clarke also relates how she intentionally placed the items in the box, “smallest to largest, and anticipated the viewer pulling them out in that order”. Obviously with each reader, the sequence has the possibility to change, which in turn affects the experience that the next collaborator has, so by being the first to place the items in the box Clarke situates herself as not the author but the first reader. (Hamer 11)

Clarke and I are both working towards a sense of collaboration between the creator and consumer of the artist's book, attempting to subvert the conventional categories of author as director and reader as audience by showing the way both interact similarly with the work.

Thinking this way can and has helped me, as a poet, to relinquish control, to deny my monstrous tendencies. I do not have to direct a reader through my work, because I cannot, and would not want it tried on me. Each world I create, whether poem or book, is coloured and expanded – more, breathed life into – by those that choose to populate it. Both books and poetry have doors. To enter into one is to choose to bring the writer's work to life. To create a poem or book is to invite a reader inside. Neither is more valuable than the other, or exists without the other. An empty world may not even be – ships without an ocean are untenable and warp. Books without a reader who is willing to accept their life, see their physicality as integral to their poetry, wither and become dead.

One of my favourite codices is Alice Walker's book *A Poem Travelled Down My Arm*^{ix}. It is a collection of words and drawings she began to sign at the beginning of her books when she became tired of her own signature. Because Alice Walker is very much alive, and constantly alive to poetry, each of these signings is of course poetry. I do not read this book through from front cover to back cover like a novel, but more as one reads a book of recipes, or a holy text. I open to a page when I need advice, and the page says – “See yourself in every eye you fear to look into,” for example. This is the way poetry and the codex form work, using

their random access and unfossilization to strike on the part of the iron that you did not yet know what softened by the world's fire.

Each time I employ the random access possibility of the codex form, I am the author of my own experience, reading the single page that I choose and interpreting it in the context of my life, or the book. The blurb for the book explains how Walker “turned an act of repetition into an act of inspiration” (Walker, blurb). I believe that if what this passage relates is true, and “the result is this spontaneous burst of the unexpected,” then Walker's alive and poetic mind is both the writer and reader of this poetry, as surprised and reactive to her work as if it were written by another hand. The quality of transcendence of categories is not limited to the reader who reconsiders herself interacting with the book, but encompasses the author who approaches work also as a reader.

In my redefinition of reader and writer, I think the former can be thought of as the first speaker, the latter a responder. Even if the reader is reluctantly reading, or even if she is unaware. The author can be her own speaker and responder, an act I think is embodied through the process of revision or book-making, and a reader is as much a writer of her own experience as the writer of the book is. These two roles that we may think of as separate I believe to be much more closely aligned than their contemporary interpretations imply, a revision that places both categories on a more equal plane, and allows them to understand themselves as in conversation through the medium of the book container and its textual contents.

This redefinition of categories as mediated through the book form is called into question when applied to other formats, such as the internet. If a poem is online, is it contained within a kind of codex? Can it be considered in a temporal format, as an interactive writer-reader medium? Of the many things that are strange about the internet and computers, one of the strangest to me is that a computer screen is a modern reversion to the form of a scroll: an endless and only linearly navigable stream of information poured into a “notebook” which is in

fact not a codex. When poetry is represented on the screen, the lines break and snap where they come to the edges. The colours are adjustable. Each text smells, feels, weighs the same – the smell of ice, the texture of air, the weight of a shrug. The smells, textures and weights of the virtual. In the mass-produced book, the author does not necessarily get to choose how her text appears on the page, but on the computer nobody does – the formatting occurs according to pre-written code, the shape fitted to the individual shape of the screen.

It is certainly possible to argue, and I think I would, that when we make texts virtual, we make the reader even more monstrous. The initial appearance of the text on the screen, its physical housing, is determined by a machine – not even a metaphorical machine, like a large publishing house designing a book for printing, but literally a mechanism that runs on binary code. When an reader sits at a computer, she has all control over the shape and spacing of text. There are no boundaries to her power, or her ability to change the work on the screen. There is no dialogue between author and reader, because the author almost cannot be found: she is distantly mediated through the untraceable medium of the internet. The reader is actionless because there are so many actions, cannot create or access the book- or poem-world because there are no walls. There is a reason we say “surfing” – nobody ever walks the web, because there is no ground.

