Bonfire of the Vanity Presses
Self-Publishing in the Field of Australian Poetry
Exegesis and Artefact

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Melbourne, Australia
2009
Abstract

This thesis explores the practice of self-publishing in the field of Australian poetry. Self-publishing today can be seen as part of a long tradition of alternative publishing. Despite changes in the technologies of self-publishing, including the continuing reinvention of non-book publishing activities, poetry remains an area of the arts where the self-published book contains both symbolic and social capital. Rather than offering a basic defence of self-publishing or a textual analysis of self-published works, the Exegesis ‘re-imagines’ self-publishing within what Bourdieu might term the "field" of Australian poetry. The thesis also incorporates an Artefact composed of published, self-published and privately-published books. Despite technological changes in the way books are published, it argues that non-mainstream print publishing forms such as the chapbook still play a significant role in fostering innovation in poetic forms. In doing so it seeks a more sophisticated understanding of the literary field, and the role of books as signifiers of prestige within that field.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors Julian Thomas and Denise Meredyth and my colleagues at the Institute for Social Research for their support during the period of my candidacy. My thanks also to Ian Hunter and Robert Hassan for their comments on early drafts of this thesis. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the friendship and camaraderie of my colleague Scott Ewing, a true Renaissance man.
Declaration

I certify that this Exegesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma, except where due reference is made in the text of the examinable outcome; that to the best of my knowledge it contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the examinable outcome; and that where a work is based on joint research or publications, the relative contributions of the respective workers or authors have been disclosed.
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Summary of Thesis

This thesis is organised into two Parts: an Exegesis containing five chapters, and an Artefact containing seven poetry books.

The Exegesis is introduced in the Preface with an explanation of the process through which this thesis has come to be presented in its current form.

Chapter 1 begins with a broad outline of the question of self-publishing, establishing theoretical, academic and personal contexts for an examination of self-publishing.

These contexts are underpinned in Chapter 2 by an application of the theories of Pierre Bourdieu to the field of poetry publishing, suggesting a set of positions more complex than a simple mainstream/underground dichotomy.

Chapter 3 briefly revisits innovations in publishing technologies and proposes a different reading of the publishing process as a performance, with special reference to the history of chapbooks.

Chapter 4 documents the production and significance of the creative Artefact, with reference to the publishing process for five of the self- or privately-published poetry book objects contained within it.

Chapter 5 explores the construction of the sixth book in the Artefact, We Will Disappear, and its performance of the rituals associated with publication.

The Reflection concludes the Exegesis with some thoughts on the survival of self-published books, with reference to the seventh book in the Artefact.
The **Artefact** is composed of seven published creative works, including one commercially published book of poetry –

- *We Will Disappear*, an 84-page book of poems (Papertiger, 2007)

– as well as four other poetry collections, privately- or self-published, namely:

- *Re:*, an 8 page A5 pamphlet (with Andy Jackson, 2005)
- *Dead Poem Office*, a 24 page A5 chapbook (self-published, 2007)
- *Morgenland*, a 24 page A5 chapbook (Vagabond Press, 2007)

Two other poetry book objects, completed before the period of candidature but nevertheless part of the context in which the work developed, are also included:


Hard copies of each of these books can be found attached, except for *Dead Poem Office*, which exists only in digital format. For convenience, digital scans of this book and each of the five other chapbooks have been included on a separate compact disc.

Four other unpublished collections or manuscripts are referred to in the text, two of which were completed during the period of candidature:

- *Between Empires* (2002), an unpublished poetry collection
- *Imaginary Cities: PC Bangs* (2005), an published book of poems
Part 1: Exegesis
But a better case for the banning of all poetry is the simple fact that most of it is bad. Nobody is going to manufacture a thousand tons of jam in the expectation that five may be eatable. Furthermore, poetry has the effect on the negligible handful who read it of stimulating them to write poetry themselves. One poem, if widely disseminated, will breed perhaps a thousand inferior copies ... Moreover, poets are usually unpleasant people who are poor and who insist forever on discussing that incredibly boring subject, ‘books’.

Myles na Gopaleen aka FLANN O’BRIEN (1997)
When I began researching the field of self-publishing in Australian poetry in 2005, I envisaged a grand, sociological study in the style of *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984), punctuated with graphs and tables, statistical analysis and interview data, an extensive bibliography of self-published books by Australian poets, and more. In hindsight, it is easy to scorn my own youthful optimism that an entire ‘field’ of self-publishing could thus be summarised in one vast yet mature and restrained tract of epic academic vigour, which I might then go on to self-publish, or even to disguise the extent of my own involvement in.
At the time I was also disassociating myself from the idea of writing a ‘creative’ or self-reflective thesis. I had certainly enjoyed the freedom of writing a 30,000 word novella entitled *Marzipan: a Confection* for my Master of Arts (Prater, 2004); but I also wanted to embrace a more systematic and theoretical approach by writing a more strictly sociological thesis for my doctorate. This attempted separation of my creative and academic writing was complicated by the fact that prior to beginning my PhD scholarship at Swinburne, I had also received a grant from the Literature Board of the Australia Council for the Arts. The poems produced with the support of this grant later appeared in *We Will Disappear* (Prater, 2007b), my first full-length book of poetry.

This thesis would not exist in its present form had *We Will Disappear* not been published. Its existence now also allows me to place in context a whole range of publishing acts. The book refers to itself, via the text of the biography on the inside back cover, as my 'first book'. In fact, prior to the publication of *We Will Disappear* in 2007 I had self-published several books of poems including *The Happy Farang* (Prater, 2000), *Re:* (Jackson and Prater, 2005) and *Abendland* (Prater, 2006a). Further complicating the supposed divide between 'published' and ‘self-published’ works, I have also participated in other kinds of non-mainstream publishing activities, including private or coterie publishing, as shown by *8 poems* (Prater, 2002b) and *Morgenland* (Prater, 2007e), and even non-publishing, in the case of *Dead Poem Office* (Prater, 2007g).

Over time, I began to realise that by writing a thesis on the subject of self-publishing, I was in a way challenging my own beliefs about the sanctity or otherwise of specific kinds of publication. This led, inevitably, to an examination of the practices surrounding the publication of my own self-published 'book objects'. To put it another way, self-published books are objectified in different ways from books published by mainstream or 'proper' publishers, although the meaning of these terms must also be interrogated and
re-assessed. This is not to say that they occupy completely separate positions within the field of literary publishing, but rather that each informs the other’s significance. How does this work?

The publication of each of these book objects can be viewed as a performance. By this I mean a reading of the production, circulation and reception of these books in terms of a particular symbolic rhetoric. The usefulness of a reading of the performance of publication is that it allows an examination of books that goes beyond textual analysis and the economy of individual genius. In the case of poetry, that most aesthetically subjective of creative forms, a meta-analysis of the 'book machines' that deliver content to readers also makes possible a reflective practice that would be untenable were one simply to focus on the themes and styles of one's own creative works. As a writer, I am fundamentally concerned with poetry both as content and as a particular practice.

As noted by Pierre Bourdieu:

> Although the break between poetry and the mass readership has been virtually total since the late nineteenth century (it is one of the sectors in which there are still many books published at the author's expense), poetry continues to represent the ideal model of literature for the least cultured consumers.
> (1993, p51 emphasis added)

This quote captures many of the tensions that are played out in the act or performance of book publishing: there's the field of 'poetry' publishing within the dominant field of commercial publishing and its 'mass readership', where poetry books are 'published at the author's expense'. Within this field, poetry maintains its status as 'proper' literature, thus perpetuating a certain style of 'proper poetry book' publication. While Bourdieu's reference to 'the least cultured consumers' could be read as an expression of educated superiority, it
also suggests a standard in terms of the way we, as consumers, judge poetry books: that in fact we perceive the rhetorical format of the poetry book itself and analyse the way it carries out or mimics the typographical 'tropes' of publication.

Or, as Feather puts it: “The printed book is a physical object as well as a medium of communication” (1991, p 825); to which we could add another variant: the printed poetry book is a physical and symbolic object which is, in turn, a highly-codified medium of poetic communication. The integration of a discussion of my own self-published works within this exegesis, which began as a supposedly objective investigation into the field of Australian poetry, is an action steeped in irony and the dangerous consequences of self-referentiality. Despite this, I do believe that in order for me to come to a more mature and complex understanding of the contribution of creative works to symbolic and other economies, it is necessary for me first to appraise my own actions as a producer of content.

The risks inherent in a thesis about creative objects written by a creative content producer should be self-evident and yet how else am I to understand the true nature of the symbolic economy? As I have come to realise throughout the writing of this exegesis, the symbolic economy will always be there, underneath the theatrics of the book launches, signings, festivals, reviews and awards. My own attempts at book creation preceding the publication of my ‘first book’ echoed earlier histories and formats of the book. This exegesis therefore seeks to fuse my personal understandings of the former with an analysis of academic approaches to the latter. Far from constituting an act of vanity, whose only remedy is a theoretical or symbolic ‘bonfire of the vanity presses’ (see Prater, 2008a), self-publishing might be viewed instead as ‘humility publishing’, a practice whose significance lies in its expression of private hopes and desires, not all of which are immediately obvious to the casual viewer or reader of self-published works.
Chapter One
To Publish or not to Self-Publish?

This chapter investigates the creation, distribution and evaluation of self-published book objects, with a special emphasis on self-publishing in Australian poetry. It is instructive to start by establishing a prevalent attitude to self-publishing, expressed here by critic, novelist and former *Australian Book Review* (ABR) editor Robert Dessaix. In an interview with Carmel Bird, Dessaix asked:

Well, what’s your attitude now to self-publishing? I ask the question because, from where I sit, it seems to me a really difficult row to hoe. Self-publishing means you have virtually no distribution — as soon as a self-published book comes into ABR or the ABC or wherever, you think to yourself: self-published — why wasn’t it good enough for Penguin or Heinemann? (1993).


On the other hand, in an abstract sense, it is also true: each book, if treated objectively as a book object, arrives discretely and manifestly at the ABR office, is taken from its wrapping or envelope, and placed in a shelf or in a tray somewhere, from whence it makes its labyrinthine way towards a review. Or
not, as in the case of a self-published book. In contrast to the anti-theory of magical ‘appearance’, a value judgement is made about the book’s worth, either by the reviews editor or the fictional ‘you’ of Dessaix’s devising. Further, the dismissiveness of the words ‘or wherever’ speaks volumes. It is worth remembering that, when he describes the place ‘where I sit’, Dessaix is referring in fact to a position of cultural privilege. Agents such as Dessaix and others occupy positions from where they can subtly control the kinds of books and authors who receive legitimacy.

However it is Dessaix’s final rhetorical question that sums up most eloquently the situation of the self-published author, not to mention the entire Australian literary landscape. The question implies that if a mainstream publisher rejects a manuscript, then it has less worth — is, indeed, unpublishable. Further, Dessaix refuses to acknowledge that the decisions made by publishers have everything to do with, as Bourdieu might have it, the maintenance of a legitimate field of literary production. Under these circumstances, the chance of a self-publisher obtaining a publishing contract, let alone a review from one of these organs of good taste, would be almost nil.

Compare this with the happy situation in which David Malouf found himself in the late 1960s when he wandered into the offices of the University of Queensland Press with a bright idea for ‘a paperback of 64 pages that would sell for a dollar’ and received a response from editor Frank Thompson within fifteen minutes:

‘Okay mate,’ Frank told me, ‘you’re on’ (Munro 1998, p. 73).

Clearly, poets who self-publish do not have anything remotely like this power or influence. While UQP’s resultant Paperback Poets series did go on to be successful and influential, much has changed in the intervening years. As Buckridge points out, in the period since then “fiction, especially Australian
fiction, has made a strong showing among readers in the last two decades, while poetry has sunk almost beneath the horizon.” (2006, p 346).

**Power, Status and Credibility: The Question of Self-Publishing**

A complete summary of the activities and positions constituting the Australian literary field would be impossible: a variety of agents and forces are involved in the maintenance of what we might term the Australian literary façade. A contest for legitimacy extends to all aspects of the production, consumption and distribution of book objects. The federal and state governments, through their funding bodies, allocate scarce resources according to specific definitions of success and prestige within the literary field. Sometimes this maintenance is spoken of as holding back a ‘flood’ of applications to the Literature Board (see for example Cork 2001). It is also arguably responding to local systems of value. To an outsider looking in, these systems may seem quite arbitrary.

Such systems can be found in most print-based cultures or sub-cultures, and should not surprise us here. Self-publishing, as an activity within the field of Australian publishing and as a cultural phenomenon, is often relegated to the fringes of legitimacy, or what might be described as a dominated position within the dominant field of literary culture. The important thing to remember is not that this is unfair or discriminatory — although some, including Mitchell (2001) have argued that this is the case — but that self-publishing’s very existence tells us much about how power, status and credibility are maintained in the Australian literary field.

Definitions of self-publishing are often hazy and overlapping. This is an important point because differences between the various definitions are crucial for self-publishing poets in Australia who seek government grants. For example, the Australia Council for the Arts, through its Literature Board, will only recognise a self-published work as evidence of a writer’s track record ‘if the
applicant can provide evidence of national distribution and at least one substantial review of the work in an established literary journal or general national magazine or major newspaper’ (Australia Council for the Arts, 2007). Poets whose work has been published by one of the Council’s ‘recognised publishers’ do not need to jump this hurdle.

While this may seem like an impossible task, it is worth remembering that prior to 2005 the Literature Board did not recognise or accept self-published works at all. In this scenario, reviews editors as much as funding board members or bookshop owners hold a veto power over the widespread distribution of and access to self-published works within the mainstream book publishing system. For proof of this attitude we need look no further than the Dessaix interview above.

The question is whether ‘to publish’ is the same as ‘not to self-publish’. In the current environment, where many commentators speak of the difficulties facing poets wishing to have their work published — see Neill (2007) for a recent example — more and more poets are turning to alternative methods of publication, including self-publishing. One could argue that this has more to do with economics than the maintenance of a certain literary culture: as Webster notes, ‘the “explosion” in [publishing] output towards the end of the [twentieth] century, particular [sic] in self- and “vanity” publishing was an indication of the lower cost of entry that computer technology was then offering’ (2006, p. 82). It also needs to be acknowledged that writers who self-publish are responding to the major publishers’ lack of interest in publishing poetry. Even UQP now only publishes a handful of poetry titles each year.

A common reason given for this lack of interest in publishing Australian poetry is that it does not sell. Australia’s best-selling Australian poet in mid-2007 was Michael Leunig, better known as a cartoonist and illustrator, or at least according to Nielsen Bookscan data, which shows that over fifteen thousand
copies of his book Poems have been sold since its publication. The second-highest selling book by an Australian poet in the Bookscan data current as of June 2007 was by a poet who has been dead for quite a long time but whose shadow continues to haunt the billabong of Australian poetry. His name is A.B. ‘Banjo’ Patterson, and the latest reprint of his poems has sold 3000 copies in the last five years (Webster, personal communication, 2007).

Significantly, poets set on high school curricula feature heavily in the top ten or fifteen best-selling books. Books by well-known living poets usually sell in the 1–2000 range, although in the case of these poets, who may have a long list of titles and a currency in the Australian literary field, data for their most recently published work may not represent the entire distribution of their works over a period of many years. While the limitations of Bookscan are well-known and have indeed been admitted by various commentators (see Neill 2006), it should still be apparent that we are discussing small numbers of books here.

If this is the reality for Australia’s best known poets, it may also partly explain the ‘explosion’ of alternative publishing Webster referred to earlier. As more books are published via alternative channels, literary historians, publishers and government funding agencies will be faced with more difficult challenges in assessing the worth of this content. A key part of this assessment will be the difficult task of accurately defining and categorising self-publishing.

**Defining Self-Publishing**

as ‘a publisher who publishes only at the author’s expense’. These definitions differ in several important, if subtle respects. For example, to publish ‘without the aid of a commercial publisher’ does not necessarily mean the same thing as ‘the publishing of one’s own literary work’. Similarly, a publisher who publishes ‘unprofitable books with the financial backing of the author’ is not quite the same thing as ‘a publisher who publishes only at the author’s expense’. Each of these definitions hint at conventions established within the field of literary publishing and subtle differences in the usage of these words in everyday speech in different parts of the world.

The *Macquarie Dictionary*’s editors’ injunction to the reader to compare (cf.) the definitions of self-publishing and vanity publishing adds further confusion. If one examines these two practices within the context of the cultural field, the question of whether one is a self-publisher or a writer whose books have been published by a vanity publisher may actually amount to the same thing: books have to be published somewhere, at someone’s expense. There may be a world of difference, however, between a writer who covers the costs of the printing and distribution of her own works in order to distribute those works to members of either private or public audiences, and a writer who engages a publisher to handle all of these tasks, including presumably the boosting of his vanity, in the expectation of immediate and long-lasting fame.

A more revealing point of view is provided by Glaister’s encyclopaedic *Glossary of the Book* (1960), which does not mention self-publishing at all, preferring to distinguish between ‘publishing’, ‘vanity publishing’ and ‘private presses’. While a full discussion of vanity and private presses can be found in Chapter 2, it is worth noting that these two terms are often used interchangeably to refer to publishing activities that are either non-mainstream or non-commercial in nature. In this sense, therefore, the most useful definition of self-publishing is that it is not commercial publishing. The term self-publishing itself contains multiple meanings.
This exegesis assumes that self-publishing refers to individual writers preparing, printing and distributing their own works for private or public audiences. The actual means by which these works are produced may range from the use of a photocopier to produce a pamphlet or chapbook, through to the engagement of the services of a printer or a vanity publisher, unless the author actually owns a printing press, in which case their status as a self-publisher is self-evident. Further, the focus here is on poets who self-publish their work, whether as a stand-alone activity or alongside other forms of publishing, including commercial publishing. This focus also reflects my own interests in performance poetry (Prater, 2001c) and my activities as an editor of an online poetry magazine funded by the Australia Council for the Arts (Prater, 2005a).

**Histories of the Book**

In assessing the historical role of self-publishing, it is tempting to conceptualise the publishing system as consisting of various competing economies, not all of which are based on capital. Publishing, even self-publishing, is not simply about the relationship between a poet and a publisher, but one manifestation of an entire field of relationships and networks. While these relationships are not simply defined by a single technology — say, ‘the book’, in Gutenberg’s ‘invention’ — this exegesis does focus primarily on self-published poetry books as book objects. It is therefore necessary to summarise some of the key developments in histories of the book.

It is possible to trace the history of the book using a linear historical narrative, and to plot the important dates and historical occurrences which together generated the current set of circumstances described collectively as ‘publishing industries’ or ‘literary cultures’. Some important historical moments to be mentioned along the way would include Gutenberg’s printing press, or even
earlier, the mastery of movable type in East Asia; stock texts in book history would also need to be discussed, with ample reference to the Christian Bible, as well as other ‘pivotal’ texts.

Historians such as Eisenstein (1979) and Febvre and Martin (1976), for example, have provided narrative approaches which can be used to structure or order the history of the book, from the manuscript copying employed by the early Christian church, to the invention of the printing press in the late middle ages, and the growing commercialisation and mechanisation of printing ever since. As Eisenstein notes, ‘It is difficult to find out what happened in a particular Mainz workshop in the 1450s’ (1979, p. 43). Or to put it more bluntly, as Glaister does in the entry for “the book” in his *Glossary of the Book*: “its invention is claimed, without proof, for Johann Gutenburg, qv. of Mainz ...” (1960, p393).

Dane (2003) critiques this apparent vagueness in historical sociological accounts of print culture, with a sharp though somewhat laborious series of demonstrations on the impossibility of counting all ‘incunabula’, a reference to Febvre and Martin’s bold proclamation of twenty million books printed before 1500 AD. While Dane is not the first to question this figure — as early as 1957 Grannis, presumably a fan of understatement, noted their ‘perhaps somewhat optimistic estimate’ — his critique is also a useful reminder of the need for statistical rigour. On the other hand, as Duguid (1996) notes, by 1962 McLuhan was already reading the book’s elegy. In fact the book has not died, even in the face of both divine and technological determinism.

While it would be tempting to criticise such linear narratives — for example on the basis of their exclusion of Asian print cultures which pre-date Western mechanised print developments — the fact remains that in various cultures, at various times, importance has been ascribed to the book as a conveyor of ideas, an expression of the power relations between various actors in society, and as
an instrument of social and political capital. These histories, surveys and sociological accounts have formed their own histories, acquiring along the way their own force and momentum, a conundrum best summed up by the title of Joan Shelley Rubin’s (2003) article ‘What is the history of the history of books?’. The field itself is endlessly generative.

Histories of self-publishing across various times and locations will not be found in these grand narratives of book history. Information about the circumstances in which poets self-publish their work is fragmented, and requires intuitive as opposed to systematic methods of investigation. It can be found in studies of the role of chapbooks in various cultures, specifically English and continental literary cultures — but also, to take another example, the proliferation of dramatic, political and pirated chapbooks in Nigeria in the twentieth century described by Lindfors (1967). It can also be found in histories of ballads and political broadsides in medieval England (Wurzbach 1990) and more recently Australia (Syson 1988), the bibliographic study of courtly love lyrics — hand-written and often appearing in marginalia or end pages of other books (Boffey 1985) — and histories of private presses, of which the most impressive is Cave’s *The Private Press* (1971).

Armstrong, discussing sixteenth century French poetry, whose dissemination was controlled by the issuing of privileges, notes that, despite the few poets who secured privileges for their works, ‘there were still others who preferred their works to circulate exclusively in manuscript among a few patrons and friends’ (1990, p. 204). In some respects, self-publication has at various times also been an act carried out in private by elite classes, whether the self-fashioning poets described by Greenblatt (1980), poets such as Pope and Wordsworth who literally published themselves in their poetry (Hess 2005), or the proliferation of artistic vanguard movements including Dada. English ‘chapmen’ also carried out an important function in the circulation of popular texts including ballads and fairy tales and thus, according to Neuburg (1968), played a vital role in
promoting working-class literacy.

Writers such as Spencer who do attempt histories of self-publishing invariably emphasise a handful of well-known modern self-publishing movements or authors while ignoring or failing to mention their pre-twentieth-century antecedents: ‘The zine did not begin with the internet e-zine, the riot grrl zine ...or even the chapbook of the 1950s, but with science fiction fanzines produced in the 1930s’ (2005, p. 94). In some respects, the rhetoric employed here is self-serving and idealistic. This is not to suggest that these movements are unimportant. No analysis of self-publishing is complete without reference to the American ‘zine movement — see Poletti (2005) for an Australian appreciation — not to mention self-published Japanese manga and anime or Samizdat, a Russian abbreviation meaning, literally, ‘self-publishers’ and a reference to the Soviet system whereby Government publishers held a monopoly over distribution of books (Feldbrugge 1975). By appropriating the name, the Samizdat movement suggested a taking over of official propaganda functions, which were then put to the service of writing and art (Wright 1995).

These accounts differ from other articles praising the bravery and individuality of self-publishers, usually found in writers’ centre newsletters and the pages of daily newspapers — see for example Wilson (1998) and Bird (1995) — which emphasise instead the importance of self-publishing as a stepping stone to future success. Inherent in the latter is an assumption of the immortality of great literature, and self-publishing’s rightful place within this grand narrative, such as that achieved by William Blake’s exquisite and now extremely valuable self-published pamphlets. To this list we could add the first edition of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1855) and the ‘juvenilia’ of other famous writers, which are these days considered valuable not just in an academic or historical sense but a monetary sense as well.
Australian Self-Publishing Histories

The history of self-publishing is not all about fame and fortune. Despite their best efforts, prominent or successful writers cannot help but be tarnished by the spectre of vanity publishing, and all its attendant insinuations. Munro and Sheahan-Bright point out the example of Charles William Blockside, under the terms of whose will the Grace Leven Poetry Prize has been awarded every year since 1947:

A World War 1 veteran and a contradictory mixture of recluse and social litterateur, Blockside maintained an air of reticence about himself and used his private income to publish his own books. He never married but harboured a flame for one Grace Leven, and his romantic memory of her lives on in this award (2006, pp. 143–4).

Virtually every Australian poet of note has won this prize over the past half century. Alison further muddies the water in her analysis of the early years of Angus and Robertson, one of Australia’s best-known publishers and an important early player in the publishing of Australian poetry: ‘The first A&R publication, in 1888, was H. Peden Steel’s verses, A Crown of Wattle, published at its author’s expense, as were the subsequent twenty or so books published up to 1894’ (2006, p. 28).

This historical observation may seem innocuous enough but it could be further argued that Angus and Robertson’s success was built upon the subsidising of its operations by its writers. Whether these subsidies were disguised at the time may likewise be mere academic speculation but as Webby writes:

...virtually all the literary works published in early Australia [i.e. after 1788 and before 1855] were produced at their author’s expense....One example is Barron Field’s First Fruits of Australian Poetry (1819), a
small pamphlet which has achieved perhaps unfortunate notoriety as the first volume of poetry to appear in Australia. Contemporary and later writers, including Patrick White, have had much fun at the expense of Field’s choice of title and his parents’ choice of first name (1988, p. 116).

Patrick White may well have laughed at Barron Field’s efforts but he probably was not laughing when his own mother paid for the printing of 300 copies of his first book of verse, *The Ploughman* (Brennan 1997), a feat made possible by his family’s relative wealth. This instance of vanity publishing in his own past seems also to have haunted White, as he tried strenuously to erase any traces of the book in his life, even to the extent of ignoring it in his autobiography (Marr, 1991). White’s attitude towards *The Ploughman* arguably reflects the unspoken assumption in Australia and elsewhere that paid publication is somehow suspect: at best embarrassing, at worst damning of one’s reputation.

Edward Duyker, writing in the *National Library of Australia News*, offers a more blunt analysis of the quandary of the self-publisher:

> In Australia we still have hang-ups about private or self-publishing. Many people still think of such works as rejects of commercial publishing or as the product of vanity (1995).

Here, Duyker’s categorisation of publishing into discrete ‘fields’ — the ‘commercial’, the ‘self’, the ‘private’ and the ‘vanity’ publishing fields — hints at a more complex and therefore useful reading or analysis of a range of cultural activities, all of which revolve around the use of books and book objects to deliver written content (in this case poetry) to readers.

This subterfuge is only further complicated by individual writers (self-publishers) who mask their own status by naming a fictitious press as the publishers of their book: ‘Many self-publishers deal with the problem of public
doubt about privately issued work by creating an imprint of their own — even if they produce only a single title’ (Ibid). Writers are also not averse to creating their own publicity, even going to the extent of writing reviews of their own work under fictitious names — see for example, Walt Whitman as described by Reynolds (2000, pp. 30–1).

Whitman was hardly the first poet to try to circumvent the reviewing process. As Erickson points out, both Keats and Tennyson were assisted by friends who wrote sympathetic reviews in the Edinburgh and London press: “... being reviewed favourably was one of the keys to, if not a guarantee of, success” (1996, p 39). These actions on the part of publishers, editors and writers alike allude to a continuous striving for legitimacy in a creative and cultural sphere that has specific rules of behaviour; that acts to approve or exclude certain individuals, organisations and works; and whose gates or walls must either be entered by invitation, breached by force or otherwise circumvented.

