

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

A PRACTICE-BASED EXPLORATION OF  
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
ARTISTS' BOOKS AND CHILDREN'S  
PICTUREBOOKS

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A thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Anglia Ruskin University for the degree  
of PhD.

Submitted: April 2015

# Acknowledgements

I am indebted to a number of people and institutions in this project. In particular, I would like to thank:

My supervisors, Martin Salisbury and Maria Nikolajeva, for the energy and enthusiasm they have devoted to this project.

Limerick Arts Office for their support from Grants under the Arts Act.

The staff at the Ó.P.L.A. collection, the Tate, the National Art Library at the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and Manchester Metropolitan University Library for giving me access to their collections of artists' books, policy statements and for answering numerous questions.

My colleagues at Cambridge School of Art and Bath Spa University in particular Becky Palmer, Jemma Kang, Katharine Reeve, Darren Garside and Vicky Millar for their helpful musings of problems and for asking the questions that I don't have answers to.

My friends who have shown an active and sustained interest in the project and, on occasion, provided much-needed distractions.

My family, Rose, Ted and Pippa Little are mentioned here for their constructive criticism, proofreading skills and for the personal support they have dedicated to the process.

# Abstract

This thesis presents a practice-based exploration of the relationship between narrative and the use of the book form in artists' books and children's picturebooks, placing emphasis on the experiential qualities of the physical book.

Most of the academic literature on the relationship between artists' books and children's picturebooks focuses on the finished book. Taking a practice-based perspective, I approached this project as a book artist and explored my attempts to make a children's picturebook. My analysis of the creation of a series of books contextualised with a discussion of literature on artists' books and children's picturebooks led to an investigation of the structures of children's picturebooks and the ways in which it overlaps with artists' books.

As a book artist, I had not anticipated my use of the book form to present significant creative challenges. However, the picturebook form imposed a more direct story than I would usually work with when creating artist's books; new ways of using the book form emerged. My depictions of narrative became more figurative and my use of the book form took on greater subtlety.

A key outcome of this research was a discussion from the book artist's perspective of the process of creating a children's picturebook. An analysis of my practical work demonstrated the possibility of taking an interdisciplinary approach as a way for practitioners to discuss work in progress and finished work, offering insights into the process of both creating and interpreting practical work while investigating the relationship between artists' books and children's picturebooks.

**Keywords:** children's picturebooks, artists' books, practice-based research, book form, narrative

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# Introduction

In Lane Smith's picturebook *It's a Book* (2012), two characters, a monkey and a jackass, discuss the nature of the physical book and the digital book. In a series of playful interactions, they establish that you don't need a mouse for a physical book, you can't make the characters fight and that you can't tweet with it. This whimsical tale provides a snapshot view of the fast-changing nature of the publishing industry at present, where the rise in digital publishing has brought about a number of changes. A key difference between digital and print-based publishing is the sense of materiality associated with the physical book. As the monkey and the jackass describe, readers interact with physical books in very different ways to their digital counterparts. While the speed of changes in the publishing industry at present makes the mapping of trends challenging, analyses drawn from statistics on sales data published in industry magazines such as *The Bookseller* or *Publishers Weekly* suggest the emergence of a greater awareness of the role of the physical nature of the book and an increasing attention to its materiality (Williams and Stone, 2013; Miller, 2013). Within the publishing industry, children's publishing is a growing market (Tivnan, 2014). It is also an area in which digital is being absorbed slowly; the print-based book remains dominant (Tivnan, Wood and Campbell, 2014). These considerations, combined with an increasing interest in the physical qualities of the book as outlined above, make the role of materiality, or the physical elements of children's picturebooks, highly relevant.

This project describes a book artist's investigation of the picturebook form. I make books: my work falls predominantly under the category of 'artists' books'. As a book artist, I exhibit at artists' book fairs and my work can be found in public and private collections of artists' books. I started this project as a book artist; however I found the visually rich language of children's picturebooks appealing. The combination of images with text can create a highly sophisticated outcome, even if it is, on occasion, presented in a beguilingly simple manner. David Lewis' observation that '... diversity, flexibility and adaptability are cardinal features of the [picturebook] form' (Lewis, 2001:61) suggests exciting possibilities for ways to work with the picturebook form. In an academic context, several recent studies (for example by Nicholas Paley (1991), Stella Reinhard (2010), Amir Brito Cadôr (2011), Sandra Beckett (2013) and Carole Scott (2014)), specifically examine the relationship between artists' book and children's picturebooks.



## Defining the term 'artist's book'

Definitions of the term 'artist's book' are much debated. Even the spelling of the term 'artist's book' varies depending on the author. In some cases the apostrophe is omitted entirely, an approach taken by Stefan Klima (1998), which he justifies by the lack of consensus on the subject. Sandra Beckett (2013) suggests that *artists' books* has become the more widespread term; however, alternatives are used in many sources, and the use of 'artists' in the plural is confusing when an individual artist is being discussed. While in this thesis I follow the spelling used by the original author in quotations, I otherwise use the same spelling conventions as Clive Philpot (1998) and Johanna Drucker (2004), who distinguish between *an artist's book* (singular possessive, that is, one artist who has made one book), the equivalent plural if the artist has made several books (*artist's books*), and *artists' books* (plural possessive, that is, several books produced by several artists).

The scope of possible definitions for the term 'artist's book' can be seen in several sources. Clive Philpot (2012; 2005; 1999 and 1998) and Lucy Lippard (2004; 1997 and 1987b), for example, have both written extensively on the topic. Johanna Drucker (2004) deliberately avoids a rigid definition, instead focusing on 'a zone of activity' that she associates with artists' books. An assortment of possible definitions of artists' books appears in the compilation of 25 different definitions by Simon Ford (1993), or more anecdotally on message boards such as that compiled by Peter Verheyen (1998). Attempts have been made to create a taxonomy of terminology associated with definitions and other descriptions of artists' books, such as that by Duncan Chappell (2003) and Mary Dyer and Anne Hibben (2012). While there is a lack of consensus on the subject of definitions for the term 'artist's book', a consideration of differing opinion can offer clarification and help set parameters around which the topic can be discussed. A selection of some of the definitions of the term 'artist's book' appear in my artist's book *This is an artist's book* (2012), which comprises 16 different definitions from authors, artists and collectors (see Figure 1). When making this book, I was looking for a wide scope of possible definitions and my selection was based on a range of these. The final version quoted 16 definitions that allowed a sense of the breadth of the topic to be sketched while limiting repetition. The order they are presented in offers a slight implication of narrative; the opening definitions outline the vagaries of the topic, this progresses into some definitions from collections' policy statements and the concluding definitions describe authors' frustrations with the topic.

"... at least three streams of activity seem to be discernible. First, a minority ... engaged in fashioning visual languages articulated by the book structure ... Second, the collectible, the book as investment, whether the expensive limited editions or as unique mute book objects. Third a proliferation of work by book makers who would seem to have taken up with books instead of sticking to knitting."

(Phillipot *Reflections*, taken from Klima 1998:30)

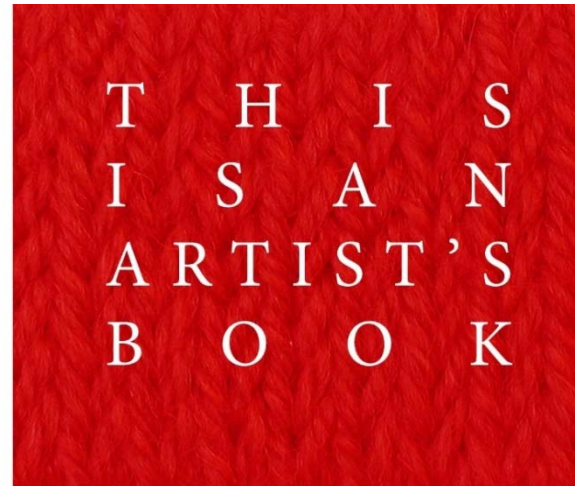


Figure 1 Double page spread from *This is an artist's book* (2012)

In this thesis, I will discuss a body of work which spans both artists' books and children's picturebooks. When looking at overlaps or variations on a spectrum, I tend to visualise this in a schematic way, such as the Venn diagram shown in Figure 2. The disadvantages of this type of visualisation is that it creates a polarised impression of the topic, suggesting categorisation of similarity such as 'either / or'. Rather than reducing complex varieties to a binary polarity, I do not intend to attempt to definitively classify books as either artist's books or picturebooks.

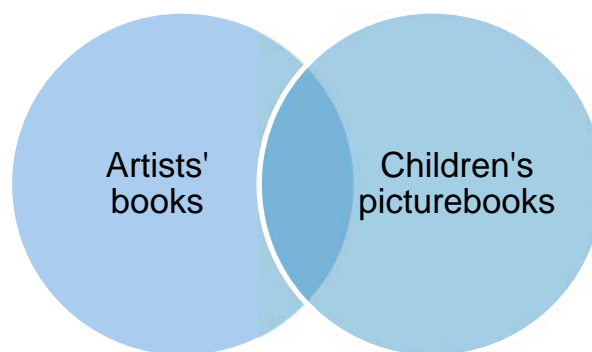


Figure 2 Venn diagram

In terms of my project, a more appropriate visualisation of the boundaries of the term 'artist's book' can be seen in the word cloud in Figure 3. This was generated from my collection of definitions of the term 'artist's book'. The algorithm used to create word clouds makes repeated words appear in a bigger font. Up to 100 words that appear in the inputted text are included in the word cloud. In this instance, 20 definitions are included. While this example is not intended to be viewed as definitive, visual patterns from this word cloud reveal that beyond a few key terms, the language associated with definitions of

the term 'artist's book' is quite diverse, demonstrating the breadth of the zones which an artist's book can inhabit.

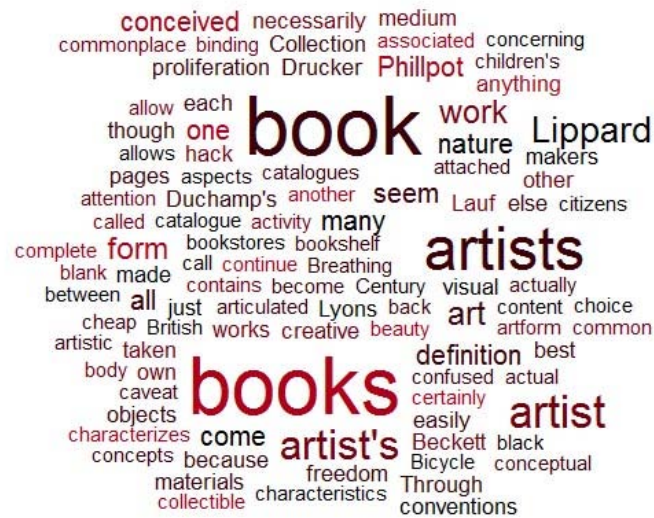


Figure 3 Artists' books word cloud

As indicated above, definitions of the term 'artist's book' comprise a significant body of work. From a practitioner's perspective, this provides considerable freedom in creating new work; on the other hand, it can cause problems in defining the remit of a project which considers areas of overlap between an artist's book and a children's picturebook. Recent publications in picturebook research which include sections on artists' books, such as those by Sandra Beckett (2013) and Carole Scott (2014), suggest that there is an increasing awareness and interest in academic circles regarding the boundaries between the artist's book and the children's picturebook. These will be considered in the next section, which explores existing literature on the relationship between the artist's book and the picturebook.

## The relationship between the artist's book and the picturebook

Artists' books sit at the edge of disciplines, spilling over into a number of different areas including art, literature and children's books. This 'mongrel nature', a term used by Philpot (Lauf and Phillpot, 1998:33), maps out an undecided zone around the artist's book, offering multiple possibilities for examination and cross-fertilisation across disciplines. Johanna Drucker (2004) describes the broad zone of activity associated with artists' books, examining the limits and the boundaries with which artists' books intersect with other disciplines, fields and ideas. While Drucker suggests that artists' books 'appear in every

major movement in art and literature' (Drucker, 2004:1), she emphasises their place within experimental, avant-garde and independent artistic activity. She goes on to state that '...'independent' suggests independence from commercial motives or constraints' (Drucker, 2004:7). This is perhaps an area in which the artist's book differs from Barbara Bader's frequently quoted definition of a picturebook as:

... text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historic document; and foremost, an experience for a child. (Bader, 1976:1)

It would be possible to propose that a key difference between an artist's book and a children's picturebook is the focus on independent versus commercial products. However, this distinction is not absolute. Rather than define an 'artist's book' as a non-commercial product that resides in the world of white cube galleries or collections as opposed to the commercially published picturebook, independent as well as commercial products will be discussed in this thesis. For example, the Ó.P.L.A. (*Oasi per libri artistici*) collection of artists' books for children in Merano, Italy, includes both handmade books made by Joan Miro for his grandchildren and an extensive collection of Bruno Munari's work published by Corraini Editore, an Italian publisher which specialises in artists' books and children's picturebooks. The definition used by the Ó.P.L.A. for the books in their collection is:

Books, therefore, to be understood as actual works of art because they are the expression of complete creative freedom which takes shape as freedom of design and allows the artist to take part in all the various stages of work, from the choice of materials to be used, to the format, to the layout, to the binding, to the graphics and so on. (Nesticò, 2007:17)

While the books in the Ó.P.L.A. collection span a wide variety of work, this definition is too open for the purposes of my project: multiple types of books could be considered under this definition. However, elements of this definition have been discussed by scholars who have examined the relationship between artists' books and children's picturebooks.

## **Artistic freedom and experimentation**

Nicholas Paley analyses picturebooks that fall outside a clear-cut definition, among them *Of Two Squares* (Lissitzky, 1922), *Die Scheuche (The Scarecrow)* (Steinitz, Schwitters and van Doesburg, 1925) and *Die träumenden Knaben (The Dreaming Boys)* (Kokoschka, 1917).

While he considers these books to contain elements of both artists' books and picturebooks, Paley regards them chiefly as art objects. In his reasoning, he questions whether they were ever intended for a young audience, speculating on artists' explorations

across different media as a way of developing their artistic practice and exploring the varied possibilities of artistic expression (Paley, 1991:268). While Paley describes these books as artists' books 'precisely because they actively experiment with the boundaries of picture book design' (Paley, 1991:264), other interpretations are available. For example, Johanna Drucker describes Kokoschka's *Die träumenden Knaben* as a close match for an artist's book, suggesting that the experimental nature of the work in conjunction with Kokoschka's integrated use of the book form, illustrations and text is characteristic of artists' books. However, Drucker emphasises that the artist originally created the work as a children's picturebook (Drucker, 2004:46). In a later analysis, Giorgio Maffei states that Kokoschka's book is 'not a book for adolescents but about adolescents' (Maffei, 2007:26). These three different viewpoints about the same book demonstrate that there is work which sits at the boundaries of artists' books and picturebooks, borrowing elements from each, and whose classification is therefore open to interpretation.



Figure 4 *Die träumenden Knaben*

When considering artistic freedom in relation to the 'experimental picturebooks' made by artists, Paley speculates that these could be perceived '...not merely as a vehicle for

instruction or entertainment – but as opportunity for deeply personal, experimental vision.' (Paley, 1991:269). The artist-focused approach highlights the motivation for creation. American illustrator Uri Shulevitz states that the predominant aim of a picturebook illustrator is to create a 'happy book' (Shulevitz, 1997). This rather wonderful yet whimsical description evokes a happy reader blissfully perusing a book. When considered in relation to Paley's quote above, books are about communicating a personal emotion or message. Looking back through my notes following a visit to the Ó.P.L.A. (*Oasi per libri artistici*) collection of artists' books for children in Merano, Italy, I was reminded of Uri Shulevitz's comment when I found my description of the books in their collection as '...feeling complete. Each book lacked self-consciousness, it just worked as a book in its own right'. In the search for a happy book, Shulevitz suggests that consideration of audience is not part of the picturebook illustrator's concern: if the book is happy, it will find an audience. My predominant focus in this thesis is a practice-based examination of the creation of a picturebook, drawing from my existing practical knowledge of making artist's books. Using the term coined by Shulevitz, this thesis will explore the process of creating a series of 'happy books'. However, the notion of audience crops up frequently in discussions about artists' books for children.

## **Audience: the adult and the child**

When I started to create picturebooks rather than artist's books, I was surprised at the level of questioning I received about the audience of my work, ranging from, 'did [I] think it was suitable for a child audience', to 'had [I] tested how children responded to [my] work'. Given the pedagogic implications associated with children's books and the focus on children's sensibilities and vulnerabilities, my initial surprise was perhaps naïve; however, audience is not a question I encounter when discussing artist's books and I was unprepared when it came up in discussions about picturebooks. The range of audiences for picturebooks is vast and there are several studies which examine the tensions associated with dual audience in children's picturebooks (see for example Scott (1999), Beckett (2013) or looking at adult audiences for picturebooks, Ommundsen, (2014)).

In studies which explore both artists' books and children's picturebooks, Paley (1991) and Beckett (2013) both speculate that the books they discuss were in most cases not primarily intended for a child audience. Beckett describes the work of Warja Lavatar, a Swiss artist / illustrator who primarily made concertina books, which retell fairy tales using an abstract

arrangement of geometric shapes. Lavater's books were initially made as artists' books; however, conjecture about their appeal for children led to a French publisher, Adrien Maeght, publishing her work as a children's books (Beckett, 2013:77). Holland Cotter describes the appeal artists' books will have for children, suggesting that '...kids, particularly kids with hungry, highly developed imaginations, will just want to get their hands on them' (Cotter, 2004:xi). These speculations are based on perceptions of the appeal of a book to certain audiences, a point that Vanessa Joosen criticises in Beckett's study, proposing to draw on reader-response theory to offer a stronger critical framework regarding audience (Joosen, 2012). However, they demonstrate that audience is a complex area in studies of children's picturebooks and crossover artists' books and picturebooks, and suggest that picturebooks can appeal to a number of audiences. I am interested in exploring the boundaries between artist's books and picturebooks. My agenda as an artist is to examine a medium that is new to me, the picturebook, while drawing from my existing experience of creating artist's books. My focus is on creation rather than distribution or audience. While at times I refer to publishers and the types of books they publish, the relationship between fine art and commercial art is not discussed. Empirical evidence of audience response is not covered within the remit of this project. Interpretations are made from an adult perspective and are intended for a critical adult audience.