Conversely, the internet is also one of the more interactive media in our world. On Wikipedia, the authors are the editors are the readers, with almost no differentiation between the categories. A reader's understanding of a text is added to the text itself in the comments section, so that every individual interpretation of the literature is accessible along with the author's own words. Jacqueline Martino's interactive computer-book arts installation used a well-defined and author-limited version of this technology to create her art, using a physical book-form to guide the reader through a computerized display. But on the internet, often this representation of authorial design choices becomes lost among the infinite and mutable

iterations of the web, impairing the ability of the reader to enter into conversation with the author and accept or resist her design choices. I think that this free-floating version of poetry and book is unhinged from one of its most basic attributes, that of temporality. Without the context of a concrete book, so much of the meaning contained in the physical book form and the author's choices regarding shape, weight, order, spacing, colour or material disappears. On the internet, the conversation is no longer between the writer and the reader, but between the writer of the work, the person who has reposted the work online, the computer's code, and the reader. It is even further removed than an author's work mediated through a publisher's aesthetics or an anthology editor's ordering: there are so many voices in the conversation that without careful mediation it can become an unproductive cacophony.

The computer is also the source of another contemporary issue: how easy it is to become detached from the act of creation if the work is never manifest physically. Even printing – that is some other person's invention, another machine grinding the paper pulp, other metal hands setting the type. Can we really project a part of ourselves in cyberspace? Never faced with choices or limits of size, delicateness, portability: how can we create with no materials? How many of us have ever read a book? Yet how many have made one? Consumption removed from production is alienation. How can we know what something is, or know how to interact with it, without knowing how to take it apart, how to fix it – let alone how to create it? Reclaiming and reanimating books may help reclaim something of ourselves.

Part of the work of this thesis was to write a collection of poetry, and part of it was to make that collection into a book. After having done both, I think that the process of creating the book was just as integral to my understanding of what the poems individually and as collection meant as the process of writing and revising them was. In many ways, making a book from your work is simply the last step of revision. The materials I had available to make the book constrained me in the most wonderful, challenging and inventive ways. I had to use

not only what was available, but what I could afford and access. Certain things were determined for me: for example, I could not make a book bigger than the size of the smallest page. In many ways it was like a process poem, a constraint. It was an exercise in invention, in physical creativity.

The poems spoke through the way they were made into a book. As I chose a layout, a colour and material for each piece, I learned a great amount about what I consciously or unconsciously thought these poems were saying and the themes they embodied, as well as where I might be wrong about their meanings. Experiments trying out certain poems on surfaces and discovering how ill-fitted the pairings were taught me a lot about the character of many of my pieces that I did not previously know. Each poem needed to match the spirit of the page it was on: *I Met A Woman Who Did A Wonderful Thing* ended up in three separate sections each in their individual envelopes: disembodied, difficult to access as a whole, covered-up.

The poems also came together as a collection, and as themes emerged and re-emerged, poems became connected through both content and shape, and an order was slowly born. The progression of the poems came not only from a realization of their relations to each other and the larger work – the three poems with epigraphs taking the same physical form because of their related stories – but also aesthetic consideration of recurring materials and colours. This design element influenced the ordering of the book, presenting the choice of whether to collect or separate similar aesthetics. I think this choice also reflects the literary character of the poems, as they were embodied by their media and thus the choice was also whether to collect or separate similar themes.

There were poems that were almost impossible to print – either I had decided that they should be on a material that I was no able to coerce the printer into accepting, or once printed, I could not align that visual impression with what I thought they were expressing. These divergences from the ideal produced many revisions – one poem found a new title, another was

printed on a completely different medium. It was like listening to what the poems wanted and trying to accommodate them, rather than imposing my authorial mastery upon them. I learned large lessons about giving up monstrous authorship and accepting my interactivity as a reader of my work during this tedious process, discovering new depths of my poetry through submitting to material alternatives I had not previously considered.