As Blahusiak (2003) points out, the issue of paid publication is not new at all; in fact, contrary to Clifford’s (1994) assertion that vanity publishing did not exist before the twentieth century, the phenomenon of private and vanity presses goes back much further, even in the Australian context. While their economic value may be miniscule, their mere existence suggests that any analysis of the Australian literary landscape should include self-published works, even the vainest undertakings. In this respect Australian literature might be more usefully compared and contrasted with other literary cultures.

**Bourdieu and the Literary Field**

Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas of the field provide useful tools for explaining poetry and self-published poetry books as a cultural phenomenon. In his essay ‘The Field of Cultural Production’, Bourdieu observes that ‘poetry continues to represent the ideal model of literature for the least cultured consumers’ (1993,
If, as is often claimed or assumed, there is no real commercial or mainstream market for poetry, then why do people continue to write it and, more importantly, what kinds of symbolic value still attach to poetry publishing? In order to answer this question, it is first necessary to define the field of Australian literature, within which the writing, marketing and distribution of poetry books by self-publishing authors takes place.

In using this term, ‘the field’, the present exegesis utilises Bourdieu’s use of the word to denote the field of positions and position takings that he finds across a variety of art forms, notably theatre, poetry and fiction writing, in nineteenth-century France. The applicability of the term ‘field’ to the Australian literary ‘landscape’ is hinted at in the title of Sinnett’s ‘The Fiction Fields of Australia’ (1856) — one of the first examples of a reference to a ‘field’ in Australian critical culture — although its agricultural and natural suggestions come to little fruition in the article, a brief appraisal of Australian fiction in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The connotations in early studies such as Sinnett’s with regard to the coming of Europeans to Australia, their cultivation of the soil and mining of gold, also offer temptation. These uses of the term fail to convey the complexity of Bourdieu’s meaning, despite their enrichment of the story of book history in Australia. The point is that fields of work on the book help us understand the complexity of the book system. Several recent articles by Australian academics have sought to use Bourdieu’s notion of the field in discussion of Australian literary cultures, with mixed success. Rooney (2001), for example, discusses Bourdieu’s theories in the context of Australian literary culture and specifically the writings and public statements of Christina Stead. Negus (2002) discusses Bourdieu’s concept of ‘cultural intermediaries’ and most significantly, Bennett and colleagues (1999) apply the ideas enunciated in Bourdieu’s 1984 opus Distinction to an Australian setting.
Bourdieu’s idea of the ‘literary field’ presents one immediate problem for existing accounts of self-publishing. In these narratives, the construction of self-publishing ‘legends’ or ‘success stories’ such as Walt Whitman or William Blake is paramount. Bourdieu, on the other hand, resists the idea of individual genius, preferring instead to view the literary field as ‘the space of positions and the space of position takings’ (1993, p. 30). The space of positions is explicated in a particular genre of literature, in this case poetry, and all of the positions that can be discerned in this field. Bourdieu’s argument is that every position in the field ‘depends for its very existence, and for the determinations it imposes on its occupants, on the other positions constituting the field’ (Ibid.).

The size of this space can be calculated by the way various forms of capital are distributed in the field. In this proposition, cultural capital such as the prestige gained by winning a prize might be just as relevant as the monetary value of the prize for quantifying success in the field, although it must be admitted that for many authors, prize money is significant in that it often exceeds income from book sales and may, indeed, increase future sales. The key element here for self-publishing in and of Australian poetry is that the field itself is governed by tensions between these positions or ‘forces’ — is, in fact, ‘a field of struggles tending to transform or conserve this field of forces’ (Ibid.). Literary prestige, for example, is also a form of capital over which struggles are waged and won and lost on a daily basis. Bourdieu goes on to observe that evidence of the flow or transfer of such capital is hard to discern in written accounts of the literary field and is therefore difficult to reconstruct accurately or richly:

It is difficult to conceive of the vast amount of information which is linked to membership of a field and which all contemporaries immediately invest in their reading of works: information about ... academies, journals, magazines, galleries, publishers ... and about persons, their relationships, liaisons and quarrels, information about the ideas and problems which are ‘in the air’ and circulate orally in gossip or
The same could be argued for the field of Australian self-publishing, in that the artefacts themselves — that is, the actual, physical objects we know of as ‘books’ — fail in and of themselves to convey the intricacy of tensions and connections between the authors, buyers, readers and distributors of self-published books at any one time. In other words, they are incapable of describing the whole human infrastructure that enables us to speak of the Australian literary field and the field of positions available within it: ‘Reading, and a fortiori the reading of books, is only one means among others, even among professional readers, of acquiring the knowledge that is mobilized in reading’ (p. 32).

In this sense, a bibliographic survey of self-published poetry books in Australia, while technically possible, would be paradoxically constrained rather than enriched by solely focusing on books as ‘objects’ in and of themselves, capable of classification and categorisation. Understanding the system of social relations or position-takings of which such book objects are an expression requires a different approach, or a series of approaches that emphasise, even by way of the crudest calculations, the social value of these relations and the way in which they enunciate Bourdieu’s ‘product and prize of a permanent conflict’ (p. 34).

This conflict in its simplest construction consists of a struggle over the cultural legitimacy of various creative works and the status and position-takings of their creators. These struggles, seeming to take place as they do in a rarefied sphere unhindered by economic constraints, are nevertheless subject to the same influences, destabilisations and forces as any other cultural sphere. While the field of poetry production in Australia may seem small and removed from everyday concerns, it is located within a system of economies, not all of which are easily classifiable by the social scientist.
It is the particular economy of the field — in this case, the printing and distribution of poetry books — that is of importance, due to its central facilitation of ‘a particular form of belief’, in which the ‘work of art is an object which exists as such only by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art’ (p. 35). In other words, without people’s belief that poetry constitutes a particular, symbolic cultural capital, poetry and the vehicles in which it is delivered to readers possess no power and therefore no usefulness as a tool for analysing social relations. As Bourdieu says: ‘... belief in the value of the work ... is part of the full reality of the work of art’ (p. 36). Works of art, in turn, are ‘a manifestation of the field as a whole’ (p. 37).

According to Bourdieu, the literary field is itself contained within the overarching field of power, and is sustained by both heterogeneous and autonomous principles of hierarchization. The first principle refers to the degree of ‘success’ of a particular agent within the field, which is influenced, unavoidably, by the normal constraints of ‘economic and political profit’ (p. 39). The second refers to the tendency within the field towards autonomy from such material constraints, and it is these two principles that produce tensions within the field and contestations of symbolic and actual capital. Therefore, within the field of poetry publishing in Australia, for example, the greater or lesser availability of economic profits, the greater or lesser the amount of symbolic capital available to those who inhabit autonomous positions with respect to the field.

This ‘loser wins’ inversion of the dominant cultural order leads to a situation in the literary field where ‘those who enter it have an interest in disinterestedness’, otherwise known as the ‘charismatic economy’ of rejection of material gains. This phenomenon of ‘temporal failure as a sign of election and success as a sign of compromise’ (p. 40) sits strangely with the proposition that struggles in the field of literary production are inseparable from overriding struggles between dominant and dominated classes. It is the literary field’s location within the
dominant class that leads to this seemingly counter-intuitive situation, whereby through the contestation of cultural legitimacy, the tensions between economic and symbolic success are played out in sympathy, as it were, with the dominated classes of the overarching world order.

Using Bourdieu’s analysis as a starting point, the production of self-published books of poetry — including pamphlets, chapbooks and full-length collections — can then be said to constitute a field that is at the same time both affected by economic forces and impervious to them. Further, when the term ‘self-published work’ is itself seen within the context of the autonomous tendency of the literary field, it is easier to account for differences between such practices as self-publishing, vanity publishing, subsidy publishing and private publishing as manifestations of the varying availability of cultural prestige and legitimacy afforded to these practices or positions. Each of these fields offers an example of a frontier between legitimacy and power on the one hand and cultural domination on the other. Recognising this, we can begin to re-imagine the field of Australian literature, and go beyond the simplistic question of whether to publish or merely not self-publish.
Chapter Two
Re-imagining the Field of Australian Poetry Publishing

This chapter analyses the structures, economies and characteristics of various fields of poetry publishing in an attempt to move beyond the binary question 'to publish or not to self-publish'. It argues that the field of poetry publishing consists of several competing fields. The field of 'mainstream' poetry publishing might instead be characterised as a highly-codified and 'symbolic' field subsidised by arts funding bodies. In this reading, 'vanity' publishing, along with 'private', 'collective' and 'academic' publishing, constitute distinct fields with their own rules and histories. Each of these fields is discussed in turn.

Mainstream Publishing or Symbolic Publishing?

There is a general consensus that poetry is a field within which the economic rewards are few. This is not strictly the case, as the rewards available to poets in Australia, while not enormous by boardroom standards, are numerous and quantifiable. Instructively, many of these rewards are made available by institutional actors, such as state and federal arts agencies, engaged in struggles within their own fields. This is not to say that poetry has no sales at all, or that it has no economic dimension over time. The problem is that poetry does not generate immediately large sales, making publishers hesitant of their returns.

Therefore, the relative lack of significant economic prizes in the Australian literary fields leads to a situation, to use Bourdieu's formulation, where symbolic prizes become more important and contestation of them acts as an expression of the field's underlying properties. When one views the practices of poetry publishing in Australia as a set of fields, it soon becomes apparent that
although many positions within the field are constant, a large amount of prestige and social capital can be gained by crossing between fields, or via success in one specific sub-field.

Much of this success is purely symbolic, both at the interpersonal and the textual level. At the level of the act of poetry publishing, it is often the poem itself, rather than the poet, that symbolically moves between fields. To take one example, a poem first published in a literary journal may later be re-published in an anthology, or in a poet's full-length collection. The poem itself has passed through several boundaries between actors competing in the field. In the case of the new entrant who, to employ Bourdieu, occupies a dominated position within the literary field, a lack of prestige or capital within the field will be countered by any effects these poems produce within that field, by very reason of their presence alongside other poets published in that journal or anthology.

To make a simple and artificial distinction between established players and new entrants denies the field any complexity, as well as ignoring the possibilities of movement between fields. It is also necessary to recognise that a large number of the poetry books published each year in Australia have been subsidised by the Australia Council for the Arts or the equivalent state funding body, either through grants directly to the publisher, or grants to the poet themselves to create the works. The publishers may have received support for the publication of other titles; or their publication of poetry titles may be partly subsidised within the publishing firm by force of another book's high sales. Still, to restrict a discussion of the value of poetry in Australia to questions of economic value would be to ignore significant economies of symbolic or literary prestige.

It is tempting to instead describe the field of Australian poetry in terms of group or ‘gang’ metaphors, as Davis' (1997) examination of cultural elites in Australia at the end of the twentieth century did, and to frame this contest as a
Stanzaland, where a contest for legitimacy extends to all aspects of the production, consumption and distribution of book objects (see Prater, 2009). Arts funding could be seen as weighted towards a particular type of publishing system in Australia, one that has been up until now more or less rooted in a mid-twentieth century model of book production. This interconnected model of a subsidised market can also be found in both old and new models of academic publishing in Australia.

This system is not a market based on the normal rules but one based on taste and above all the preservation of a distinctive, national Australian literature, written by Australian creators for both Australian and international audiences. Similarly, the grant system in Australia is not necessarily one of patronage but, increasingly, of merit and peer judgement. In this sense, subsidised publishing is a professional meritocracy with its own systems for advancement in the field which, while not faultless, are an attempt to systematise funding support for writers, and which produce indisputable effects within the field of poetry production.

State and federal governments, through their arts funding agencies, distribute largesse to poets and publishers as part of the maintenance of a particular cultural field. Poets and publishers in turn produce new books, the critical reception of which is controlled, at least partly, by editors and reviewers. This is one way of looking at the field of literary publishing but what of the large number of poetry titles published each year whose publishers operate outside the established channels of distribution and reception?

**Proper Poetry Publishers or the Vanity Press?**

The scale of the struggle for legitimacy within the literary field, with its focus on the book object, might well be summed up best by a history of vanity publishing – if it existed. As Kameny states: “There are no histories of vanity publishing or
even of individual vanity presses – believe me, I have looked” (1988, p 66).
Nevertheless, the emergence of “book subsidy (or vanity) publishers such as
Dorrance Publishing (Pittsburgh, PA), founded in 1920, and Vantage Press
(New York), founded in 1949” (Dilevko and Dali, 2006, p 209) demonstrates
that there is a real history here, somewhere beneath the layers of terminology.

In the field of poetry publishing, for a work to be labelled ‘the product of vanity’
is, unsurprisingly, the greatest insult of all. As may be apparent from the word
‘vanity’ itself, the term is usually used in a pejorative or derogatory sense:

Even to mention authors who subsidize the publication of their own
work is to raise the spectre of an unpleasant subject with an unpleasant
name: vanity publishing. But the term is more than ugly: it is peculiar
(Kameny, p 65).

The earliest usage of the term 'vanity publishing' in the *Oxford English
Dictionary* (OED) is in a 1922 text by Holliday & Van Renselaer, entitled *The
Business of Writing*: “Numerous devices are employed by the 'vanity publisher'
to lead the innocent author on toward becoming famous in his own eyes and
those of his friends" (p138). Edith Sitwell’s biographer reported: "She had
emerged from her vanity publishing to the real thing ... 'I have found a
publishing in England is not so extensive, being mostly limited to poetry”
(p497).

That was in 1960. A more complex view was expressed by English poet Ken
Smith in a 2000 interview:

I’ve never done the vanity press scene, where you have to pay for the
publication. I think that’s a complete waste of time and money and
it’s usually a racket – those publishing houses that do that by making
money and keeping their printer supplied at your expense. So, I’ve never done that! But I have occasionally ‘primed the pump’ a bit. There’s a long poem I wrote ... I had a mate at that time who worked as a technician at London University and he said ‘Let’s just put it on the machines and print it up.’ So we did that ... we sold these off for a fiver, and we printed off a hundred of them, so we had a decent Christmas and it got some decent reviews, including a review in the *Guardian*. (Evans, 2000)

Clearly, one does not simply “get” a review in the *Guardian*. At the same time there is a certain magic bravado in this clandestine academic or vanity publishing act, played out in the mainstream literary arena, and ‘reviewed’, as if it were a performance. The ambivalence of this position is underlined when the interviewer asks again:

Do you think vanity press is a complete waste of time?
Smith: Yes.

As we shall see in Chapter 4, this is by no means an isolated instance of blurred boundaries between ‘proper’ and ‘vanity’ publishing. A plethora of publishing activities are conducted in more or less clandestine ways.

Johnathon Clifford, the founder of the National Poetry Foundation in the United Kingdom, self-published a book which is probably the closest thing we have to a ‘foundation text’ for vanity publishing. Unlike Cave’s monumental work *The Private Press*, which was published in an elaborate format by Faber & Faber, *Vanity Press & the Proper Poetry Publishers* (1994) is an unassuming book, a copy of which I was able to track down via an online rare books site. In it, Clifford documents his dealings with unscrupulous vanity publishers, and makes the following prescient observation:
The answers to the question ‘what is vanity press’ have always been about as useful as the answers to the question ‘what is poetry’. Sometimes too glib, sometimes well thought out, sometimes biased, but invariably unsatisfactory and incomplete. (p. 48)

He claims that at the turn of the twentieth century, "(before the upsurge in the mass media that made it possible for vanity publishers to flourish) there was no such thing as vanity publishing." (personal communication, 2005). He also claimed later to have coined the term 'vanity publishing' himself in 1959. Interestingly this incorrect assertion has been the subject of a recent debate on the Wikipedia site's 'Vanity Press' (2007) page where, ironically, the authenticity of Clifford’s claim has now been questioned.

Clifford himself may be well-intentioned in his one-man crusade but his assertions are unfortunately symptomatic of a general characteristic of the field: namely, that everyone within it is still attempting to defend his or her own reputation at the expense of everyone else's. Hence, Clifford's misleading claim to ownership of the very term vanity publishing, despite evidence in the OED that it was in usage at least as early as 1922, suggests that his other claim — that prior to the twentieth century vanity publishing did not exist — is also factually incorrect. With little actual documented evidence, it is often difficult to repudiate such claims.

Clifford’s method of exposing fraudulent operators involved sending three poems he had "concocted" to a list of publishers he believed were in fact vanity publishers. Whenever he received an encouraging response, he then mailed a collection of approximately forty poems to these publishers. What the publishers did not know was that this collection was the work of another anonymous poet, whose manuscript had been rejected by Clifford during adjudications for a poetry prize. To see whether any of the publishers actually read the poems, he further complicated matters by duplicating some poems
within the text. While it is very difficult to describe these poems without engaging in an act of literary snobbery or of judgement, as Clifford notes: "... poorly written verse full of archaic language, the over-obvious, the banal, the twee and the forced rhyme, is recognised as simply poor boring verse by anyone with half an ear for poetic cadences" (1994).

He received a variety of responses to the manuscript, some of which noted the duplicated poems; others gushingly complimented the quality of the poems. A number of publishers in fact offered terms for the production of the book, at inflated prices. Often this difference was justified on the basis of marketing and advertising. Clifford's experiment, in attempting to distinguish between good and bad vanity publishers, is noteworthy for several reasons, the first being that it sought to make a distinction between printing services offering a market price for the printing of a set number of books, and the vanity publishing service which is in reality offering the same thing at a greater cost, using the veneer of complimentary language to fool the writer into the false belief that his or her work is being accepted on the basis of its quality.

Here, the deception involved is in massaging the author's ego (hence, vanity) when the reality is that this deception is carried out in order to convince the author to pay for the costs of publication. Clifford's distinction between good and bad vanity publishing is significant also because it implicitly argues for the legitimacy of paying a printer to produce one's work and then carrying out the sales and marketing of the book oneself. This definition, closer to that of self-publishing, is arguably more helpful.

**Small Press Publishing or the Private Press?**

What do we mean exactly by this phrase 'the private press'? In one sense, the term echoes the peculiarly American practice of private pressings of vinyl records. Of course, private presses have a much longer history, with significant
studies produced by Cave (1971), Bellamy (1980) and, in the Australian context, Farmer (1972). Bellamy claims that in England in the years since 1945 “poetry has become the largest single category of material to be published by private presses. ... Nearly all well-known contemporary poets such as Philip Larkin, Thom Gunn, Charles Tomlinson, Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney have had their early work issued by private presses ... This happens because poetry lends itself to pamphlets” (p 67).

He also sees the ritual created by this seeming rehearsal for publication as being an appropriate one for the bug-eyed younger poet, “who finds the world of the major publishers a bewildering and forbidding environment.” Finally then, by “bringing poet and reader together” the private press bypasses the “irrelevant complexity of the commercial world” (p 78). The relation between poetry and the private presses is also seen as symbiotic:

Publishing new poetry by unknown poets seems to be full of uncertainty for the main commercial publishers as well as being something their accountants frown upon. Because of this it has been left to the private presses and small independent publishers to do their best for aspiring poets during most of the twentieth century. (p 67)

Bellamy’s greatest debt is to two pivotal printing and publishing texts: Glaister’s *Glossary of the Book* (1960) and Roderick Cave’s *The Private Press* (1971), not to be confused with Franklin’s 1969 book of the same name.

Glaister defines a private press as “A small printing house which issues for public sale limited editions of books which have been carefully made on the premises,” while also acknowledging that “no concise all-embracing definition of a private press is possible”, ending his entry with the somewhat lofty assertion that “Private presses are almost as old as printing itself.” (p 396). Meanwhile, as Cave notes:
But for the author who is unable to persuade any publisher to accept his work on normal terms, and too poor to have his book produced at his expense by vanity publishers or to commission a printer to produce it, a private press often seems the only way of giving his work the authority and power of print. (pp 78-79).

This idea of the private press therefore suggests a more organic relationship between the self-publishing author and systems of private prestige – and therefore a more complex view of how different printing traditions bestow power and authority.

Key examples of private press icons include the works of William Blake, including his masterpiece *Jerusalem: the emanation of the giant Albion* (1804-1818), which are renowned for their craftsmanship as much as for their content; and the idiosyncratic works of William Morris, the private press publisher par excellence. Bellamy regards these two superstars as representing distinct strands of the private press:

Morris succeeded in creating great works of art, but in a very different sense from William Blake. For Blake the book was a starting point, a vehicle for the artistic expression of his prophetic vision. With Morris, the opposite is true, for he saw the printed and illustrated ‘book beautiful’ as an end in itself. He sought to create something which was self-contained – the essence of the book (pp 22-23).

As the curator in a certain sense of a particular notion of the ‘Arts and Craft’ movement, Morris’ work represents a complete abstraction from the worldly concerns of book production.

Evidence of Australian private poetry presses can be found in Farmer's study,
which supports Webby’s argument that prior to Federation, Australian literary publishing was mainly a private affair. Defining amateur printing as “a hobby which became popular in English middle class drawing rooms in the nineteenth century” (1972, p1), Farmer finds no evidence for its existence at the same time in the colonies, and is thus forced to conclude that “whatever the reason, amateur printing does not seem to have started until the 1890s” (Ibid). A change in the field seems to have occurred early in the twentieth century, when the term ‘private press’ “did come partly to mean the aesthetic judgement implied by the phrase ‘pwetty pwecious pwivate pwess’” (Ibid). Farmer distinguishes the “self-conscious luxury” (Ibid.) of what we might term vanity editions from the truly private press, whose credibility is judged in terms of “the worth of the printer’s self-expression, either literary or typographic” (p 2).

**Journal Publishing or Collective Publishing?**

One significant sector of the field of Australian poetry that has remained more or less constant over the past few decades has been the existence of a small but relatively constant number of journals publishing poetry. While economic activity associated with these magazines is not significant it is still quantifiable due to the publication of payment rates and the existence of grant funding. The importance of these journals as sites for struggle within the field is that publication in journals acts as a quasi-peer review system. In addition, demonstrating a track record of publication in recognised journals is one of the pre-requisites for funding from the Australia Council and other arts funding bodies. These journals are likewise interesting because of their resemblance to older forms of coterie publishing.

The relations between poets within each field can easily be mapped by analysing whose works are published where. Once again, it is the poems or texts that circulate – no one is actually moving, but their positionings are constantly being evaluated through a closed system of recognition and symbolic capital. Further,
and most importantly, a track record in journals is usually seen as a prerequisite for the publication of a full-length collection by both mainstream and independent publishers, although as Lea points out, this unspoken convention is not always adhered to:

Many publishers like to see that individual poems have been published in literary journals prior to appearing in book format. This not only serves as a means of developing a readership for a poet’s work, but it also verifies that the poems have been vetted by independent editors. As a general observation, however, Australian presses have not insisted on this practice with the same rigour as have their overseas counterparts ...

(2007, p 252).

Within or close by the field of journal publishing we might also find the sub-field of anthology publishing, which over the last five to ten years has changed dramatically in the Australian context, with the emergence of two rival ‘best of’ publications – UQP’s The Best Australian Poetry and Black Inc.’s Best Australian Poems. The titles of these two annual anthologies alone indicate the difference in editorial philosophies underpinning their ‘appearance’. Since their nearly simultaneous launches, the former has followed a policy of choosing the ‘best’ poetry only from a list of approved journals, while the latter has eschewed a systematic policy of selection; in other words, the editor’s brief is to solicit poems by poets that he or she considers to be the ‘best’.

Interestingly, Best Australian Poems 2007, edited by Peter Rose, follows a selection process similar to UQP’s model. For their part, UQP’s 2007 anthology included a commitment from the series editor to solicit poems from a wider cross-section of poetry journals including, for the first time, online journals. Nevertheless, these anthologies are artificial constructions of consensus in a highly diverse field of actors. The poems move symbolically through the field while the poets themselves are together in name or index only.
What is often overlooked in debates about poetry is the important role both off- and on-line poetry journals and literary magazines play in fostering the development of young or unknown writers who otherwise would have limited opportunities for publication. Further, they play a crucial role in an individual poet’s progress from complete obscurity to the proud day of their first book’s publication. The acknowledgements page in that book is a performance of this process. Similarly, the Australia Council’s criteria for literary funding for emerging writers require that in order to be considered for funding of up to $10,000, a certain number of literary works must have been published in recognised Australian journals. In the absence of published books, therefore these journals and magazines constitute a site of struggle for new entrants to the field.

Another factor that is overlooked is the percentage of poems published in journals that have been written by what the Australian Taxation Office terms ‘hobbyists’, or what others might disparagingly call amateur writers. Apart from one or two publications, these writers may never receive any recognition or critical reception in their lives. Then there are also the ‘non-poets’, those whose work is never ‘published’ at all during their lifetime. A poet such as Emily Dickinson, whose work remained ‘un-published’ for many years after her death, might be a good example of a ‘non-publisher’. Non-publishing is paradoxically the most prestigious source of glory for a poet, as it demonstrates modesty as well as the crucial role of the discovery of the poet’s work posthumously. Evidence of this field of ‘non-publishing’ can be found in the archives of selected libraries – a complex, vast and often unnoticed world.

The classification of these book objects thus becomes more complex for archivists and librarians, who are now faced with a mountain of chapbooks, zines, broadsides, pamphlets, private presses, political tracts, pirated versions, spoofs, photocopy art and other arcana including books found only in truck stop
cafeterias, collections of bush verse sold only in south coast souvenir shops, books available via mail order or distributed via the Internet, passed from hand to hand or hidden, only to be found amongst a writer's private papers when posthumously donated to one State library or another.

**Books About Self-Publishing or Academic Publishing?**

In discussing formats for books in terms of their genre, it is also interesting to compare the physical formats of books about publishing. It is no coincidence that Jonathon Clifford’s book about vanity publishing is a rather tawdry volume. Both the layout and the gloss paperpack format echo its 1980s DIY origins. On the other hand Cave’s study of private presses is more in keeping with its subject matter – large, tome-like, featuring illustrations of types and plates, with chapter titles such as “The Author As Publisher” and “Clandestine Presses, Moral and Immoral”. These two contrasting examples of book types tell us something about the way in which non-mainstream publishing activities are constructed.

One can take, as another example, the genre of books about self-publishing. With titles like *Successful Self-Publishing* (Clark, 1997), *Self-Publishing Made Simple* (Mitchell, 2001), *Poet Power: The Complete Guide To Getting Your Poetry Published* (Williams, 2002) and the wonderfully direct *How To Do Your Own Publishing* (Beaumont, 1984), this genre is fascinating for its overwhelmingly positive attitude towards self-publishing, including its DIY values and greater or lesser degree of self-promotion. In another sense it does seem ironic that a review of the literature on self-publishing reveals countless self-published books about self-publishing.

While the focus of this thesis is on self-published poetic works, there are many other fields of self-publishing, which include significant genres such as family histories and genealogies; financial self-publishing (see O'Regan, 2007); self-
published fiction and non-fiction; and travel writing. For example, Lonely Planet's travel books began as self-published pamphlets, a fact now acknowledged in all of their guidebooks. Each of these areas deserves an academic study in its own right.