## **Book form**

The significance of the book form has been mentioned above in relation to both artists' books and children's picturebooks. Bader's definition of a picturebook includes:

As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page. (Bader, 1976:1)

When describing artists' books, Carole Scott observes that:

...interrogation of the book's format as it communicates ideas, emotions, and ways of seeing leads to breaking established boundaries, and impels the creators to experimentation and new aesthetic vision. (Scott, 2014:50)

Common areas between artists' books and children's picturebooks have been described by Carole Scott, who explores the idea of the book as a container, focusing on materiality and the interactivity of the reader and the book (for example, page turning), and referencing a number of examples of artists' books and children's picturebooks. While Scott identifies common ground between artists' books and children's picturebooks, she is less explicit

about crossover books, or the blurred boundaries between books which could be classified as either an artist's book or a children's picturebook. She argues that by applying criteria typically associated with artists' books to picturebooks, they might be seen to contain elements of artists' books. For example, when discussing *The Book About Moomin, Mymble and Little My* (Jansson, 2005 (first published 1952)) she suggests:

Remembering that the creators of artists' books are extremely focused on experience, it is apparent that Jansson's book is very much an artist's book in many ways, even though it is reproducible and not hand made. (Scott, 2014:48)

In *Experiments in Picture Book Design: Modern Artists Who Made Books for Children 1900 – 1985*, Nicholas Paley directs attention to books that had been chiefly overlooked in the research on picturebooks (Paley, 1991:264). Recent sources have addressed the books Paley describes as both Modernist picturebooks (Higonnet, 2009) and as crossover artists' books and picturebooks (Beckett, 2013). However, if Paley's categorisation of books that have been overlooked due to problems in their classification as either picturebooks or art works is applied, the Moomin books, which have been discussed in children's literature (see for example (Druker, 2009)) do not fall into this category. This does not imply that the Moomin books do not fit Scott's criteria of being 'focused on experience', but it demonstrates the breadth of the spectrum of work that could be classified as having elements in common with both artists' books and picturebooks.

A similar approach to Carole Scott is taken by Stella Reinhard (2010) in a paper which considers Peter Newell's books as artist's books, where the 'book form becomes an active part of the finished piece' (Reinhard, 2010:101). Reinhard argues that Newell's awareness of the book form can be seen in his playful use of images, for example in *Topsys & Turvys* (Newell, 1998, first published 1893), shown here in Figure 5, different images are perceived when the picture is viewed the right way up and upside down. An image of an elephant becomes an ostrich, for example, when inverted.



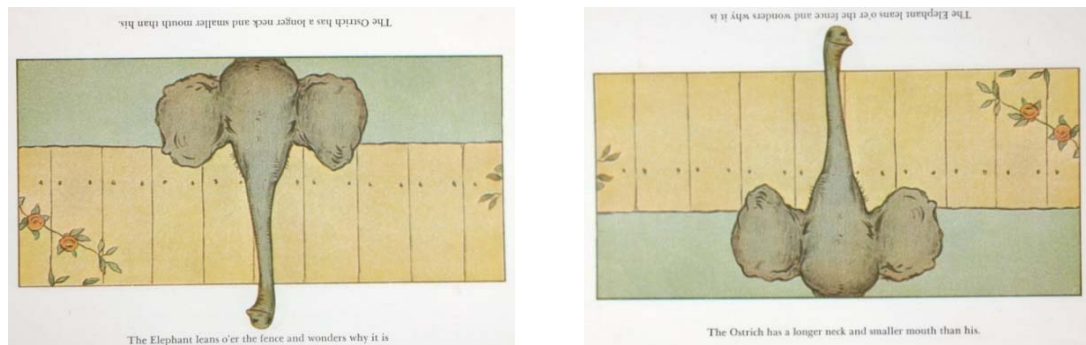


Figure 5 Peter Newell, *Topsys & Turvys*

Reinhard suggests that the need to turn the book upside down and back again to read both versions of the image, thus requiring the reader to actively engage with the book form in an innovative way, allows Newell's work to be considered as an artists' book. Yet these criteria are common in several picturebooks and when compared to contemporary artists' books from the turn of the century, such as those produced by the Russian Futurists, I find Newell's work to be closer to my perception of a picturebook than an artist's book. While this comparison examines the work of an American illustrator next to that of Soviet artists, bringing in questions of cultural and artistic differences, artists' books created by the Russian Futurists have been described as the 'arena in which the 20th-century art of the book emerged' (Drucker, 2004:46). It is possible that my perception is influenced by the greater sense of materiality in the artists' books of the Russian Futurists, where cheap, readily available material such as cardboard, staples and rough paper were frequently used (Compton, 1978). The artists were directly involved in the production of the books, an involvement that, as Drucker suggests, had a direct impact on the artists' heightened awareness of the form of the book, contributing to their experimental approach to the book form (Drucker, 2009). In *Topsys & Turvys* there is an awareness of the conventions of illustration and the pictorial constructs on which optical illusions are based. Each image is printed on the right hand page, with a blank page on the left hand side, causing the book form to feel as if it were chosen as a functional or practical means of collating and displaying a series of content which follows a similar pictorial theme, rather than forming an active part of the finished piece as Reinhard suggests. Another book by Peter Newell Reinhard discusses is *The Slant Book* (Newell 2009, first published 1910), which is a more overt example of the book form contributing as an active part of the overall book design. The pages are cut on the diagonal, creating the impression of a book which slants, and this is reflected in the narrative, which is based around a slant.

These examples demonstrate that as a defining characteristic, an awareness of the book form is not sufficient to cover the full spectrum of work that could be classified as an artist's book.

## Narrative

The relationship between narrative and the book form has been observed in discussions on avant-garde picturebooks (see, for example op de Beeck (2004), Higonnet (2009), Olson (2012) or Kümmerling-Meibauer (2015)). In this instance, I am following Marilyn Olson's definition of 'avant-garde' as '... often identified with the kinds of early Modernism around 1900 ...' (Olson, 2012:2). While Higonnet and op de Beeck both categorise the picturebooks they discuss as 'Modernist', terminology I will follow to avoid confusion, using Olson's definition, these books could equally be classified as 'avant-garde'.

Margaret Higonnet examines *Die Scheuche (The Scarecrow)* (Steinitz, Schwitters and van Doesburg, 1925) and *About 2 Squares* (Lissitzky, 1922) using a Modernist ideology. She justifies this approach because of the artists' experimental use of colour, typography and material qualities of the book to construct a narrative through the interaction of words and images (Higonnet, 2009:96). While Higonnet takes a different critical perspective to Paley and Beckett's examination of Schwitters' and Lissitzky's books, similarities in the criteria each author identifies can be seen, such as the role of artistic experimentation and conscious awareness of the book form in crossover artists' books and picturebooks, which is outlined above. However, while narrative is often discussed in literature about picturebooks, it is infrequently mentioned in literature about artists' books. This does not suggest that artists' books do not contain narrative elements, or that all picturebooks are narrative based, but it is an area in which the discourse around artists' books and picturebooks differs. As such, it is an area which I will discuss in my exploration of making a picturebook.

Monika Fludernik defines narrative as:

... a representation of a possible world in a linguistic and / or visual medium, at whose centre there are one or several protagonists of an anthropomorphic nature who are existentially anchored in a temporal and spatial sense and who (mostly) perform goal-directed actions (action and plot structure). (Fludernik, 2009:6)

The visual creation of characters, the depictions of their emotions and their inhabitation of an environment as they progress through a story in a book will be considered in the

following three chapters. My visual exploration will be considered alongside a critical contextualisation. While several narratologists stress that narrative theory is applicable to visuals (see for example Bal, 1997 or Fludernik, 2009), narrative theory remains predominantly text based (Fludernik, 2009); a point that Wendy Steiner (1988; 2004) and Magdalena Sikorska (2010) both emphasise in the opening sections of their applications of narrative theory to visuals. Overlap in applications of narrative theory can also be seen in Seymour Chatman (1980), who explores narrative discourses within films and comic strips as well as literature. As my work is chiefly visual and based around making books, I will mainly draw on applications of narrative to picturebooks such as those by Perry Nodelman (1990), Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott (2006), Angela Yannicopoulou (2010), Magdalena Sikorska (2010) and Nathalie op de Beeck (2010), who focus on the integration of words and pictures in a picturebook. In addition, I will refer to a few applications of narrative theory to visuals that are not in picturebooks, for example by Wendy Steiner (1988), Werner Wolf (2004), Neil Cohn (2013) and Klaus Speidel (2013).

It is apparent from the above that there are blurred boundaries between artists' books and picturebooks. There are a number of possible criteria for the identification of elements that could be considered to apply to both artists' books and picturebooks. Rather than attempt to identify common criteria to apply to a selection of finished books, I will explore the boundaries of artist's books and picturebooks by making several books. The following chapters will outline my thought processes in creating new work, using my existing practice of making artist's books and developing new skills as I explore the picturebook form.

## **As a practitioner**

In a recent publication, David Paton examines a perceived gap in the theoretical underpinning of research into artists' book. He suggests that writings on artists' books have traditionally taken an approach which is biased towards practice, and outlines the need 'to raise the level of critical discourse and to support a more rigorous critique and analysis of artists' books' (Paton, 2012:2). While theoretical analyses of artists' books presently offer only a small body of research to draw on, children's literature has a broad variety of critical discourses based on a number of different analytical frameworks. For this reason, I will be drawing on the discourse of picturebooks in this project.

With some of the first practice-based PhDs completed in the 1990s, practice-based research in the UK, while a relatively new area of academic study, is growing, with research

groups such as *The Centre for Children's Book Studies* at Anglia Ruskin University promoting the study of children's picturebook illustration from a practice-based perspective. Recently completed theses from this research group include Katherina Manollessou (2011) and Jemma Kang (2014).

In a wider context, a number of peer-reviewed practice-based publications are emerging. The *Journal of Illustration* began publishing in 2014. *VaroomLab*, a peer-reviewed sister publication to *Varoom! Magazine* produced by the Association of Illustrators, published its first issue in 2013. In relation to artists' books, *The Blue Notebook: Journal for Artists' Books* was launched in October 2006. *Book 2.0*, first published in 2011, publishes articles on book creation and design and the American book art journal *Openings: Studies in Book Art* published its first volume in 2012. These publications suggest a vitality that reflects a dynamically changing professional industry and academic perception of these subjects. However, these publications are currently emerging; their identities are being formed. Whether researchers in this field begin to examine or bridge the perceived gap between theoretical and practice-based approaches or take other directions remains to be seen. For example, the opening statement in the *Journal of Illustration* states: 'Despite its cultural significance and rich history, illustration has rarely been subject to deep academic scrutiny.'<sup>1</sup> While this quote talks about illustration generally, it is not applicable if contextualised within children's picturebooks, where there are multiple sources in children's literature which subject the illustrations in children's picturebooks to academic analysis.

In the broader context of art history, W.J.T. Mitchell describes the relationship between the artist's role in both theory and practice as a complex one. In the twentieth century, art movements were often constructed around a theoretical or ideological standpoint presented in a manifesto, generally written by artists (Mitchell, 1989). Yet while the same individual can be both a researcher and an artist, the interchanging or interweaving of practice and research is initially difficult to achieve. Donald Schön suggests that 'Reflective research requires a partnership of practitioner-researchers and researcher-practitioners.' (Schön, 1984:323). Michael Biggs (2004) suggests that practice-based research should include an outline of its relationship with the experiential content found in practice. In an

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-Journal,id=233/> [Accessed August 25, 2014]

attempt to elucidate the creation of a number of books, while taking into account the perceived gap between theory and practice, this thesis will use the discourse of scholars of children's picturebooks, applied from the practitioner's perspective: it will examine the creation of a 'happy book'. With the aid of a systematic framework, I hope that a discussion that explores the boundaries between artist's books and children's picturebooks from a practitioner's perspective will emerge.

As an artist, my primary interest in how picturebooks or artist's book work is based on their visuals. The frameworks on which I will be chiefly drawing are semiotic with regard to the reading of visuals and narrative. Several studies in the literature on picturebooks focus on the finished picturebook. A language or 'grammar' of visuals has to some extent been developed in order to describe and discuss the images of picturebooks. In his *Introduction to Picturebook Codes*, William Moebius provides a comprehensive framework for the formalist construction of images examining, line, colour, size, framing and the disposition of objects on the page (Moebius, 1990). David Lewis (2001), has argued that a semiotic approach is the most developed attempt at verbally describing visuals in picturebooks, an approach that can be seen in the work of Perry Nodelman (1990) and Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott (2006), for example, who examine the ways in which picturebook images can be interpreted or read. Drawing on Perry Nodelman's (1990) semiotic approach and also Rudolf Arnheim's (1974) studies on visual perception, Jane Doonan (1992) offers a further series of case studies on how to read picturebooks.

Speaking as practitioners, Molly Bang (2001) and Scott McCloud (1994) have developed methods of visual expression to demonstrate ways in which an image can be constructed to form a particular effect. In the preface of *Picture This: How Pictures Work*, Bang describes her investigation of how simple geometric shapes can be used as a way to depict emotion. Her approach derived from the realisation that while reading the emotive aspects of an image happens quite intuitively, as a practitioner, she was unsure of the analytical reasoning behind her visual depiction of emotions. In a series of visuals, she attempts different approaches to using shapes, colours and their positioning on the page to construct alternative emotive readings to a visual retelling of *Little Red Riding Hood*. For example, a triangular wolf is spikier and scarier than one that is constructed using round shapes. McCloud uses the creation of a comic to inform and articulate his ideas about how the images and text in comics work. However, in terms of visual language, some of the points he makes are equally applicable to picturebooks. These books are significant in

terms of practitioners discussing their work. While other illustrators have discussed their work (e.g. Quentin Blake (2012), Maurice Sendak (There's a Mystery There: Sendak on Sendak: A Retrospective in Words and Pictures (2008)) or Anthony Browne (Browne and Browne, 2011)) the context of these is based in professional practice. Bang and McCloud take an analytical approach to questioning why images behave in certain ways.

## **Research aim**

The aim of this research is to expand on the work outlined above and to create new insights into picturebooks from a practitioner's perspective. The majority of literature about picturebooks, in an academic context, focuses on the finished book. By taking a practice-based approach, I will explore the process of making a book and offer insights from a maker's perspective, conceptualised using a theoretical framework. This approach makes this research relevant for both picturebook makers and theorists. With regard to artists' books, the body of existing literature is quite small. As outlined above, there is a perceived gap in theoretical underpinnings in this body of work. By taking an interdisciplinary approach and drawing on picturebook theory, I hope to establish frameworks in which artists' books can be discussed in a way that is relevant to both practitioners and theorists.

In my work, I take a design-based approach to constructing books and narrative. In the following chapters, I will discuss and analyse elements of my work taken from sketchbooks, reflective diaries and finished artwork, contextualised by a discussion of the literature on children's picturebooks and artists' books. This project examines the relationship and tensions between creation and interpretation in the literature on picturebooks and artists' books. The parameters of this project are defined by my visual practice, presented here in a selection of books that span both artists' books and picturebooks. While I will speculate on elements of this study that could be applicable to the work of other illustrators, my practice is a boundary for the scope of the project. The thoughts presented here are informed by personal creative practice from which more generalised conclusions may be drawn.

The next chapter describes my transition from professional practice to research practice. It examines the challenges this presented and explores the role that reflective documentation played during this process.

# Bookmaking as a method of inquiry

The previous chapter alluded to Donald Schön's 'researcher-practitioner' as well as the 'practitioner-researcher' (Schön, 1984:323). In this chapter, I propose to examine the differences and similarities between professional practice and research practice and outline the benefits of taking a practice-based approach to my project.

## **On the divide between theory and practice**

In the opening sentence of a paper which examines the interplay between the creative process and theoretical interpretation, Wolfgang Iser (1984) describes tackling such a task as 'formidable'. While Iser is chiefly concerned with literature, the divide between creation and interpretation and the daunting nature of examining it is also applicable to art and design. In his discussion of the use of narratology to explore children's literature, Peter Hunt observes that the appeal of narrative, ways of storytelling and what makes us turn a page is relevant to both the practitioner and the theorist (Hunt, 1990:46). According to Gérard Genette's 'systematic theory of narrative', 'narrative' focuses on *how* the story is told (as distinct from 'story' which refers to the content of the narrative) (Genette, 1980). Taking a practice-based approach allows for an exploration of 'how' the images, text and structure of the book are constructed from a narrative point of view. Looking at work in progress and failed attempts can provide new insights; for example, that it is not uncommon for artists to work intuitively, with many decisions happening on a subconscious level. This way of working is described by Donald Schön as the 'professional knowing of the practitioner': implicit knowledge developed as an intuitive process (Schön, 1984). An understanding of one's subject becomes a tacit knowledge, which by its nature is often hard to articulate and thus left unspoken.

An artist's sketches and work in progress offer a view into their thought processes, yet this insight often comes without a coherent structure or map. Ideas develop organically, and it can be difficult for the outsider to access the development of the artist's ideas. If there are too many ambiguous elements in an image, this can create tension in the viewer's mind (Pratt, 2012:518). Examples of this tension can be seen in Jean Fisher's writing, which documents his frustrations with unfinished drawings from the perspective of the viewer. He mentions the idea of a 'secret that the artist is maliciously withholding' in their unfinished work (Fisher, 2003:219). However, Ben Shahn suggests that as creators, professional artists are proficient at visual articulation, while noting that they are rarely

required to formally or consciously verbally articulate the experiential knowledge that underpins their practice. While naturally there are exceptions, interpretations of art are most likely to be written by scholars or critics (Shahn, 1990). Looking at the tensions created when art schools began to be amalgamated with universities in the 1950s, Shahn describes the differences between scholars and artists in this context as:

... the scholars speak of art in terms of class and category, and under headings of which the artist may never have heard. ... he [the artist] has absorbed visually, not verbally (Shahn, 1990:18).

