IT BEGINS IN THE BOOK
writing the material poem

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Thesis submitted for a Masters of Creative Arts
University of Technology, Sydney
September 2009
Certificate of Authorship / Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Foreword

*It Begins in the Book: writing the material poem* is the title of my thesis, submitted as part of a candidature for a Masters of Creative Arts at the University of Technology, Sydney from March 2006 to September 2009. This period includes a leave of absence for the whole of 2008.

The practice-based components of my candidature are as follows:

A Flash poem presented as an interactive map interface
[www.thehomelessgods.net](http://www.thehomelessgods.net)

An anthology of text-based art and intermedia writing
[www.nongeneric.net](http://www.nongeneric.net)

**Conversions (2008)**
An exhibition of poetry in translation
[www.nongeneric.net/itbeginsinthebook](http://www.nongeneric.net/itbeginsinthebook)

The exegesis contained in this document forms the research-based component of my candidature. It should be read in concert with the accompanying website: [www.nongeneric.net/itbeginsinthebook](http://www.nongeneric.net/itbeginsinthebook). This website replicates all written information contained herein and also provides additional images relating to the above practice-based components. Content exclusive to the website has been replicated on a CD, attached to the hard-copy of this thesis.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis has been made possible by the assistance and support of many individuals and organisations. I would particularly like to thank the following individuals: my academic supervisor at UTS, Martin Harrison; my proof-reader and constant companion Jane Gibian; Peter Minter, for his advice in my original admission application; my long-time creative partners, Karen Chen and Guillaume Potard; all of the contributors to *The Material Poem*; my fellow postgraduate students: Nour, Astrid, Kais, Wafa, Katherine, Suyin and Amy; and, finally, my daughter Marilla, whose arrival in the world provided the most real of deadlines.
Contents

Abstract viii

00: Turning the First Page 1
  Developing the language of materiality

01: A Survey of Materiality in Literature 6
  Three modes of materiality
  The Material Poem: applied materiality

02: A Few Ways to Skin a Poem 18
  Determining poetry’s material basis
  Written, visual: poetry on and off the page
  Ungrammatical: the semiotics of poetry
  Meaning is in the mind of the beholder

03: Poetry, Interaction, Interface 34
  Old media: interacting with the new
  Landing sites: the user in relation to the poem
  A model for the material poem

04: Closing the Codex, Opening Ideas 52

05: Bibliography 55

Project 01: The Material Poem 59
  About
  Credits

Project 02: The Homeless Gods 62
  About
  Process
  Project self-assessment
  Credits

Project 03: Conversions 68
  About
  Process
  Project self-assessment
Illustrations

0 Peter Lyssiotis (with Leon van Schaik), Paris, [Photograph James Stuart] Front cover
1 James Stuart (ed.), The Material Poem (2007), launch flyer 1
2 James Stuart et al., The Homeless Gods (2007), screenshot 2
3 James Stuart et al., Conversions (2008), Bookworm Chengdu [Photograph: James Stuart] 3
4 Stephane Mallarmé, Un coup de dès: jamais la chance n’abolira le hasard, typical spread 10
5 George Alexander and Wayzgoose Press, Orpheus through the rear-vision mirror (2002), detail 12
7 Franz Ehmann, Speaking the world into existence (2006), exhibition detail 15
8 Page from the Ellesmere manuscript of The Canterbury Tales (an illuminated manuscript showing both lineation and text blocks with early paragraph markers) 20
9 Qur’an manuscript in Arabic on polished paper, Kashmir, 18th c., 339 ff., 22x14 cm, single column, (15x9 cm) from The Schøyen Collection http://www.schoyencollection.com/religions.htm 22
11 Peter Minter, blue grass (Salt Publishing, 2006), cover and ‘Never Return To A Meadow Permit’ [Photographs: James Stuart] 26
12 guardian.co.uk, screenshot (30 August 2009) 36
13 Devimahatmya, Praise of the Great Goddess, Manuscript in Sanskrit on palm-leaf, Bihar or Nepal, 11th c., 32 ff., 5x31 cm, 2 columns, (3x27 cm) from The Schøyen Collection (http://www.schoyencollection.com/religionsLiving4.html#23.15) 37
14 The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1896) 39
15 Arakawa and Gins, Reversible Destiny Lofts, Mitaka, Japan [Photograph: Masatako Nakano] 41
17 Jason Nelson, *Game, Game, Game and Again Game (Game)*, screenshot 45

18 James Stuart (ed.), *The Material Poem* (2007), typical spread 59

19 James Stuart (ed.), *The Material Poem* (2007), typical spread 60

20 James Stuart (ed.), *The Material Poem* (2007), typical spread 61


22 Karen Chen, early sketch for ‘Mashu’s Refuge’ 63

23 Karen Chen, concept sketch for New Eridu map interface 64

24 James Stuart, storyboard for ‘Docklands’ 65

25 James Stuart et al. *Conversions* (2008), Bookworm Chengdu
   [Photograph: James Stuart] 69

26 James Stuart et al. *Conversions* (2008), Bookworm Chengdu,
   [Photograph: James Stuart] 69

27 James Stuart et al. *Conversions* (2008), Bookworm Chengdu
   [Photograph: James Stuart] 70

28 James Stuart et al. *Conversions* (2008), Bookworm Chengdu; from L to R:
   Aku Wuwu, Lu Juan, He Xiaozhu and James Stuart
   [Photograph: Bill Stranberg] 71

29 James Stuart et al. *Conversions* (2008), ‘Love’ by Lu Juan,
   unmounted banner 72

30 James Stuart et al. *Conversions* (2008), ‘Walk of a Cat’ by He Xiaozhu,
   unmounted banner 72
Abstract

It Begins in the Book: writing the material poem comprises practice-led research in the form of three creative projects, and a thesis. Its central question is how the theory and practice surrounding the materiality of language can be applied in the context of poetic practice.

The first of the three creative projects is The Material Poem: an e-anthology of media-specific writing and text-based art, published in mid-2007. The second, The Homeless Gods, is an online poem-world developed using Flash. The third and final work is Conversions, an exhibition of Chinese poetry in translation. I explore the processes underpinning them through dedicated project assessments. All projects are in some way collaborative and all parties are duly acknowledged.

The thesis formulates a model by which these works (and other literary endeavours engaged with the materiality of language) can be critically assessed.

The first proposition is that we must move beyond materiality’s purely formal meaning. Accordingly, I have developed a three-pronged model of materiality that centres on the following questions: what enables, and how does, a reader to respond to a literary work (material basis); what socio-cultural forces influence the relationship between writers, readers and the language-object (materialism); and finally, the actual material expression (or materiality) of a language-object. This is the subject of the first chapter.

The subject of the second chapter is how this model might be applied to a specific literary genre, poetry. Drawing on texts by Huisman, Riffaterre and Perloff, I argue that poetry’s material basis is driven by its visual interface, its localised semiotic systems and, in the case of certain poetic traditions, ultimately indeterminate meaning. This material basis differs vastly from that of most other literary genres, indicating potential for experimentation with poetry’s material form.

The third and final chapter centres on this assessment. Having established that interactivity and interface are emblematic of poetry’s material basis, I revisit the conceptual and creative work of artists/architects Arakawa and Gins to develop a model of materiality that echoes their concepts of terrain, landing sites and perception stations. In turn, this provides me with the required critical framework to revisit and reassess my creative projects as complete “language-objects”.

viii