Alongside these developments, in the magazines and newsletters of state writers' centres and libraries, a more ambivalent and multi-layered response to self-publication has emerged, as shown even by a cursory survey of articles in writers centre newsletters about self-publishing, including "Print me: when authors self-publish," (Brennan, 1996), "How to publish – and be damned?" (Powell, 1990) and "Self-publishing: fast track to success or road to nowhere?" (Wilson, 1998).

These articles also generate responses in the editorial pages of newspapers and magazines, leading in turn to a new genre, letters to the editor about self-publishing, each documenting one person’s experience of the harsher realities of the publishing ‘game’. Again, the field is endlessly generative. Each of these public pronouncements is itself a performance of a particular role, or position, within the field. The opinion pages, letters to the editor and other public forums constitute another site of struggle for dominance within that field.

Within the academic context, use of the term ‘vanity publishing’ to describe publishing activities may be construed as a negative descriptor. Despite this, when we are speaking of books that are published by an academic institution, including monographs or reports, the practice of paid publication is common. Whenever an academic publication is printed, the costs of printing are borne by the relevant institution. A number of copies will be given away, or made publicly available; others will be archived within university libraries and also used in teaching classes. Only a small number of copies will eventually be sold, if any.
So, is academic publishing really just another name for vanity publishing? Kameny asks: “How can the most reputable form of publishing, that is to say academic publishing, resemble in any way the least reputable form of publishing? The answer, I think, is that our markets are similar in one critical way: they are small” (1998, pp 66-67). In each case, the book has done its job, namely the dissemination of information to participants or actors within a specific field. This information, like that contained within the thousands of other bound doctoral and masters theses, remains available for an indefinite period of time within academic libraries and, increasingly, electronic communications systems.

Academic publishing could be seen as a publishing act which defers or rejects prestige, an almost private act, within a seemingly closed system. On the other hand vanity publishing could be seen as a publishing act which mimics or disguises prestige, and which almost requires public validation. When the vain and the academic meet in the public and private spheres of poetry publishing, the tensions between these acts are played out, are in fact embodied in the book objects they produce, and in the actors they either consecrate or ignore. Indeed, the very act of conducting a ‘review’ of the literature on self-publishing – an otherwise normal academic exercise – might also be viewed as a ‘performance’ of knowledge or virtuosity, the underlying assumption being that the academic is in a position to judge the worth of various book types.

The grey areas between legitimate and peripheral fields of publishing are thus patrolled by actors who are themselves engaged in contests for academic or cultural legitimacy. On the other hand, despite the actions of gatekeepers, both books and their authors arguably have the capacity to move dynamically between these often arbitrary field distinctions. How then should we describe various movements on the part of supposedly inert objects and their creators?
Chapter Three

The Performance of Publication

This chapter proposes a 'reading' of book objects using the metaphor of the 'performance'. It examines technological changes in the way poetry publishing is performed in both public and private spheres, with a special emphasis on the survival of poetry chapbooks.

The Performance of Publication

It almost seems unnecessary to enunciate the power of the book as an object within literary culture. The process of publication for any book of poetry can be mapped according to its performance of rituals associated with consecration. Every publication is a performance, with both intended and unintended audiences. This consecration or validation might be bestowed upon a mode of publishing, actors within specific fields of publishing, or else the culturally rarefied book itself:

The closed cover, turned page, broken spine, serial form, immutable text, revealing heft, distinctive formats, handy size and so on offer their own deep-rooted and resilient combination of technology and social process and continue to provide unrivalled signifying matter. (Duguid, 1996, p64)

The constructed object performs itself. Elements of this performance might include the book's launch, as well as other peripheral 'acts'. In the case of a poetry book, its contents may have circulated in various other books such as journals. The book's critical and symbolic reception via reviews and its
subsequent modes of sale and circulation can also be seen as a playing out of highly symbolic rituals.

Traces of these rituals can be found in the presentation, layout, typography and inscribing of the book object itself. It’s thus possible to categorise books not only by their format, but also by the rhetoric of that format. In other words the book performs the social and artistic codes of its authors. Its actions are also a performance of the codes inherent in its own production (see Prater 2008b for an application of this argument in a review of six contemporary Australian poetry books). The idea of the ‘performance’ of publication can also be applied to a variety of non-book poetry objects, including web content, CDs, CD-ROMs, blog poetries, visual and concrete poetry, graffiti and street art and, most vitally, spoken word (see Stanton and Tinguley, 2001). The surprising common thread between many of these formats is the emphasis on the rapidity of transmission, a ‘live publication’, by means of a re-contextualisation of an old audience for poetry – a group of people in a room. Even a poetry slam is a highly-orchestrated ritual where approval is constructed in elaborate yet consistent ways.

Pre-existing traditions of language transmission – some visual, some oral – were not simply supplanted by books but have continued to exist alongside other more recent technological innovations and media. As Marrotti so wonderfully reminds us, in the age of the manuscript in Renaissance England:

Poems appeared not only on paper but also on rings, on food trenchers, on glass windows (scratched with a pin or diamond), on paintings, on tombstones and monuments, on trees, and even (as graffiti) on London’s Pissing Conduit (1995, p3).

It is therefore not unreasonable to argue that different forms of poetic capital also existed prior to the use of books – and that these fields of practices,
conventions and positions were mapped onto the structure, presentation and dissemination of books. However to impose a divide between authentic ‘performance’ poetries and ‘written records’, as some do, would be too simplistic. As Duggan argues:

Some of the older ‘performance poets’ still harbour nostalgia for the stadium: Soviet era visions of ‘the masses’ eager to hear their work. These poets tend to imagine a once huge audience that might come back again if the rest of us abandoned ‘difficulty’ and directly addressed the populace. I always felt this was a kind of ‘golden age’ myth. In reality poets, even the ‘difficult’ ones now have much larger audiences than the Elizabethans ever did, or the ancient Chinese for that matter. (2005)

At the same time the ‘appearance’ of a poet is a complex playing out, usually in public, of a range of positions, disguises and facades that constitute the field in which both performance poets and ‘proper’ poets compete for symbolic capital, including the right to be called a poet, and the power bestowed upon those poets who get to call others poets.

When speaking of poetry book-objects, one rarely thinks of these books as a performance. One usually speaks of an inert object – the ‘slim volume’ or ‘chapbook’, the ‘debut’ and then the second ‘collection’ of poems, whether this be the full-length collection, the ‘new and selected’ or ultimately the ‘collected works’. Each ‘type’ of book carries out an intricate set of authorisation rituals. At a technical level – in other words in terms of controlling the reception of the work by its intended audience – the performance of each of these books of poetry precedes the work. The book object has already been constructed and can thus be analysed according to a set of elaborate rules including its use of the signature, its corresponding rarity and its reference to a plethora of in-knowledge and codes. In the case of poetry, one example of this is the acknowledgements section of the collection, where the names of journals in
which individual poems have been previously published become symbolic mantras (and signifiers) of prestige.

The book becomes an actor in a field of other books, other performances. This field, what Bourdieu might call the ‘set of positions and position-takings’, can also be said to constitute a public rhetoric or utterance, a performance of the work incorporating highly specific symbolic acts. One of these is the performance of the launch of the book. Such a performance usually consists of a reading or authorisation of the work. The author might read from the book, symbolically re-enacting the scribal tradition, suggesting that this is the only copy and I am reading from it, so that you may listen. Contrast this with an authentic or real ‘performance’, which requires no symbolic consecration: there is no book between us; I am transmitting this poem orally to you. With most performances situated somewhere between these rather convenient poles, practices exterior to the performance are also doubly polarised.

Inherent in all of this is the conflict between three elements: the written practices of the book, the oral performance of individual traits masked by these practices, and the public or cultural field where degrees of consecration are contested. With a limited number of new or ‘legitimate’ positions in the mainstream publishing field each year, publication becomes a contested site and the ability to move between fields becomes more valuable. The evidence or scars of these contests can be found in the physical formats or typography of book-objects.

**The Poetics of Old Technologies**

While resisting a determinist reading of technology in history, an analysis of the uses of technology by writers and readers provides a useful context for describing the field of self-publishing in Australia. Changes in formats for books are not necessarily brought about by the use of new technologies. Rather, new
technologies allow old formats for books, including ‘poetry chapbooks’ to be produced more easily, at a lower cost, by a larger number of people. Bellamy, for example, describes a nineteenth century England where

[the] prosperous middle classes, with a progressively increasing amount of leisure time on their hands, were induced by astute commercial interests to take up home printing for their amusement and further enlightenment. This development had been made possible by a major improvement in printing press technology (p 17).

This development was the miniaturisation of the hand press, and innovations in its action, enabling it to be used atop a table, within the home. The popularity of parlour presses in Victorian English homes reached a high point in the decades between 1855 and 1875, suggesting something of a fad, only to be in decline by century’s end with the dawn of amateur photography (p 18). It also suggests a more sophisticated view of the ‘private’ publisher, and hints at the vast amounts of self-published literature from this era that surely still exist. Similarly, technological arguments have been promoted in accounts of the so-called ‘boom’ in small press publishing in Australia in the late 1960s, which arguably had as much to do with obsolescence of old technologies as revolutions in printing. Denholm, for example, points to “the ability of almost anyone to produce pamphlets, magazines and books, with the advent of offset printing and a freer approach to layout” (1979, p 1).

At the same time, as Pi O points out, “poets were once again tramping across town to a friend of a friend’s who had a gestetner set up in the kitchen or lounge” (1985, p 9) – in other words they weren’t necessarily making use of the latest advance in offset printing; they were seizing the opportunity to use older technologies as well. As with the letterpress, roneo and other movements, the arrival of ‘desk-top publishing’ in the 1980s and 1990s again saw an ‘explosion’ in the number of self-published books, this time including zines. As with the
Beat poets of the 1950s and 1960s, these indie zines (across a range of genres, most notably punk, science fiction, comics, diary writing, fan fiction and poetry) were circulated amongst a limited audience (Spencer, p 114).

Despite all of these innovations in the 're-tooling' of technologies for creative purposes, and the accompanying explosions of content, a significant number of these objects were and still are published in standard A5 format. As we shall see, this size echoes older chapbook traditions. Why is it that poets, despite the existence of many new technologies with which to 'publish' one's self, continue to cling to these older formats?

**The Performance of Online Publication**

This is not to suggest that poets remain fixed in a Gutenberg galaxy. I have argued (Prater, 2001a) that despite the growing use of information and communications technologies by poets – for example in the growing number of poets with blogs, or the proliferation of poetry mailing lists – poetry is an area of the literary arts where the individual book of poems remains paramount. Clemens (2001) sees this as a backward tendency within the field, which is almost pathologically unable to adapt: “One of the most peculiar consequences of the digital revolution is the consistent inability of poets to come to terms with it. Of all the many types of ‘symbolic operators’ that informational globalization incessantly throws up, poets seem to be dealing worst with this radically new New Deal” (p 1).

Significant changes have occurred in the field of online poetry publishing in Australia in the years since the turn of the century. Distribution and broadcast models for poetry using information and communication technologies including the internet – for example, hijacking Blogger to create a poetry journal; the emerging post-avant poetry communities online; the proliferation of mailing lists, the increased use of print-on-demand technologies and avenues for online
payments and distribution – are now being actively explored. While the growing use of the Internet and other networking or communication technologies by poets could be viewed as an example of self-publishing, online publishing differs from other self-publishing practices in that despite the survival of tropes from a pre-Internet age in the on-screen 'page' rhetoric, web-based creative works represent a fundamental break with the performance of publication.

Internet publishing is a different performance entirely from a self-published poetry chapbook performance. New possibilities for self-authorisation once again become possible. This potential exists not simply because of the technology itself, but because of poets’ use of the technology to map both their ‘selves’ and the network of relationships which together comprise the ‘field’ in which they are operating as poets. In addition, new skills, knowledge sets and formats previously only available within the printing and publishing industries now offer authors unique opportunities to directly control the dissemination of their printed and electronic works. These new publishing practices also provide opportunities to create novel forms of poetry delivery. With the conflation of tasks brought on by the advent of converged information and communication technologies, authors are once again becoming publishers themselves.

While a full examination of this emerging field is beyond the scope of this thesis, its existence brings us back once again to the question of the legitimacy of various fields of publishing. In some respects, online publishing has begun to replace the self-published chapbook as the preferred means of distributing poetry to a specific audience. In others, it has supplanted the idea of the author-publisher relationship, as well as that between author and reader. The open source nature of much of the Internet tends to multiply its usefulness as a communications medium, especially its two-way hypertext component. The re-emergence in online audiences of groups which are either limited or semi-public suggests also a return to older ideas of coteries and closed systems of
poetic exchange, although on a much larger scale.

The Survival of the Chapbook

We have come a long way since the invention of the book. Today, just as in the age described by Marinetti, poetry can again be found on a variety of printed surfaces, represented on screens, transmitted through space, compressed and archived, electronically manipulated and voiced aloud by machines. Whether the book is a medium that continues to facilitate the creation of poetry, or whether it will finally succumb to the new orality of Internet text-based communication remains to be seen. In any event, if self-published poetry chapbooks do survive beyond the twenty-first century, their future manifestations will surely have much to reveal about the field or fields in which they have been performed.

The phenomenon of mass-produced books that we know today is a relatively recent trend in the complicated transmission of language through form or media. Older or previous practices form closed systems of reverence that instead emphasise rarity over widespread distribution; these older formats for books can also be analysed and observed in terms of the rhetoric of their typographic construction. The survival of old forms in contemporary self-published poetry chapbooks, with their echoes of the zine and Samizdat traditions, suggests that technologically driven arguments must be analysed closely. Despite advances in technologies in the printing and distribution of poetry, these older forms continue to provide opportunities for artistic innovation and therefore symbolic social capital.

In the case of self-published poetry books, despite the proliferation of forms currently available in which to communicate poetry, it is the chapbook format that self-publishing poets utilise most often. The traditional chapbook form as it was defined by Glaister had the following dimensions:
Chapbooks were usually about 6 [inches] by 4 [inches], had up to 24 pages, illustrations were crude but lively woodcuts, and had a decorated cover title. (1960, p92).

Chapmen bought these chapbooks at wholesale prices, and “included bundles of them with the buttons, threads, laces and so on which they carried from village to village.” (Ibid). This character of the chapman might be said to be similar to the “paultry” pedlar, described in Cotsgrove’s 1611 Dictionaire of the French and English Tongues as someone who:

in a long pack or maund (which he carries for the most part open, and (hanging from his necke) before him) hath Almanacks, Bookes of News, or other trifling wares to sell (p11).

This portrait also suggests a completely different type of audience for chapbook works. Indeed, Neuburg in his first study of chapbooks argues for “the existence of another public, which in its attitudes, tastes and values was very different from the more sophisticated one, and is at least as worthy of detailed investigation” (1960, p11), going on to argue in his second that “[c]ontemporary bibliographical techniques have not yet been fully employed to investigate the extent of chapbook literature, its production and distribution and above all its social significance.” (1968, p3).

Some three hundred years after the fact, modern day archivists and scholars who do find examples of these chapbooks — as Neuburg does, noting that many of them contain little original material, are of cheap composition and have been written by unknown authors (1960, p7) — face an impossible task in ever truly cataloguing their extent and social significance, most traces of which have disappeared. Neuburg does however supply imaginative colour in both of his studies. This was a world of running or flying stationers, chapmen selling
broadsides and garlands, travelling colporteurs, execution sheets and running hawkers. Despite the existence of these many and varied characters populating the lanes and taverns and fields of the English countryside – not to mention the twenty three different kinds of chapbooks he classifies by subject matter ranging from religious, political, stories in verse, song books and so on – Neuburg admits that “Authors who wrote chapbooks were very few in number” (p5).

The sheer volume of printed matter must have been astounding, ranging from collections of poems “intended for singing to tunes with which the public were familiar” (Glaister, 1960 p 452) to multiple copies of single sheets, known as broadsides, broadsheets, single-sheets, street ballads, stall ballads and, most ominously, black-letter ballads (Ibid p 93). Neuburg also claims these travelling chapmen played a part in the emergence of guidebooks in England, including the 1687 tome, City and Country Chapman’s Almanack (1968, p32). By the end of the eighteenth century the chapbook trade was in decline in England. Neuburg posits a golden age of chapbooks encompassing the years 1725-1825, with a similar decline by century’s end, due the increasing volume of daily and weekly newspapers (pp 42-47). As Glaister notes, chapbooks were important in their day as a way of “keeping alive and transmitting fairly tales, traditional love and the anonymous English and continental tales of adventure and romance told by the troubadours of medieval times” (1960, p92).

As already noted by Neuburg in referring to “another public”, an argument can be made for the role of chapbook distribution in the expansion of literacy amongst groups not traditionally regarded as ‘readers’, that is the working classes. Hess also points to the change in audiences for books, expanding from “what had been primarily a tight circle of scholars and elite classically-educated readers to include much of British society, especially the growing middle class” (2005, p 36). Although it’s unhelpful to compare sales of books across different times, in the case of the Romantics comparisons can be instructive. To take two
examples of successful books of poetry from the Romantic era, according to Hess, Lord Byron’s 1814 publication *Corsair* “sold ten thousand copies on its first day of publication ... and twenty thousand in its first fortnight”, while Sir Walter Scott’s *Lady of the Lake* (1810) “sold over twenty thousand copies in six months alone”, and “thirty thousand copies in a year” (2005, p23).

The golden age was soon over and poetry sales declined throughout the nineteenth century, “to become an entirely minority taste in the twentieth” (Sutherland, 1991, p811). Erickson also discusses the effect of two printing innovations – the stereotype and the cliché – on the decline of poetry in England in the post-Romantic fallout. The effect of these technological changes on market conditions led to the rise of the literary periodical and the literary annual in 19th century England. Both of these new forms were developed in the context of the increasing mechanisation and economies of scale that stereotyping allowed. These new forms also competed with poetry for audiences, with the result that “by 1830 almost all publishers refused to publish poetry” (1996, p 26).

Social and cultural developments since have enabled poets to “authorize themselves in ways that compensated for their loss of an immediate sense of audience and shared aesthetic and cultural norms” (p37). In fact, the ‘stereotype’ we have today of the armchair or academic poet originates from this decline in poetry publishing, because in these new economic conditions, it was only wealthier poets who could afford to contribute to the publication of their own books: “Although the publishing of thin volumes of poetry had an anachronistic gentlemanly air after 1830, it did so because publishers had obeyed market conditions and forced writers to underwrite the risks and costs of publication” (p 39). Therefore, an established writer like Wordsworth could afford to insure his publisher against losses in return for a share of profits. As Sutherland notes, “there are several ways of minimising risk. Making the author insure his work by pre-publication subsidy (‘vanity publishing’) is one” (1991,
The survival of vanity publishing as a practice could be seen as linked to the survival of other literary practices, including formats such as the chapbook.

**Contemporary Chapbook Performances**

The chapbook tradition has been preserved by zine and avant garde literary movements (Wright, 1996) and various private presses, as well as contemporary poets. Is it a coincidence that the size of today's zine or poetry chapbook is identical to the dimensions of the chapbook as defined by Glaister? How and why do self-publishing poets, and zinesters, produce book objects similar to those produced hundreds of years ago? While styles and formats differ, modern day chapbooks can be defined very easily. The aesthetic is almost oppositional, even when it comes to the binding of these objects. A stapled chapbook is an altogether different thing from a book with 'spine'; for the collector or fan, there is a detective joy in seeking out these rare objects, often in re-mediated circumstances:

> When I go to second-hand bookstores and look through the poetry shelves, it's the books with staples, as opposed to spines, that catch my eye. To me the staple is the mark of the self-publisher, and self-published work, in my mind, is more likely to have that spark, that frisson of passion that really lets you see into the mind of the poet. (Ford, 2001)

A fuller understanding of the chapbook format depends on information gained from informal or unofficial sources, from lesser known writings and unpublished materials. For archiving institutions such as the National Library of Australia, collecting this material might be seen as part of its mandate:

> As well as collecting every book, magazine and newspaper published in Australia, the library must also collect items that represent a "cultural record" of Australia – which can include cartoons, maps, paintings,
photographs, oral histories and artefacts, as well as less highbrow publications. "We try to be comprehensive, so we try to collect trash," says Ms Burn. "Romance, self-published family histories, vanity publishing, as well as the mainstream and respectable." (Gilchrist, 2004, emphasis added)

The United States Library of Congress, on the other hand, until recently explicitly refused to collect self-published material, except in notable circumstances (the details of which are extremely pertinent to this thesis):

Works of American popular literature are collected, but vanity press and self-published works are not collected, although self-published works of quality may be collected in areas where self-publishing is an important part of the publishing spectrum (e.g., poetry, African American literature). This holds for materials in any language published or distributed in the U.S. (2000, p 2 – emphasis mine)

Since then, the Library has revised its collection policies, and no longer goes out of its way to collect self-published material, this change in policy reflecting the sheer number of books the library receives. This would tend to suggest that in the United States and in Australia substantial and culturally significant collections of self-published material do exist, many of which have not as yet been explored by scholars. As Webby (1988) has pointed out, a large amount of unpublished work also exists in Australian libraries and archives. Humanities researchers (for example Sukovic, 2000) have also noted the importance of this material to the study of Australian literature.

Chapbook publishing sometimes operates alongside or within mainstream book distribution channels, for example in small or independent bookshops. However, most poetry chapbooks lack an International Standard Book Number (ISBN), thus making cataloguing difficult, not to mention data on sales and
distribution. Further, as already noted by Duiker, many chapbooks refer to a fictitious publishing 'house', making archival inquiries difficult. While chapbook authors are probably likely to assert authorial copyright, there is no way to verify this copyright if a copy of the chapbook has not been lodged with a collecting library.

One thing we can say is that most contemporary poetry chapbooks are still published in A5 format. A self-published poetry book, just like any other book object, can be analysed and critiqued according to the extent to which it echoes, acts out or performs older formats, and the struggles within the field this performance mimics. It can also be compared with other self-published books. Moving beyond a technologically-determinist discussion of the poetics of old technologies, and in particular the technology of 'the poetry book', requires something of an imaginative leap, involving the characterisation of a book as a 'performance'. Such a performance often involves the playing out, in public or private, of a series of rituals that bestow authority or poetic 'capital' upon the book's author(s).

This is particularly true when it comes to contemporary performances of the chapbook format, which echo previous performances of the form and in doing so perpetuate certain kinds of obscure and private capital. The circulation or otherwise of these book objects reflects struggles for authenticity within the field of poetry publishing.
Chapter Four

Five Self-Published Poetry Chapbooks

This chapter documents five of the poetry chapbook objects contained in the Artefact, with particular reference to the terminology outlined in Chapter Two and the discussion of the performance of chapbook formats in Chapter Three. Each chapbook is analysed in terms of six factors, namely:

- its construction (that is, the context in which it was produced);
- its format, including printing specifications;
- details of any performance or launch (if applicable);
- a summary of its circulation and potential publics;
- any records of critical reception or appraisal of prestige; and
- its archival placement and/or survival as a physical object.
The Happy Farang (2000)


CONSTRUCTION/ CONTEXT

The poems that were first published in The Happy Farang were written in longhand while travelling in Thailand and Laos in 1999. While I do not intend to carry out a content analysis of the poems themselves, most of them are written from the point of view of a Western tourist or, in Thai, ‘farang’. At the time I didn't think of them as poems I would like to publish in a literary journal, mostly because of their personal nature. Upon my return to Australia, keen to have a lasting memento of my travels, I typed the poems into a word processing file on my home PC and then laid them out in a 26 page chapbook. I printed one copy on a cheap laser-jet printer before finalising the order of poems and the cover. In 2000 I took this chapbook with me to Newcastle, where I stayed with a friend who had access to a colour photocopier at his work. Late one night we printed two hundred copies of each page. We then took the pages home and stapled them all together. And thus, just like Ken Smith’s little chapbook, which appeared out of nowhere, The Happy Farang was born.

FORMAT/ OBJECT

The Happy Farang is an A5-sized object with a mottled grey cover page, white pages for the content and blue ink text throughout. The choice of the blue ink had been serendipitous but in hindsight the blue tones suit the ‘travelogue’ nature of the poems. Also in hindsight, the book contains all of the hallmarks or characteristics of a classic chapbook. I’m not sure what readers will make of the naïve bold Verdana font on the book’s cover, or the placement of the title above
the author’s name, separated clumsily by the word “by”. Further, the back cover features a glossary by mistake – it was supposed to appear on the inside back cover. The inside front cover includes acknowledgments and a dedication. While copyright is asserted, the publisher is named as Pumpkin Press, and an address in Northcote is given. This is a fictitious name, although the address at the time was real. While the book object thus bears some hallmarks of a self-published work, it also performs aspects of private or ‘clandestine’ publishing.

PERFORMANCE/ LAUNCH

I did not hold a launch for the book but an invitation to perform at the 2000 Next Wave festival in Melbourne offered me an opportunity to make public the ‘character’ of the book’s title. I thus ‘launched’ the book as part of a six poet show curated by performance poets Phil Norton and Angela Costi. Each poet was allotted a ten minute slot and for my appearance I chose to perform the happy tourist, complete with backpack, map, camera and – last but not least – my chapbook, from which I read out the title poem. In this sense the ‘publication’ of the book amounted to a performance of its contents and an ‘acting-out’ of its central preoccupations. There was no real sense in which the object itself was being launched – in fact I had foolishly neglected to bring along any copies for sale or distribution at the gig. My partner at the time was forced to go back to a local bookshop and take back all of the books I had left there on consignment the previous day. In the end, I probably sold five or ten copies of the book that night, and afterwards considered it a great success.

CIRCULATION / PUBLIC

While *The Happy Farang* echoes the format of chapbooks and zines in its eschewal of an ISBN — not to mention its reference to a fictitious publishing ‘house’ and its omission of a recommended retail price (RRP) – the book was in fact distributed, though in erratic ways. To begin with, copies were sold at the
‘launch’, or else given away to friends, fellow poets and other people I met in the course of my everyday life. I also went to the effort of leaving some copies on consignment in several Melbourne bookshops including Polyester Books in Fitzroy and Readings bookshop in Carlton. This distribution is ‘marked’ on one of the few remaining copies in my possession by the presence of a $3.30 price tag, courtesy of Readings. In fact, *The Happy Farang* is still listed in the Readings online catalogue, though the book is no longer available through them. I have managed to rid myself of almost all 200 copies. In this sense it has an easily-defined public.

RECEPTION/ PRESTIGE

It’s difficult to speak seriously of any critical reception for *The Happy Farang*, as there was no conscious effort to send the book to reviewers or to elicit any testimonials or praise from established poets for the purposes of a blurb. On the contrary, the whole point of producing the book in chapbook form was to avoid or ignore the usual trappings of a poetry collection. However, again in hindsight, the book represents a serious first attempt to crystallise my desire to produce a meaningful book object. Therefore in terms of literary prestige, even from a purely personal point of view, *The Happy Farang* can be considered as an obscure example of self-publishing containing elements of private or coterie publishing. As such, its significance lies in its performance of a set of rituals known collectively as ‘chapbook’ or ‘poetry publishing’. At the time, this mode of performance could not have been described as deliberate or very well thought-out.