Shahn's observation can be seen echoed in a more recent source, the Arts and Humanities Research Council's (AHRC's) report on practice-led research published in 2007. Chris Rust, Judith Mottram and Jeremy Till observe that gaps between practice and theoretical work remain, and suggest, among other points, that the practitioner can find the language of the theorist disconcerting, while conversely the theorist can find the language of the practitioner lacking in critical perspective (Rust, Mottram and Till, 2007). Similar observations have been made on practice-based research by, for example, Estelle Barrett, who describes the professional artist as potentially being seen as 'reticent' (Barrett and Bolt, 2010). The unwillingness of artists to verbally articulate their work is also described in the commentaries of Hazel Smith and Roger Dean, who suggest that:

Creative practitioners have sometimes argued that theorisation or documentation of the creative process risks subduing the creative fire or reducing the range of responses to their work. But such arguments reinforce the mystification of the creative artist and romantic ideas about the spontaneity of the creative process. (Smith & Dean, 2009:25)

This project attempts to describe a picturebook creator's insights and place them within a wider contextualisation and critical commentary. In this chapter I consider frameworks and approaches for practice-based research in art and design and introduce my practical work within this context.

## **Frameworks for practice-based research in art and design**

While practice-based research in art and design is a relatively new area, there are a number of approaches and frameworks in the field. Carole Gray and Julian Malins' (2004) text is frequently cited as a comprehensive introduction to practice-based research methods; based on a series of lecture notes, their text is useful as an introduction, however does not give an in-depth discussion of frameworks or methodologies for practice-based research. Attempts have been made by practitioners to draw on a more scientific model to use in



their practice in an experimental way. For example, David Hockney's (2006) analysis of the use of optical devices as an aid to drawing examines the confident line style that is apparent in a series of Ingres' portraits. Hockney set up a trial in which he produced one series of portraits using optical devices and another drawn by eye. He determined that a drawing created by eye will contain more tentative, or 'feeling lines', whereas the use of an optical device allows for a quicker, more confident line style, and concluded that Ingres had used an optical device when creating his portraits. In this example, Hockney's experience as an artist is key to prompting his curiosity in devising his research question, his method of approach and also in enabling him to draw conclusions. While this approach is scientific rather than reflective, it is used here as an example of what Schön describes as the 'reflection-in-action' of the practitioner (Schön, 1984:50).

In his paper 'Research in Art and Design', Christopher Frayling suggests the three categories 'research into art and design', 'research through art and design', and 'research for art and design' (Frayling, 1993:2). He describes the first category, 'research into art and design' as historical research, or research into the aesthetics of art and design. Practice-based studio work, development work, and active research that is documented in a research log or diary would fall into category 'research through art and design'. 'Research for art and design' occurs where the 'end result is the artefact'; all the research is embodied in the final piece. While these categories do not constitute a methodology as such, they suggest varied approaches that can be taken for research in the field. Frayling first published this paper in 1993; writings on practice-based research have increased exponentially since then and there are a considerable number of further publications on the topic. However, as a framework, Frayling's terminology still provides a concise overview of three areas of interest. Below, I will describe my approach to this project under Frayling's categorisations.

### **Research through art and design: reflective documentation**

Examining the role of reflection in the classroom, Jennifer Moon describes it as a way to clarify, identify and code experiential understanding into language (Moon, 1999). As a way of identifying connections and patterns, reflection can be an effective starting point for verbalising practice. The role documentation can play in practice-based research as a way of examining the artist's approach to creative expression is discussed by Nithikul Nimkulrat (2007). In this paper, Nimkulrat focuses predominantly on the role of documentation within her own practice. A wider study can be found in the work of Nancy de Freitas, who takes a grounded-theory approach in order to investigate the role that documentation

holds within practice-based research in art and design and concludes that active documentation is useful in identifying and elaborating on the tacit or implicit elements of practical work (de Freitas, 2007). In my case documenting my work in reflective diaries helped to identify patterns and connections. However, while a reflective diary was a useful tool for categorising elements of my practical work, I do not consider it to be a finished artefact in itself.

Within the context of practice-based research, it has been suggested that the tacit knowledge of the practitioner should be combined with intellectual rigour (Schön, 1984). Michael Biggs & Daniela Büchler define the '... concept of rigor as a quality of argumentation that legitimizes an outcome.' (Biggs & Büchler, 2007:68). They stress the role of written analysis as a way of contextualising and forming an argument in practice-based research. Biggs and Buchler's focus on argument is reflected in Brad Haseman & Daniel Mafe's emphasis on the importance of providing contextualisation of practice-based research through theorisation. They suggest that it is 'only when the practice is located within critical contexts that findings can begin to be established' (Haseman and Mafe, 2009:216).

## **Research for art and design: presentational issues**

As practice-based research projects are a moderately young area of research, it has been suggested that this has resulted in a high level of relatively inexperienced researchers in the field (Rust, Mottram and Till, 2007). The relationship between theory and practice, and the emphasis on one or the other in the presentation of the research provide scope for a number of approaches. For example, in the area of picturebooks and comic books, non-verbal studies such as those by Scott McCloud (1994) and Molly Bang (2001), use visuals to demonstrate articulately a series of points. My early attempts to follow a similar model were unsuccessful. Drawing on visually engaging presentations of images contextualised by pockets of commentary, such as those presented by Alan Bartram (1999) and Alan Powers (2001), I initially attempted to utilise design as part of the presentation of this project (see Figure 1).

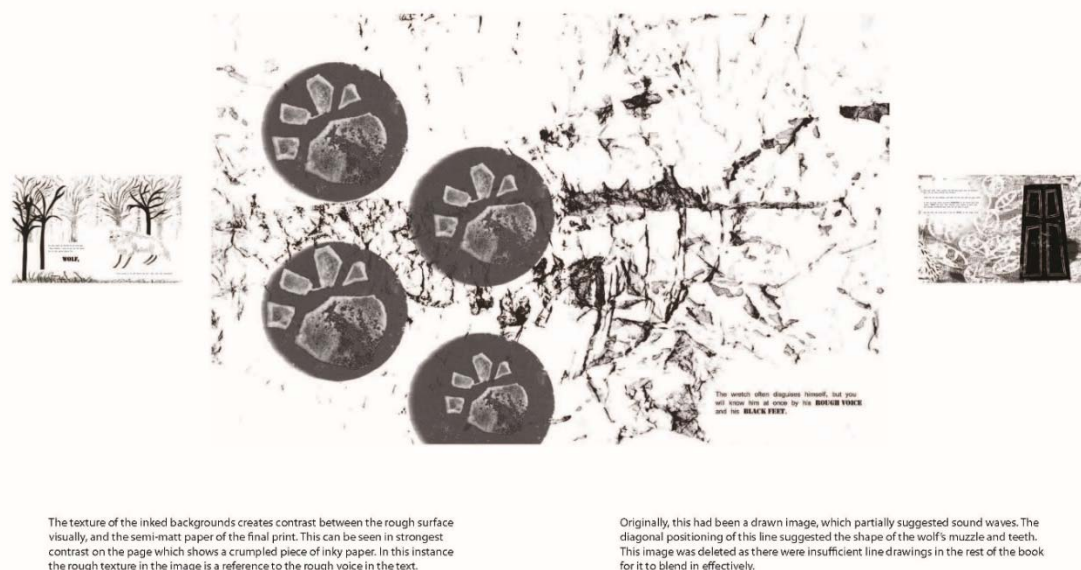


Figure 1 Sample spread from an early attempt at integrating images with a critical commentary

In this example, the presentation comprises a double page spread from my book, with some commentary beneath it. A smaller image of the preceding and subsequent double page spreads are shown at a smaller scale on the left and right hand edges of the commentary page. This allows the page to be viewed in the wider context of the book, showing how one page follows another. There were two fundamental problems with this approach. The focus on the design and layout of the double page spread in my commentary document had a detrimental impact on the content: the commentary became engrossed with description, which felt redundant when the image was on the same page. Secondly, the focus was too heavily biased towards discussing finished artwork. A practice-based project offers the opportunity to provide a different way of looking at a series of problems or examples. A conscious awareness of one's own work, a recognition of the successful elements, but also an examination of the problems encountered and a discussion of failed attempts, can provide an alternative insight into a topic. Michael Biggs suggests that practice-based research should outline the relationship to the experiential content found in practice. However, due to the greater potential ambiguity of interpretations of non-linguistic modes, he argues against a doctoral submission that is solely non-linguistic, suggesting that while argument need not exclusively be constructed linguistically, it is an effective mode to use (Biggs, 2004). Chris Rust is less prescriptive in suggesting outputs for a thesis, however he suggests that in order for practice-based research to include

'research' the researcher must outline the subject of their inquiry and the motivation for it, and the context and methods used in approaching the topic (Rust, 2007). A successful attempt to address theory when discussing practice has been made by Aidan Chambers, a children's writer and former teacher. In *Booktalk* (1985), he examines his own and others' creative writings from a critical perspective. In a fascinating approach to children's literature, he breaks down the gap/divide between creation and interpretation. His engagement with theory gives structure and conviction to his discussion; the application of theory to his own work makes the discussion accessible and tangible.

## **Research into art and design: theoretical approaches**

Academic discussions about images are often situated in an interdisciplinary context (Herbert, 1995; Mitchell, 1995). W.J.T. Mitchell describes how 'Linguistics, semiotics, rhetoric, and various models of 'textuality' have become the lingua franca for critical reflections on the arts, the media, and the cultural forms' (Mitchell, 1994:11).

Interdisciplinary approaches are not uncommon in practice-based research projects, where practitioners draw on a number of frameworks in their research (Rust, Mottram and Till, 2007). However, while the diverse and interdisciplinary nature of practice-based research can offer alternative interpretations and insights, the interdisciplinary traits can make it hard to fit practice-based research into a traditional research context (Barrett and Bolt, 2010).

The following section and the next two chapters will examine how image, text, narrative and the form of a book can work synergistically together, while referencing a number of books I made during this project.

## **Bookmaking as a method of inquiry**

Two of the first books I made were *Blue Book* and *50 Full Stops*. These were early experiments, in which I was exploring visual sequences in a book. In *Blue Book*, balance or visual weight on a spread were examined, while the aim of *50 Full Stops* was to look at pattern, rhythm and repetition across several pages. When discussing the uses of sequences in picturebooks, the temptation is to discuss this in relation to narrative, which will impact significantly on the flow of the book. In these early experiments, I wanted to avoid direct narrative or pictorial representations; focusing on using images in a book form. The visuals are largely abstract.

## Example 1: the Blue Book

The *Blue Book* investigates the balance or visual weight of images on a spread. As Nodelman (1990:126) observes, many structural elements of codex books<sup>1</sup> work in conjunction with one another, so for example, balance or visual weight on a page will be different in stand-alone images from how they might be viewed as a series of related images spread across several pages. For this reason, Rudolf Arnheim's (1974) discussion of balance in paintings and prints and Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) comments on balance in advertisements, which are designed to be viewed as stand-alone images, are not necessarily relevant to picturebooks, a point demonstrated by Jane Doonan by applying Arnheim's 'structural skeleton' lines to a page of *When Sheep Cannot Sleep* by Satoshi Kitamura. She concludes that picturebooks will not follow the classical compositional rules of painting, but suggests that using the 'structural skeleton' is an interesting way to examine the disposition of objects and balance of individual pages and double page spreads (Doonan, 1992:28).

My main aim was to look at balance on individual spreads, and how the weight of images on the page impacts the flow or sense of pacing through the book. I was exploring this on a detailed level on individual spreads, and not necessarily paying much attention to the overall feeling of balance in the book. Given that the book is made up almost entirely of abstract shapes, the focus is on how visual weight affects the feel of a spread and how it can be used as a page turning device.

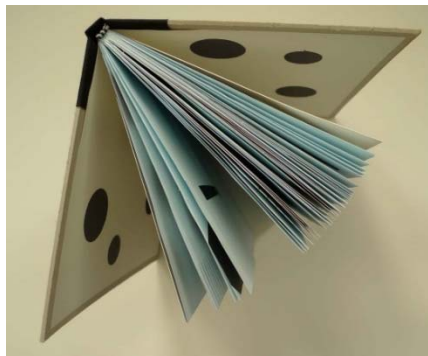


Figure 2: *Blue book*

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<sup>1</sup> Codex books are typically defined as a series or stack of pages, bound along one edge. The term is used here to distinguish from other types of binding, such as concertina books.

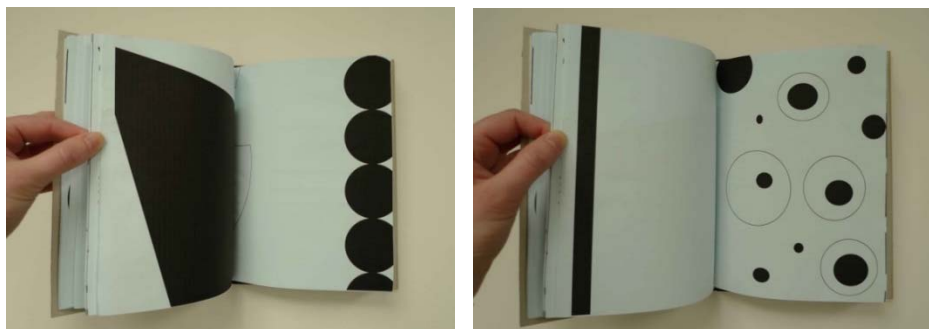


Figure 3: Spreads from *Blue Book*

While there are differences between painting and book design such as the one mentioned above, influences from painting remain in my work. In their analysis of Malevich's *Red Square*, *Black Square*, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) suggest that the directionality of the images of squares and subsequent visual tensions created are based around the viewer's search for equilibrium within the unbalanced image. Arnheim (1974) observes that darker objects appear heavier within a painting, an observation echoed by Doonan (1992) in relation to picturebook design. In the images above, I used solid, black shapes to create a sense of visual weight on the page. In the example on the left, the image of the triangle spilling off the edge of the page creates an imposing black surface. Bang (2001) describes the dynamic qualities that can be created using the angles and sharp sides of triangles in drawings. While the points of the triangle above have been cropped by the edges of the page, the sides of the triangle create a sharp and a gentle incline towards the gutter of the book. This, combined with the use of an overwhelming, solid black fill creates a dramatic image in my book, unsettling in its starkness. Contrast is created by juxtaposing a series of circles on the opposite side of the double page spread. The softer shape of the circles has been diminished by cutting their edges off with the edge of the page.

In the right hand image above, the transposition of balance is more subtle. The bar on the left hand side emphasises the blankness of the page, creating a pause. The circles on the right hand page depict solid shapes displaced from the centre point of a line outline. I imagine the direction of reading these circles as a progression diagonally downwards from top left to bottom right, as shown by the red lines in the image below. While the central line, with the balance of the two bottom circles pulling their weight towards the bottom of the page, perhaps suggests this, the other lines could be more coincidental, based on my preconceptions of how the flow of the page ought to follow rather than how it could reasonably be interpreted.

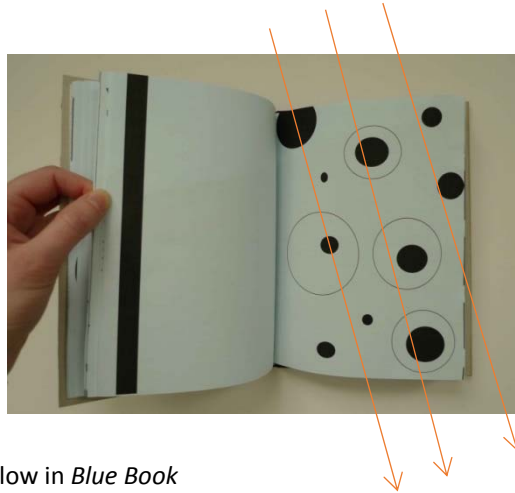


Figure 4: Directional flow in *Blue Book*

Drawing on Arnheim's (1974) theory of visual perception, Nikolajeva & Scott (2006) examine movement in relation to the flow and directional properties of images with regard to common patterns in picturebooks, providing specific examples.

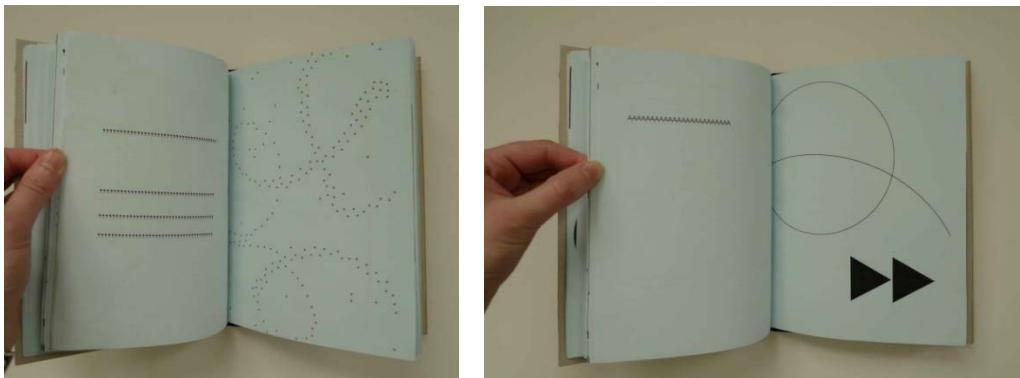


Figure 5: Directing movement on a page

Pages of my book shown above contain some visual similarities to the flow-diagrams produced by Nikolajeva and Scott. In the left-hand image, the rows of inverted commas on the left page are arranged in a pattern of rows of type. The rows of asterisks on the right-hand page create the impression of movement by spiralling exuberantly across the page. A similar effect can be seen in the image on the right. Here the line drawing of two overlapping circles creates the impression of movement on the page. This is emphasised by the inclusion of two triangles pointing towards the bottom right hand corner of the page, inviting a page turn.