The materials and shapes that cropped up repeatedly were also telling. One page was printed on paper that I made – such a strange sense of ownership and the need to be careful with one's precious product – while another was outlined with sandpaper. Such fragile and harsh substances in the same work highlighted the many divergent sides of my poetry through their physical manifestations. The image of the frame or door also appeared many times: the structures that we consider ourselves to inhabit, or that we close off, or that we enter. The knocker on the front of the box, the framed chamois of the first poem, the envelopes, the unfolding paper – these all pointed to the same material theme, as well as being interactive book-parts that require action or reaction on the part of the reader. It taught me that I was channeling some idea of enclosure, of an outlined space with an access point, of the third dimension that hides behind the flat rectangle. The critical content of this essay crept into the poetry and bookmaking of the creative part of this thesis. These themes cropped up as representations of the need to take the text, codex and reader together to access a deeper dimension of meaning. I also employed divisions, separations, and attempts to look at a too-large object from many different poses both in my poems and their pages. There was a recycling of words and materials that I think served to make them both more familiar and strange at each encounter.

During process of making the book I found myself at the same time occupying the roles of writer, revisionist, and reader. I felt a deep connection to my process of writing many of the pieces through putting them into physical form, found opportunities for change and alteration

in the poems through the way they appeared in drafts of the book form, and was pleasantly surprised by the new discoveries I made about my poetry through the process of seeing it again through different eyes, mediated by the codex form. Once finished, the book felt like a cross-section of my current mindset, an interrelated dialogue of my thoughts and poetic themes, a milestone that both looked back to my previous work and contained hints of what work might be to come.

I think that through my poetry and my book-making, I am trying to challenge concepts we may hold about books, writers and readers – perhaps even more so than I was initially aware of. Reading through my poetry that I put into the book, I see how these themes are reflected in my writing: in the second-person commanding voice of “Sleep Race” that directly addresses the reader yet requires no specific action; in my epigraphs taken from scholarly articles, government protocols and product promotion pamphlets that I turned into poetry without the original author's knowledge; in the way I want to at the same time draw in the reader through sharing my understandable experiences and alienate her by detailing my disturbing thoughts in a recognizable manner. I talk abstractly about the body as a concept, but then turn the attention quickly to the actual form itself, “as if/our bodies were not also in the room, listening”. In the same way I am here talking abstractly about books, but have also constructed a real concrete codex myself, embodying at the same time the creator, the critic and the consumer.

By making more than half of this thesis project into the writing and revision of poetry, as well as the creation and binding of a book, I have brought back to the forefront the idea of temporality. This essay is important in its ability to put into words my critical thoughts on the matter of books, readers, and writers, but the poetry and artist's book that I made were necessary in how they brought a narrative of my own actions, my own temporality, into this thesis. I ordered my thoughts through poetry, refined and sharpened them through the process

of revision, which is by definition a temporal one: the poem changes as time passes through my mind. I then ordered my poetry, and so even more my thoughts, through the act of bookmaking and the thousand choices that go into that creation. This essay, the poetry, and the book I have made are all temporally lodged in the history of my actions and thoughts, and the conscious work that I put into ordering their internal temporality place a visible, tangible and accessible bookmark in my life.

A book is not a clear pane of glass; Light bends around books – the world is heavier in eddies surrounding them. They are laden with worlds that can only exist when populated by a reader. As, and sometimes more, important than the words is the page between fingers, the heft of the cover, how easily the leaves turn, the way the text makes shadows on the other side of the paper. Hidden space between quires and spine. Previous lives of the materials. Who made it. My interaction with poetry and artist's books has helped me to redefine my ideas about the categories of reader, writer, and the codex form, as well as their interactions with each other and my placement among and within them.

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