ARCHIVAL/ SURVIVAL

Two final anecdotes about the book’s survival demonstrate the idiosyncrasies of the self-publishing world. About a year after the ‘release’ of the book, I received an email from an American tourist who had found a copy of *The Happy Farang*
in Polyester. He was writing to me to let me know that he was the editor of an Asian culture magazine called ‘Bug’ and that he had mentioned my chapbook in an editorial, describing it as a better depiction of tourism in Thailand than *The Beach*. Unfortunately, I have not since been able to find any trace of the magazine or its kind editor. On another occasion, while travelling in the United States in 2002, I left a copy with Michael Basinski, a librarian working at the State University of New York’s Buffalo campus. He took me on a tour of their collection of twentieth century poetry in English, a treasure trove of self-published and privately published works. I’m not sure whether he ever catalogued the copy I gave him alongside all of those rare books and ephemera – but then again maybe he did.
8 Poems (2002)


CONSTRUCTION/ CONTEXT

In the two years after I wrote the poems that would eventually become The Happy Farang, approximately fifteen of my poems were published in Australian and international literary journals. This was an improvement on the years prior to 2000 and it was then that I first applied, unsuccessfully, for funding from the Australia Council for the Arts. During this time I wrote a number of poems that would prove to be very significant to my development as a ‘published’ poet. For example, my poem ‘in a dim sea nation’, chosen for inclusion in The Best Australian Poetry 2003 (UQP, 2004), was written at this time. Still, I did not hold out much chance of having a book ‘published’. Then, in 2002, Melbourne poets Michael Farrell and Joe Hill set up a publishing house called du papa and I was lucky enough to be included in a compilation of three chapbooks entitled issue 1. My 8 poems appeared together with Melbourne poet Claire Gaskin’s 9 poems and Slovenian poet Primoz Cucnik’s 4 poems.

FORMAT/ OBJECT

The three chapbooks were staple-bound individually in A4 format and compiled loosely in a plain white folio with a black ink line on its cover. It was altogether a minimalist affair, devoid of the publication details one would expect to find in the physical incarnation of a ‘properly’ published book – for example, the address of the publisher, the date of publication, an ISBN or price. The front cover of 8 poems shows the title, followed by my name and then below that acknowledgements to the online journals in which two of the poems had first
appeared. All titles and contents are written in lower case. Collectors may be interested to note that the inside front cover incorrectly states that I was born in 1969. The A4 format stands in sharp contrast to the actual amount of text on each page. Unlike *The Happy Farang*, in which words are crammed onto the page or tilted due to sloppy photocopying, these poems barely make an impression on the overwhelming field of white space.

PERFORMANCE/ LAUNCH

Despite the uber-minimalist nature of the whole enterprise, *issue 1* was launched, appropriately enough, in an inner-city Melbourne gallery space, where Claire Gaskin and I stood on white wooden boxes in order to declaim our verses to an indeed minimalist crowd. Wine was served from casks and copies of the book were sold. While I have very few memories of the launch itself, I do remember a feeling of liberation when I got up on a box to shout my poems at the bemused audience. For me, the ‘performance’ was also a demonstration of an avant-garde aesthetic which rejects worldly gain in the cause of a higher ideal – in this case the ‘art’ of poetry. It’s very easy to reject worldly gain when you believe you have no chance of attaining it. In fact, I never expected to receive any financial gain from this performance of publication at all. Therefore, by loudly declaiming my verses in that trendy inner-city art gallery, I was really saying that I had nothing left to lose.

CIRCULATION / PUBLIC

While I do not have access to circulation figures for *issue 1*, I do know that the three chapbooks were circulated, in a very limited sense, amongst a small group of people, mostly poets. *8 poems* is an example of private, or coterie publishing. It was also my first experience of working with an editor, who also happened to be a poet. Therefore, it’s misleading to speak of circulation in this instance – in reality, the real ‘audience’ for this work was other poets. On the other hand, I
have to admit that while I received ten free copies of issue 1, I never went to the trouble of circulating them. In fact, I still have five of those copies in my possession, and even threw one out with the recycling in a moment of frustration. The performance of this publication, then, might be considered a mime, or a denial of an audience, rather than something aimed at ‘readers’.

RECEPTION/ PRESTIGE

A complete lack of critical reception for any of the three chapbooks included in issue 1 suggests that we need to look elsewhere for expressions of symbolic capital. One observation I might make is that private or coterie publishing is often confused with vanity-publishing. Despite its avant-garde trappings, 8 poems is still, in fact, just a bunch of photocopied pages. It’s ironic then that one of the poems chosen for publication in 8 poems was originally entitled ‘Humility Publishing’. Sensing that I had somehow called out the game, or spoken an unwritten convention, the editor kindly suggested that I change the title of the poem to ‘[i don’t like cricket]’. This poem offers an ironic response to the notion of 8 poems as an act of personal vanity. At the same time, the physical embodiment of this act of ‘humility publishing’ might easily be viewed as a trivial and almost worthless experiment gone wrong – in the sense that du papa issue 2 never materialised.

ARCHIVAL/ SURVIVAL

Interestingly, the poems from issue 1 have had an impact on my subsequent writing. Firstly, two poems from this chapbook, namely ‘5 Mobile Phone Text Messages’ and ‘Caroline’, would re-appear five years later in my so-called ‘debut’ collection, We Will Disappear. The title of the former was changed to ‘5 Haiku SMS’. Secondly, in 2005 I travelled to Slovenia, partly in the hope of meeting my fellow du papa poet Primoz Cucnik in Ljubljana. While I unfortunately missed him by several days, the occasion of our failed meeting
became the subject of another poem, which appeared in my chapbook, *Abendland* (2006). The poem, ‘Pink City’, was dedicated to du papa editor Michael Farrell. In conclusion, 8 poems may well be open to accusations of vanity but the spirit of poetic collaboration involved in its construction points to some other motive. On the other hand, one day I may look back on the act of publication itself as an act of support — or even bravery — in the face of apathy.
Re: (2005)

12 page A5 pamphlet, unstapled, co-written with Andy Jackson, 4 poems each (unattributed), 50 printed. Launched in front of approx. 35-40 friends at the VWC Reading Room. No ISBN. No reviews. Self-financed/ clandestine. All copies distributed free. High symbolic capital within the closed field. Private press pamphlet.

CONSTRUCTION/ CONTEXT

In 2004 I received a New Work grant from the Australia Council for the Arts, which enabled me to spend three months in 2005 preparing the collection that would later be published as We Will Disappear. During this time I also wrote a second set of poems, Love Ship Demos (Prater, 2005b), which remains unpublished, although a number of poems have since been published in journals. This second manuscript could be considered as private or even ‘non-publishing’. At the end of this period of intense writing, I began discussing with Melbourne poet Andy Jackson the idea of collaboration, which eventually manifested itself as a co-written pamphlet. The desire to make a book object stemmed in part from our involvement in performances, recordings and the poetry scene. We named the pamphlet Re: in honour of a series of emails we’d sent each other without a subject line, thus producing a recurring ‘Re:’.

FORMAT/ OBJECT

If 8 poems was a minimalist affair, Re: set new standards in book-object deconstruction, in my mind at least. It consisted of three A4 pages in landscape format folded over to produce an unstapled pamphlet of twelve pages in total. The cover featured our take on the recurring ‘Re:’ plus our names and nothing else. In total, it probably took an hour to format, and about ten minutes to print. Each copy was also numbered by hand but bore no other human marks. The order of the poems was straightforward, with a total of four poems each printed in alternating order. My four poems were all new, and were taken from
Love Ship Demos. We chose not to attribute the poems individually, preferring to present the object as a co-written collection. While the decision not to staple the pages together was probably made for practical reasons, in hindsight it seems eminently suitable for the physical format of an anti-book to be virtually spineless and unbound. The format itself speaks to a DIY aesthetic more usually found in music fanzines and political tracts, but which also has its roots in English broadside culture.

PERFORMANCE/ LAUNCH

The launch for Re: was held in the Victorian Writers Centre in June 2005, and drew a crowd of thirty to forty people. Here’s the text invitation we sent out:

DAVID PRATER & ANDY JACKSON LIVE UNPLUGGED & POETIC

Join us THURSDAY 9th JUNE, 6pm at the Victorian Writers Centre (Level 1, 37 Swanston St, City) for TWO HOURS of POETIC POWER! David Prater and Andy Jackson go tag team, with MC Paul Mitchell calling the shots. Entry $5/$3, with free wine and EXCLUSIVE chapbook on entry. Yes, you read correctly: a FREE chapbook. Who else would dare? Also featuring giveaway set-lists, plectrums and other rock ’n roll poetry souvenirs. This will be Davey’s final show before heading overseas, so come along to make sure he actually leaves!

While the tone of the invitation suggests that the evening was playful, I think we both felt that the launch and reading offered us an opportunity to ‘create our own space’ and use it to perform our own works, on our own terms. It was the first and so far only time I had ever had a launch for a book containing my own poetic works. It’s interesting to reflect on the ways in which our ‘performance’ – two twenty minute sets each, in alternating order, introduced by an MC – was
in fact an act of instant ‘self-publication’. In a similar way, the clandestine printing of the book object called *Re:* was also a statement of independence. While the construction of the object preceded the performance of the work, both were equally important elements in a clear ritual of self-consecration.

**CIRCULATION / PUBLIC**

Only fifty copies of *Re:* were ever printed. We could have printed up hundreds of copies if we had wished but the whole point of the project was to create an artificial sense of rarity. The sense of rarity was achieved by numbering every copy but this rarity was artificial because, to be frank, anybody could have made another copy quite easily. All fifty copies were distributed freely both on the night of the book’s ‘launch’ as well as by hand over the days and weeks following the launch. It was very important to us that the pamphlet and the launch performance were connected in such a way. In this respect the circulation for this book object was probably even less than the circulation of *8 poems*. Both of these book objects share one characteristic, namely a small but interested audience, composed mostly of other poets. The audience for both books might be described as ‘controlled’ as well, in the sense that as author-publishers, we made a deliberate decision to restrict the readership for these works.

**RECEPTION/ PRESTIGE**

Chapbooks and broadsides can easily be analysed in terms of the manner of their performance. *Re:* is defiantly non-commercial, and resists classification through its eschewal of ISBN, library data, publishing details and so on. In fact, if anything, *Re:* resembles a split 7” release by two bands, with traces of punk in its obscured sense of irony. If one were to seek to classify this book object in terms of the manner of its construction, one might argue that it contains elements of self-, private, vanity and non-publishing all at once. It might also be viewed as an expression of a highly symbolic capital, bestowed upon both the
book object and its authors through acknowledgement by other actors within the field of its construction. More contentiously, the fact that *Re:* remains one of the only examples of a co-written work in our respective 'bibliographies' suggests a more complex ‘turning away’ from notions of authorial or individual genius. In fact, the book in some ways supports the notion of authorial intention, while still seeking and creating its own copyrighted space within which to mock that intention.

ARCHIVAL/ SURVIVAL

I am now in possession of only one copy of *Re:*. In 2007 I wrote to Andy asking him if he would be interested in re-publishing the pamphlet, either in its original format, or else online as a PDF. We also toyed with the idea of re-mixing the poems, or writing new poems in response to the original poems. The fact that none of these ideas got off the ground speaks partly to that particular ability of poets to promise everything and deliver nothing. It also speaks to the possibility that in every way this was a successfully completed project that neither of us has any desire to adjust, spoil or tamper with. In this sense, its survival in our writing practices is what matters the most. I can’t help wondering what happened to the other forty eight copies we printed, folded and hand-numbered. Did they suffer a similar fate to my recycled copy of *8 poems*? Were they thrown out immediately after the launch in 2005? Or will they hide in bookshelves for years to come, awaiting that rarest of characters, the future reader?
Abendland (2006)

28 page A5 chapbook, colour cover, staple bound, 25 printed POD. Self-published and financed. DIY launch at Frankston TAFE as part of guest lecture to students. No ISBN. Two web reviews. All copies sold at $5 each. Obscured amount of literary prestige. Self or Vanity Publishing?

CONSTRUCTION/ CONTEXT

In 2006 – that is, six years after the release of The Happy Farang – I made my second truly self-published chapbook, entitled Abendland. Again, its contents had been written while travelling, this time through Europe in 2005. Once again the poems dealt with my travel experiences – the word ‘abendland’ or ‘evening-land’ is sometimes used to refer to Western Europe. I originally wrote seventy poems in a diary in longhand but then, at the end of my European trip, I travelled to Seoul where I was undertaking an Asialink residency and where I wrote poems for a companion volume called Morgenland. I entered the text directly into a content management system and published the poems on the web. In fact all of the poems can still be read in their original context on the Blogger site where they were first ‘published’ (Prater, 2005c). When I returned from Korea, I compiled the best twenty poems into a chapbook.

FORMAT/ OBJECT

I laid out the chapbook in A5 format, arranging the contents using a publishing software package, photocopying the colour cover at a local printing shop and stapling the pages together myself. In total, the look and feel of the book was pretty much the same as The Happy Farang. I printed fifteen copies but knew that I could print up more any time I liked, at a unit cost of $1. The look and feel of the chapbook is not quite as minimalistic as my previous efforts but still fairly rudimentary. On the cover, the name of the author and title appear vertically, with the green title dominating the smaller, grey name. The cover image is a
detail from a photo I took when I was in Ljubljana, the place where I wrote ‘Pink City’, my poem for du papa editor Michael Farrell. On the acknowledgements page, we see the copyright statement, followed by references to magazines in which some poems first appeared, a link to my now-defunct blog, my email address and some acknowledgements. There are no human traces on the book, no numbering or classification apart from the number ‘1’ printed on the final page of each copy.

PERFORMANCE/ LAUNCH

There was no launch as such for Abendland, although I did give a guest workshop at Frankston TAFE where I gave a reading of poems from the book and even sold a few copies (Prater, 2006b). Indeed, you might almost say that the workshop was a performance of the book’s DIY construction, with the lecturer helping to staple copies together while I spoke with students. I’d categorise Abendland as a classic self-publishing performance that riffs off some aspects of The Happy Farang, most notably its A5 format. On the other hand, it is not so casually put together, and shows a more advanced understanding of page layout and design. Also, it is clearly presented as a self-published book, sans fake publisher. In fact, at no point is an actual publisher specified in the text, apart from the copyright statement’s acknowledgement of ‘David Prater’ as its owner. The ease of the book’s construction also suggests the small-scale possibilities of Print-On-Demand (POD) techniques and yet this method of construction is not referred to in the book’s ‘text’ at all. It’s a secret performance.

CIRCULATION / PUBLIC

As mentioned above, I posted a notice about Abendland on my blog and over the next few months began to send out and give away to friends the few copies that I had printed. I avoided offering the book to bookshops on consignment
this time around, due more to the hassle of going in there than anything else. Looking back now I can’t really explain my lack of enthusiasm. It may have had something to do with the fact that I felt it really was time for me to seek out a ‘proper’ publisher for my work. As of 2006 a significant number of my poems had been published in magazines, I had been successful in applying for grants and residencies, and I had compiled several manuscripts worth of poems, none of which will ever see the light of day. In this context, I suppose I had essentially explored as many of the possibilities of self-publishing in the chapbook tradition as were then available. It seemed pointless to sell, circulate or distribute Abendland as a valuable ‘piece of art’, when I knew very well that with a unit cost of $1 or less, its significance in the eyes of readers would be minimal at best.

RECEPTION/ PRESTIGE

I did make the effort to send a copy to a friend and fellow-poet in the USA and another to a NSW poet and blogger, both of whom wrote reviews of the chapbook, which can be accessed online (see Fieled, 2007 and Motion, 2007). For this reason I would make a connection between Abendland, 8 poems and Re:, all of which were essentially publications ‘performed’ for an audience of fellow-creators. What can ultimately be said about the symbolic significance of these kinds of performances? Is it enough to say that they are ‘apprenticeships in publishing’? On the one hand it is true that acquiring skills and knowledge in formatting and book layout is essential for any poet wishing to publish their works in the public sphere. On the other hand, these semi-private acts of non-publishing do also reflect the lack of capital attached to poetry in general and poetry books in particular. Hence the cheap, stapled, DIY format and the amateurish typography and layout further entrench a particular image of the self-published book.
ARCHIVAL/ SURVIVAL

Despite the disengagement of the named author from a specific reader, Abendland is dedicated to a real person, who does exist. Further, despite the fact that very few copies of this book object were actually printed, the potential for any number of copies to come into existence at any moment suggests that the making of Abendland was not just an act of vanity, but also an important step in my evolution as a publisher of my own work. Abendland was not constructed in the same way as The Happy Farang. It may never really have been truly ‘published’ at all. The copy that is included in the Artefact attached to this Exegesis was created to stand on its own as a book object just like any other book. In this sense, every copy is the first copy, and maintains an equal rarity, of an infinitely small degree.
Morgenland (2007)

24 page A5 chapbook, staple bound, 100 printed. Rare Objects Series No. 50, Vagabond Press (Sydney). No launch. NO ISBN. One review. Manuscript supported by a grant from Asialink. 10 free copies. Obscured but definite literary prestige. Small Press. Private Publishing.

CONSTRUCTION/ CONTEXT

In late 2005 I travelled to Seoul for a four month Asialink residency. My time there was spent teaching courses in Australian Culture and creative writing at Sogang University, and working on my own projects. I wrote a large number of poems and prose poems during the residency and did most of my writing in Korean internet cafes (or PC Bangs), entering my posts straight into a weblog. By the time I returned to Australia in 2006, I had two finished manuscripts: Imaginary Cities: PC Bangs (Prater, 2005d) and another chapbook, Morgenland, incorporating poems written in Korea and Japan. This second volume was conceptually related to Abendland, in that it was concerned with ‘morning-land’, a word sometimes used to refer to ‘the East’. At the time I intended to publish it in a similar manner as that of its counterpart but after meeting Vagabond Press editor Michael Brennan in late 2006, I sent him the manuscript for consideration. Morgenland came out through Vagabond Press in late 2007 in a limited edition of one hundred copies, right after the release of We Will Disappear.

FORMAT/ OBJECT

In terms of layout and production Morgenland, while Abendland’s twin, displays a more refined and professional sense of itself as an object. It also bears several hallmarks of what we might call ‘proper poetry publishing’ while at the same time spurning standard international systems of identification such
as a barcode or ISBN. The cover is a thick, textured cardboard, and features a hand-affixed digital image by artist Kay Orchison. The author’s name, as with *We Will Disappear*, sits above the title, which is capitalised. The publisher’s name and the place of publication appear at the bottom of the front cover, as with all previous titles in the Rare Objects series. The back cover features the publisher’s address at the bottom. On the inside front cover is a list of acknowledgements, the Asialink logo, a dedication, the publisher’s name again and the Rare Object number (#50). At the very bottom is the author's copyright statement and a link to my website. All aspects of the book's design were handled by Vagabond Press, in accordance with the style used for previous books in their Rare Object series.

PERFORMANCE/ LAUNCH

While the launch and publication of *We Will Disappear* in August 2007 (see Chapter 4) had been almost totally public, the ‘publication’ of *Morgenland* amounted to meeting Michael Brennan once more, this time in a Sydney pub in November 2007, in order for me to sign and number all one hundred books. Thus, having duly ‘authorised’ *Morgenland*, I received my ten free copies. This ritual was obscure and fascinating in itself; every tenth copy was kept by Vagabond as part of its archives for the Rare Objects Series. I also bought an extra twenty copies at a discount rate and was allowed to keep one extra unsigned and un-numbered ‘reading’ copy. In the absence of an official launch, one can only say that as a performance, *Morgenland* is a chapbook that seems to want to be valued; it retains aspects of both digital culture in its assembly and delivery and prior traditions of the chapbook or ‘garland’ in its size, length and modesty. It is more aesthetically pleasing than any chapbook I have made myself, before or since.
CIRCULATION / PUBLIC

*Morgenland* is therefore, in essence, a performance of private publishing, destined for one hundred or less readers, which bears hallmarks of quality in its design and presentation. As mentioned above, I bought twenty copies for my own purposes, and have managed to sell about half of these to friends and readers at gigs and performances. Unlike *Abendland*, copies of which I gave away freely or for very little money at all, I have tended to be more careful about how I circulate copies of *Morgenland*, partly because even at a discount rate, the cost to me personally is far greater. I also treat these book objects differently because they’ve been made by someone else, in order to communicate my poetry to an audience. The true extent of this audience remains unknown. I presume that Vagabond will continue to sell copies of *Morgenland* at future launches and readings. Just as with *Re;*, the rarity of the object is guaranteed by the limited number of authorised copies.

RECEPTION/ PRESTIGE

Morgenland has received one review, again written by a friend (Fieled, 2009). While some aspects of the way in which *Morgenland* was produced were different from my previous publications, what remains essential to each of them is the primacy of the chapbook form, as well as the symbolic power of these kinds of books to act as ‘business cards’ or entry points into a specific field. In this sense, one could argue that a high degree of symbolic capital is attached to this object. The object’s rarity is authorised not only by my act of signing each copy, but also by the publisher’s authorisation of the book’s contents. In this sense it is more like *We Will Disappear*, which was also published by an exterior publisher, and which performs another whole set of conventions and rituals associated with what we might call ‘proper poetry publishing’. As the history of the private press shows, when we speak of ‘proper’ poetry publishing, more often than not we are in fact speaking of chapbook publishing, as opposed
to the twentieth century conception of a book of poetry with a spine, an ISBN and a watermark. The book’s capital is partly a result of its echoing of older forms and traditions.

ARCHIVAL/ SURVIVAL

_Morgenland_ has been archived by the National Library of Australia and the State Library of New South Wales. Its survival might therefore be said to be guaranteed, for a few hundred years at least. What more could a writer of poetry ask for, given the lack of a large audience to guarantee wider dissemination and thus preservation for his or her work? What is more important in terms of archival and survival is the publishing of _Morgenland_ within a series that over the last decade has featured a wide range of Australian poets, most of whom have also published what we might call ‘proper’ books of poetry. In the end this is what will guarantee it a footnote in the history of Australian literature. Interestingly, both _Morgenland_ and _We Will Disappear_ have also been archived as ‘books’ by the Swinburne Research Bank. Given this chapter’s examination of a range of book objects, how accurate is this classification really? How are we to distinguish between these two publishing performances?
Chapter Five

The Production of *We Will Disappear*

While the ‘performances’ outlined in the previous chapter differ in several respects from *We Will Disappear*, each one played its part in the book’s construction. In other words, the publication of my ‘debut’ book is in fact intricately connected to a range of other publishing activities. Nevertheless, *We Will Disappear* carries with it a set of understandings and conventions which together work to manufacture the impression of a defining moment, a ‘debut’ in every sense of the word. Further, my performance of the conventions that consecrated this book was carried out in a way that would not have been possible had I published it myself. Professionally published poetry books can also be viewed as performances of a particular publishing ritual that references older formats.
We Will Disappear (2007)

84 page book, paperback colour cover with spine, 500 printed. Soi 3 Modern Poets, an imprint of papertiger media (Brisbane /Chiang Mai). Launched at MWF and QPF. ISBN and distribution. CiP data, copies with SLV and NLA. 3 reviews, one testimonial. Publisher supported by grant, MS support from Australia Council Grant. 10 free copies plus royalties. High amount of literary prestige. Independent, subsidised and mainstream publishing.

CONSTRUCTION/ CONTEXT

The contents of We Will Disappear are in reality a composite of several private and semi-private manuscripts developed over time. The book is presented as a thematic whole – in short, a ‘debut’ – while in actual fact over half of the poems contained within it had already been performed, sometimes more than once. In 2002, on a trip to the United States, for example, I wrote a series, Between Empires (Prater, 2002c), which I made available online. A number were later published in We Will Disappear. Later that year I began writing what would become my Masters thesis, a prose fiction novella entitled Marzipan: a Confection (Prater, 2004). While only two copies of this work have ever been made, it too can be considered a rarefied, private publication. My Masters supervisor, Tony Birch, ended up launching We Will Disappear at the Melbourne Writers Festival in 2007. In 2004 I also published two books in my capacity as editor of Cordite Poetry Review. The books – tom see’s OI (2004) and Nick Whittock’s covers (2004) – were produced using basic POD technology. These various publishing acts, though strictly outside the bounds of this thesis, were also carried out within highly-codified fields.

The book is therefore a product of its long gestation, a common situation for a first-time writer. That all-important first collection becomes an amalgam of often many years’ worth of writing styles and contexts. I’d in fact had the idea for a book called We Will Disappear ever since 2000, when I wrote the first draft of a poem called ‘disappearer’, which later became a pantoum entitled ‘We
Will Disappear’. Therefore the book as a concept existed for a long time before it became real. The poem was originally inspired by the Sonic Youth song 'Disappearer' (Goo, 1989), and most of the other poems in the early incarnations of the collection took their names, if not their subject matter, from other Sonic Youth songs. The album Daydream Nation (1988) in particular was name-checked in the titles of poems such as 'Space-Age Riot', 'The Sprawl' and 'Silver Rocket'. I first submitted We Will Disappear to a university press in 2002, on the recommendation of a friend. The manuscript I submitted amounted to a selection of the poems I had been writing for the previous three years. Unfortunately, despite some encouraging words from the editor, the manuscript was rejected.

Several other publishers expressed some interest but admitted that publication, if it happened at all, might take years. Between 2003 and 2006 I submitted my work to as many recognised journals as possible. In fact, this publication track record was of great use when I applied for Australia Council funding in 2004. The funding enabled me to substantially revise my theoretical manuscript, with many poems from the original falling by the wayside, and a significant number of new, more thematically-defined poems as well. It was not until August 2007 that We Will Disappear was finally published, by Queensland-based emerging publisher papertiger media, whose editor Paul Hardacre had asked me to send him a manuscript in 2006. The process of how I came to be ‘asked’ was a lot more complicated than that. papertiger had published my poem ‘In a Dim Sea Nation’ in their CD-ROM journal papertiger: new world poetry (Hardacre & Dionysius, 2002). The poem would later go on to be selected for inclusion in the University of Queensland Press’ Best Australian Poetry 2003, the first poem published in a non-print format in Australia to be recognised in this way.

It’s possible to view papertiger media’s ‘invitation’ to submit a manuscript as a case of being in the right place at the right time. Having released the first three books under their soi 3 imprint in 2006, the editors decided to duplicate this
publication schedule in 2007, with one substantial collection from ‘mainstream’ poet Barry Hill, another collection from ‘established’ poet MTC Cronin and a debut collection from myself, an ‘emerging writer’. According to this argument, I actually benefitted from not publishing my first book earlier, as by the time papertiger invited me to submit a manuscript I was in fact a ‘fully-emerged’ poet, with a strong track record and a couple of grants under my belt, as well as several self-published books. Therefore it was not just a case of luck, but of hard work over a long period of time. From a manuscript of approximately one hundred pages, the editor and I whittled *We Will Disappear* down to fifty three poems, thirty one of which had previously been published in print or online journals.