## Example 2: 50 Full Stops

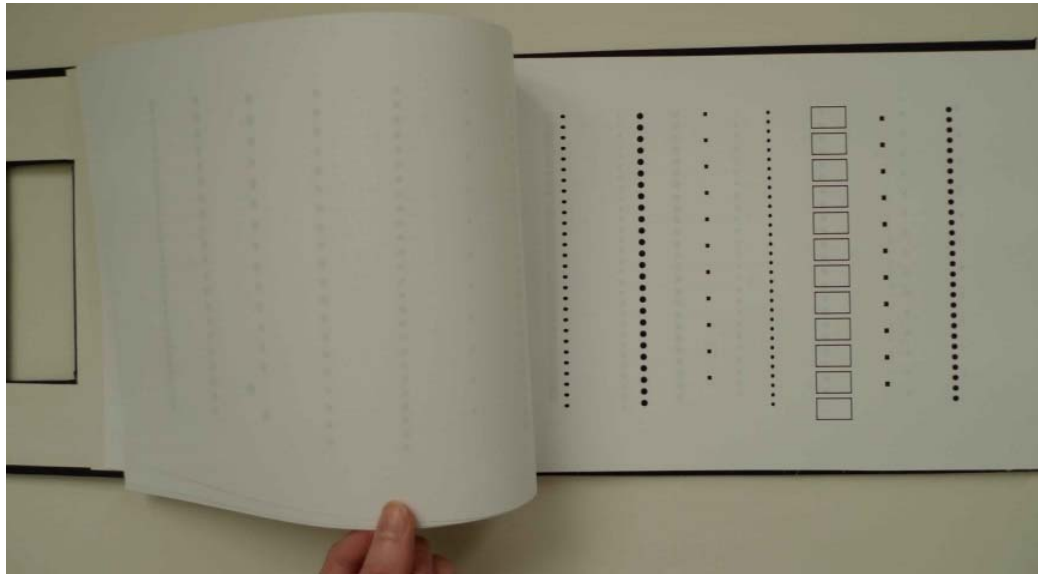


Figure 6: *50 Full Stops*

Ideas about the nature of the book and its reproduction are further explored in *50 Full Stops*. Jim Butler (2013) asserts that the materials and production methods used can be key in allowing a book to be easily reproduced. He suggests that printmaking and bookmaking can form a natural synthesis in allowing for production of multiples. My preoccupation with material and reproducibility can be seen from this extract from my reflective diary:

The cover is intended to present an engaging way into the book. I generally use understated covers, often utilizing natural cardboard grain direction or the textures of single coloured book cloth. In this case, I utilised cut outs, windows and shapes. Adding elements to the cover as well as cutting through the surface of the cover allows a playful interaction with the contents and gives a sense of depth by utilising the form of stacks of bound paper that make up a book.

My awareness of the physical structure of the book, and the materials used, was an important consideration in my early version of *50 Full Stops*. While changes were made in the materials in the cover, decisions regarding the content remained the same as for my original idea.





Figure 7: Close up *50 Full Stops*

*50 Full Stops* came about from looking at visual codes in text, exploring possible readings of these visual symbols when taken out of context. A page of full stops without text becomes a pattern rather than a symbol which is recognised as denoting a sentence closure. My reflective diary expands on how the use of repetition and pattern are apparent throughout the book.

There are breaks in the pattern; however it would need effort on the part of the reader to find these discrepancies: the book is not immediately visually engaging on a micro level to the extent that each page will be scrutinised in depth. The repetitive pattern across each page creates a very steady rhythm throughout the book; the tempo does not change from one spread to the next, which encourages a high level overview when looking at the book. It works better if you flick across the pages, skimming over the individual spreads.

Changing the typeface emphasises the visual nature of typography, while questioning the meanings associated with it. The use of typography as a visual form of expression, including examples by the Dadaists and references to concrete poetry, can be seen to influence this book.

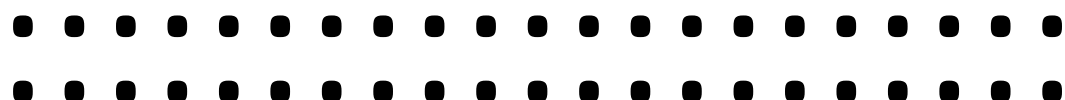
In this section, the work discussed is closer to my idea of an artist's book than a children's picturebook. In these books, I deliberately avoided any direct elements of narrative, in these pieces I was emphasising elements of my practice that come naturally to how I make books, namely a preoccupation with shapes and patterns.

An interest in letters and the patterns they make can be seen in several artists' books, examples of which are cited by Barrie Tullett (2012) and John McDowall (2014). These examples expand from the typographical experimentation used by Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*, which includes pages of asterisks (Tullett, 2012). The rhythms of punctuation alone can be seen in Riccardo Boggione's *Ritmo D: feeling the blanks*, in which the words of sentences are blanked out, leaving just pages of punctuation distributed unevenly across the page (McDowall, 2014). So, for example, this paragraph would resemble the following:



Figure 8 Punctuation patterns

While displaced, the lines of punctuation here do create a rhythmic pattern of a sort. Traces of the underlying words are implied by the positioning of the punctuation. There is both order and a slightly discordant sense of unease in the marks left on the page. While in my book, *50 Full Stops*, the pattern and distribution of shapes on the page is very ordered, following a set structure throughout, Boggione's book offers a more organic approach to the distribution of punctuation on a page. The role of repetition and pattern is visually described by Molly Bang, who invites the reader to make sense of an image by looking for order and discord in a pattern (2001:78). Bang uses geometric shapes rather than punctuation in this example; however, the shapes that punctuation marks make can also be geometric, as demonstrated by the rows of full stops and colons below.



When arranged in this manner, full stops and colons are sufficiently geometric to make an abstract, yet ordered geometric pattern. Associations with written text can be tentatively linked to these images, yet the shapes are sufficiently removed from direct elements of the alphabet for connections to be tenuous. More overt textual associations can be seen in other punctuation shapes, for example, the row of commas below:



This row of commas has stronger associations with punctuation marks than the full stops above, bringing clearer textual suggestions to this line of marks. Using letters, such as the row of 'A's below, further emphasises the textual elements of the letters.



However, when arranged in this manner, the repetition of the letters on the page creates a pattern rather than a direct association with the letter 'A': it becomes a picture.

Up to this point the focus has been on the weight of images on the page, shapes and patterns. However, the use of typography and shapes as a way of making pictures has been deliberated in both symbolic and mimetic terms in artists' books and children's picturebooks. Some examples will be described in the next section.

## **Typography, shapes and symbolism in artists' books and children's picturebooks**

Johanna Drucker describes Russian avant-garde artists' books<sup>2</sup> in which shapes and letters are used in conjunction with one another. Drucker considers the examples of artists' books she describes as holding particular significance, as experimental typography was generally more common in posters and flyers than in books during this period (Drucker, 2004:52). Tatiana Saarinen draws similar conclusions to Drucker in describing how posters or flyers are more common sources of experimental typography from this period. However, Saarinen also describes the influence that posters had in Russian Constructivist picturebooks, suggesting that picturebook spreads were designed in a similar way to posters, with emphasis placed on graphic boldness, simplicity and a single, clear message. It was considered that, 'a page should express rational organisation in its simplicity, laconicism and geometry.' (Saarinen, 2001).

The significance of Russian artists' books from the early part of the twentieth century is outlined above (p 10). These artists' books are significant for their contribution to both book art and the relationship between artists' books and children's picturebooks. *About Two Squares* (Lissitzky, 1922) features in descriptions of artists' books for children by both Nicholas Paley (1991) and Sandra Beckett (2013) as a significant early example of the cross-over between artists' books and children's picturebooks.

Branislav Jakovljevic describes *About Two Squares* as 'the only Suprematist tale for children' (Jakovljevic, 2004:25). While Lissitzky's work contains clear references to Malevich's Suprematist, geometric language, the MoMA (Museum of Modern Art, New York) description of Lissitzky's book suggests that his inclusion of a narrative with social and

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<sup>2</sup> In this instance, I am using Drucker's definition of the term 'avant-garde' '...to refer to early 20<sup>th</sup>-century activities, thus distinguishing it from "avant-garde" as a generalized idea...' (Drucker, 2004:64).

political undertones was influenced by his move from Suprematism to Constructivism in 1921 (*Pro dva kvadrata. Suprematicheskii skaz v 6-ti postroikakh* (Of Two Squares: A Suprematist Tale in Six Constructions), 2008).

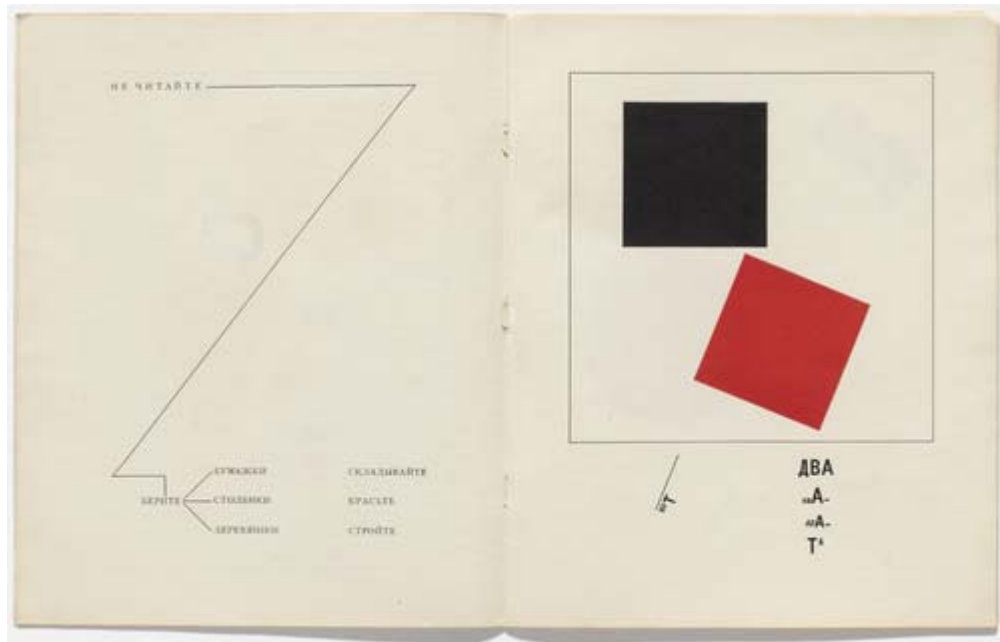


Figure 9 About 2 Squares

In *About 2 Squares*, Lissitsky uses a combination of words and graphic pictures to create an integrated dialogue of words and pictures, with a ■, for example, being used instead of the word 'square'. Shapes are used to create simple graphic representations of characters. The protagonist and antagonist are each represented by a square: one black, one red. The squares, based on Malevich's *Red Square*, *Black Square* (also known as *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack - Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension*) come down to earth. The black square wreaks chaos, however is ultimately defeated by the red square, who imposes order. While Lissitsky's book contains direct narrative elements, the role of narrative and discourse in relation to abstract shapes is an interesting area.

## Narrative in abstract shapes

When discussing Malevich's painting *Red Square*, *Black Square*, Mitchell suggests that narrative should not be excluded from interpretations of the image. The physical arrangement of the shapes and the symbolic associations based on their angles, positioning and colours are interpreted as follows:

The relation of black square to red square is not just the relation between abstract opposites like stability and tilt, large and small, but of more potent, ideologically charged associations like deadly black and vivid, revolutionary red, domination and resistance, or of even more personal and emotional relationships like father and son. (Mitchell 1989:359)

The projection of narrative to this image, which comprises abstract, geometric shapes, offers interesting possibilities when applied to a more tangible 'character' shape. E.H. Gombrich observes a human 'propensity' to 'project familiar images', for example seeing a pair of eyes in the headlights of a car (Gombrich, 2002:89). Adding information to an image that could be read as physiognomic enhances the narrative qualities of that image. For example, in the images taken from my sketchbook below, the addition of a letter 'A' gives the impression that the triangle is facing downwards, pointing towards the bottom of the page (Figure 10).

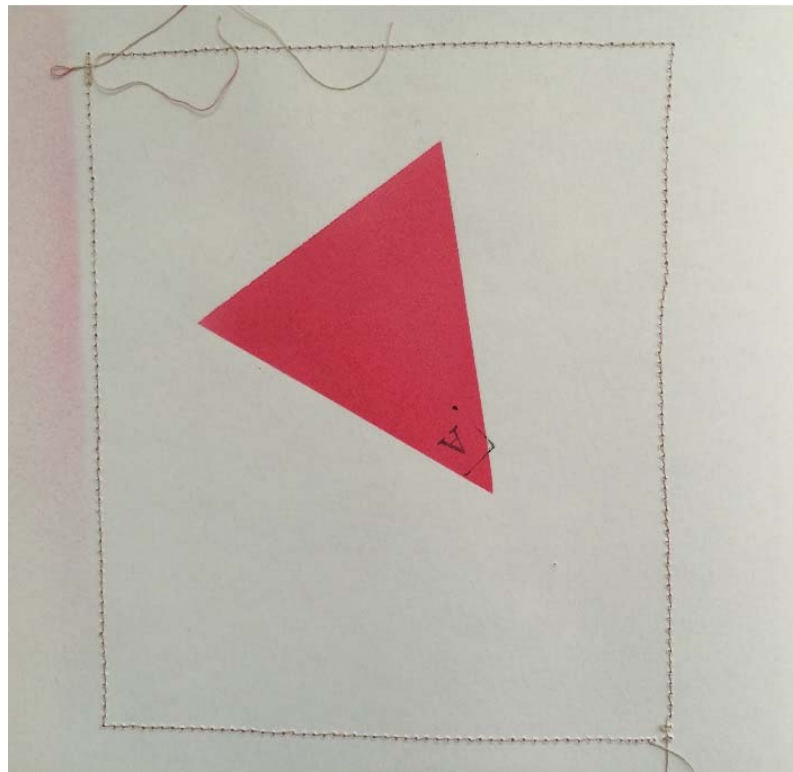


Figure 10 Red triangle

This impression is heightened by making the 'A' into an 'O', which more closely resembles an eye through its round shape (Figure 11).

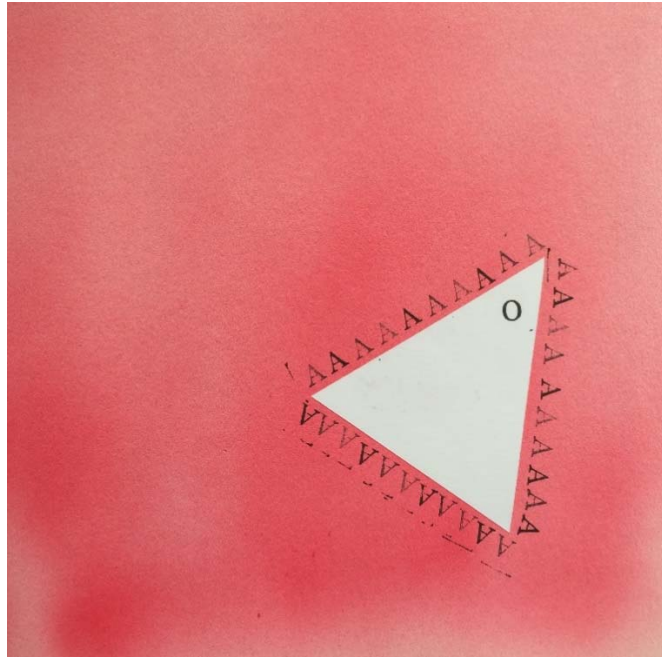


Figure 11 White triangle

Here, the triangle looks like it is facing upwards.

As a visual device, adding small directional, or potentially physiognomic details, can enhance the impression that two objects are interacting with one another. The emotive qualities of that interaction can also be inferred, for example, it might be harmonious (Figure 12).

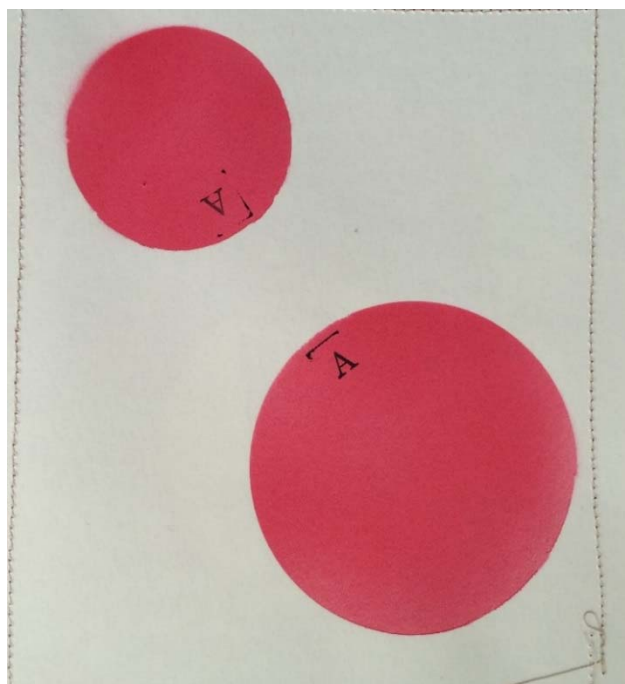


Figure 12 Two circles

Or aggressive (Figure 13).

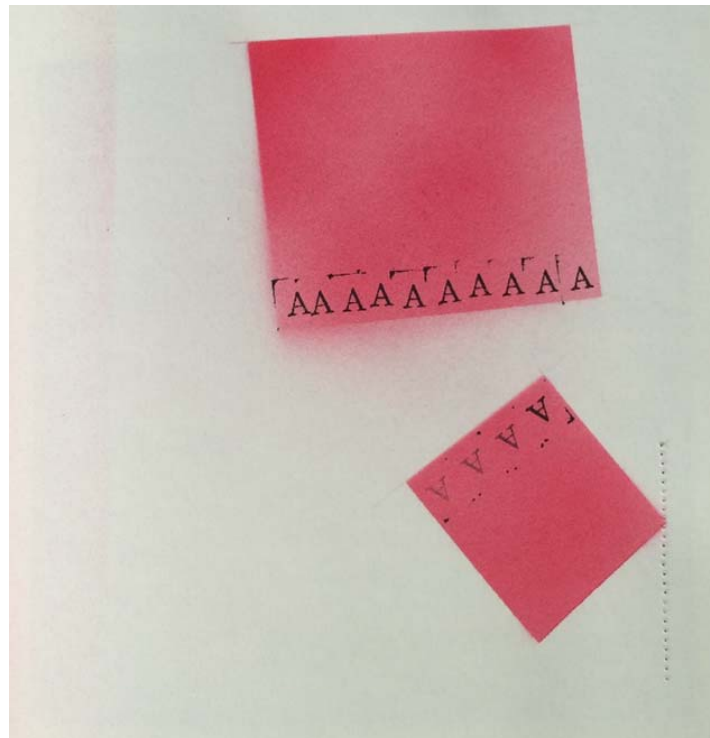


Figure 13 Two squares

The emotive association of shapes are described by Bruno Munari (1966; 1965), W.J.T. Mitchell (1984), E.H. Gombrich (2002) and Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996), to name a few. Referring to picturebooks, Perry Nodelman suggests that the rigidity of squares offers strength and structure while the softer, rounded shape of circles is seen as gentler and more accommodating (Nodelman, 1990). Molly Bang has explored shapes visually as an artist, creating different images and analysing the results. Echoes of gestalt theory and visual perception can be seen in her visual investigation of the effect of different shapes, sizes, colours and positioning on the page in her abstract version of *Little Red Riding Hood* (Bang, 2001). Different arrangements of shapes on the page, for example, a series of triangles placed on the diagonal, create a dynamically charged image.