**FORMAT/ OBJECT**

*We Will Disappear* is a perfect-bound, paperback book. Here are the specifications for the book as they appear on the publisher’s website:

- **ISBN:** 978-0-9579411-5-1
- **Author:** David Prater
- **Title:** We Will Disappear
- **Series:** soi 3 modern poets
- **Language:** English
- **Publisher:** papertiger media inc
- **Pub date:** 01 August 2007
- **Extent:** 84pp
- **Height:** 218mm
- **Width:** 135mm
- **Thickness:** 8mm
- **Format:** Paperback
- **Distributor:** Dennis Jones & Associates
- **Price:** AUD$21.95 (inc. GST); NZD$24.95 (inc. GST)

(papertiger media, 2007)
Even a brief appraisal of these specifications shows that in several notable aspects – for example, the ISBN, the publisher, the distributor and the RRP – *We Will Disappear* is a completely different book from its predecessors. If you compare the front cover of *We Will Disappear* to that for *The Happy Farang*, for example, you will notice that while the former features my name proudly displayed above the title, in the latter the opposite is true. In fact, taking the front and back covers and ‘French flaps’ together, the cover for *We Will Disappear* mentions my name a total of seven times. It seems ironic then that it is *The Happy Farang* which is considered a self-published book, while *We Will Disappear* is not. If anything, to paraphrase Whitman, *We Will Disappear* ‘publishes my self’ in a far more comprehensive way than all five of my previous publications put together. The physical format for the book is just one aspect of this symbolic projection of the authorial self onto it.

The cover image, also taken by me, shows the interior of the Austin Car manufacturing plant on Dudley Street, West Melbourne. According to Shannon Bufton, “the Ruskin Motor company had also used the building to manufacture body parts. Later on in its life it was used by the Commonwealth Department [of Administrative Services] to maintain its fleet of cars.” (see Prater, 2007c) The car pictured may well be one of these sad old beasts. This picture has great significance for me personally. Firstly, I got a job in this building as a barman at the Public Office when I first arrived in Melbourne in 1998, thanks to my friend Quinton Duffy (to whom *We Will Disappear* is dedicated). Secondly, in 2000 I spent six months or so living in the downstairs warehouse space known as the 109A project. Thus the front and back covers as well as the author biography on the inside back flap constitute a performance of my own personality, a way of presenting myself to the world that is made less vain only by the fact that it is carried out by an independent ‘publisher’. To put this into perspective, not one of the previous five book objects I had published featured an image of me, let alone a biography.
Another factor that distinguishes this book from most of the other books I have made is that it was designed by Marissa Newell and typeset by Paul Hardacre in a professional manner, in accordance with a specific papertiger ‘house style’. The book also features high quality paper and binding, a watermark and expensive fonts. *We Will Disappear* is also the first book of mine to feature a testimonial, by Australian poet Jill Jones:

David Prater’s *We Will Disappear* is a full tilt swerving syntax for a crazy world — speedy, accurate, satiric, tender, intense, visceral, engaged. It’s chocked with wake up calls and rhythms for the new century, sounds of cities, seas, planets, spinning and disappearing, and a lament for what’s passing. All along Prater pitches a dark destabilising line then subverts it with an explosion of pure lyric joy. Formally inventive whilst also dropping beats of pop media jargon and all the transitory idioms we live in, this is a new language for all tomorrow’s aching parties. Exciting, highly charged, and affecting.

(papertiger media, 2007)

At 8mm thick, it has more spine than eight copies of *The Happy Farang* laid on top of each other but is still thin enough to pass itself off as a ‘slim volume’ of verse. It exudes enough prestige to be called a ‘proper book’. I look at it and see ten years of my writing life.

The author photograph on the back cover was taken by Melbourne poet and good friend Sean M. Whelan, in a park in Fairfield. Since the publication of the book I have felt slightly uncomfortable about the size of this image: it’s almost a little over the top, when compared with the slightly austere front cover. *We Will Disappear*, just like my other publications, is a performance of publication. Each of the five hundred copies is like a finely-crafted machine or engine designed to transmit and ‘authorise’ my credentials as a poet. There is no need for me to autograph, number or in any other way authorise its contents: the
book authorises itself, and thus me as well. On the other hand as a printed book object the performance of *We Will Disappear* precedes its actual publication. The entire process of construction of the object, from manuscript submission through to final proofing, might also be seen as a performance or dance between two distant partners: a sanctioning ‘editor/publisher’ and an ‘author/creator’ seeking validation. This dynamic starts to change once the book begins to perform itself in public.

**PERFORMANCE/ LAUNCH**

Two launches were held for *We Will Disappear*, the first at the Melbourne Writers Festival (MWF) in August 2007, and the second at the Queensland Poetry Festival (QPF) in Brisbane the following month. Both were in fact launches for all three soi 3 books being published that year. The contrast between the MWF launch and my 2000 ‘launch’ of *The Happy Farang* could not have been greater, while my QPF performances brought me back, full circle as it were, to that original performance. Here’s how I described the MWF launch on my blog, several weeks after the fact:

> Well, the truth is that I’ve been in and out of rehab since my book launch at the Melbourne Writers Festival, almost three weeks ago. That’s what happens when you choose to drink a glass of champagne for each page of your book. And even with a ‘slim volume’ of verse, that’s 84 champagnes ...

> By the time Tony Birch got up to launch my book I was packing death. My breathing was erratic and my skin had turned red. Tony said some very kind things, and then it was time to get up and face the music. Fortunately the reading went well — I pulled out all the classics, including “We Will Disappear”, “The Happy Farang”, “There’s a Wild Jack Russell in the Moon” and “Identikit Nation”, the reading of which
allowed me to say that, finally, I had managed to utter the name of Punky Brewster at a Writers Festival.

After the launch it was straight outside to begin downing those 84 champagnes. The empties piled up and friends began to peel off, summoned to other duties, other champagne drinking contests. As the sun began to fade, I realised that it would soon be over, and that a chance like this comes only a very few times in anyone’s life. I switched to schooners and then pints of champagne, until the Festival bar announced that they had sold out of copies of my book, now called “We Will Champagne”. After a couple of fascinating conversations with several slightly-moist champagne glasses my champagnes dragged me away to the Champagne Bar where we champagned until the early champagnes of the champagne.

It was at around this time that I lost track of the number of champagnes that I had drunk and my champagnes and I decided to call it quits, surmising that I had probably passed my 84 glass target, with a couple of flutes to spare. What more was there left to do but trudge up to Stalactites to indulge in a champagne glass full of beef fat and lard, before heading up the long and windy road to Champagneshire ...

(Prater, 2007d)

This deliberately tongue-in-cheek account masks the intense seriousness of the event and its symbolic significance. For if there is one part of the ritual of book publishing in which consecration of the object occurs, it is the book launch. This was a very public and highly-orchestrated event that had been, when one thinks about it, over ten years in the making. Whereas in 2000 I ‘launched’ The Happy Farang by symbolically performing the book to the public, on this occasion not only were books available through the Festival bookstore but guests had also been invited by the publisher, drinks were made available before and after the
launch, and a photographer was on hand to take pictures of the poets reading their works.

The event was MCed by Gig Ryan, the poetry editor of *The Age* – whose publisher, Fairfax, was also the Festival’s major sponsor – and was attended by over one hundred and fifty people. The launch was publicised via the publisher’s website, the MWF website, the publisher’s Myspace page and my own Facebook page, as well as a string of emails, telephone calls and face to face invitations over a period of two months. Compared with my other ‘launches’ the MWF launch was therefore a ‘big deal’ that involved a significant number of actors other than myself. When I read the title poem from the collection, with its last line ‘the disappearance of our mothers’, it was good to be able to publicly acknowledge my own mother and father, sitting in the audience.

What I found most interesting about the launch was the highly-ritualistic naming, validation and quasi-religious consecration bestowed upon the three poets whose books were launched, as well as my own feelings of self-validation afterwards. These feelings were in fact identical to what I felt after performing ‘The Happy Farang’ before an audience seven years previously. It was intensely satisfying, then, to have an opportunity to read this poem out again at the MWF, and to have that poem included in my first ‘real’ book of poetry. However, for all the highlights of the MWF launch, it was the QPF launch in Brisbane that really expressed, for me anyway, the tensions between the oral performance of poetry and the performance of a book of poetry. It’s therefore worth discussing the differences between these two performances.

I actually appeared twice at the QPF. The first time was a thirty minute reading on the Saturday night of the festival, in the Judith Wright Arts Centre’s large auditorium. This was in many respects a professional performance, involving a sound-check, the use of audio and a large stage across which to move. Ironically, I only read one poem from *We Will Disappear*; the remainder of my
set was a mixture of performance pieces and other unpublished poems. The experience of performing in front of such a large crowd was daunting but rewarding in the end. I managed to authorise myself with a mix of humour, pathos and rhythmic vocals. The performance was casual and irreverent.

My second QPF performance was an ‘official’ soi 3/ papertiger book launch at the sober hour of 11am the following morning. This reading was structured in a similar way to the MWF launch, with readings from Margie Cronin, Luke Beesley and myself. While the Saturday evening gig was loud and amplified, the proper launch was quieter, almost reverent. This format suited readings of poems from the book, and each poet did so. As with the MWF launch, each poet was again introduced by a speaker. In my case, Melbourne poet Matt Hetherington launched my book with a few choice words. I read about ten poems from the book, and then we adjourned to the foyer for refreshments.

CIRCULATION / PUBLIC

These two performances of publication – one instant, live; the other pre-constructed, ritualistic – also suggest the existence of at least two kinds of audience or public. As stated previously, five hundred copies of We Will Disappear have been printed. The majority of these are handled through a distributor, and via the publisher’s website. I have also bought a number of copies for my own private distribution. The 'public' for this book is therefore limited and, to some extent, quite strictly controlled. Copies of the book are available in several independent bookshops in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne. Launch attendees could purchase copies and have them signed. Non-attendees could order the book online and have it sent to them in the mail.

While sales figures are not currently available, as of September 2009 I had sold or given away fifty to seventy copies of the book myself, entering multiple copies for prizes and awards, mailing copies to reviewers and editors and so on.
Nevertheless an assessment of the circulation or public for *We Will Disappear* needs to be based on something more than sales figures or numbers. To begin with, thirty one of the poems within the collection had been published previously in print and online magazines and journals, many of them more than once. The combined readership of these journals is hinted at in the acknowledgements section in the front matter. The book addresses a multitude of readers, and fields.

This theoretical readership will always be confined to a number less than five hundred. In this respect *We Will Disappear* is exactly the same as any other entry-level collection of poetry: fighting for space in a small but well-defined number of retail outlets or, more rarely, online; and otherwise available either from the publisher or, more usually, the author him or herself. Once this essential cycle of the book’s production is over, the performance of appreciation and recognition of the book as an object has only just begun. As such, *We Will Disappear* begins to perform itself. Once 'published' into the field, it attains certain forms of symbolic capital, the traces of which can be difficult to find, and even more difficult to describe accurately.

RECEPTION/ PRESTIGE

*We Will Disappear* has received a total of three reviews since its publication. The first of these was a review online in *Cordite Poetry Review* (Scott, 2007). It was also reviewed on ABC Radio National’s Book Show (sometimes, 2007), and in the pages of *The Weekend Australian* (Clemens, 2008). The book has also received favourable mentions on a number of websites and blogs. In some ways, this is keeping with the different contexts in which the poems within the book were originally produced – online and performative contexts, as well as the more traditional print. In another sense, even the production of these reviews can be seen as a reflection of the networked aspect of the contemporary literary field. The review in *The Weekend Australian* was written by Justin Clemens,
who had launched Barry Hill’s book at the MWF. The review on ABC Radio was written by one of my peers, Melbourne poet alicia sometimes. Finally, as the managing editor of *Cordite*, I am somewhat compromised by the publication therein of a review of my own book.

While the review that appeared online in *Cordite* was not commissioned by me and was written by an unknown reviewer, the fact is that I still feel somewhat nervous about leaving myself open to accusations of boosting my own ‘vanity’. The writing of favourable reviews by friends or supporters is quite common, and can be seen across a variety of fields. One can point to countless examples of writers who have benefitted from such reviews, even – in the case of Whitman – gone to the effort of writing reviews under assumed names. The lengths that actors go to in order to disguise their connection with an author under review might be seen as a turning away from actual prestige that seeks to assert symbolic prestige. An author’s acceptance of the implied social capital gained by these or any other kinds of review likewise implies a turning away from the dominated position in the field, where poets whose works have not been reviewed mark time.

The book communicates its prestige through its characteristics as an identifiable object: namely, as an example of subsidised publishing by an independent publisher. Most elements of the book’s production were in fact subsidised by the publisher or myself, as well as arts funding agencies, festival organisations, literary journals and independent presses. In the same way, my attendance at the QPF was subsidised. Indeed, both events also benefited overall from subsidies from state and federal arts agencies, just as the writing of *We Will Disappear* was also supported by a grant. This subsidy economy sometimes presents itself as something that is not subsidised, in the sense that a certain prestige is attained by deferring or ‘turning away’ from the real sources of funding for the arts in Australia. Conversely, this deferral often glosses over the fact that many publications have been produced without any funding at all.
In this context, the presence of the logos of these funders acts as a double signifier: a symbol of prestige in the body of the text, like a visible watermark, whose presence invites a turning away from other economies in which the contents of the book have previously been produced. At the same time, the publisher and the author also 'turn away' from this act of patronage by asserting their own rights or watermarks. The prestige of *We Will Disappear* is therefore partly bound up with the way in which the publisher performs the various acts of publication, including ensuring that the logos of funders are performed in the text; providing bibliographic details including the names of the publisher and designer, the name of the author and the performance of the author's copyright assertion; and overall ensuring that this performance of the book's text is 'authorised'.

**ARCHIVAL/SURVIVAL**

Both *We Will Disappear* and *Morgenland* have been archived and catalogued by the Swinburne Research Bank. Copies of both books are also held by the National Library of Australia in Canberra. *We Will Disappear* is archived by the State Library of Victoria. A copy of *Morgenland* has also been deposited with the State Library of New South Wales. Compared with the haphazard archival of my previous chapbook publications, this has been an extremely well organised process, mostly due to the fact that it has been carried out by the publisher in fulfilment of their obligations under Australian copyright laws.

The fact remains that each of the five hundred copies of *We Will Disappear* will sooner or later disappear. This is the unsubtle irony of existence, a subject with which the poems in the book seek to grapple, and which casts a shadow over its cover, its typography and photography. I wonder what the book will look like in fifty or a hundred years' time. I wonder if the book will exist at all. When we compare the five hundred copies of *We Will Disappear* with the roughly five
hundred copies in total of the five chapbooks presented in the previous chapter, the question arises as to which representation of my ‘self’ is more likely to survive, or have the most significance over time. On the one hand, the high production values and relative permeability of *We Will Disappear*, along with its critical reception within the literary field, guarantees it some chance of survival. On the other hand, the five chapbooks have also circulated within a highly codified field, and have attained significance over time.

This is not to say that the contents of any of these books have remained constant. The analysis performed in this chapter could easily be applied to any poetry book object. Far from constituting a replacement for New Critical content analysis, in this reading book objects themselves are not inert; their movements, appearance and construction reveal substantial information about the fields in which they are circulated and read. More specifically, it is the poem that moves between fields, in a symbolic reflection of the underlying power relations that make such movement possible. The actual survival of these one thousand objects – the incunabula of my collected poetic output – will depend on more than an understanding of the literary field. In the end, it is the existence of readers – past, present and future – that makes such discussions possible.
Reflection:
Dead Poem Office

In July 2009, when this thesis was in its final stages of production, I discovered that another chapbook of mine has been archived by the National Library of Australia. As it turns out, this is one of the only copies of *Dead Poem Office* (2007) that was ever printed, and was probably bought at the National Young Writers Festival in Newcastle in 2007, at the traditional zine and book fair. I hadn't been intending to sell *Dead Poem Office* at all. Its title is a tongue-in-cheek reference to REM's *Dead Letter Office*, an album of 'b-sides compiled' (1987). The idea was to collect together a chapbook's worth of poems that had been published previously in journals, but that had not made the cut for *We Will Disappear*. It was just a mock-up – but in the noise and bustle of the book fair, I either sold or traded it to someone, probably for as little as a dollar.

How it's come to reside in the NLA I'm not entirely sure. The person I sold it to might have been an undercover collector, snapping up copies of zines and chapbooks for a specific purpose. Whatever the reason, the book has been catalogued, is available for reading by the general public, and is now even available for digital download, for a price. I’ve also received emails from book distributors inquiring as to its availability. The irony of this is clear: despite my best efforts to present to the world an 'authorised' version of my poetic output, in the end individual authors have little or no control over which of their works will be remembered or archived. I now know, if only on a trivial level, something of what Patrick White must have felt all those years ago when he discovered a copy of his book *The Ploughman* in the NLA.

While I could always simply print up another copy (I still have the text and the cover image on file), I decided to pay the $13.20 required to have someone at
the library scan Dead Poem Office electronically and then send it to me via email. I have included a copy of this scan as part of the Artefact because of the way it symbolically both represents and erases me as a 'self-publishing' author. Dead Poem Office represents and archives me by way of the Dewey Decimal number \textit{Np A821.4 P912 de} hand-written on its front cover. However the scanned copy is of such poor quality that my name, originally printed in silver ink on the cover, is unreadable, as is the image used for the front and back cover. My name does not appear on any other page of the book. All that is left is the title and the poems themselves.

In the end this is fitting: for many poets, libraries also constitute a 'Dead Poem Office', a final resting place for poems that may sit unread, just like undelivered letters, for many years. While this represents a cautionary tale for any poet distributing their works in public, it also shows that books continue to have an uncanny ability to outmanoeuvre their authors. Self-published chapbooks are indeed actors within a field of books whose only real enemy is that 'bonfire of the vanity presses' all writers fear. For this reason alone they should be celebrated, discussed and remembered.

This thesis has demonstrated that various publishing activities can indeed constitute a performance, a 'publishing of the self'. Publishing, in the literary field at least, is a word that describes a multitude of public and private acts. The reinvention of old formats for books, including the chapbook format, is indeed just one aspect of this multiplicity. While many forms of publishing and dissemination are possible, when poets use traditional formats, they are in fact entering a conversation with older fields of prestige. The five other chapbooks presented in the accompanying Artefact represent a performance of self-publishing, rather than a simple denial of mainstream publishing. The sixth book in the Artefact, \textit{We Will Disappear}, is a performance of 'mainstream' publication that also bears some hallmarks or characteristics of other kinds of publishing, including self-publishing.
Re-examining the fields in which these poetry books were produced has involved an analysis of the role of books as signifiers of prestige within those fields. Chapter One discussed the social and literary contexts within which the practice of 'self-publishing' takes place, with particular reference to Bourdieu's notion of the 'field'. Chapter Two outlined six possible fields, each of which has its own histories, traditions and ritualistic practices. The spaces between these fields of publishing are likewise occupied by a variety of actors, and their creative works (in this case poems, chapbooks and other book objects). Despite differences between fields of publishing, books can also be read as a performance of struggles within the field(s) in which they are produced, as was discussed in Chapter Three.

The usefulness of this reading of publication as a performance was demonstrated in Chapter Four's discussion of the five chapbooks contained within the Artefact. Finally, in Chapter Five, the examination of the publication of the sixth book contained within the Artefact, We Will Disappear, argued that even mainstream book publications can be analysed in terms of their performance of rituals associated with consecration and acceptance. Despite technological changes in the way poets communicate their works to the world, older book forms such as the chapbook still play a significant role in poetry publishing. The performance of poetry book objects can tell us a great deal about the way the field of publishing works. In doing so, they inspire a more sophisticated reading of the literary field, and of the importance of books as signifiers of literary and cultural prestige.

DAVID PRATER
September 10, 2009
People in Korea are a poetic people, like the people in my home town, even the way the people speak is in itself poetic – all you have to do is write it down and you have poetry … but I wouldn’t want a people who only write poetry. You need a time when poetry is rejected and despised. Then you also need a poet who writes poetry in solitude and defends poetry alone. You don’t just have poetry in paradise – you also have to have poetry in hell.

KO UN (Donegan, 2005)
Part 2: Artefact

This section lists the contents of the seven poetry books contained in the Artefact accompanying this Exegesis.
The Happy Farang

2000

26 page A5 poetry chapbook, self-published (Northcote, Australia).

The Happy Farang
Monk-Lovers
Bangkok: City of Angles
Thomas Pynchon & the Art of Anonymity Maintenance
Cities On the Move
Tuk-Tuk
The Postman of Kowloon
Non-Touristic Trek
The Chao Le
Takraw Monkey
Oh Blossom
Mountains of Pai
Mr Tui
Emaciated Buddha
The Boys on Thanon Lim Khong
Low Season, Last Days
The Kip & How to Carry It
Under the Pavement, Laos
A Photographer’s Wet Dream
Cock & Football
Visit Laos Year
Tintin & the Plain of Jars
The Gums of Vientiane
8 poems

2002

12 page A4 poetry chapbook, du papa press (Melbourne, Australia).

The House That Cortez Built
5 Mobile Phone Text Messages
Desmond
I Don’t Like Cricket
Madchester
[ ]
Caroline
Departure(s)
Re: (with Andy Jackson)

2005

12 page A5 poetry pamphlet, self-published (Melbourne, Australia).

This Stubborn Spotlight*
   Oh God!
A Safe Distance*
   Maz
Another Suicide Girl*
   Summer Bay Dreaming
Everything Is Paid For*
   Station Static

* indicates poem by Andy Jackson
Abendland

2006

28 page A5 poetry chapbook, self-published (Melbourne, Australia).

Yo La Tengo
Walt Whitman Service Area
Fir
Mna
18 Fields
Gorazde
Death In Dubrovnik
The Two Faces of Zlatyu Boyadziev
Mit Gas!
Pigtails
Baudelaire in Bruxelles
Pink City
Kathy Kruse
Abandoned Youth Camp
Durer: Innsbruck 2005
Dachau
Landschaft (mit Gerhard Richter)
Another Death Star
Abendland
Kunst-Wet
Alone In An Airport
Morgenland

2007

24 page A5 poetry chapbook, Vagabond Press (Sydney, Australia).

Alone In An Airport II
Jetlag World
Sound of Vitality
White Space
Snow Grocer
Hoju Bihang-gi
Nagasaki Crows
Trans*
The Hanok Fields
Drunk As Ko Un
Makkolli Moon
Mokochukcha
Saihou Jodu
Imaginary Mao
Snow Sea Swan
Lonely Planet
Icebergs
Moriapo
Back To The Tourist III
We Will Disappear

2007

84 page paperback poetry book, soi3/papertiger media (Brisbane, Chiang Mai),

[envoi]
In a Dim Sea Nation
Abstract Moon
We Will Disappear
(On the Tomb of) Victor Bruce
Northern Rivers Pastoral
While Your Children Are Small
In Heaven It's Always Raining
Avalon V
Airliner
Post-Holocaust Tram
Between Empires
1001 Nights
Dexedrine Bombs
When We Were in the Wild
Lovers / Lateness
Ada
Ken
Japanese Bush Poet
The Happy Farang
Non-Touristic Trek
Tintin & the Plain of Jars
The Chao Le
Ich Bin Ein Tourist
Od(e)
Entgegengesetz
Fassbar
Kerze 1
We Miss You!
Spring*
Peace Falls
Bustling
A Veteran of the Club Scene
Identikit Nation
City Slacker
There’s a Wild Jack Russell in the Moon
The Bloody Hollys
Ma Sonic
Code Pervin’
Let’s Fight the Pop-Ups!
Machines for Living In
Search Poem #9
Kyoto Crow(s)
Betty Conquers All
Silver Rocket II
‘Wounded or Sound’: The Death March of Johnny McQueen
Karin Revisited
Unmarked Harlem
She Finds Her Speed
The Rise & Fall of Davey Dreamnation
(On the Tomb of) The Unknown Waitress
We Are Living
Caroline
5 Haiku SMS
Dead Poem Office

2007

24 page A5 poetry chapbook, self-published (Melbourne, Australia)

Kate's Photograph
Xanana's Dog
The Sprawl
Thomas Pynchon & the Art of Anonymity Maintenance
A Photographer's Wet Dream
Cars
[          ]
Last Night Betty
The House That Cortez Built
Tribesco Krowe
America

Slam!
Peppercorn Rent
Black G.S.T.
Funeral For Democracy
Dead Poem Office
The Boys Who
Run Lola Run
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- ’To Publish or Not to Self-Publish’, Southern Review vol 40; No. 2 (2007) pp 59-73
- ‘Taking Kylie To Korea’, The Advocate (NTEU), 2006
- ‘In a Dark Fibre Age’, Sleepers Almanac 2005

POETRY (PRINT)

- ’Anti-Kraak’, Four W #20 (2009)
- ’Poet Momentous’, Blast Magazine (2009)
- ‘Four Poems from Leaves of Glass’, Stop, Drop and Roll, Issue 1, 2009
- ‘Great Big Star’, FourW #19, 2008
- ‘Sunbathing’, Overland, 2008
• ‘Kerry’, Famous Reporter (2008)
• ‘Nieuw Holland’, Island #113, (2008)
• ‘De Kraai en het Paard’, Going Down Swinging (#25, 2008)
• ‘Yer Morningness’, The Age, February 9, 2008
• ‘new space seasons’, FourW #18, 2007
• ‘travelling types’, Overland, 2007
• ‘The Day Britney Died’, ‘More sun than clouds’, OCHO (USA) 2007
• ‘Walt Whitman Service Area’, The Age, January 2007
• ‘1001 Nights’, Overland 183, 2006
  Mirage #4/Period[ical], USA September 2006
• ‘50’, Going Down Swinging 23, 2006
• ‘City Slacker’, Overland #181 2005
• ‘funeral for democracy’, The Age, 20 August 2005

POETRY (NON-PRINT)

• ’(On the Tomb of) Yun Hye Yong’, Ekleksografia, USA 2009
• 'CHMOD RXW', 'B.A.S.E.', 'She's An Autarky', foam:e, 2009
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• ‘A House On the Bank’ (with Ginka Biliarska), Lynx, October 2006
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• ‘Karin Revisited’ (Audio), *The Red Room*, October 2006
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• ‘Insurgency’, *Eyewear* (UK), August 2006
• ‘IC Heli –‘ *Stylus*, July 2006
• ‘The Boys Who’ (audio), *Going Down Swinging #23*, 2006
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• ‘Exes & Zeroes’, ‘Oh God!’ *PFS Post* (USA), March 2006
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• ‘in heaven it’s always raining’, ‘why do you cry run lola run’,
• ‘when we were in the wild’, *nthposition* (UK), July 2005
• ‘Dead Poem Office’, *Cordite Poetry Review #22*, July 2005
• ‘Tribesco Krowe’, ‘Haiku’, ‘Impossible Socks’, *Snorkel* 1, April 2005