The images she chooses contain a pictorial element: there is sufficient information for the reader / viewer to fill in the gaps and read the narrative coherently. Her use of shapes extends to backgrounds as well as character design. She depicts the forest, for example, as a static series of parallel vertical lines when Little Red Riding Hood first enters it. The character is positioned as a small red triangle at the bottom of the page, creating the impression of the forest as an imposing space. This impression is heightened on the page which introduces the wolf into the forest, where Bang places the trees at harsh angles that



create tension within the image and suggest an intense and disquieting initial meeting with a menacing character. The use of abstract, geometric shapes is highly effective even though they are not figurative.

## **The use of shapes to depict characters in picturebooks**

In Molly Bang's book, Little Red Riding Hood is depicted by a simple red triangle. The use of abstract shapes to depict characters is also demonstrated in Leo Lionni's (1959) *Little Blue and Little Yellow*, in which the characters and their environment are shown as pieces of torn paper. Lionni uses the physical qualities of torn paper throughout as a way of creating a cohesive narrative. The environment the characters reside in, their homes and schools, are also created with torn paper. The emotions the characters feel are similarly depicted, for example, a crying character sheds smaller pieces of torn paper. This pattern and use of the material qualities of torn paper is broken when two tightly hugging characters can be seen to merge into one shape.

E.H. Gombrich has commented on the role the reader can play in creating an image, observing that the artist may rely on the reader to be complicit in creating meaning and filling gaps within an image (Gombrich, 2002). Scott McCloud echoes this sentiment by describing the artist as 'aided and abetted by a silent accomplice', the reader (McCloud 1994:68). This participation on the part of the reader offers the artist considerable freedom in choosing how to depict characters and scenes. In *Dottoko Zoo*, Norio Nakamura (2012) experiments with abstract shapes, demonstrating how few pixels are needed to allow a possible identification of a number of animals in a book described by the judges at the Bologna Ragazzi as a 'highly sophisticated graphic puzzle, a tour de force of composition and minimalism designed to stretch the mind and the eye.'<sup>3</sup> Suggestions that withholding information from the reader or viewer can aid engagement by offering a puzzle have been made, for example, by Richard Pratt (2012:518).

Visually, letters are made up of a series of shapes, lines and curves which potentially have pictorial qualities. The use of lettering to create pictorial elements can be found, for example, in *Die Scheuche* by Kate Steinitz, Kurt Schwitters and Theo van Doesburg (1925). In this book, letters have been arranged to create characters. For example, an ostrich is created by using a capital 'O' to represent its body, topped by a capital 'P' to form a neck

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bookfair.bolognafiere.it/en/bologna-ragazzi-award/winners-2014/non-fiction/2227.html> [Accessed August 25, 2014]

and head, and two lower case 'i's underneath the 'O' to create legs. An angled question mark forms the tail.

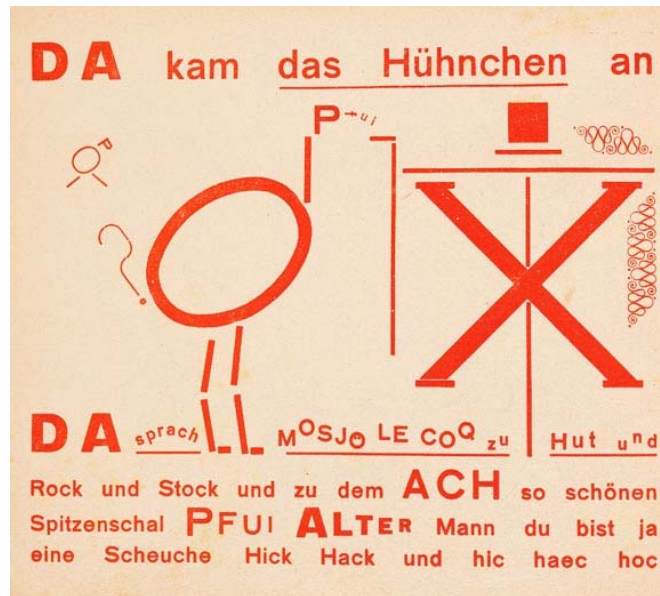


Figure 14 *Die Scheuche*

Further examples of letters creating pictorial shapes can be seen in Roberto de Vicq de Cumptich's portraits (2007) and picturebook *Bembo's Zoo* (2000), in which he creates remarkably characterful images extremely economically.

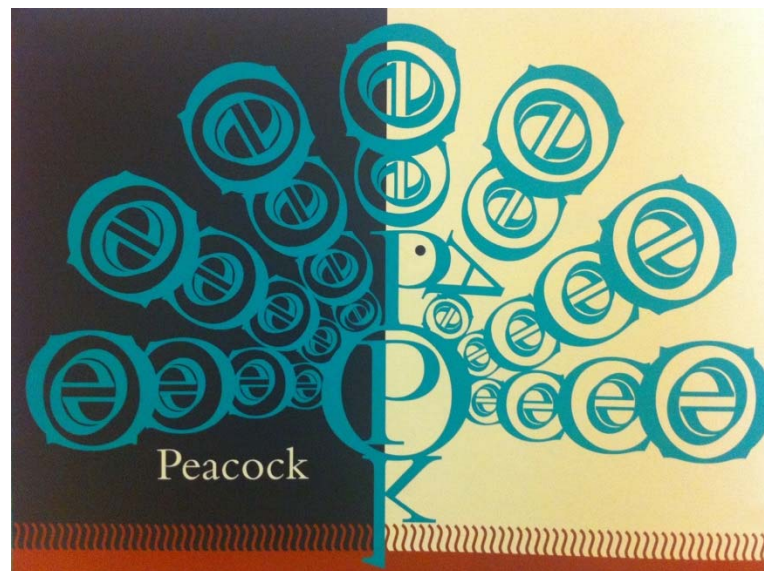


Figure 15 *Bembo's Zoo*

From these examples, it can be seen that elements of narrative can be read into a series of shapes, either symbolically, as Mitchell describe in relation to Malevich's *Red Square*, *Black Square*, or as a more mimetic representation, as shown *Die Scheuche*.

In the examples above, a depiction of a character and their progression through a plot can be seen. In the light of this, I wanted to explore adding narrative elements to my work. In the book I discuss below, I examine ways in which letters can be arranged to create pictorial images and the effects achieved by this.

### **Little Red Cap, a typographic retelling**

For this experiment I used the story *Little Red Cap* by the Brothers Grimm. Familiarity with the fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood, which is based on this story, allowed me to focus on the narrative, or how the story was told, rather than the story itself. It offered possibilities to tell the story in a way which used mainly shapes and the arrangement of their placement on the page.

The positioning of typographic shapes on the page and their symbolic associations became the chief points of interest in the typographic retelling of *Little Red Cap*, which experiments with the shapes formed by letters and explores how these could aid the telling of a story with minimal visual language. I was interested in exploring how little information I needed to include in offering a combination of shape-based marks which contained allusions to pictorial elements.

The image below, for example, shows Grandmother's house at the edge of the wood (Figure 16). Two capital 'L's, an 'A' and an 'i' are combined to create a quite figurative depiction of a simple, rural cottage. The trees at the edge of the forest proved more difficult to create. Textual descriptions of the forest through which Little Red Cap must walk in order to reach her Grandmother's cottage suggest that the forest is a dark and dangerous place. The shapes created by 'l's and 'i's were too balanced to capture this. Placing them closer together created a more claustrophobic effect, but the stripes created by the vertical shafts of the letters remained too parallel to appear threatening. The cross strokes of the letters 't' and 'f' offered an interesting contrast to this, however the curved elements of these letters were too soft and accommodating.



Figure 16 Grandmother's house

The letter 'k' provided a balance between sharp, angular lines and parallel vertical lines. When the elongated letter was positioned in a repetitive grouping this created a non-figurative representation which captured the ominous and slightly threatening impression of the forest I required. However, the phonetic sound of this letter was not directly related to the shapes I was using it to depict.

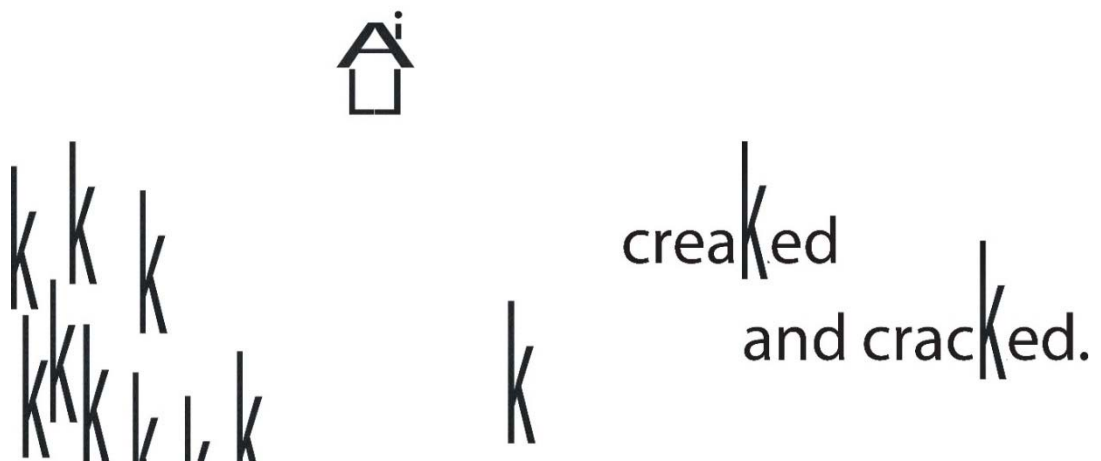


Figure 17 Grandmother's house version 2

In this version, I added some descriptive words with onomatopoeic elements, which allowed a playful integration between the letters which formed words and the letters which formed the forest.

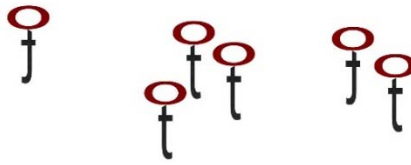


Figure 18 Flowers

In contrast, to the hard, angular shapes used for the forest, the field of flowers which the wolf uses to tempt Little Red Cap into leaving the path is created with the softer shapes of the letters 'o' and 't'. This image is intended as a direct contrast to the forest, a safe haven away from the its perils, while still tinged with danger, as it is off the beaten path through the forest, and Little Red Cap's foray allows the wolf time to arrive at Grandmother's cottage ahead of her. The sense of danger is captured in the red heads of the flowers, which offer both a hint of colour and life but also the sense of a symbolic threat of danger. The flowers appear twice in the book, initially when Little Red Cap leaves the path to collect some for her Grandmother at the suggestion of the wolf. The second time is on the final spread of the book after the wolf's death. I had considered changing the colour of the flower heads to black in this scene, but the impression this created felt overly romanticized, and the flowers remained red.

## Depicting characters

In *Little Red Cap*, I was interested in experimenting with minimal visual information. Initially, I used the shapes of letters to create pictorial images, with possibilities of association with phonetic sound. I focused on the shapes of the letters, attempting to create a semi-pictorial image rather than using a directly figurative approach. I concentrated on identifying ways in which letters could be used with minimal manipulation to create a representation of a pictorial image, such as the picture of the wolf below (Figure 19 Wolf).

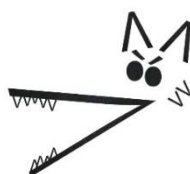


Figure 19 Wolf

However, using letters in this manner resulted in quite a cartoon-like image. There is insufficient 'wolf-like' information for this image to be successful as a picturebook illustration. While it is possible to capture character and representational images with remarkably economic line use, this image failed to achieve this, being neither abstract enough nor pictorial enough to work effectively. Looking back again at the shape-based imagery in the books discussed above, I explored ways in which a more abstract visual language could be developed, which still captured some pictorial elements. Rather than attempting a pictorial representation (such as Figure 19), I concentrated on developing an alternative visual discourse which allowed for a greater freedom of expression, while maintaining a limited visual palette, again using typography as a means of forming images.

The anthropomorphic elements of letters used by El Lissitzky have been outlined by Adela Roatcap, who describes how a letter 'A', for example, can be seen as a triangle with legs (Roatcap, 2003). In my book, this image is extended by the addition of a letter 'o', representing a head on top of the triangle body and legs that made up the letter 'A' (Figure 20).



Figure 20 Little Red Riding Hood

A 'W' becomes a visual play on the representation of the wolf and a visual depiction of his open jaws snapping down on Little Red Cap (Figure 21). To underline associations between the wolf and the letter 'w', I used alliterative words that draw connections between the visual shape of the letter and the sounds it made. So the wolf woofs, whines and whimpers at various points in the book.



Figure 21 Pouncing wolf

In Figure 21, the physical shape of the letter 'w' is emphasised by its positioning on the page when it becomes a representation of the wolf's open jaws, descending on Little Red Cap. The wolf's jaws are enlarged: the whole of Little Red Cap would easily fit in them. The exaggeration in scale makes the wolf seem imposing. When combined with the stark angle at which the jaws descend on Little Red Cap, the impression of a threat is created. I softened this slightly by blunting the ends of the wolf's muzzle with a flat edge. Creating a pointed end to the muzzle would have made the image look like a pair of tweezers and given a more comic affect. The subtleties of how the flat edges, pointed sections and curves of letters integrated with one another became important as the visual information given in these images was minimalistic.

These images, which utilise the shapes of letters to offer suggestions of a more pictorial image, leave gaps for the reader/viewer to fill in. The use of a fairy tale should allow enough prior knowledge of the story to allow the reader/viewer to construct an inferred narrative from these images. In this book, while familiarity with the narrative of a fairy tale allows for a free retelling, the sections of the text I chose to visualize were fragments rather than a retelling of the entire narrative. I had originally started to lay these out across a picturebook. While double page spreads were used in the original version of the book, the majority of the images took up half a page with some textual explanation positioned around them to clarify the narrative. In the later version, the use of text provided the possibility to be less directly representational with the imagery.

While these images of *Little Red Cap* are graphically interesting and offer the possibility of using letters in a semi-pictorial way in a narrative, the images work more effectively as standalone images. When combined together, the separate pages do not flow into one another effectively. Attempts to address this by considering the role of materiality and the book structure will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, in which I analyse a book I made based on the fairy tale *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* by the Brothers Grimm.



# Combining abstract and pictorial images in a narrative

In chapter 2, I discussed early work which uses abstract, geometric shapes as content in a book. *Blue Book* and *50 Full Stops* focus on the form of the book and the role of shapes in visual balance and page turning; an investigation of the ways in which the physical structure and the content of a book can interact. I began to explore this in a pictorial manner using letters as shapes to form a visual narrative in my typographical book *Little Red Cap*. Chapter 3 develops the ideas discussed in the previous chapter and presents a reflective discussion based on my practice-based exploration of a fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm, *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*. I look at my work in relation to a semiotic approach in picturebook design as outlined by Moebius (1990) and Nodelman (1990). The structural elements that I discuss include line, colour, framing, position or size of the objects on the page, perspective and rhythm. My focus is an exploration of the creation of characters and their environment from the perspective of the illustrator, an investigation of the process of creating content and the extent to which this can be done using a formal design-based approach. The use of the book structure, including page turning and pacing, will also be discussed with regard to narrative storytelling.

My book *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* is based on the fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm. My images are not representational drawings, but combine abstract and pictorial elements to create tension and visual representations of the personalities and emotional responses of the characters. The heavily visual approach creates an encompassing atmosphere throughout the book, which could be seen as visually describing the emotional or evocative element of the story, or emphasising the sensual pleasures of pictures. In her review of Nodelman's discussion in *Words About Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picturebooks*, Doonan (1992) mentions the evocative elements of images as being absent in Nodelman's text. By approaching the narrative of *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* in a visual way, I investigated how formal approaches in creating a picturebook can create atmosphere and emotion. For example, there is a sequence in my book where the mother goat returns home to discover the wolf has come and has eaten all her children. In the original text, this description is a few sentences long. In my version, this sequence is stretched over a long section of the book, comprising full bleeds of a grey background with

minimal, dusty black images. Visually it depicts loneliness, while the repetitive background maintains a rhythmic progression.

In this chapter I discuss three versions of my book, and outline how the project changed and developed as the work was created, edited and reworked.

## **Version One: The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids (Typographic project)**

The *Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* originated as an exercise in exploring typography. The first draft of the book was entirely typographical. The use of different fonts can be seen as an extension of my earlier books *50 Full Stops* and *Little Red Cap*; I was interested in exploring the visual appearance of letters in a longer narrative. In *Little Red Cap*, letters were used as a series of shapes to create characters and their environment. However, as the images clearly resembled letters, the phonetic qualities of the alphabet became a point that needed consideration. From here, I was curious to explore the extent to which typography could be used to contribute to narrative meaning in a picturebook. As Drucker describes,

Writing produces a visual image: the shapes, size and placement of letters on a page contribute to the message produced, creating statements which cannot always be rendered in spoken language. (Drucker, 1984:8).

This version of *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* came about from looking at visual codes in text and explores possible readings of these visual symbols as an additional source of meaning to the text. Changing the typeface emphasizes the visual nature of typography, while questioning the meanings associated with the text. I initially started to use typefaces as a way of depicting characters' voices and allowing their personalities to show through. For example, references to the **WOLF** were shown in a **HEAVY, CAPITALIZED FONT** which drew on elements of a stencil. The book contained several different fonts for different characters. I gradually began to include shapes associated with typography, for example, circles and lines derived from full stops and underscores. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen discuss the qualities different shapes evoke, with circles representing organic shapes, squares mechanical shapes and triangles dynamic qualities (Kress and Leeuwen, 1996), which is outlined in the previous chapter (page 33). The shapes I used in my book were chiefly circles and squares, for example an arrangement of circles formed an image of

the wolf's feet and a black square with a white circle for a door handle was used to represent a door (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Typographic version of *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*

This use of typographical shapes worked when dealing with simple shapes such as a door. However, when I attempted to represent more complex images, characters and emotions, this approach felt somewhat limiting. Using a different typeface for each character quickly became visually confusing, with multiple fonts competing on the page. I began to explore how pictorial elements could be integrated with the typographic elements of the book to create characters, initially by sketching some ideas as line drawings.

## Version Two: The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids (Codex book)

### Line

How illustrators use line and their quality of line is discussed extensively in formalist approaches to picturebook design. The use of line to depict emotion, for example, the suggestion that strong, angular lines could depict anger or dynamism, while softer, tentative or broken lines could be used to show timidity or fear has been frequently demonstrated. Scott McCloud maps associations between lines and the emotions that they could be seen to represent, based on their strength and direction. (McCloud, 1994).

Jane Doonan looks at the role of line in its literal use to create shape, contour and movement. She also explores the relationship between the artist and the viewer through the artist's use of line. She states:

The drawn (or painted) line is a direct record of the movements of the artist's hand, describing objects and events. The line that tells you about the pictured world reveals at the same time something of the personality of the picture-maker and how he thinks and feels about what he is doing. (Doonan, 1992:23)

An artist's interest in the relationship between their hand and the marks they make on the page is apparent in El Lissitzky's self-portrait, *The Constructor*, which shows an image of the artist superimposed on an image of his hand holding a pair of compasses, suggesting that insight can be passed through the artist's hand directly onto paper (Perloff and Reed, 2003).

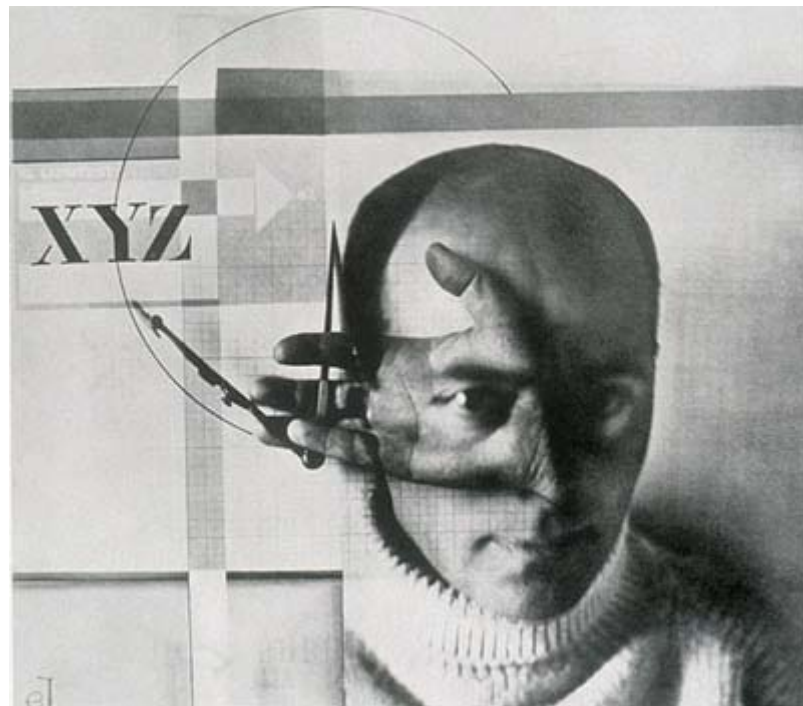


Figure 2 *The Constructor*

While mark making is expressive and the artist's feelings about their subject matter may be captured by their line work, I think that an insight into the artist's personality, as opposed to their feelings or the effect they are attempting to capture, would be difficult to identify and examine from their drawings alone. I would suggest that the emotional experience on the part of the viewer associated with the work of illustrators is due to a combination of factors. Line is one part of an image and is informed by the whole image.

Perry Nodelman suggests that an illustrator's individual style is less an expression of personality than a source of meaning (Nodelman, 1990:81). He proposes that colour is more effective than line as a way of conveying emotions in illustration. In his discussion of black and white drawings in picturebooks, he compares them to cartoons or caricatures,

which emphasize the actions depicted in the illustration rather than its visual appearance.

Nodelman goes on to state:

Picture books emphasize showing as much as telling, and their pictures often fill in the details of emotion and of setting that their words leave out and that color seems most suited to convey.  
(Nodelman, 1990: 69)

Nodelman states that line drawings can be used effectively to convey action, McCloud demonstrates this visually, discussing the use of movement lines, or blurring an image to give the impression of speed. It is also possible to create the impression of movement through the dynamic positioning of shapes (Bang, 2001:52).

### Early sketches

When I began to investigate incorporating line drawings in my work, I discovered that I had a number of preconceptions as to what a picturebook should look like. I began by sketching toys, such as the blue-striped mouse below (Figure 3). These drawn studies were an attempt to capture character and line. I am predominantly right-handed for writing and drawing. These images of the mouse were drawn with my left hand, to try and capture a more spontaneous line style by removing the pre-trained approaches gained from practice in moving hand and pen across the page. While the line is clumsier in these images, the overall effect is not significantly different from how I draw right-handedly, suggesting that the final line quality is due to how I think rather than how practice has trained my hand to move a pen across the page.

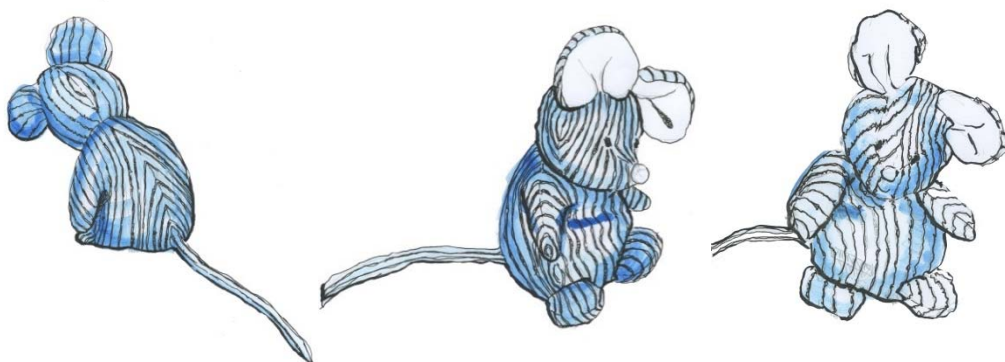


Figure 3 Sketchbook: Blue mouse stuffed toy

My initial ideas on images for a picturebook involved using pen and ink outlines filled with watercolour, as shown in my drawing of the anthropomorphised wolf below in Figure 4.



Figure 4 Sketchbook: Anthropomorphized Wolf

However, my visual work is predominantly based on printmaking and the outcome of these paintings and drawings (Figure 3 and Figure 4) felt inadequate to me. The style of drawing was one I based on others' work, rather than my own. In this example, referencing toys could be interpreted as a somewhat disingenuous, adult attempt to evoke romanticised reminiscences of childhood (Sanders, 2013; Rose, 1993).

Making the wolf character less anthropomorphic by setting him on four paws instead of standing on two lessens the cartoon-like feeling of the drawing (Figure 5). Using small shapes next to one another in a pattern allows the character's form to be shown on the page. The use of white space within the character emphasises the small black shapes which represent teeth and fur, while allowing the character to blend into the background of the forest. The use of shape rather than line in this final drawing enables the image to communicate details of setting and character without using colour. The forest in this scene is indicated by the bleak, empty branches of trees. The integration of the character with the background is intended to reflect this atmosphere in the image. The wolf is positioned on the right hand spread, but facing towards the left, snarling at the viewer: he is depicted as aggressive and partially camouflaged by his environment.



Figure 5 Less anthropomorphic wolf

This image takes a mimetic approach to depicting the wolf's character, however, the written narrative of the *Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* tells how the mother goat describes the wolf to her kids as a character who would love to gobble them up, a master of disguises, but identifiable by his rough voice and black feet. This description offered possibilities to create a more allusive depiction of the character. Focusing on the wolf's voice, I explored this section of the story as a line drawing (Figure 6).

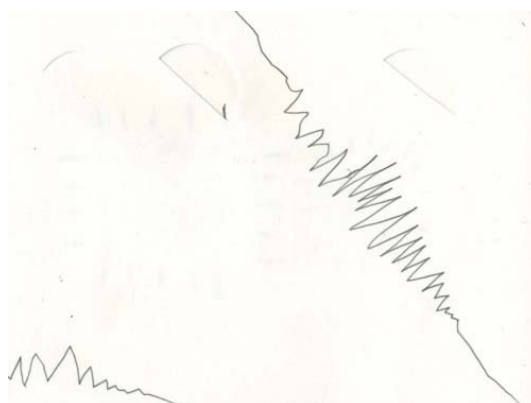


Figure 6 Sound waves

This drawing was an early attempt at representing pictorial elements of the story in an abstract way. The zigzag lines suggest the sound waves created by the wolf's voice, while the diagonal positioning of these lines alludes to the shape of his muzzle and teeth. The jagged line in this drawing (Figure 6) is more confident and dynamic than the line used in the first drawing of the wolf (Figure 4). However, it lacks sufficient tangible information to

capture the sense of anxiety and trepidation that the young kids might feel on hearing about the wolf.

The final artwork for this spread (Figure 7) introduces elements of shape and an expressive background to suggest the emotive elements prevalent in the narrative. An image of crumpled paper, with ink lining the creases, creates an organic background which suggests the roughness of the wolf's voice. Tension is created in this image by evoking a disorganised, or fragmented atmosphere, with jagged lines and sections of shape unfolding unpredictably and extending beyond the edges of the page. Overlaying the background, images of the wolf's black feet are stamped on dark, round disks, giving weight to them. The absence of the character emphasises the fear of the unknown. In this example, the illustration progressed from mimetic to symbolic in a search for expressivity.

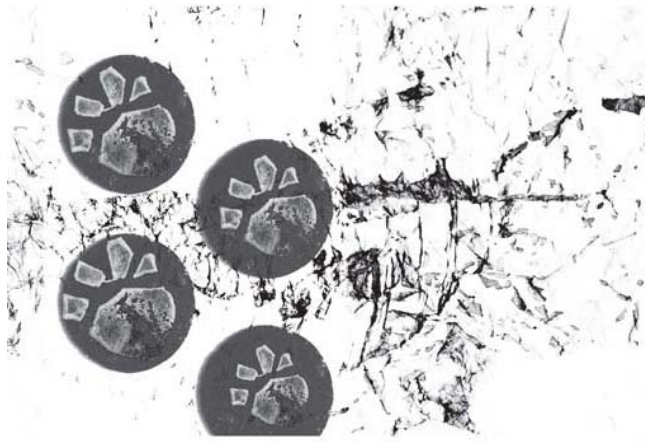


Figure 7 Black feet and rough voice

The symbolic associations in this image worked well, and I used it for my final depiction of the wolf, who is only shown as a series of black paw prints throughout the book (Figure 8). By depicting the wolf as a series of black paw prints, his presence is clearly felt by the trace marks he leaves behind, yet the absence of a directly pictorial depiction of the character emphasises the anxiety associated with the appearance of the wolf: we fear what we cannot see.

In terms of my visual language and my preference for mark making, using a stylised paw print to depict the wolf felt more authentic than some of the painted or drawn depictions, which I felt were quite unsuccessful. In this instance, the material I was working with, a potato, created a specific quality in the print. There is a simplistic, almost crude effect created by the knife incisions that removed the negative parts of the print in a series of



short, straight cuts. The potato for this print was cut quickly, without detail, resulting in the toes forming a series of irregular shapes. The shape is not precious. The uneven surface of the potato provides a textural quality to the print, with pools of excess ink gathering at the edges of the cut shapes, creating the suggestion of an outline to the print (Figure 8).



Figure 8 Wolf's paw prints

In relation to the wolf character, the combination of abstract imagery with some pictorial elements created an image I was happy with; it captured the elements of the wolf's character that I wanted to highlight. By making the image more abstract I avoided the over-sentimentality that tends to go with anthropomorphism and created a more personal approach. I continued to experiment with abstract imagery for other scenes in the book. In the sequence when the mother goat returns home and discovers that all her children have been eaten by the wolf, I tried to use a high-contrast image with drips of ink flowing freely down a textured page (Figure 9). From a symbolic point of view, this image captured the scene, however, it was less clear how this image related to the mother goat's emotions. This image is graphically simple yet visually eventful; adding further elements would create too much visual 'noise' on the page. In terms of overall book design, it also did not fit the visual language I had been constructing in the rest of the book. As a double page spread, it felt out of place. In an attempt to address this, I looked at ways to incorporate the mother goat more directly into this illustration.

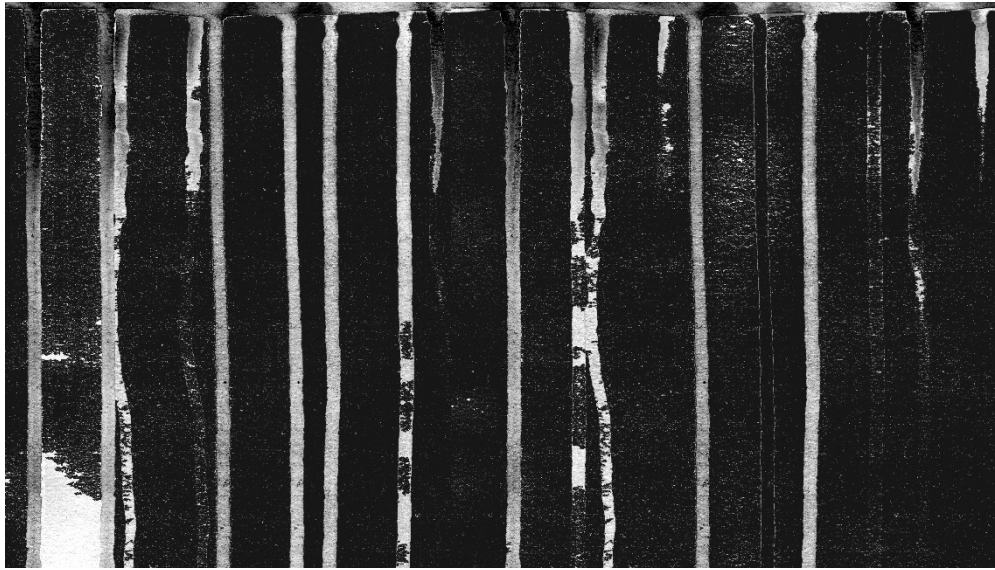


Figure 9 Ink dripping down a page

I sketched an emotive painting of the mother goat when she discovers that all of her children have been eaten by the wolf (Figure 10). However, this image was unsatisfactory. E.H. Gombrich observes that 'the rendering of the exact nuance of facial expression is notoriously difficult' (Gombrich, 2002:282). While it is possible to convey depth of emotion using simple shapes and lines, which Gombrich exemplifies with the illustrated work of Jean de Brunhoff, who in the Babar stories captures a multitude of expressions on the face of an elephant using a few lines and dots, the portrayal of sadness, grief, distress and a combination of these emotions is complex.



Figure 10: Initial version of mother goat

I felt my depiction of the mother goat's emotion was overly simplified; it failed to capture either a sufficient level of irony or seriousness and the result appeared trite and sentimental. In terms of characterisation, the goat is insufficiently 'goat-like'. Reflecting on this image, I saw similarities between it and the image of the blue mice discussed above,

which felt forced because this type of image-making falls outside the remit of my preferred working methods. In an attempt to bring this image closer to my practical work, I considered ways to simplify it. Rudolf Arnheim discusses the complexity of making physiognomic judgements based on visual information. Facial expression and gesture combine subtle movements to convey a variety of nuances of meaning. Describing empathy theory, Arnheim outlines how visual information appraises the viewer of the situation, while leaving them to draw their own inferences from past experience. He states:

... one has to learn which expression goes with which state of mind because one could perhaps comprehend how one was generated by the other, but one could not perceive expression as directly as one does colors and shapes. (Arnheim, 1974:448)

One aspect of the project I was particularly interested in was the integration of abstract and pictorial images. Considering how the image of the wolf had developed into a simple, graphic, shape I changed the image of the mother goat, with a focus on developing shape rather than facial expression. In chapter 2, I mention adding small details to abstract, geometric shapes which give the illusion of physiognomic representation (pages 31-33). Here, I draw on that to explore the tensions between explicit representation of facial emotion and the implicit representation of emotion via placement and suggestion.

## **Shape**

I simplified the image of the mother goat to emphasise shape, removing all facial expression, and looked at ways of creating atmosphere from the backgrounds. The images of the mother goat were created as a paper cutout in black card. There are imperfections in this image, in the line around the edges of the shapes, which gives a slight sense of character. However, these details are insufficient to capture the nuances of what the goat might be thinking or feeling. The goat-shape provides a canvas onto which the viewer / reader can project further information based on the setting and background of the image. In the final version of this spread, which shows the mother goat's reaction when she realises that the wolf has eaten all of her children (Figure 11), the shape of the mother goat is placed over a photograph of a pane of broken glass; the symbolic aspects of the image are emphasised over the figurative. In order to integrate the image of the goat with the background, a small grey outline was added around the goat shape. The black silhouette of the mother goat in the foreground dominates the spread and creates a layered effect on the page. The image of the glass in the background breaks outwards, fragmenting off the page, creating a sense of movement and distress.



Figure 11 Mother goat against a fragmented background

The perspective within this page is exaggerated; the character dominates the foreground. Moebius suggests that larger characters could be seen as either a depiction of their advantage, or of an overblown ego (Moebius, 1990). While both of these readings are possible within my book: the mother goat ultimately secures an advantageous ending, and, despite various tricks, the wolf is thwarted, she is also positioned this size to draw focus to her and to ensure that she is not overly enveloped in her environment.

Common characteristics of the final images of the wolf and the mother goat in this book include the use of simple, repeated shapes with little movement or facial features. While the shapes are pictorial rather than purely abstract, the characters are shown as simple graphic shapes. The emotions and personality of my characters are created through the backgrounds and atmosphere of the pages, which are largely abstract. This approach, of using the backgrounds to create images with interesting tensions presented some challenges. To address this, I frequently used the device of framing in this book.

## Framing

The edge of the page creates a natural frame in a book. Each page may also contain framed images and show images of frames within an image. There are symbolic and design associations with using frames. As Carole Scott describes,

... exploring the purposes and effects of framing in picturebooks involves not only consideration of the aesthetic aspects and graphic design of graphic-narrative metafictional devices and literary constructs. (Scott, 2010:101)

William Moebius suggests that framed illustrations provide a limited glimpse into a world. Framing as a way of looking through to something partially hidden in the view behind can be seen in my artist's book *Prohibited Vehicles* (2007), which photographically documents

the spaces behind gaps in fences, showing the urban decay along the Millennium Walk in Greenwich, London (Figure 12).