**EDITED WORKS**

• (with Denise Meredyth) *Southern Review* Volume 38 #2 (2005) Special Issue: “Archives & Online Journals” (ISSN: 0038-4526)
• (with Lisa Greenaway and Steve Grimwade), *Going Down Swinging*, Issue #24, 2006 (ISSN 0157-3950)

**ISSUES:**

• # 21.0: Domestic Enemy (2005)
• # 21.1: Robo (2005)
• # 22.0: Editorial Intervention (2005)
• # 23.0: Children of Malley (2005)
• # 24.0: Common Wealth (2006)
• # 24.1: Candylands (2006)
• # 25.0: Generation of Zeroes (2006)
• # 26.0: Innocence (2007)
• # 26.1: White Homes (2007)
• # 27.0: Experience (2007)
• # 28.0: Secret Cities (2008)
• # 28.1: Mulloway (2008)
• # 29.0: Pastoral (2008)
• # 29.1: Haikunaut (2009)
• # 30.0: Custom/Made (2009)

ARTICLES/EDITORIALS:

• 'An Interview with Arjen Duinker' (31/8/2009)
• 'An Interview with John Leonard' (19/3/2008)
• 'An Interview with Ryan Paine' (24/7/2007)
• 'Hits and Online Readership' (24/7/2007)
• 'Greetings to the New Malleys' (1/12/2005)
• 'Editorial Intervention' (26/6/2005)
• 'An interview with John Tranter' (27/6/2005)

PERSONAL WEBSITES

• http://www.daveydreamnation.com
• http://www.davidprater.blogspot.com
• http://www.pcbangs.blogspot.com
Contents of Artefact (Compact Disc)

The attached compact disc contains digital scans of the six chapbooks in the Artefact, namely:

- *Re*: an 8 page A5 pamphlet (with Andy Jackson, 2005)
- *Dead Poem Office*, a 24 page A5 chapbook (self-published, 2007)
- *Morgenland*, a 24 page A5 chapbook (Vagabond Press, 2007)

Due to copyright restrictions, an electronic version of *We Will Disappear* is not included on the disc.
glossary

baht: thai unit of currency (approx. 25 australian cents)
chao le: sea gypsies
chao phraya: river flowing through bangkok
cock & football: lao brand of rolling papers
farang: any western (read: white) person
karen: hill tribe of northern thailand & burma
khob khun khrap: “thank you very much”
kip: lao unit of currency (4000 kip to $1 australian)
soi: lane
stupa: pointed dome on buddhist temples
takraw: thailand’s national game, a cross between volleyball & soccer
thanon: street
thao rai: “how much?”
tuk-tuk: three-wheeled taxi
wat: buddhist temple

the happy farang

by
david prater
this book is dedicated to rachael antony
&
the working elephants of thailand & laos

all poems copyright david prater 1999
produced by pumpkin press, melbourne

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no monkeys were harmed during the making of this book

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the happy farang

hello! — i am so happy to be a farang in your country relieved to discover this word that describes me & pleased to be here spending all my money on trinkets & going to the toilet — hooray! now even my shit is farang! a foreign body yearning to be assimilated! get out of thailand i say to my ungrateful excrement leave more room for kfc & coke i look forward also to depositing another 500 baht at the airport (also farang) & can't wait to develop all of my excellent photos — bye for now!
monk-lovers

she loved me for a matter of seconds
but her affair with the monks promises
to be a lifelong obsession hey that hurts —
right there doc can you lance jab pop it
cut it out? look at this it's a postcard
she sent me — monks! you think that's
trivial? wait till you see the photos!
monks on bicycles monks on chao phraya
river express ferry monks carrying food
bowls happy monks monks sitting on the
'reserved for the monk' bench in hualam-
phong railway station monks watching tv
monks patting mutant temple dogs & monks
hanging out — oh to be a monk!
— ouch!

bangkok:
city of angles

timpani crash/tuk-tuk
caged verandah/air-con
little bells/squid vendor
fecund waterway/chao phraya
police helmet/city intersection
pollution viaduct/sky train
hardware section/chinatown
pirate tape stand/thanon khao san
shining stupa/urban wat
thomas pynchon &
the art of anonymity
maintenance

the choice of sunglasses is important —
ray-bans are out/too miami vice ... beatle
specs? no dead giveaway leave my crow's
feet visible ... chem-mart budget eye-wear?
tint in sunlight /good anonymous average

plain collared shirt? hmm i'd prefer a gaudy
hunter s thompson hawaiian number but
beige is a city colour camouflage ... same with
pants /now the hard part — loafers? i shudder
afraid so ... dumb haircut also necessary

i lead my child by the hand home from school
every weekday afternoon — this is a truly
impenetrable disguise hence my surprised &
anxious fury in the bright afternoon — click!

what the hell has a camera got to do with my
anonymity maintenance? i shouted fuck you pal!
& are you glad to have proven that we're both real?
it must have been those cheap fucking sunglasses ...

cities on the move

it is the year 2542 BE — in bangkok
the streets are flooded with people 543
years in advance of the western world
but only 7 hours ahead of GMT — in the
meantime football grips the nation &
entropy invades every available thanon
& soi art flourishes in the city moving
slowly north towards this exhibition of
student works the highlight of which is
a collection of flower pots — the artist
encourages me to take one but fearful of
customs & strange looks i decline thinking
who knows what strange plant might emerge
from this soil & what colour flower bloom?
the postman of kowloon

given the unenviable task of delivering mail in a cantonese walled city charged with entropy & chaos - criss-crossing its aerial corridors -- conduits they call them -- linking towers that change position daily - he can never decipher the old city's next move & remains astounded by the next innocuous envelope's habit of finding a home...

still sighing he scratches out the addresses of orphans & the deceased — another day another map to discard & the postman of kowloon —

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non-touristic trek

COME & SEE THE HILL TRIBES PLOUGHING UP THEIR OPIUM FIELDS IN PREPARATION FOR NEXT YEAR'S CROP OF NESCAFE! THIS TREK HAS BEEN APPROVED BY BOTH THE THAI & US GOVERNMENTS ALONG WITH JOINT MILITARY EXERCISES IT WILL CONSTITUTE THE MAIN THRUST OF THEIR WAR AGAINST DRUGS NO RAFTING ELEPHANT HIKING OR SOUVENIR-SHOPPING EXPERIENCE REQUIRED JUST A WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT THIS ONCE IN A LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY TO JOIN A NON-TOURISTIC TREK I REPEAT THERE WILL BE ONE TREK ONLY - AFTERWARDS THE ENTIRE REGION WILL BE DECLARED "FREQUENTED BY TOURISTS" & CLOSED TO ALL NON-TOURISTIC ACTIVITIES THUS CAUSING A MASSIVE RISE IN BOTH PRICES & TOURIST NUMBERS HURRY THIS IS YOUR LAST CHANCE TO SEE UNTouched & AUTHENTIC HILL TRIBES IN THEIR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT! REPEAT: ONE TREK ONLY! ENQUIRE WITHIN! CREDIT CARDS WELCOME!

mr tui

mr tui you'd have to win the "safest driver in thailand" award you were a man of few words but smooth driving actions eg your easy familiarity with the nine hundred & forty two sharp corners between chiang mai & pai mr tui you knew when to sound your horn around a hairpin bend when to change down to second when to accelerate & swerved superbly to avoid collapsed road shoulders but mr tui the one criticism i would have is that you flicked the windscreen wipers on & off unnecessarily — it really was raining quite heavily mr tui & you could have saved yourself the trouble by leaving them on for the entire trip — record time nevertheless: 2 hrs 56 mins start to finish khob khun khrop
my name is mud as in good i help you with
thai translation i am monkey & i am crazy
good at takraw & at takraw kicks — do you
see me where i practice? yes? at the beach
with a ball of flotsam-styrofoam & a piece
of string tied to a tree so i can kick & jump
like a crazy monkey there is no end to my
energy for the game & no one can tell what i
am thinking at any given moment — monkey!
ha! your name? david? david beckham? ha!
football! — takraw! — monkey! — you think i'm
crazy? i am mud as in good — good at takraw
see you next year you want sprite? 1000 baht!
yes! you want room? 1 million baht! yes! time
to practice again! & off he goes into the innocent
night — relax bay thailand keeping the peace
oh blossom

come here blossom fall down here on my lap & let me run my fingers through your delicate pink petals the way you used to like it in springtime when you were all in bloom oh blossom remember every season is another reason to love you tender blossom come on back over here don't let the wind blow your fragrance in another direction blossom let me be the lucky little bee climbing ever so carefully towards your sweet sticky centre oh blossom who'd dare pluck your perfect beauty?
Mountains of Pai

Pai bursting through the fog to fly in low across the rice paddies dumping its deadly load & setting the pond a-tremble with aftershocks the size of frogs now skipping the mountains of Pai unfold untold numbers of Karen separatists pray fervently for a rain cloud to carpet bomb the ponds of Burma we saw one coming over the mountains along the surface-tension's wire as quickly as it came the raincloud retraces the thirty miles back to Thailand if only the skies would remain blackened by something like smoke...
the chao le

housed in two human zoos constructed for their survival's sake on the east & west coasts of koh lantah it's good to know that the chao le are still allowed to play football on the beach at low-tide its wave sounds mimic the crowd-roars of wembley coming down the supermarine cable all the young men & boys dip their finger & toenails in preparation for the referee's inspection tomorrow they will collect these clippings & together with various haircut-offcuts launch their offerings upon the andaman sea in a special wooden boat after which they gaze longingly half-hoping the tide will bring it back knowing also that some small part of themselves has escaped both the zoos & the fickle sea-spirits' protection

emaciated buddha

fireworks rupture the temple on the hill's serenity the interior's panorama suffocated by a buddhist vision of hell flavoured with more than a dash of hindu horror — here's a massacre of men & women sawn in half by grinning & willing fellow men & women here's old buddha himself count his ribs this is before he discovers the middle path still there are thousands of hungry children in the buddhist world — more than a thousand monks & nuns forced to cross the burmese border in search of alms — they are all still hungry — count their ribs
the boys on
thanon lim khong

armed with their hideouts & slingshots & smiles they gather at nightfall beside a rocky river road to compete in monied contests dodge tuk-tuks & flurries of laughter now pulling the notes from their pockets & placing them on the road's river brown & then throwing their thongs from line-marks towards jackpots of fluttering notes /see the worn old thongs skim! & the bigger boys win but the stream of lao notes stutters onwards it's 8 in the pm & time to go home now everybody's happy & one lucky boy's an instant millionaire ...

low season,
last days

depressed as the prices no longer deluded by smiles passing signposts kilometres coming no closer to what were once called destinations — border crossings & pass-outs different games same rules waiting for the photo-op that might make the cost of the ticket worthwhile — low season, last days & the promise of last rains again linger as clouds obstruct an aeroplane's view let tomorrow's dawn break as high as a season — bright season, first day
the kip &
how to carry it

in bundles my friend!
in every pocket!
stuff those notes!
hang the exchange rate!
just get out there &
start handing it over!
spend it daily!
spend it gaily!
but wait — there's more!
it's all for sale!
everything must go!
clothes looks lifestyles —
out the door!
but wait — there's still more!
you can buy it —
come on & try it!
talk's cheap —
you can buy that too!
but don't forget to bargain!

under the pavement, laos

under the pavement, laos in dissent:
a skin full of worn bones, the footprint's
masseuse, a fist full of pavements & laos

under laos, the mekhong's predictions:
swallowing bombs, reeking dimly of lao
beer on a menu full of laos & mekhongs

under the mekhong, the current's advance:
upon an unknown beach, a silent chorus,
from a porous row of mekhongs & currents

under the current, the riverbed's half-truths:
imprints of bottles where eyes once shone,
yawns in a mouth full of currents & riverbeds

under the riverbed, the earth's velocity:
half-lies boring rings in fire, extinguished
by the scrutiny of riverbeds & earth

under the earth, the fossil's remainder:
snails that spiral, ladders of chance, scratches
in sandstone outlining earth & fossils

under the fossil, the stone's logic:
a dead language rehydrated then vaporised
by the closeness of fossils & stones
a photographer's
wet dream

ah! luang prabang ancient capital unesco
world heritage magnificently preserved
in pristine condition please bring cameras
film & kleenex for the mop-up/click! &
we're off through the view-finder: monks
kiddies grannies trannies ripe for developing
when you get back to your secret laboratory
national geographic are definitely interested
oh i'm spent! /i'm spent again! / how the stock
curns like spectators through a turnstyle!
 i can feel it! the money shot's in my sights!
i'm getting warmer now! i can't hold off much —
oh!
— click /click

jesus! —

— oh!

another kleenex moment

cock & football

cock & football! it's time to get up &
don't those horny roosters know it!
cock & football! cock & football! around
the brown river bend here comes dawn's
breaker rise & shine cock & football! cock
& football! cock-a-doodle-do! it's morning
once again & don't those poor hens know it!
cock & football! your smoking pleasure!
international! now available — via satellite
in black & white and colour blasted straight
into your "loungeroom" with all the subtlety
of a striptease on speed cock & football! cock
& football! get out of bed reach for that cold
spoon & apply before rising cock & football!
world cup final! & a nice pair of legs to stare
at while shouting cock & football! time to get
up you frisky fat farangs cock & football!
cock & football! cock & football! cock & football!
cock-a-doodle-doo!

fucking cockheads
visit laos year

visit laos & bring your wheelbarrow
pretend this isn't communism gone nuts
ignore the poorly-organised protesters
turn a blind eye to the fall of the wall
incarcerate yourself in a capitalist prison
you're lucky to have been arrested here
now there's nothing left between you &
the socialist state's caring attitude towards
intellectuals & slogan-dodgers do not float
candle-boats on the mekhong & don't ask
why your demonstration was not reported
in the papers nobody noticed in this most
'enigmatic' of nation-building nations being
fucked-over by every major corporation on
earth makes this a stupendous destination
let's hope visit laos year lasts forever

tintin & the plain of jars

nothing to report as usual save for
a badly bruised rump boy these laos
sure know how to build a road! &
as for the jeep — well the driver was
adamant that i ride in the back for
fear of bandits who as usual failed
to materialise (as did captain haddock
having discovered the medicinal value
of 'sang sam whiskey' i'll see you in
phonsavan! i shouted above the din
of fighting cocks & mtv asia blistering
fucking barnacles! he screamed do you
expect me to risk my life for a handful
of cracked fucking jars? go to hell tintin!)
oh captain my sore arse is here to tell you
that phonsavan wasn't worth the trouble
as for the plain of jars itself however i
soon managed to shake off my guide &
was just starting to enjoy the serenity
of my solitude amongst a thousand years
of mystery when a muffled explosion to
the southwest caught my attention being
wary of landmines i took my time but it
was too late the poor guide had become
alarmed at my giving him the slip & in
this plain of bombs had searched for me
only to find his left foot on top of a rusted
metal disc & one second later his entire
body blown to the four winds what more
could i do but commandeer the old jeep &
settle into the padded driver's seat for the long
ride back to phonsavan to await both my
drunken captain & his pointless expletives?
the gums of vientiane

standing at attention
a column of white gums
awaits its commander's
final orders — over the top!
down the embankment!
secure all garden plots
& fish traps! then down
the mekhong we go—
all in a row sir yes sir
drowning at attention sir
ye loyal diggers/saplings
planted when? & for
what strange reason?
in dust-blown vientiane
in the service of her majesty
ye brave snow-white gums
form a levee — but for how
long can you hold back this
determined tide of change?
8 poems

david prater

acknowledgements: shampoo, poetry espresso
David Prater was born in 1969.
He lives in Melbourne.
delays and pirate ships
the rivers flow with gold
he will write to his brother

"i shall cross the chasm myself
if you find it so wide!"

"of course, before the ones
before me there was another
but senora, i should say
they were dead before i arrived!

"ah, imagine my own family:
i shall rebuild them all!
and heaven:

i will tear it down myself."
you've got new haiku
something in the air has changed
more radiation

* writing on a phone
i could be playing gameboy
what a geek i am

* when a machine talks
nature is also mimicked
choose your own bird sound

* origami girl
folding paper cuts your hands
you need more band-aids

* your training is done
now you must walk on alone
brand new haiku boots
desmond rejects the setting out of arguments
he is neither analytical or lateral
he dips his hand into a pool of water
& it is cold
just a moment ago it was dry
it was also in my pocket
my button remains there
my belt keeps my trousers up
desmond's house falls on him
blue-green drops
there's the sound at last
of bombers falling in the grass
will they ever retrieve the sky
he kills a mosquito & stares at himself
there is no need to be concerned
a wheel churns in the gravel
& disrupts somebody's feet
screwing neatly into the sky
desmond follows all of this eagerly
desmond forgets the earth
the ivy wastes hold yesterday's rain
& crawl like a bereaved remainder
so far i’m my only reader but i like what i see
writing becomes much easier when you can
focus on present company though it be poor
"i don’t like humility publishing, oh no: i love it
ahl" - had a book launch the other night &
it went really well having invited myself i duly
turned up & bought that only untitled copy yes
of course i signed it wow what a huge success
& i said to myself maybe i should send poems
to one of those literary journals but whoa there
i answered myself reprovingly that would be
vanity publishing & i both know what i think of
vanity i’m right i agreed no way i’m going there
that wouldn’t be fair not allowing me ‘as reader
the freedom to interpret the text as i see fit well
i’ll fix that i said pressing the green start button
standing back to watch one copy spewing out
just for me in my deep & everlasting humility
in a backroom practising the madchester stomp
playing basketball as the ice machines exploded
hiding cases of beer in our flares & wiggling out
to the mondays dosed on smiley faces & white t's

inhaling our bandannas we "wrote for luck" (12")
staring right back at me ringo ian bought bevvies
we all got stoned & shaun set the beats rocking
while some guy called gerald played the sitar

& we all got stoned then hid cases of beer
in our flares & I'm growing my hair long!
you can't even see my forehead now or my ears
to a man we mooched out for lemonades

in the pool room someone held a cigarette we
huddled around it someone bought a mondays
12" & we thought he was stoned I sat on his radio
we heard the new valentines ep stashed bevvies

in our haircuts & how cool were slowdive man!
I gazed at my shoes for so long I developed arthritis
of the guitar i'd never even heard of ecstasy then
someone who worked in a record shop said I should

buy a cd player & the rest is supergrass - still I
bought the new mondays ep yeah I play it sometimes
even give the roses a spin every comedown or two
but I'll never go back to freaking madchester again.
1. a poem never written or sent
2. by the bay
3. lackadaisical
4. meaning unknown
5. too smart for its own good (trans.)
6. remember
looms out of terror's twilight
unknown destinations yelp

caroline! aka san francisco's
swing scene is this all i'm

coked up to be? i don't make
cocktails like your hair they

spiked my spirits with shampoo
but you asked only for water &

watched all night from behind
"the nicest person here" you -

remained oh so baja california!
stay there! waiting for a dance

i will draw you an extinct frog
but i hope you like poetry also
Depature(s)

We wish to repulse all slazengers that due to cretinous blazers tonight's sfandicide of beard wigs has been scancilled. Our ornithologies to any pewers affected by these strangers.

Would all shopping bags please install guided lasers in the lap of the crux. This is your thin captain biscuit crunching, early weirs are strongly made of courage, let us weep silently over bread tins, nuff head.

Would all spartans please kilt backwards at the service bureau de change or a diaper. Gallantly shredded oatmeal stickers are advised that due to prawl panes in the malfunctioning room, tennis balls will be served at onight's orange duece.

Would all karaoke endeavours please re-hinge the rear end of tossing to he basque revival. Indigo trailer wipes comply with the strictest guidelines for shuddering fantan sales pitch tricycles, strongly feminine biscuits.

Repeat, could small wing nuts please remove kite instrumentals rom mailboxes and curry. Sounds like a funfare all day headlock with hrapnel goonies. Haiku edits are particularly ballast at the rear end of ignity's salad, entertain gumnuts and shoulder attitude feathers for a kylark in butter.

Could all simpletons gaffer in cul de sacs, whisking toilet lids and salmon ast rodent butchers. The next shave could be your past one, magnificent rench cuddle biscuits await you in the gall stones of our heroin.
could all breadcrumbs please stick to the bottom of the toaster. We are experiencing a temporary flak of galaga players, bring soiling resin again and I will be forced, as napkin, to delete these trying gulls from our weapons bladder.

killing me snuffly with kokomo.
Oh God!

oh god yeah god my god my oh
yes james joyce ulysses yes yes
penguin modern classics yeah
my god yes yes & a penguin oh
i'm coming over many penguins
yes more penguins yes & books
yes a book filled with penguins
yes & lot & lots of poems yes oh
yes yes stop no start go yes god
oh yes leave it right there go yes
yep yep schnell yes hell yes oh
bless god yes yes god oh no
god no yes no ts suck my breast
eliot yes ts yes not yet go no oh
hard as hit my arse & go hard ts
go go go stop no go god go go
hell yes heaven no go zone that's
yes right there in english oh yes
english yes that's english oh god
pocket rocket god yes throbbing
yes wet yes oh yes molly oh god
yes blooming blooming god yes
flower fucking yes my god that's
yes yes yes not god no god in
a knot yes not there yet stop yes
god yes god yeah no no go on &
oh yes on & on & on a river yes
yes by the river yes god on & on
like a river yes god no don't
hold on god oh no gods all gone

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Andy Jackson & David Prater
Printed on recycled paper
Not for sale

No sea monkeys were harmed
during the making of this chapbook
A safe distance

So there was always the body, just out of reach, whispering its suggestions across the negotiating table of each age, mustering its formidable troops up to the gates of half-thought, the tone not threat but frustration at for how long we've barely been able to meet our bodies' eyes, face the truths they hold.

I'm sure this eighties mix-tape of memories I've compiled is bound to have missed some underrated scenes, but this need to know by speaking is impatient. You and I were the first in our group to buy porn, though it took us two attempts - we'd assumed Playboy couldn't cost much more than TV Week. Honestly, it was the soft light pawning unveiled pale curves that interested us, not the shock of shallow gynaecology, though what of the body can survive such severance? One weekend, we took turns to streak, fig-leafed in jocks, from the school's art-room balcony to the fence and back. I think we called it a dare, and never since felt the need to repeat or deconstruct it. Years before, our grade one legs patterned with gum-tree shadows, we sat on either end of a bench, waiting for your mum to come again to comfort you in your homesickness.

I was quiet and watched a vacant swing sway;

braver, cold or merely ill-equipped to say or do what you might have needed from a friend. What's changed? Every seven years are bodies are entirely new, but faced now with this photo of us at twelve - fresh from the Bendigo Show, twingly grinning for the camera, monopoly money stuffed between our bowl-cut framed temples and the arms of mirror sunnies - I see the allure of the games we learnt and still play to maintain a safe distance, which is at first theoretical then real. Each body trembles in its isolation. We were never exempt. Leaving adolescence before we knew its worth, we did what people do - we lost touch.

Summer Bay Dreaming

this isn't home & away you know you'll never be tammin sarok & I'm not even sure who I'd cast as me i hate my waxhead arrogance but we haven't turned into digits yet have you noticed how a surf clubs transformed by childhood tuckshops free ices sunny boys how a girls smiles erased by the backdrop utterly fibro hopeless underneath a dead banksia tree holding eskimo bars gently like a riot of teenage freckles milky ways kiss & tells fad packets & secret crushes will you plunge down waterslides with me even though the mats are torn foam & the pools closing in about an hour maybe after that we could go down to the beach o-or watch the tee tree stream trickle down to join the waves observe the rip or feel for pippies with our feet i've got a bronze medallion now i can swim with all my clothes on just to prove it if that's not okay ill understand it was only ever a summer bay dream & after all you can't do that on television
Everything is paid for

When he came home last night, it started as normal. He poured himself a scotch and listed his griefs like a condition report - the pawprints of tenants on walls, the black holes of their pockets, whining home-buyers, his dim pretty assistant - not noticing the expression on my face. He took off his jacket and tossed it across the room as if it was the world's pain, and asked me how I was, out of habit. These last few weeks the dream we'd shared but drowned in our pool, buried under our tennis court and somehow forgotten has begun knocking from under our grounds. When I finally spoke its words, he downed the whole shot and shot back, Have a look around, woman - what more is there to want? The look on his face almost made me think he was glad our lives had shrunk to the size of my womb or his fist. He shook his head and grinned. I became one of those clients of his with a slight home loan, went quiet and turned to face the floor. He had just the place for me. He took me to bed. Now, in the morning, like a lost ghost I drift around our community of gates. After some cue beyond sound, next door's dogs bark, and dig at the concrete. Other young mothers parade their newborn by the man-made lake. Everything's ordered here, and we pay for it. I return to find a sparrow behind the lounge-suite, a feather and a smudge on the pane, a red hemisphere on the carpet. I can only lift her up, still warm, drop her in the bin and weep. There are not enough guards, alarms or fences to keep what's out there from us. There are so many victims. I have wanted their pain, and now I think it is coming.

Station Static

would you still love me if i was a type b if i gave up smoking would you kiss me it's a long way from bondi to kingswood country i hear your stocking's shimmy gazing in wonder upon your pale calves chats over bagels at a grim hospital cafe we talk of many things boring boyfriend why don't you leave him all sounds safe snubbing my nose at the car pool bitch life's too short for sexless psycho(logy)s on the train i thought for a moment we could get it on forever stop off at mount druitt maybe or disappear via granville i kept my eyes on the cityrail diagrams & tried not to think of thighs rubbing together near ashfield station there was a girl sitting on her boyfriend's lap he looked the wrong way at a guy coming down our aisle & the air was pressured they traded punches it was on for young & a million old men fighting their way towards them suddenly your body was pressed up against mine just trying to stay out of harm's way i suppose in that moment between lives we were lovers surely but we broke up later at central yes it was a necessary termination you caught another bus back to your bondi boyfriend (i sat there thinking of your stockings & the old woman who calmly told the bruised girl just get off the train
Another Suicide Girl

Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.
- Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality

"Til the first image slid from the printer, and I held that warm portrait, I didn’t think I’d ever be beautiful, hot, wanted.

There’re these few extra kilos, my glasses, the hint of a ’stache under a wide nose, my tats... During the photo shoot, in my head I had this looped image of myself undressing in the dark as if the light might burn. Now, if I focus, all I can see is Missy take my trembling hand, put on music I like, and pose me so naturally among my own toys and guitars. I am laughing over my shoulder at the camera I once saw as a torture device. It consumes my many imperfections and leaves an impression of me I barely recognise – both dirty and coy – that’ll make them look at my eyes (first, at least).