Figure 12: Double page spread from *Prohibited Vehicles* (2007)

Perry Nodelman outlines the difference between frames around images and frames within images. Images of doors or windows within an image create a different effect from a framed image. The symbolic associations of the use of doorways or windows in picturebooks have been outlined by Moebius, who states:

I would point out that the frequent depiction in picturebooks of gates, doors, windows and stairs, of roads and waterways and the changing representation of light, artificial and natural, to accord with different degrees of character understanding, are not accidental or fortuitous phenomena, but downright basic to the symbolic force of the story. (Moebius, 1990:137)

In my version of *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*, the images bleed fully over each double page spread. There are frames within the images, for example, in the double page spread in which small sections of the young kids can be glimpsed through an open doorway (Figure 13). At this point in the story, the wolf has tricked the kids into opening the door for him. The young kids are partially concealed by the opening door, however they are positioned so that one goat's tail, another's head, a section of body and some legs are visible. Combined, the different body parts show a complete young kid. The bottom kid on the image can be seen peeping curiously around the edge of the doorframe.

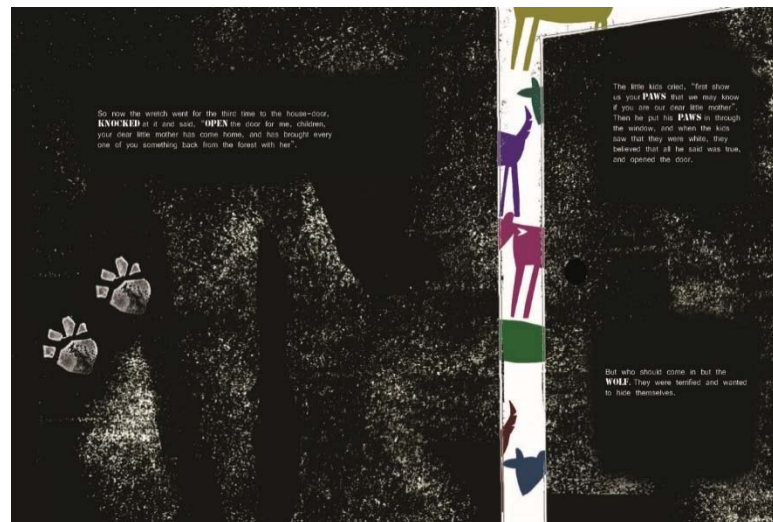


Figure 13 'Open the door'

The highly contrasting white stripe creates a frame in which parts of the young goats can be seen. This slice of white on the dark background suggests the opening of a door left ajar. Framing in this instance is used to create tension, both through highlighting the part of the narrative which is told within the frame and also through the visual effect on the page.

The nightmare-like associations of figures hidden in doorways are also present in David B's *Nocturnal Conspiracies* (B., 2008), where hidden figures can be glimpsed from behind door or window frames. Fingers and eyes are just visible through the frames. This glimpse of a scary figure through an open doorway contrasts with my book.



Figure 14 *Nocturnal Conspiracies*

While the door is ajar in my book, the elements shown are the little kids rather than the wolf. The spread captures the moment when the kids have just opened the door, but not

yet realised the wolf is behind it. The absence of the figure of the wolf creates tension and emphasises the fear of the unknown: as mentioned above, we are scared of what we cannot see.

Scott McCloud discusses the dramatic tension which can be created through the elements of a scene which the illustrator chooses to depict, and the parts of the narrative which are left 'between images', and to the viewer's imagination (McCloud, 1994). The view shown on this spread is a glimpse of the protected world of the young kids. At this time they are still safe and shown in colour. On the following spread, when the wolf is in the room, the image of the kid who escapes is shown as a black silhouette.

In my book, the positioning of the doorframe on the page is neutral; however the diagonal line at the top of the page points to the top right hand corner, inviting a page turn. Framing is used in a different way on the next spread, where the hidden young kid is shown in a spotlight, visible to the viewer but not to the wolf, whose presence is apparent but who is not visually depicted on the page. The little kid is shown as small on the page but large within its frame. The frame of the page has been used to create an ominous space (Figure 15). The young kid is depicted as a small black silhouette in the far bottom corner of the page. The circle framing the kid serves as a spotlight, drawing attention to that section of the page, in an otherwise dark spread and creating an impression of the timidity and smallness of the character in a threatening environment. A gentle shadow on the left edge of the spotlight offers a slightly three-dimensional element to the image and softens the edge of the circle, which creates a contrast with the harsher line quality on the right hand edge of the spotlight. Encasing the kid in a circular frame presents a direct contrast to the diagonal line of ascending, jagged triangles cutting across the double spread from the top of the page, here suggesting the wolf's teeth imposing downwards in an open jaw. The use of larger shapes at the top of the image upsets the balance of the spread (see Arnheim, 2004), creating further tension within the image and suggesting a downwards motion of the teeth snapping shut on the page.



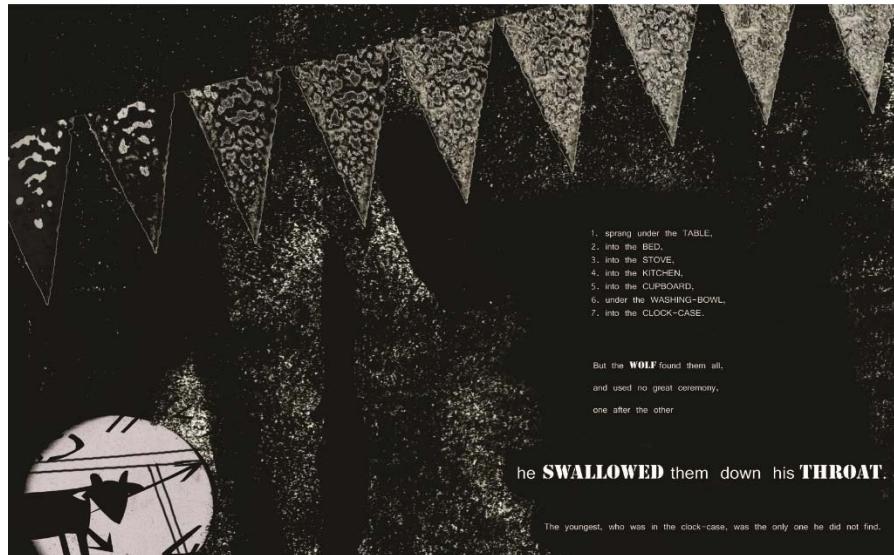


Figure 15 The youngest kid hiding under the clock, v.3

Prior to using framing in this image, I explored the arrangement of shapes to create an ominous atmosphere. The initial drawing of this image (Figure 16) shows the youngest kid hiding under a surrealist-style, melting clock, which contains references to Salvador Dali's surrealist painting produced circa 1930. The iconic image of the clock dominates this image, creating inferences which are distracting. The shapes in the image are too soft and gentle for the idea of a character hiding from a terrifying experience; the clock appears to be floating gently just above the kid. Symbolic associations with the passage of time did not fit in with this section of the narrative.



Figure 16 The youngest kid hiding under the clock, v.1

A second attempt at this drawing contains a clock face at an angle with the little kid hiding under it (Figure 17). The shapes in this image are also too soft. The angle of the clock is insufficient to feel menacing. Visually, the integration between the numbers and the shape of the goat does not work effectively; the edge of the five crossing the kid's tail is visually confusing, possibly creating the impression that the kid is spinning the clock on its tail.



Moving the kid higher emphasized this, moving it lower created too much distance between the objects, and the clock started to look as if it were floating above the kid rather than helping to conceal it from the wolf. In terms of the overall book design, these images (Figure 16 and Figure 17), are too much like small standalone images. The focus on two elements, the kid and the clock, makes the illustration feel like a separate element rather than an integrated part of the book design.

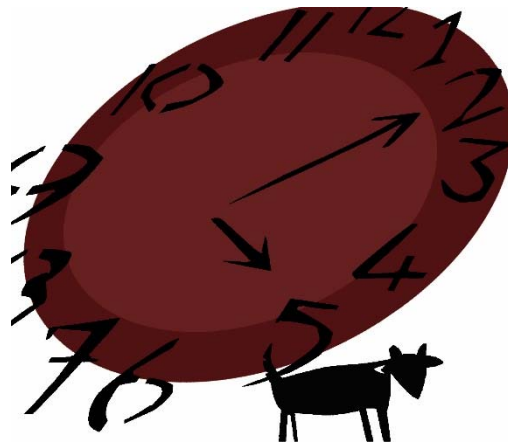


Figure 17 The youngest kid hiding under the clock, v.2

Including it as part of a larger background image that incorporated the drawing of the kid and the clock in a less literal manner allowed the image to take on a more symbolic meaning. In the final version of this image (Figure 15), the clock face is still present, but the little kid has been moved into a central position in the foreground. The pointed angle of the clock hands directs attention towards the opposite side of the page, utilising linear directional devices in accordance with Evelyn Goldsmith, who states:

Attention can be ... directed by linear devices such as edges of roads, swords, arms, or echoes of colours or shapes that tend to group in the manner described by the gestaltists. (Goldsmith, 1984: 133)

This image of the young kid encased in a circular frame is echoed later in the book when the mother goat cuts open the wolf's stomach and a young kid pops its head out. In this image, the young kid is shown in colour. The kid's escape from the wolf intact restores a sense of well-being, echoed from the opening pages, which shows the young kids frolicking in colour in the forest.

My illustrations accentuate atmosphere and emotion through the use of shape and pattern, rather than linear representation. These images do not provide representational drawings, but are intended to create tension and depict the personalities and emotional responses of the characters using a mixture of symbolic, abstract backgrounds and more

mimetic images of characters. Most of the images I have discussed so far are black and white. The next section will look at areas in which I used colour.

## Colour

Most of my book, *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*, is in black and white. However, elements of colour are used in the opening scenes of the Arcadian forest, suggesting the youth and innocence of the young kids (Figure 18), before the introduction of the wolf. In the original version, the trees in the opening scene in the forest contained leaves and fruit and were shown in colour (Figure 19). Elizabeth Cleaver discusses the symbolic nature of trees in picturebook illustrations of myths and folk tales. In her description of illustrating a Canadian folk tale, she references trees as sacred groves, and as symbols of fertility and seasonal change, transformative images of life and death (Cleaver, 1984). In my book, I felt that the contrast between trees with branches full of fruit and leaves on the initial spread introducing the young goats, and bare branches on the next spread which shows the wolf for the first time, was too stark. The leaves were deleted so that the trees had bare branches in both images, but birds singing in the trees were in colour. The birds and the young goats in colour are sufficient to create the impression of an idyllic Sylvania on one spread (Figure 18), which is then contrasted with the bare branches of the trees on the next spread, which introduces the wolf (Figure 5).



Figure 18: The kids in the forest

The colour scheme of the young goats is primarily made up of secondary colours that would naturally appear in a forest: shades of green, red and purple. Reference was made to the colours used in Monet's idyllic country scenes in his impressionistic paintings 'Within

the Forest' and 'Irises in Monet's garden'. The young goats lose their colour when they are tainted by the presence of the wolf, and are depicted in black.

Both Nodelman and Moebius describe the use of warm and cold colours to indicate emotion in picturebooks, with blue typically showing gloomy or sad scenes, yellow suggesting happiness and pink and red hues representing a warm glow. Doonan develops this further and suggests that colour has a symbolic role as well as indicating the physical environment. She discusses the function that hue, saturation and tone can play in creating physical structure, such as how heavy an object can feel on the page. She looks at the emotional connotations of colours, and outlines how these can change depending on context; a red-ochre colour, for example, could be symbolic of danger, or of sunsets, or autumnal beauty (Doonan, 1992). The emotional spectrum in my book includes a focus on fear, grief and loss, which I have chiefly depicted using black and white images.



Figure 19: Tree

Up to this point I have chiefly discussed technical and graphic decision making, describing the roles that line, colour, shape and framing can play in creating an image. On a structural level, this approach offers a solid framework to discuss the physical construction of an image, but a consideration of each of these elements purely in isolation is overly simplistic. Describing the role of line, for example, is a valuable exercise. However, line is not an isolated part of an image; depending on the project, there will be other elements to consider. The role of symbolic imagery, depictions of action, and pacing are also relevant to the creation of my book *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*; these will be discussed below in relation to narrative.

## Narrative

In chapter 2, I looked at some ways in which simple geometric shapes could be used as visual devices to guide progression through a book and also examined some ways in which shapes and abstract backgrounds could be used to depict characters and their emotions. Another element to my book *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*, is the narrative aspect, which will be discussed below. This allows the focus of my retelling to be on how the story works, rather than what the story is. Following Fludernik's definition of a narrative, as outlined in the introduction, my focus is on the visual creation of characters and their environment, the portrayal of the actions the characters take and the creation of a temporal and spatial sense in a book.

Studies such as those outlined by Werner Wolf (2004) which examine narratology within a multi-modal approach, look at the narrative of pictures (as both stills and sequences) and the narrative structures of text. In an earlier text, Seymour Chatman (1980), explores narrative discourses within films and comic strips as well as literature. While several narratologists stress that narrative theory is applicable to visuals (see for example Bal, 1997, Fludernik, 2009), it remains predominantly text based (Fludernik, 2009); a point that Wendy Steiner (1988; 2004) and Magdalena Sikorska (2010) emphasise in the opening sections of their applications of narrative theory to visuals. The dominance of text in narrative theory is also reflected in some descriptions of images. Marie-Laure Ryan, for example, is dismissive of what she terms 'illustrative narrativity', stating:

Compared to the ability to articulate new stories, illustrative narrativity is admittedly a rather weak and subordinated mode, but this does not mean that it should be dismissed as entirely parasitic. (Ryan, 2004:139)

This citation forms part of an over-arching introduction of applications of narrativity; Ryan's subject matter spans from Renaissance painting, to comics, silent films and pantomimes, offering a very broad range of interpretations for the term 'illustrative'. In the specific example of book illustration she gives in this introduction, she describes in positive terms the synergy between text and image in John Tenniel's illustrations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, where she notes that Tenniel's drawings provide clues regarding the motivation of the characters. However, perhaps the idea that images are secondary to text is also apparent in this observation, as authorial content in illustration is not considered here. It is worth considering that the examples Ryan gives do not include picturebooks. Perry Nodelman has observed that the pictures in picturebooks are unlike the

...so-called “narrative-paintings” popular in the nineteenth century; rather than invite viewers to make imaginative guesses about the story it implies, a picture in a picturebook confirms and makes more specific a story that is already implied in the content of the previous and subsequent pictures... (Nodelman, 1990:vii-viii)

While narrative theory has been applied to picturebooks (see for example, Nikolajeva and Scott, 2006, Yannicopoulou, 2010, op de Beeck, 2010 and Sikorska, 2010), I will also be drawing in the following section on some examples in which narrative theory is applied to other images. Werner Wolf, in his discussion on multi-modal approaches to narrativity (Wolf, 2004), focuses mainly on paintings and prints. He discusses, for example, William Hogarth’s *The Rake’s Progress* (1735), and the approach he takes is, as such, predominantly based on the allegorical relationship between poetry and painting, which W.J.T. Mitchell describes as typically occurring in pre-1900 painting (Mitchell, 1984). Some of the ideas Wolf puts forward, such as the need to ‘infer’ narrative from pictures (Wolf, 2004:94), which also arise in Nodelman’s description of nineteenth century painting, fall outside the remit of picturebook narrative. However, Wolf also offers interesting ideas which are applicable to picturebooks, which will be referenced below where appropriate.

## Depictions of action

My use of a repetitive shape for each character and character set throughout the book resulted in a lack of many traditional action poses. For example, figures are not shown to be running, pouncing or crouching. Facial expressions are minimal or non-existent throughout the book. Werner Wolf describes how a story emerges from a series of stills, captured frozen images made up of 'pregnant moments' (Wolf, 2004:94). In my book, the impression of action is similarly created through the elements of the narrative which are shown, and the elements which have been left out.

Perry Nodelman suggests that depictions of actions in a picturebook are often made up of images which show an action which happens just before the event reaches its climax (Nodelman 1990:160). Examples of this can be seen in my earlier book *The Taste of a Red Cap* (2005), which visually tells the story of *Little Red Cap* by the Brothers Grimm. The decisions on which scenes to include were based here more on action, for example, an image of a pouncing wolf on one double page spread was followed by an image of snapping jaws, dripping blood, on the next page. This depiction of action before, during and occasionally after an event, was appealing to draw, but as a sequence it lacked subtlety (Figure 20).



Figure 20 *The Taste of a Red Cap* (2005)

In *The Wolf and The Seven Young Kids*, the pages progressively build with increasing intensity to a point of action; however the images stop before the action takes place. Instead, the focus is on the effect the action has on the characters and the aftermath of the event, serving to create tension in the images, and allowing gaps to be filled by the viewer. For example, on the page where the wolf comes to eat the little kids, the wolf is not shown. The little kid shown is the one who is not found by the wolf (Figure 21). The background is used to create an impression of the impact of the actions, rather than the actions themselves. For an action-based part of the narrative, the page is quite static.



Figure 21 The youngest kid hides under the clock

A chaotic scene could have been created by showing the panicked group of young kids tripping and dashing across the double page spread, as the wolf chases and swallows them. My version takes a minimal approach, with a single character shown on a black background. While the large triangles suggestive of jagged aggressiveness across the top of the page could be interpreted as representing the wolf's closing jaws, neither the wolf nor the remaining kids are shown being eaten. McCloud describes action which happens between spreads or panels as reader-facilitated; 'every act committed to paper ... is aided and abetted by the silent accomplice' (McCloud 1994: 68). Depicting a scene the moment before, or the moment after action takes place creates tension within a sequential narrative and allows gaps to be filled by the viewer, in this case with the wolf eating the young kids. In this example, the viewer / reader does not necessarily mentally see the missing image, but is made apprehensive by the thought of it.