It’s in the exchange of glances arousal’s found, and all those subscribers who’ll see me looking back out of the net this way will appreciate me and know I’m not an object. Not that I care who logs on or why. This is about how I feel, being lifted up out of myself to a place where I can see how this body can be loved. Plus,

us non-models should claim our freedom to be seen – ’cos just the sight of a scar or a freckle’s a spanner in the machine, isn’t it?
We decide exactly how we put ourselves out there, and hardly touch the airbrush function. No male gaze moves on us till it’s all on-line. This is the brand of feminism that makes me feel real. Every one of our days contain such moments, turning on desire, waiting to be caught, and every shape ought to be adored, even mine. What d’you mean
Why?? – I just said... didn’t I?

Maz

have you heard what they’ve been saying about old drug dealers & ex-girlfriends how it’s hard to be quite sure who you’d rather avoid well believe me there’s a choice I’d prefer not to make at any time let alone now you’re probably a lawyer that degree having been financed by a mountain of small deals secreted inside bread rolls & take-away spaghetti under kitchen counters due to the cops or were they also buying once i arrived at the flat to find some guy there your dealer maybe although you were sweating it was winter i guess we each have our own method of payment but i was jealous of the intimacy who was i to judge your judgements you were always there for me never failed to deliver in a way i was in love with your cool mobile lifestyle i hadn’t seen any of the movies you told me about we would meet in the strangest places bars parks the aforementioned kitchen then you cut off your grey hair & went bleached i knew it was a sign of our impending separation now i do not fear for you & often wonder whether we will meet in william street’s neon shadows kenneth slesor never did quite understand the reasons for our running into strangers averting eyes like johns with no desire you remain the anti-flaneur the bright hope of entire generations still hooked
This Stubborn Spotlight

I sat down and you trudged up to lay your grey muzzle on my knee, free of the pain of imagining being taken away, yet not of the slow loss of bodily functions, nor the vague sense of what was coming – I'd stroked your head and looked into your eyes differently this time. I don't want to let two-legged complications intrude into your old-dog dignity, but they do. Lines like these are weak and artificial.

So, I won't exclude facts like how Mum, who some would call your owner, never re-married after Dad died, but was sure to bring another pup home, soon as she'd returned from the vet then drunk herself calm at a friend's house. Was our only honest speech with each other indirect, through you? But let me try now to shift this rusted, stubborn spotlight, for just a moment, away from the human animal. If I have to, I will leave you on this note – me not calling but you coming anyway, your soft bronze ears still keen, our two winter breaths becoming one then gone, and how you looked into me, your tail slow wailing, coming to its rest between your legs, as I left.
Limited edition of 50 copies of which this is number 0
Abendland
David Prater
Abendland

Yo La Tengo
Walt Whitman Service Area
Fir
Mné
18 Fields
Gorazde
Death In Dubrovnik
The Two Faces of Zlatyu Boyadziev
Mit Gas!
Pigtales
Baudelaire in Bruxelles
Pink City
Kathy Kruse
Abandoned Youth Camp
Dürer: Innsbruck 2005
Dachau
Landschaft (mit Gerhard Richter)
Another Death Star
Abendland
Kunst-Wet
Alone In An Airport
Yo La Tengo

Ira Caplan's sonic squall rips
New York's fourth of July gulls
from the captivities of silence
like a chainsaw down a bough
of glass, or chalk on yesterday's
pavement. A soul possessed by
demons determined to explode.
Indices Richter-scale on Jersey's
fret board: blinding sounds erupt
then ribbon out - dangling notes
along the blue-green themes in
a park for homeless evangelists.
Shredding civic programmes deep
in the feedback dream (blooming
into atonal squiggles of sound -
an express blast of manhole heat),
peace bombs dropped on America
heave in a swollen thrashed loop
of pure non-violence & entropy,
each firework of snarls & stripes
tearing the sky a new arsehole.
Walt Whitman Service Area

I sing the throbbing pains of your great nation's bad coffee!
Hot plates keeping the entropy warm. Out along the turnpike

your name is dissected by the moon-like stares of motorists.
Stupefied in the concrete glare,
Using the car electric! May it

render your oil wars useless!
Though to be truthful, Walt,
these you never did envisage.
May the worn hands of peace

close together over industries!
Radios play *The Turnpike Down*.
Rock us into that gentle sleep
in each of our final rest areas.

Fir

Not the tree but the man.
Not the fire but the boys.
Not the emergency plan.
Not the silence nor noise.

But the swan or the glass.
But the time or the dream.
But the elegant trespass.
But the wings and the stream.

And the wind not the boat.
And the blood not the bay.
And the soundless float.
And the voice but the day.

Or the nail nor the wishes.
Or the tray but the ball.
Or the unwashed dishes.
Or the men but the all.
Mná

Nor the key and the woman.
Nor the girl and the moon.
Nor the blindingly human.
Nor the shard for the tune.

And the hill for the crescent.
And the pond for the scale.
And the continuous present.
And the smile save the Braille.

In the table save billows.
In the mirror save clouds.
In the triumphant pillows.
In the bib it’s the shroud.

It’s the same now the ebbing.
It’s the time now the most.
It’s the estuarine webbing.
It’s the girl and the ghost.

18 Fields

18 fields (sites, battlegrounds)
17 banners (standards, uniforms)
16 bands (spartan, militaristic)
15 ribbons (loose, fluttering)
14 sashes (bright, coloured)
13 clouds (grey, foreboding)
12 drums (clipped, regimental)
11 fires (effigies, crackers)
10 rows (deep, breasted)
 9 steps (slippery, barnacled)
 8 hours (waiting, working)
 7 days (blessed, counting)
 6 rounds (fired, targeted)
 5 friends (rioting, missing)
 4 slogans (graffitied, shouting)
 3 leaders (inspired, pathological)
 2 winds (changing, dying)
 1 blow (kingdoms, coming)
Goražde

Who will give colour to Joe Sacco's
goražde
safe haven - & who will go there
is it needed are the people safe?

When will the mist shrouds on
the mountains give up their secrets
these criminals those war dead &
weary - which daughters sons?

How are we to read the inverse
braille of bullet-studded buildings
riverside mosques that pierce the sky
the river itself a great onward flow?

What happened to the generators
the flywheels paddle steamers hydropower creators that fed the people
juice to watch war movies in the dark?

& where do you go Joe Sacco in your
dreams - is it black & white or do
colours invade that paper-thin canvas
& bleed the edges of your stolen sleep?

Death In Dubrovnik

you dispense with direct emotion/
experience & become the second
person the observer - it's safer
here you see & as for your reader
well she's gone her own way she'll
meet you later in the old town -
for now be content to sit & watch
as tourists wait impatiently for
their boat to arrive a three island
cruise you suppose - it's late & the
harried salesgirl repeats in three
or four languages - one more hour
seven more minutes five more now -
then someone challenges her in
italian - that was ten minutes ago!

she raises her hand as if to hit
the sky & the frenchman looks at
his wife - at his command she rises
- he flashes his ticket at the brown
girl & demands the expected - a
refund & while she's off to fetch it
you see the look on the woman's
face & sensing a small part of your
self there you close your eyes to the
adriatic sunshine & for that moment
of shame you cry & you want to die
The Two Faces of Zlatyu Boyadziev

(1)

crystal: dignitary portraits
his men clean-shaven the women
stern children on sleds if you
remember rightly panoramas
of coal mine towns silly dogs
chins pointing to the future
the sun - gold haloes spirits
with whiskers window frames ...

(2)
crumpled: just out of bed
or home from a long night of
drinking all traces of artifice
stripped away peasant loves
more silly dogs the omnipresent
minarets Bulgarian eternities
lifeless eyes trembling brushes
a grandmother in every canvas ...

Mit Gas!

could you be flirting with me (tiny periwinkle of a trip-hop
soundtrack? was that a smile (pretty vacuous air bubble at
the bottom of my glass? come here & slide down my throat
(ab)abstract freckle of a thirst quencher hobo of the backwash
past (re)boot the soda stream of our invisible passions (poet
of the cafe bar menu (lifeguard of the frozen bottle (remove
yourself from this moment (stolen password of my internet
identities (echo chamber of that dream lover's rehearsals
refill this loneliness (unbranded apple flavoured cinnamon
doughnut of a daydream (me wearing sunglasses (crucial
sunshade of a postcard meeting (intern of hotel romancers
change my channel (aqua blue invisible shapeless nomads
of my early morning coffee headband greeting (effervesce
my face (pigtail non-plussed crude translation of a mineral
(once more mit gas (repeat mit gas (kiss your aerated body
(pump the spray (ignite the liquid gel of these silhouetted
traces in the neverending (nitrous of our emissary specks!
Pigtails

she emerges from the bobble-corded bathing area with her pigtails wet & sticking out like unicorn horns from the back of her head – instantly she's a girl again the shining happy memory of herself as a swimmer a dancer & singer all at once like a sea monkey queen reacting with water swirled & sequined in the jar for all to see – i've been reading too much murakami not to understand what does drive the mind growing old what cues the eye interprets as "summer holidays": chipped nail polish lines of a different bikini beneath the new pair we stretched our legs on a gaudy beach towel airport novel open at a random page left there like the roof of a swiss house sometimes i forget that i can't speak japanese & this book's just a translation its americanisms irritating as the endless parade of paris hilton stunt doubles along the beach – vacuous stares hidden from view by designer fly or wasp sunglasses ... they couldn't ever hold a candle to this girl in pigtails emerging like reality TV from the water

Baudelaire in Bruxelles

a silent cartoon wanders the non-descript chaussée over bridges it casts its chisel comic-book shadows illuminated by a passing policeman's truncheon light as air; that withered stare turns flowerboxes to stones or the dogs to barking fruit stalls there in the internet cafe glare baudelaire calls burundi for twelve cents – resenting the booth's semi-privacy (one hand in pocket jiggling ... hear the retort of someone's little gun (as though he's not there & the women are all black now in this frame, thought bubbles crammed with grammatical marks suggesting curses in parlour rooms or else that unbearable harpsichord & he sees in this zone between falling empires the rest of his days collapse like a cloak on a corpse (nina simone sings run to the river (to the rock
Pink City

For Mikey

bad boy scouts wearing red
bandannas & hiking boots prowl
the outdoor bars bringing alpine
airs to ljubljana – i won’t be
climbing the steps to the castle
won’t conquer what’s not even
there (the view the haze) instead
i’ll walk around photographing
pink buildings for you ... do you
remember that cold afternoon at
scheherazade after the mallarme
gig? i can see why you liked it
here where the boys ride bicycles
& sit by the river smoking long
whites joints – & sparrows bum
cigarettes from strangers for
a lark – i missed primoz by two
weeks but there’s poetry here in
the inventiveness of the street
performers or the flowers on the
cobblers’ bridge ... i know that
somewhere here there’s a boy you
once loved if even for that one
short visit – it’s summer & all
the pastel’s aglow despite the
crumbling flaking skins i can
hear you & only wish these few
photographs could capture their
audible decline – the boys whose
hair alone makes me feel so much
older so much younger than even
this breathless poem ever could

Käthy Kruse

For Slava

the hands that made the hands
then passed her to the second set
the hands that plucked the human
hairs & threaded them into a wig
hands sewing on the yellow jacket
passed then to unknown hands that
gave her eyes to see herself mouth
to breathe in cotton hands to hold
her head in until she fell asleep ...
two hands that made her cheeks
pink in case she was called upon
to blush the hands that filled her
belly full of spittle or gruel hands
that kept her upright while they
sewed her shoes into place & left
her there wobbling but alive alone
but made of human hands of hair
the skirt to hide her girlhood hair
combed platted maybe depending
upon her mood then the hands that
transplanted the still-beating hand-
made heart into her chest covered
breasts & silken brain with which
käthy produces her first thought:
their hands have stroked my arms
& legs my doll’s face into dreams
my heart beats like a baby drum
Abandoned Youth Camp

the planes fly well overhead now
& couples no longer dawdle down
by the jetty where an old dinghy
rises & falls on the fluke waves
of passing powerboats ... & the
cicadas chorale across an empty
bay old pipes protrude from the
muddy shallows & the trees though
blooming still billow untended &
unloved (though the summer & this
giant cross remain drifters are
its only pilgrims — snorkellers
scan the basin for discarded
bikinis or martini glasses (the
old wreck of a hotel still hopes
for a reunion with its past loves
the storms at sunset or the mock
evacuations — shells bursting
underfoot as the guys with their
miniature five string ukuleles
serenade two lovers demolishing
a lobster — all gone to the great
fairground in the sky — packed
up like crates of beer bottles &
shipped off to another island
or another beachside retreat
now I hear the choppers swing
low coming in for their daily
sightseeing pass — dissecting
sea mist like it’s cold cabbage
inspecting abandoned futures
like so many real estate agents

Dürer: Innsbruck 2005

Do not throw anything yet, Albrecht;
It is dangerous as well to lean out!
Customs examination of luggage:
Important notice. In winter, steam
Macht (Thomas Mann) mobil. Also ...
Kinder unter 15 fahren gratis. You
Have no claims on the blue— green
River waters flowing backwards to
Trento. This is our Tiepolo. See
Gerhard Richter (19-3 to 13-12-2005)
Run. Informazioni per il Viaggio:
"The most brilliant SF mind on any
Planet". (Rolling Stone). Read more
Penguins online. With an introduction
By Venezia, S. Lucia. Penalties for
Improper use. Plus Blake Morris on
The lost art of editing. One Saturday
Poem by David ... "the art of hint". (5)
Dachau

dachau

there was no need to be told
of the jewish custom whereby
rocks are placed near graves
instead of flowers (eg lilies

in the place of the barracks
we found an ocean of stones —
larger than a fist smaller
than a child’s head just big

enough to force one to walk
more slowly than normal & to
think with each step about
a person who has passed on

nothing is expected of us
except understanding (& an
opening towards knowledge —
like the burgers of dachau

whom american troops forced
to march through these gas
chambers saying look! look
this happened in your town

rocks grow in every country
this world is filled with
graves — one day they will
return us to the rivers &

smooth our sharp edges over
centuries of soothing (easy
for me to say on windy days
i think of anton music who
drew pictures of his living
hell in charcoal & who is
known today as the “dachau
artist” born in slovenia &
a student of fine arts in
venice arrested & sent here
only for his talents to be
rediscovered it’s chilling

but necessary to look upon
his ghost lines of tangled
limbs & to know his words:
“we are not the last ones”
**Landschaft (mit Gerhard Richter)**

took a photograph of sunday night 
then blew it all onto a wall in paint 
something stirs in the brittle light – 
abrupt denouement; studio sounds 
erupt into white (the power’s down) 
this wasn’t scripted neither were 
your forearms’ shudders – closing in 
on abstract stalks that make a 
silhouette in green a single figure 
walks on your microscopic moon 
but he’s a fake the painting’s done 
on corsica perhaps in a sun room 
or alone at last in a private church 
where guardrails keep the volk at bay or catalogue 
this desperate silence that makes photorealistic 
snow swept the candles gutted or 
a chair pushed back like a lock of black & white hair; poised for 
an ironic pose jackie onassis is 
becoming bored reading newsprint 
on the freshly-plastered walls ... 
inside an album sleeve notes keep their peace; & revolutions occur 
on a momentary basis swinging on 
chandeliers borrowed from the cast 
(we all need to eat) in this essay 
at last the landscape is given its 
due & sleigh bells ring out like 
broadway tunes or stolen dogs & 
here finally stands gerhard richter

---

**Another Death Star**

For Martin

i hear lady vader’s footsteps clang on the stainless steel 
gangway & look busy attending to my knobs & buttons 
but the force is so strong in this one that i am forced to 
switch on the emergency power – a light bleeds across 
my console & i swivel in my chrome-plated bauhaus / 
ikea captain’s chair to face her wrath should it ever come 
there is another death star i explain it contains no flaws 
unlike its predecessors into whose plans vader for some 
reason saw fit to introduce design elements that would 
make a first year engineer blanch; perhaps he knew even 
then something of his fate ... were those two hideously 
creige orbs a metaphor for his own body’s penetration 
fantasy? a slight shudder as the x-wing entered the duct? 
how else to explain the ridiculous ease with which those 
rebels identified our killing machines’ weakness – other 
than by referring to that space (in vader)? i digress – & 
our plans progress would you care to inspect? with that 
slight limp she follows me to the docking bays where 
our transport awaits – after you i murmur giving way 
so as to watch as her plastic skirts sashay only hinting 
at the unseen power of that incredibly spherical argh–!
in abendland our eyes reflect the windows of real estate agencies couples roam there small dogs shit wherever they like everyone has a bulging belly here in abendland guitar music is de rigeur words like de rigeur are never used rivers flow & woods are pictures hung in galleries frequented on sundays & feastdays only post offices never close old audio cassettes remain unavailable sought after only by newcomers phone calls will be monitored & can only be made from inside hastily-assembled booths & there are no television channels only movies with in-built & hard to avoid advertisements girls wear stripes & old boots that make their ankles look skinny boys maintain a gruff persona only enhanced by permanent thirty six hour growths love is an absence or closing time garbage piles up but no one seems concerned in abendland beer comes in bottles that the homeless can collect & exchange for pennies or one more beer poetry has not yet been invented nor cricket which would be absurd

two intersecting lines radiate strings of heart beats in four times double the directions secreting small agents into the surrounding streets & lanes transfers of desire stilt-legged voyages hour-burst rambles freshly-bottled smell of the underground random splices of muzac shred the dark corners of an interruption clock's soundless alarm men follow women towards escalators triggered by their muffled boots the station entrance collapsing out into the waffle prints of passing tramline desires meanwhile you're down there stroking tokens that get stuck in the machine above our heads amongst the stars giant pulsing nuggets of steel erupt in longing while the red lights blink delaying our union by variants of minute-long bursts of motion this is the station called silence at which i long to get off with you so as to emerge into some blinding shower of certain life-affirming illuminations as blades of wet rubber hack away at the heads of screen actors we shoot our own minimalist movie under the smurf-blue-on-white of kunst-wet this hyphen between breaths where electrons & whole atoms wander aimlessly plotting dotted lines on imagined vertical sheets of glass & of her far-flung snow-bound commune dappled with spots of rain love.
Alone In An Airport

all the concessions have finally closed
the luggage tags likewise now unravel
i've spent the night in an airport alone
even the cleaners have all gone home ...

out on the runways the rain is a canvas
the planes are invisible up in the sky
at every counter the shutters have risen
only perfumes of the flight crews linger

the terminal's redevelopment is complete
now there's nothing left here to expand
& duty-free shops disappeared long ago
inside the food court a fake fern sleeps

departure boards flick like REM dreams
but the gangways are empty of tired feet
the veins of the airport throb in safety
nevertheless i will practice my tai-chi

i use broken glass to create my murals
ticket stubs provide my fire with fuel
i walk naked through abandoned latrines
in arrivals halls i begin planting trees
© 2006 David Prater
Written July – August 2005
(northern summer)

"Walt Whitman Service Area"
first published in
The Age
November 2006

"18 Fields" &
"The Two Faces of
Zlatyu Boyadziev"
first published in
Mirage #4/Period[ical]
May 2006

"Dürer: Innsbruck 2005"
first published in
Cordite Poetry Review
December 2005

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Thank you
Katie, Liam, Keiji & Andrea

Cover image:
Concrete detail, Ljubljana
by the author
Dead Poem Office
DEAD POEM OFFICE

Kate's Photograph
Xanana's Dog
The Sprawl
Thomas Pynchon & the Art of Anonymity Maintenance
A Photographer's Wet Dream
Cars
[   ]
Last Night Betty
America
Slam!
Peppercorn Rent
Black G.S.T.
Funeral For Democracy
Dead Poem Office
The Boys Who
Run Lola Run
Leaves of Glass
That's Buddha
FOR ADRIAN
KATE'S PHOTOGRAPH

this photograph is of kate running away
from the camera (from me?) as i hold
the camera to my eye, chasing
a collage of colliding bright flames
fading into the lake as backdrop
frozen still —

"the shutter shuttered, i shudder
in the cold morning," running away
from the camera, running like a
riptide (running, so i could never —

so i took it just to catch her
for an instant:

one leg caught in floating mid-air...

running ... in the ice-cold morning i saw
her face in the mirror reflected
and the railroad tracks at the bayside
clack ing by in stutter ed negatives
XANANA'S DOG

You can call me Xanana’s dog but
You can’t run from my lapping tongue; please
Say a prayer for Xanana’s dog but
Don’t you dare tell them where I am.

They can’t find Xanana Gusmao, though
They search the church for him, crying:
“Where did he go, where is Xanana?” So
They arrest me, because I’m Xanana’s little dog.

Set me free! Asleep at night forget,
In the day remember, asleep at night forget me but
In the day remember that I am Xanana’s dog.

Free Xanana!

They chain me up, but I’m Xanana’s little dog;
They set me on fire, but I’m Xanana’s little dog;
They call me names, but I’m Xanana’s little dog;
They beat me and try to make me speak but I am only a little dog.

Set me free! Asleep at night forget,
In the day remember, asleep at night forget and
In the day remember.

Trouble comes for Xanana’s little dog;
Java comes for Xanana’s little dog;
East Timor says goodbye to Xanana’s little dog—
“Goodbye, Xanana’s little dog!”

Xanana, Xanana Gusmao!

Please help me, I am only a little dog!
THE SPRAWL

To bring it back to rock 'n' roll influences, when I was writing Neuromancer, I'm pretty sure I was listening to Springsteen's Nebraska & thinking 'OK, it's not hotrods, it's computers'.

WILLIAM GIBSON

i grew up in a shotgun row / sliding down the hill / out front were the big machines / steel & rusty now i guess

KIM GORDON

springsteen i'm on fire cutting slack down the line down the wire from atlantic city where the girls are so pretty they wear makeup & pretty red shoes let's call them all betty lost in a sprawl of their own perfecting threads of knotted hair & that wow! expression

betty's waiting but bruce doesn't show up though he left a note that read put your jacket on because the long sprawl nights are getting cold she's beside a railway track disused since the whole world went cable wobbly old lines rusted no caboose for who knows how many years bruce

bruce where are you man she needs you badly now the sprawl's got into the water supply there & folks are talking about fluoride again bruce get your arse in here take that tape out of your back pocket time to play it man don't be sly

there's a girl waiting outside in the cold for you let's call her betty she's standing next to the cypherpunk graffiti having just finished her shift at the diner & she's wondering whether you'd be up for a drive down by the old wooden bridge remember the place you used to go when she was your high school sweetheart

she's still got the ring and your last payslip you left it in the envelope when you bolted with the money that was going to be for her college education you had it all figured out she'd continue working her shifts & you'd keep sending her little payslips to let her know you were saving up for that mansion on the hill

but then something happened bruce the little payslips stopped coming the bed got cold she got sad she began to forget the feeling of your stubble against her shoulder shunted off to another yard now even the ring slipped off her finger because her hands were too cold in that cold single bed in her uncle's cold house
she's never been on an aeroplane but she's telling everyone she meets that you're coming back for her when the light burns bright in August no she hasn't started walking down that road yet she's still waiting for the chiming guitars to kick in and that bloodcurdling scream to issue from your mouth bruce

the radio relay towers send the love buzz down through the aerial & out the tiny speaker now the sound gushes into her pelvic region broadcasting its own signals uncannily 80s & the fog rolls in bringing rumours of the closure of the very last automobile factory steel mill timber yard & nomination for presidency

bruce why did you do that why didn't you give the republicans a murder song instead too late now for the forty one shots they've already been fired the smoke's cleared leaving a bleak industrial landscape coloured metallic blue complete with one or two dogs & a telegraph pole tilted at forty five degrees

here comes betty again with that make-up on & hair real pretty & bruce is singing maybe every thing that dies some day comes back but she's lost in the sprawl of smoke your cigarette sends pluming into the atmosphere as the car blasts straight towards
the choice of sunglasses is important
but on the maple leaf? ray-bans are out
too miami vice ... beatle specs no dead
giveaway (tint in sunlight) chem-mart?

anonymous average ok collared shirt
i'd prefer a gaudy hunter s thompson
hawaiian no. but beige is a city colour
camouflage same with pants & as for
loafers? i shudder ... afraid so ... dumb

haircut also necessary a weekday's truly
impenetrable disguise thus my surprised
& anxious fury in the bright

— click!

i shouted

fuck you pal! on my way back to Macey's
but on reflection maybe the cheap fucking
sunglasses did give me away after all.
A PHOTOGRAPHER'S WET DREAM

ah! luang prabang ancient capital unesco
world heritage magnificently preserved
in pristine condition please bring cameras
film & kleenex for the mop-up /click! &
we're off through the view-finder: monks
kiddies grannies trannies ripe for developing
when you get back to your secret laboratory
national geographic are definitely interested
oh i'm spent! /i'm spent again! / how the stock
churns like spectators through a turnstile!
i can feel it! the money shot's in my sights!
i'm getting warmer now! i can't hold off much —
oh!

— click /click

/jesus! —

click /click

— oh!

another kleenex moment
CARS

for Bruce Beaver

surfacing breathless
in the peaceful domain
from the tunnel like dogs
a sax's sporadic coughs of sound
beneath these great figs spread their roots
like fingers digging into sand or dirt
or a bridge sinking into memory

now the cars come out
green water sloshes —
a bell rings suddenly
in alarm
then stops
another grumble

Jazz

you stencilled it on the page
i saw eternity written on the floor in chalk
as the train plummeted towards the city
the lines looped, joining like belts
my buckled notes & letters

cars spluttering
shade & sunlight wavering
in the astonished green water
like your words

Jazz

domains of sound
a moving ferry

& someone walking past.
1. a poem never written or sent
2. by the bay
3. lackadaisical
4. meaning unknown
5. too smart for its own good (trans.)
6. remember
LAST NIGHT BETTY

last night betty went down to the river & never came back
she put on her old black leather boots put her shit in a bag
left a note saying once you start living there's no running back
left the radio on left the dishes to dry in a rack

last night betty went down to the cane fields & never came back
stuck her thumb in the general direction of love on a map
left a note saying don't believe bruce i'm not giving him jack
left a sign in her window & thereby invited attacks

last night betty went down to the railroad & never came back
put her demons on notice i'm taking my memories back
said goodbye to the river her lover her tiny red shack
left a note saying now i believe that my organs are black

last night betty went down to the highway & never came back
took a walk past the pits & the black tire marks on the track
whistling as she covered my grave with a heel & some trash
took her shoes off & trudged through the glass out the back

last night betty went down to the phone booth & never came back
left the note in her pocket & promised to call me right back
last seen dropping a coin in the slot & then turning her back
turn away from the circling birds & the modern world cracks
please
do
not
put
anything
into
this
toilet
unless
you
have
eaten
it
first
SLAM!

) hell-bent spent relentless immune
to the edicts of the so-called poetic government WHAM!
this is your legs-up honey
pass me a barrel of small press

) engage enrage camouflage your age
croon to stare off the so-called block blues BAM!
last drinks mud-guts
get off my new page

intuit don’t do it live through it
canonise free speech & so-called soft blades SHAZAM!
wake down spring picket
coz this old mike just blew it

emote devote or free float
pretend until the very so-called end & then SLAM!
into the bright superstructure of now
but please just make it matter people —

they’d be grateful for it.
PEPPERCORN RENT

Well, to be honest with you, I’m not Prepared to provide any references. No, not at this stage. They haven’t Been model tenants, exactly. Rent is always late & often in the shape of trees I don’t need, if it gets paid at all. We’re still trying to reconcile the account as we speak. Then there was the sub-letting, which led to all kinds of complications, as you can imagine. In the end we had to go to the tribunal in order to have them evicted & the locks changed, though what good that’s done, I’m not sure. Just shipping the problem elsewhere, hence your call, I suppose. But as I hope you’ll understand, we’ve been swamped with these sorts of requests Recently, so I’d ask for your patience With regards the paperwork & such. The fax isn’t working, I’m afraid. You should receive our reply by January next but then there’s Liberation Day & the parade. It’s good to know some People still bother to make checks, observe procedures, ask permission, follow orders. Have a nice day, okay?
BLACK G.S.T.

__% of childhood.
__% of country.
__% of memory.
__% of hope.
__% of laughter lines.
__% of dots.
__% of uranium, bauxite and aluminium.
__% of cowboys.
__% of dance.
__% of saltwater crocodiles.
__% of totems.
__% of Canberra.
__% of your head.
__% of Charles Darwin.
__% of protectors.
__% of peppercorn trees.
__% of truth.
__% of dignity.
__% of black armbands.
__% of Tiwi.
__% of Albert Namatjira.
__% of football.
__% of Wimbledon.
__% of gold.
__% of language.
__% of Lowitja O'Donoghue.
__% of Hindmarsh Bridge.
__% of white guilt.
__% of deaths in custody.
__% of Uluru.
__% of Arthur Tunstall.
__% of running.
__% of petrol.
__% of Michael Long's feet.
_% of Rumbalara.
_% of Ruby Hunter.
_% of gum trees.
_% of clean water.
_% of immunisation.
_% of dreaming.
_% of Captain Cook.
_% of terra nullius.
_% of historians.
_% of talkback.
_% of little things.
_% of crying.
_% of big things.
_% of sorry.
_% of reconciliation.
_% of stolen wealth.
_% of everything.
FUNERAL FOR DEMOCRACY

Summer revolution, flowers in your
Air. Nike sweatshops. You are here:

be there. For Pericles' printable
version of our democracy just died.

Come & join the funeral, bring a Lotus.
Or your own war dead. We have

shredded our constitution like ham.
I don't take the peace movement

seriously. Then again as a National
Security Anal(yst) I might be wrong

& so I tell it like it used to be, with
a cortege of (Shit, the Fourth Reich's

on at the following Florida venues!
A page has been torn from our torso,

I swing high my own private drive.
Democracy's dead. The hand brake's –
DEAD POEM OFFICE

I read the last rites over your submission today
& since our procedures have been streamlined
I'm delighted & at the same time proud to say
That we've found a place for your poetry here.

Give us your poems & in several years' time
We'll give you an idea of death's landscapes.
Redundant rhymes, image, metaphor sublime:
Your four line stanzas, our grim burial plots.

Taking a rejection personally is well-advised.
That's why we never say no to anything sent.
Our acceptance procedures have been revised:
Please note in case of future correspondence.

Simultaneous submissions remain unwelcome
As we pride ourselves on our unique position
Within the mortuary canon. Flattery seldom
Impresses as much as genuine humility does.

On behalf of our hard-working gravediggers
Congratulations once again on your success.
In future issues, as our catalogue gets bigger,
May we transcend our obsessions with death.
The boy who wanted to be a film director. The boy who vomited at his tenth birthday party. The boy who smiles at dead rainbows. The boy who cries. The boy whose mother won’t kiss him goodnight. The boy who wouldn’t grow up. The boy who disappeared. The boy who got shot at. The boy who never left. The boy who said the boy who looks after all his sisters is a girl. The boy who had no sisters. The boy who kissed his best friend’s sister. The boy who missed out on kisses. The boy who runs. The boy who drew spirals on his wrist. The boys who swam across the river. The boy who followed them never made it back. The boy who travelled there. The boy who dreams. The boy who was a girl. The boy who bellows. The boy who finds god. The boy who suddenly thought he was god. The boy who draws pictures of god that look like nuts. The boy who was a nut. The boy who invented peanut Butter. The boy who ate crocodiles. The boy who lied in his sleep. The boy who’d sell his own aunt for a peanut. The boy who understood French movies. The boy who thought he was a French movie & later turned out to be right. The boy who tried to fly to the moon. The boy who he met when he got there. The boy who met boys out the front of the movies offering peanuts. The boy who’d seen it all was mistaken because he hadn’t yet seen the boy who sees boys who say they’ve seen it all. The boy who insists on wearing white shoes. The boy who likes to steal white shoes. The boy whose shoes were once white. The boy who tried to eat peanuts but didn’t know he was allergic to peanuts. The boy who offered them to him was very sorry. The boy who died never knew he was sorry. The boy who did it never did it again. The boy who wanted to be the film director never grew up to find out who did become the boy who wants to be the boy who after all.
RUN LOLA RUN

why do you cry run lola run
does pain cause it (lola runs
are your eyes leaking & lola
why do you run lola runner
in a hallway run crying lola
after me crying run in pain
cau"sed by lola running lola
ran away from pain & cried
why does pain cause it lola
runs away run lola run run
as fast as you can cry lola's
running away from me her
tears running down cheeks
(lola why are you running
is it me lola run who causes
it who caused it lola run
run lola why do you cry as
you run & why am i crying
lola keeps on running as the
movie camera tracks her
tears running on & on lola
why lola why do you cry &
does pain cause it lola runs
why she runs i cry run lola
run lola run cause me pain
lola never again lola never
run lola run to me lola run
as fast as you can lola runs
back to me backwards lola
why do you run lola away
lola run away are you that
runaway on the radio lola
run lola run why do we cry
lola don't run lola — walk
LEAVES OF GLASS

summers angles false starts hits trail a fuselage of painted mist
the leaves & seasons glue assist suspension under glass portraits

snails delay hollowly all along convex carpets of autumns soft
crackle as the lens sends back fortitude in the shape of bells

winter kills the leaves of glass passing from time to liquidity
an abstract class a new botanics snakes in an inkwell timbre

these yes more shaded areas where spring sells dynamite &
sodden memory engines rhyme automated slices of yesterday

lines formed by horizons clutch at rain drops soft pleasant hells
pealing sentience from mechanics tending their hydraulic shifts

whose stare disrupts the unguent on the sky made up like drought
these more yes besides the wheel was rounder in those days

questions served a function yet the day he decided to drive away
shards upended ceaseless sharp hollow clouds hovered over him

slow as seasons eaves or darts beneath roads plovers throttled
subtle crickets bat migrations dopplering their fearless trill

besides this ecstatic twilights rate highly glints in a web of
sugar strings times changer shellbursts oblivion to barriers

walls transparent objects whirr with uninterrupted mass gravity
steps on painted glasses coats the shining bottles empty of air
THAT'S BUDDHA

When it rains non-stop for twenty four hours, that's Buddha.

Both the rain and the ending of the rain, after which the freshness is Buddha, too.

When you walk beside the lake, Buddha is in the water, disguised as a golden cow.

Both the lake and the camera you use to take a picture of the cow are Buddha.

It begins to feel as if everything is Buddha.
That's also Buddha.

When the cooks at the dumpling restaurant laugh at the way you eat your food, that's Buddha.

When graffiti walls disappear overnight, only to be replaced by acres of bricks, that's Buddha.

It begins to feel as if everything is Buddha.
That's Buddha.

When you dance, Buddha is your DJ.
When you kiss, it's Buddha’s tongue inside your mouth.

When you fall in love, you will find Buddha sitting on a small cushion inside your heart, eating KFC.

Are you ready?

It begins to feel as if everything is Buddha.
That's also Buddha.

That's Buddha.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Some of these poems first appeared in the following publications: The Age, Cordite Poetry Review, Divan, Going Down Swinging, Gutcult (USA), Jacket, Meanjin, nthposition (UK), The Red Room, Short Fuse: the Global Anthology of New Fusion Poetry (Rattapallax, USA) and Voiceworks. Several others were first published in my chapbook The Happy Farang (1999) and by du papa Press (Melbourne) in 8 poems (2002).

This chapbook (whose title is based upon REM’s collection of b-sides, Dead Letter Office) is a companion to my debut poetry collection, We Will Disappear (soi3, 2007). Visit the publisher’s website for full details: www.papertigermedia.com.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS


Thank you Nikki Anderson, Michael Brennan, Keiji Minato, An Sonjae, Sang Kee Park, Joseph, Tan, Larissa Hjorth, Alexie Glass, Moon Sun Choi, Joo Young Lee, Kathleen Asjes, Anouk Iloare, Andrew Cook, Sean Heaney, Hiroshi Sasaki, Steve Riddell, Kevin Puloski, Young Eun Pae and Bridget O'Brien.

Most of these poems were written while undertaking an Asialink residency at Sogang University, Seoul in 2005. Thanks to the Australia Council for the Arts and the Australia-Korea Foundation for their generous support.

& Asialink

for L

Rare Object No. 50

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Alone in an Airport II

in arrivals halls i begin planting trees &
walk naked through abandoned latrines
the veins of the airport throb in safety
nevertheless i will practice my tai-chi
the gangways are empty of tired feet
inside the food court fake ferns sleep
I use broken glass to create my murals
my terminal redevelopment is complete
now there's nothing left here to expand
only perfumes of the flight crews linger
even the cleaners have all gone home
departure boards flicker REM dreams
i'm spending tonight in an airport alone
all the planes are invisible up in the sky
Jetlag World

Wake up calm. It will be morning soon. Hours disappear, then shatter at the
Sound of a phone call (wrong number). Your mobile bleats when it's time to
Change the battery, in that awfully Disconnected voice that's had reverb
Added to it, in the room where you Remain alone. Eat a mandarin. That's
Better. No use trying to go back to
Sleep. You’ve deposited enough hours
In that bank to fund your hibernation,
This winter, when it comes. II will.
Television wakes you again. When did You switch it on anyway? Consenting
Adults. Leave the room. Be sure to
Wrap yourself in warm clothes, for It is cold this morning. The Minimart's
Open forever. Buy cans of hot coffee.
Sit outside and watch the businessmen
Leaving their apartments, MP3 players
Already fitted, a soundtrack you can't
Hear jettisons them towards offices That are already lit. Return to your Room and watch television again. It's Samuel L. Jackson in a kilt. Leave the
Mandarins where they are. Shower.
Catch the subway. The morning mist Has not yet cleared. This day in the Land of the morning calm is already
Several hours older. Sit in front of The monitor. Work. Write this poem.

Sound of Vitality

It's the sound of a whiperack,
(whiplash on the windswept road
It's the sound of reed engines
(engine reels & carburetors
It's the sound of a small purr
(purrpure lubricants that whirr
It's the sound of exploded cans
(canplode diode transmissions
It's the sound of pine whispers
(pinepanic at the smell of snow
It's the sound of radio burning
(radiospherical planetoid buzz
It's the sound of dim mechanics
(dim stars on a shadowed orbit
It's the sound of transplants
(plantlings panting for daylight
It's the sound of beige burrs
(burrrpools rotating mindlessly
It's the sound of abstract drills
(drilldown to the rotten old core
It's the sound of modest tools
(foolswept into the convex blades

"Sound of Vitality" is the slogan of Cass beer.
White Space

building a spaceship
to take me to a moon
made out of makkolli
a dead sparrow falls
through the window i
left open overnight
in case it snowed

the sparrow’s white
beak & feathers are
frozen (made of snow
i hold in my hands
as if it might melt
& outside even the
moon’s falling down

like snow or a bird
in the darkest days
(when the spaceships
first landed here
i used to trap birds
sell them for spare
parts & makkolli

now i can’t remember
why birds fly or fall
& i’m stuck down here
in a metal workshop
trying to make another
spaceship to fly us &
the frozen birds home

Makkolli: Korean fermented rice liquor

Snow Grocer

like Sun Ra soaking up a cosmos
snow grocer sits there with his
white gloves & laughs every time
i try to guess what he’s saying
e.g. how much to pay for makkolli
& then one day he says eh tonight –
snow! as if he knows what i am
thinking – how these skies look
pregnant with ice, both of us
smiling and laughing – tonight!
only it doesn’t snow, not tonight
or any other night this week but
still i trudge on down to him &
ask tonight snow? at which he
shrugs or laughs or both yes,
tonight, snow & then i realise

he’s been speaking in English
for days & it hasn’t snowed &
but in the dead of the night it
falls down gently, like a rain

of makkolli on the hanok roof
& i think about how quiet it
is & how the sound of snow is
like a human breath on a window

or footsteps on the world’s head

Hanok: traditional Korean roofing tile
Hoju Bihang-gi

eh! the plane! the plane!
hoju bihang-gi like silver
birds above our skylines
over the wires a plane!
a silver plane! coming to
save their hoju princess
to fly her to hawaii! or
anywhere but here! her fur
coat trailing in the dust
on the sleepy seoul tarmac
silver plane full of furs!
come to rescue her again but
we're just kids! running
around in the lanes or
looking up at the sky -
to see planes! not like
the black planes full of
fire - hoju bihang-gi!
big silver bird glides
across the sky the sound
of trumpets ta-da! it's
a plane! eh! an australian
aeroplane - full of hoju
birds & soft toys - the
plane! come to rescue us?

it's a plane! silver winged
bird of prey! liberation
all over again! goodbye
syngman rhee! goodbye too
to your australian princess
a plane! a plane! a hoju
bihang-gi! eh! lightning!

Hoju Bihang-gi: Korean for 'Australian aeroplane' (from 1948 to 1960 Syngman Rhee was president of the First Republic of Korea; his wife, Francesca, was Austrian. A Korean man in his fifties related a story to me in which during that time, children would look up to the sky and see aeroplanes and think they were Australian planes, come to rescue their Australian [sic] princess. The departure of Syngman Rhee and his wife for hawaii in 1960 was greeted with jubilation by many Koreans).
Nagasaki Crows

"It was the corpses of the Koreans that remained scattered in the ruins longer than any others. One reason is that although many Japanese survived, the body resists history; we pretend that the Koreans look different, or that victims are all the same. Even when they remained silent, we could hear their voices, scattered across the unbelievably blue sky, hanging in the horror invisibly, keeping time, giving a human aspect. A curtain of dead flesh longer than a shroud, sadder than silent bells, more dignified than any surrender, never to be buried like the others.

One day we shall know their names, the reason for their being there that morning. Death is just another criminal, an adversary that does not need a motive, although we may wish to assign it one. The many cries, the stunned desolation of this port town in the moonlight, its people scattered like broken glass. Even the walls that survived bear shadows like execution drawings, and inside the museum, the pathetic legacy of atomic bombing, while they sue for peace. Of course, it's very hard to know who suffered the most. Was it the few who remained to bear witness, or the Koreans who disappeared? It's hard to know what exactly was salvaged, despite the crows saw circling in the blood red skies. After this, anything grow? There was nothing we could do.

Crows are sacred in many cultures. That morning, as they flew down, making their raids, we sat with our heads between shame and annihilation. Meaning existed in their grim and tidy circles, their flexing and dusted beaks. They grew fat and sick from the flesh of the Koreans. We watched the dim carnival play itself out, while the sky burned into stillness and the shrieks grew faint. Searily, we ate rice cakes sent from surrounding towns, as the odd medic wandered about dispensing water. Our remains fixed in a downward stare. Out nowhere, the crows came again, seeking the eyeballs of the Koreans, the plastic souls of those dead with no names. They were no longer simply ghosts that haunt our city still. We ate rice cakes that may or may not have carried radiation. They ate the eyeballs."

"Chrysanthemum and Nagasaki" by Ishimure Michiko; from an installation at the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum.
**Trans**

*across the breeze / birds fly / foam in their beaks / silver wings / radar traces / trans / lateral / trans / am / take me away / silver bird / foam in your beak / across the breeze / trans / are / see flying / the friendly skies / am / trans / am / silver wings / disappearer / traces / wingspan / mighty clouds / flying blind / aneils / am / trans / dam / birds foam / flies in their beaks / are see trans / or trans / am / erica / w / air / line / s / am / de / trans / tran / trans / late / nation / trans / lation / s.

---

**The Hanok Fields**

there's another country buried here
in the ground (under all this snow
i can see it in these rice field rows
the white shrouds make them look
like the flat plane of hanok rooves
as if some long-departed designer
(maybe even king sejong had seen
it just this way & thought (in all of
this order i smell yin & yang merge
white moon above) dim bird below
the empty furrows coated like tiles
(here i will make my sweeping arcs
admiral yi sun shi's burial mound –
see the turtle boat) cloaked in snow

---

*King Sejong: inventor of the Hangul alphabet
Admiral Yi Sun Shu famously repelled Japanese
invasions using armoured 'turtle boats'.
Drunk as Ko Un

Audience of subway strangers. Stagger at them! Pelt them with praise! I'm Ko Un, and I'm drunker than a poem. This text, pirated, sallies forth upon the bristled breeze. Ko Un! Standing in your shadow magic. Spam, originating from the Republic of Soju, hits me fortuitously. Ko Un! Standing by the door, laughing at advertisements. Shouting obscenities at microscopic mobiles. Dreaming of deep blue grass. Coming round to the sound of sirens. Drunkenness, created by weaving fingers! Text! Applause! Ko Un! You look so cute in that dress. Oops, sorry! That wasn't meant to ... go to you. Hmm. Text me! Tomorrow you'll wake up and wonder what I was drinking. I was drunk on your text! Looking forward to your future replies! To your future! To the text future we are creating together. You ... Ko Un ... you really looked ... drunk in that text. Boy, were you drunken! Who would have thought your poems - out loud? Ko Un! Text me! Call me a name! I know voice calls are expensive but I need to hear from you! Okay, so I'm drunk. What's new? Text! Your poem vibed sounding out the freak stages! Ko Un! I'm dancing down the aisle, I'm dancing down the escalator, I'm dancing down the street with my texting fingers itching, drunk! I'm seeing a thousand Ko Uns standing in the subway station. It's dark and drunk. I'm texting myself to see whether I'm alive. Or just drunk! Ko Un! Baby, I'm drunk. Can you text Ko Un and let him know we'll be late? You looked just ... great line. Text! Damn drunkers! I want to kiss ... etc. Who, you? Nah, Ko Un.

Makkolli Moon

Underneath the makkolli moon
We'll get drunk & spit at stars
Roll cars out into roads & fight
Trespass on the night's property

Underneath the makkolli moon
We'll fall in love & then forget
Throw bottles at the alley cats
Inveade Poland, or whistle tunes

Underneath the makkolli moon
We'll wind our frozen watches
Shout obscenities at a shadow
Boil milk from subway sparks

Underneath the makkolli moon
We'll step on broken glasses
Make pain from frozen garbage
Shatter poems with two sighs

Underneath the makkolli moon
We'll murder all our tomorrows
Draw moustaches on our heroes
Drown punches in tears of milk

Underneath the makkolli moon
Spraying slogans on ourselves
Running away from the fires
We'll pretend we never existed

Ko Un: Korea's most famous living poet
Soju: Korean white spirit
Mokochukcha!

You know you want to. Look at me: I want to. Look at everyone else: they want to. You want to. Stay.

Mokochukcha!

Do you know what happens to yesterdays? Do they turn into tomorrows? Who cares, your glass is empty.

Mokochukcha!

I'm seeing lots of purple and strawberry colours. Is this bad? Please tell me it's okay. You're all purple. I'm purple.

Mokochukcha!

I want to dance but my feet are unwilling and there's no one to dance with. You know you want to. Shall we?

Mokochukcha!

Is this eternity? Your smile? Our crazy dance? Is this what keeps people up all night, long after they should be at home in bed?

Mokochukcha!


Mokochukcha!

Look at me: are people born for each other, or just for themselves? Why do we have to die anyway? Perhaps you know.

Mokochukcha!

Let's meet up again, in a soju bang, a nightclub or even on the street. I'll recognise you and we'll do it all over again.

Mokochukcha!

You know you want to. Live.
Saihou Jodo

who will carry me to saihou jodo
what to bring there what to wear?
take me to the top of a mountain
leave something behind to forget

who'll build another kogetsudai
fire my body at the silvery moon?
leave something behind to forget
falling into orbit & spinning space

who'll throw me into ginshadan
drown all my past in the wet sand?
falling into orbit & spinning space
shutting my eyes in the darkness

who will carry me to saihou jodo
what to bring there what to wear?
shutting my eyes in the darkness
take me to the top of a mountain

Imaginary Mao

I got Mao’s text around eight – I was sitting in a dingy bar
watching boxers spar on the TV I’ll be late don’t wait for me
so I ordered some more wasabi peas & massaged stiff knees
dreamily it’s always like this I think because it’s Mao who’s
always late (mentioning something about make-up a facelift
a mausoleum somewhere they’re probably touching him up
as I speak (Friday night in Beijing not quite what I expected
it to be despite what that old fortune teller told me about
patience being the key to my future life ... still I can’t help
wondering what’s keeping him – maybe rain, or a lost taxi?
more beer recharge my battery witness seuffles by the door
& more peasants turned artists swarm for stools & drink
until finally (finally!) there’s a buzz by the window & his big
moon face floating past I shout Mao! mate! his head swivels
& I feel like the devil drinking Faust I make way for the body
of my hero, cold but shining in the wan electric ceiling light
what would you be drinking then I say (without waiting for
a reply – it’s always vodka for us six shots each then a glass
of hot milk still I’m a little annoyed by his drunken silence
after all who’s not stopping him from texting away on that
big TV phone of his? – a freebie from some company seeking
advertising rights over Mao or the Madame I ask how she’s
going (no reply (the guy’s manners are beginning to piss me
off not to mention the barman who once thought of Mao as
an old friend it seems Mao’s been keeping better company
something about drunken Lenin & Santa Claus Mao mimics
him going Ho Chi Minh ho ho this draws a laugh from one
or two desperate pop artists but I’m mum & won’t even look
at him preferring instead to pretend my beer bottle’s just a
telescope & its contents a sea abruptly the barman calls last
drinks but Mao doesn’t even move dead drunk I suppose that
great mug of his looking kind of fake now in the bright light
of dawn somehow I stumble out into a hutong with no past
my arms around Mao’s slippery neck we do a little dance

Saihou Jodo: “paradise mountain in the west”
Kogetsudai: “platform towards the moon”
Ginshadan: “silver sand sea”
(Silver Pavilion, Kyoto)
together & try to resurrect the name of the club we'd planned
to visit to no avail thus I'm left with no choice but to pile
him into a taxi & pay off the driver with a wink & ten Yuan
see this one gets home safely would you? thanks he's a special
mate of mine – Mao imaginary Mao (bye I say bye (no reply

Snow Sea Swan

Snow globules hanging from the trees, like silvery pollen
or the larvae of worms. Rice fields smothered by six
months of snow, their feeder canals obliterated, the
shallow stream a black slit in the hollow. Houses dwarfed
by their new snow skins, train stations drowning be-
neath the sky's white tears. More snow than I have ever
seen in my life.

Sea coloured metallic grey and gun barrel blue, heaving
and sludge. Water befuddled by the frozen wastes that
feed it, concrete storm buttresses the colour of the dis-
appeared sands. Tiny harbours and breakwaters holding
several frozen boats. Views across gigantic bays and
technical seas, towards mountains of snow coloured like
oceans, rising.

Swan so white its feathers are like blasted snow, bobbing
in the swell near the storm water outlet. Birds so elegant
in the water they are the animal kingdom's icebergs.
Treachery on land, rearing up to strike the feeding
hands. A diorama of peace, just there in the freezing
water, a family of swans surrounded by snow birds,
seagulls, air.

Hutong: Chinese laneeway
Yuan: Chinese currency
Lonely Planet

There's a train that's stopped moving, in the middle of Hokkaido, in the middle of the night, in the middle of winter. The sound of a thousand snores, a thousand sleepy sighs. The rumble of a passing train. The one the driver's waiting for.

There's a train that's stopped moving but any minute now it'll tug at its carriages, jerk into motion, shudder into being. No one wakes up. The girl in the smoking area crouches over the table, asleep, a full ashtray next to her head. icy wastes.

There's a train going through a tunnel that never ends and the farther it travels the harder it is to reach, to hear. The lights are all still on but the air in the carriages is full of bubbles. How to remain forever frozen, underwater, beyond the steamed glass, a community of future humans with gills staring at the train.

There's a train with no passengers waiting at an ice-bound station, cartoon characters on its sides, ice crawling towards its doors. Somewhere a bell rings and cracks the silence but the train remains motionless, misunderstood.

There's a train running late but no one even seems to care or hear it coming. A flag is raised, a finger pointed, an information display adjusted, blips. Crowds line up to see it pulling into the phantom station. Craning. Breathing.

Sapporo-Tokyo by train, January 2006
Icebergs

Icebergs calve, plop and bomb.  
Great sheets of arctic pain –  
metaphors, forever lost.  
The polar bears just stand there,  
in mid-air, then drop.  
White water dreams after Greenland,  
or was that Hell.  
Whatever.

It's a bit of a stretch but if  
they can tow one to Belfast  
then why not here?  
For some reason, Hitler comes to mind.  
I'm no longer involved.  
Ha!  
Sitting here, my new wife and  
I, on the icebreaker's deck.  
There's a novel in my drink,  
an icy cliffhanger.  
Whatever.  
Rubbing my cheeks with whale fat.  
Where the hell did that  
come from?  
Nick Cave's in my cabin, with the fever.  
Here come the northern lights,  
a stadium in miniature bathed  
in signal flares.  
My wife's a rose and I'm malt whisky.  
Arranging deckchairs, etc.

Moriapo

like a murder suicide yesterday's tiffs  
became today's shower of glacial regret  
hit on the head by a super large moriapo  
left winded bruised & read-dead on our  
set-list stories of lost orders events  
tragedies that come in threes like the  
drinks the straws (deadly for dolphins  
the lipstick trace a circular argument  
nobody heard a thing (or suspected yet  
there it is: an empty office & a drill  
draw your conclusions or bite your lip  
sure of what you're about to say (next  
thing you know there's a glass in your  
hand & tears beside the water fountain

Moriapo: hangover (Korean)
Back to the Tourist III

you'd better run, squirrel ...
Barman, Back to the Future III

destinations detonate like
the coyote on acme speed
my runners wear thin again
so it's time to go back to -
the tourist (iii) ... troubles
i've seen 'em (stacked them
high lived them low better
clear out of this saloon &
hope a time machine comes
soon ... sitting inside a
pentagon (shooting aliens
is more fun than it looks
send home an ordinary book
hear the killer drone it's
a shoelace they've untied
forgotten homework inside
a locker full of pin-ups &
baseball pendants at home
in the suburban brochures
took a spin in the rhyme
machine pedalling madly
just to make these hours
swim in buckets shortened
calls - the snowy breezes
& the freshly paved street
sheets of burning rubber
castle motels conventions
buses without destinations
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We Will Disappear (2007)

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