### **Conscious awareness of the book form**

Following an exploration of colour, shape, line, framing, the integration of abstract and pictorial images and character development in my book *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* as described above, I produced a 42 page mock-up of the book. While there were interesting elements in this, as a whole, it lacked impact and visual pace. Pages which had worked individually felt too busy when combined with other pages. There were no periods of quietness or contemplative moments within the book, which I felt would be appropriate for this narrative. At this time I was reading *Edward Ruscha: Editions 1959-1999*: a two-book catalogue from an exhibition in 1999. The first book in the catalogue is made up of essays by the exhibition curator Siri Engberg and the artists'-book critic Clive Phillpot. The second book comprises images of Ruscha's artist's books (Phillpot and Ruscha, 1999).

The images of Ruscha's books are pictured as thumbnails printed across a double page spread, so that every double page spread from one of Ruscha's books is printed on one side of a double page spread in the catalogue. Turning the page in a book replaces the preceding spread with a new one: you cannot view two spreads simultaneously. Laying out the catalogue in this manner, so that two spreads are visible, emphasises the repetition of similar images and subject matter in Ruscha's books and provides a strong pattern in the overall book.

Part of the process I follow when I make a book is to spread all the pages out on the floor. This bird's eye view allows me to see common patterns throughout the book, to weave in



elements of repetition, which aid overall cohesion, and to gauge the level of complexity, or simplicity of images per double page spread, allowing me to balance the rhythm throughout the book (see Figure 22).







In terms of content, deletion of the text did not have a significant impact on the story. When looking at the element of the fairy tale I was exploring, such as depictions of the characters emotions, the textual elements were not totally necessary. From a narrative perspective, the choice of using a fairy tale offered the flexibility of being able to assume a level of knowledge of the story on the part of the reader, a point exemplified by Marie-Laure Ryan who describes how a well formed mental image of a fairy tale can aid a viewer in allowing them to recognise the plot, a point she demonstrates with reference to the ballet *Sleeping Beauty* (Ryan, 2004). A similar observation has been noted in relation to Warja Lavater's *Blanche Neige, une imagerie d'après le conte* (1974), in which a presupposition of knowledge of the story allows that while there is no text, there is intertext in the telling of *Snow White* (Higonnet, 1990:47). Lavater's largely abstract concertina books are an interesting example in this case. Her work is in the Ó.P.L.A. (*Oasi per libri artistici*) collection of artists' books for children in Merano, Italy. Sandra Beckett discusses Lavater's work as a crossover book in her chapter on artists' books (Beckett, 2013). In this, Beckett describes how Lavater's books were originally created as artist's books, but speculation about their appeal for children led to the books being published for that market by the French publisher Adrien Maeght. A typical structure for Lavater's books consists of a key, which outlines which symbol is used to represent either a character or an object, which are then arranged in a seemingly-abstract pattern throughout the book (see Figure 23).



Figure 23 Warja Lavater *Blanche Neige, une imagerie d'après le conte* (*Snow White*)

Lavater's approach offers a visually rich and fascinating book, however the reader is presented with a puzzle in decoding the symbols in her work. Ernst Gombrich has observed

the role the reader can play in creating an image: the artist may rely on the reader to be complicit in creating meaning and filling in gaps within an image (Gombrich, 2002). From an artist's point of view, this offers considerable creative freedom in choosing how to depict characters and scenes visually. In this sense, the deletion of the text did not have a significant impact on the story in my book. When allowing an assumption of knowledge of the fairy tale on the part of the reader, there was sufficient visual information to tell the story. However, excluding the textual elements of the book changed how the book was read. Without text, focus was on the visuals and in places the balance of content was wrong. Considering the pages spread out individually on the floor in a bird's eye view, the boundaries of the book form and the edges of the pages changed. Relating this to book art, Johanna Drucker suggests that:

... the meaning of the book as a boundary, a point of delimitation and demarcation on the one hand, and the meaning of the book as a space, infinitely imaginable and expandable on the other hand, are explored as two aspects of the paradoxical nature of the book [of its very bookness and of its extreme self-consciousness.] (Drucker, 2004:195)

Looking at the pages this way I started to investigate ways of binding the book differently. Allowing the pages to be viewed sequentially in a long strip: the page would become a more self-conscious space. The combination of folded sections, which can be unfolded into a long, single strip of a concertina book seemed an appropriate structure to examine.

### **Version three: The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids (Concertina book)**

A concertina book is made up of a stack of pages folded in a zigzag. It is not bound at the spine; each folded page can unfold and stretch out to create a long, single strip. Within a codex book, I refer to the left and right hand pages combined as double page spreads. In a concertina book, I use terminology from Keith Smith (2003), and refer to these sections as 'frames'. Each frame has an inward fold in the centre (valley fold), so the frame folds in on itself when the book is closed. At the edge of each frame, an outward fold (mountain fold) connects to the preceding frame on the left and the subsequent frame on the right (Figure 24).

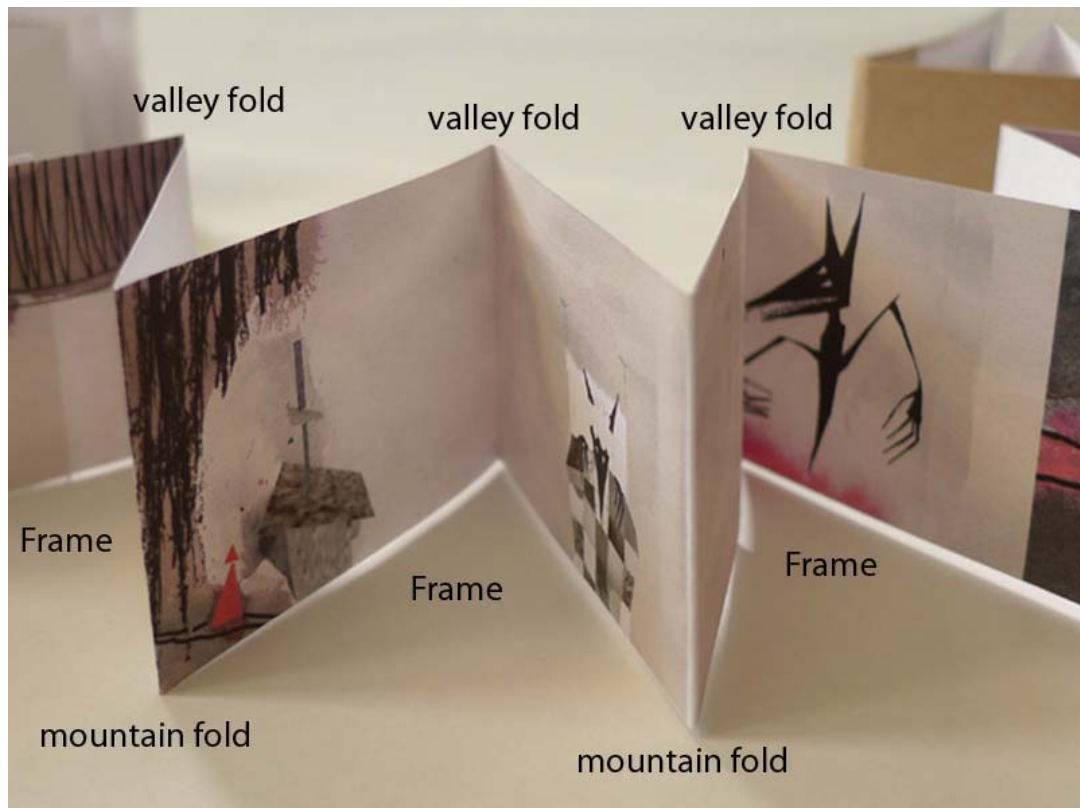


Figure 24 Concertina book *The Taste of a Red Cap*, 2005

Within a concertina book, the ability to spread the pages out into a long, linear strip as well as consider them in individual frames creates different readings of the book. When I created a concertina book using the images from my version of the *Wolf and The Seven Young Kids*, suggested the possibilities of exploring the rhythm, or timing of the book in a different format. In a codex book, page turning is an essential part of the book design. As one double page spread is opened, the preceding and subsequent spreads are hidden. However, in a concertina book each frame can be viewed as an individual moment, but the pages can be stretched out as a single strip and viewed linearly. This viewing changes the spatial sense of the work, offering interesting possibilities to explore tempo, rhythm and pacing.

### **Tempo, rhythm and pacing**

Depicting time, both in terms of its passage and also as an abstract concept presents complex challenges (see, for example, Ryan (2009), Bal (1997) and Wolf (2004)). W.J.T Mitchell states:

The very fact that temporality must be inferred in a painting suggests that it cannot be directly represented by the medium in the way that spatial objects can be. (Mitchell, 1984:101)

Lawrence Sipe describes the metaphoric relations between the rhythm of images and music that several artists, including Maurice Sendak and Randolph Caldecott, have used to describe the lyrical qualities of image and text pacing in a picturebook (Sipe, 2012). In relation to picturebooks, both Perry Nodelman (1990) and Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott (2006) draw connections with timing in films. While in films there might be discrepancies between how long something actually takes to happen and how long it takes on screen, visuals of clocks turning or pages flying off calendars provide clichéd examples of showing that time has passed even if the sequence on film takes only a few seconds. In a picturebook, on the other hand, the viewer/reader is free to linger on a page. Nathalie op de Beeck (2010) examines this issue in a comparison of animations and comics and observes that the visual devices used to depict timing in animations and comics can be quite similar, drawing on Scott McCloud's observation that 'space does for comics, what time does for film' (McCloud 1994:7). He describes how the placing of a character within a box, or a comic book frame, can create the impression of time; setting a character in a longer frame, which gives the character space, creates the impression that more time has passed, than if the same character is encased in a small frame which fits snugly around it (McCloud, 1994). Molly Bang draws similar conclusions, also suggesting that space implies time (Bang, 2001).

Complex images necessitate a pause in the narrative, as the viewer pauses to absorb the details (Nikolajeva, 2010). While it makes sense that a higher proportion of details and action on a page will need longer to be viewed, from a practice-based perspective this feels slightly counter-intuitive. I think there is tendency to envision that complex images containing many different elements will be viewed as fast-paced and to imagine them to be read at speed to reflect that. However, the narrative time (how long something takes in the story) and the discourse time (how long something takes to narrate) are not necessarily going to be equal or proportional, nor do they need to be.

Using the form of the book, or different types of paper, such as those used by Bruno Munari in *Nella Notte Buia* (1996), can affect the sense of pacing in a book. The semi-translucent paper sequence in the middle of Munari's book has a very different pacing and feel to the black pages that the book opens with (Poesio, 2002). The change in pace is also due to images from other spreads being partially visible on a semi-transparent page, creating a sense of depth in a quieter, dream-like sequence. This contrasts sharply with the

heavy black paper Munari uses in the opening sequence of his book, where the tempo could be inferred as more rigid.

The use of contrast in different sections can also be seen to an extent in *The Wolf and The Seven Young Kids*, which contains four sections with different approaches to colour and layout. These four sections are partially narrative devices that highlight different elements of the story, but they also affect the pacing of the story. The first section begins with a white background. This gradually becomes darker in the second section and the double page spreads become more intense until the page where the young kid is hiding under the clock as the wolf eats its siblings, and the background is almost completely black (Figure 21). The pace slows down during section three, which has empty grey spreads evocative of the mother goat's grief on discovering that her children have been eaten by the wolf (Figure 11). Section four is a concluding sequence, which mirrors the opening, more neutral sequence of white backgrounds with some imagery on them.



Figure 25 The mother goat and little kid

The third sequence of the book shows the mother goat returning home to discover the wolf has come and has eaten all her children. In the text, the description of this is a few sentences long. In my book this sequence is exaggerated and stretched over several double page spreads (Figure 25). The scale of the mother goat and the little kid, positioned at the bottom of the page, emphasise the emptiness of the spread. These spreads are full bleeds of a grey background with minimal, dusty black images. Visually they depict loneliness, while the page layout and structure maintain a rhythmic progression through the book. This long section gives the impression of passing time as outlined by McCloud (1994).

Placed after a section which is visually intense, this quieter section creates a pause in the narrative, allowing a break where there is less information to be considered. The disruption of spatial relations allow sufficient contrast to the rest of the book to set this section of the narrative time apart, offering the impression of a change in pace even if that change was not reflected in the discourse time.



Figure 26 Monoprinted background

The grey backgrounds of this sequence were problematic; it is difficult to visually depict blankness or emptiness. As blocks of solid colour imported from Photoshop, they were too flat. As monoprinted backgrounds, they were too textured (Figure 26). The final background image is an enlarged section of a photograph of freezing fog (Figure 27).



Figure 27 Photograph of freezing fog, Limerick 2010

This captured the cold bleakness of the image and gave a subtle depth to the grey, while maintaining an almost blank spread. This period of visual quietness and emptiness provides necessary contrast and a resting space in the book. The use of abstract backgrounds, while providing images with symbolic overtones, created visually active and demanding backgrounds (see Figure 22). Using simple graphic shapes for character tempers this to an extent, however reflecting back on my earlier work in the previous chapter, where geometric shapes were used in a minimal way, the visuals in *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* are more eventful. From here, I was curious to explore the extent to which I could bring elements from the work described in this and the previous chapter together. The next chapter will explore creating pictorial characters using geometric shapes and the extent to which a minimal and formal arrangement of shapes on the page can be utilised in constructing a narrative.



# Creating a pictorial image using geometric shapes

In chapter 3, I discussed the integration of abstract and figurative imagery in *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* in the symbolic and mimetic depiction of a narrative. This chapter will have as its focus *Sammy the Fish*, a book which explores ways in which simple geometric shapes can be used to represent character and create a pictorial narrative. After making *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*, I wanted to explore a more minimal approach. Johanna Drucker describes how using a limited set of tools, in her case a selection of letters in a letterpress book, of which she decided to use each letter only once, can force the artist to consider and devise alternative solutions outside of their normal working patterns and vocabularies (Drucker, 1984). When working with minimal images, the subtleties and nuances of creative decisions have a greater impact on the artwork as there is less visual information. This chapter responds to and develops elements of the work discussed in chapter 3 and offers a reflective comparison.

After *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*, I was interested in exploring further the use of shapes and repetition in developing a character set. Following a visit to the *Museum für Naturkunde* (Natural History Museum) in Berlin, I decided to work with images of fish. Fossils of fish display a delicate intricacy of shapes and line created by skeletal structures and body shapes, which are visually intriguing (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 Fossilised fish displayed in the *Museum für Naturkunde*, Berlin

The tonal variation between the fossil and the background stone offers a subtle disparity of colour. As these fossilised fish are static, I spent some time examining the way fish move in the aquarium at London Zoo. Based on the sketches from this visit, I drew the stylised sketch below of some swimming fish (Figure 2). In this image, I used inked thumbprints to create a pattern on the page. Ink lines added fins and tails to turn the thumbprints into the bodies of a shoal of fish. Painted reeds added some background to the sketch.

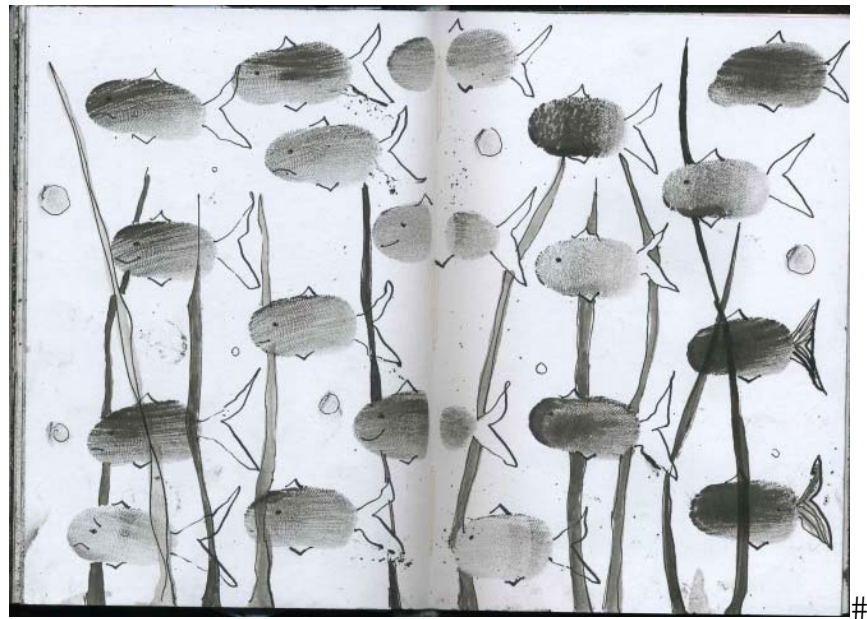


Figure 2 Thumbprint fish

The image of the shoal of fish swimming through reeds shown in Figure 2 was developed into the final artwork shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3 Fish swimming in reeds

Notes from my reflective diary describe the process of creating this image:

The fish shapes originated as a series of my thumbprints inked on the page. In the final artwork, I cut out paper stencils which I coloured using an airbrush and then scanned and layered the different elements of the image digitally in Photoshop.

Layering the separate images together created a more dynamic sense of movement. When the reeds, for example, are shown as a standalone image, the areas of darker and lighter green look like stripes on the reed. When juxtaposed with the fish in a combined image, the stripes of colour seem more muted, giving the impression of the reeds twisting in a current. Some freeform ink work was added to the background to create a more organic look.

This image of the fish incorporates repeated shapes and patterns, but as several hand-cut stencils were used, the individual fish and reeds are not identical.

Alongside their fossil collection, the *Museum für Naturkunde* also houses The Wet Collection: over 250,000 specimens of fish, mammals, spiders and amphibians pickled in ethanol (see Figure 4). The round glass vials they are stored in slightly distort the features of the specimens, giving them an eerie sense of personality. In some cases the animals are packed tightly in the jars, offering an overwhelming sense of rubbery flesh. The effect is one of both fascination and repulsion. The sense of mortality and preservation represented in these jars brought to mind some examples of seventeenth century Dutch still life paintings, where images of decomposing food combine depictions of luxury with temporality.



Figure 4 Fish in jars, *Museum für Naturkunde*, Berlin

While the contents of the jars on display were dead, I considered the idea of creating a narrative in which they were alive. In the image below of two goldfish in a bottle (Figure 5), I intended to reference the surreal elements of folk and fairy tales and horror novels such as the resuscitation of life in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. However, the impression created was much more tranquil. The scale of the fish suggests that they are swimming quite contentedly in their bottle. The serenity of the fish in this image brought up some questions regarding the possibilities for a story about a fish swimming around. However, the empty background put greater pressure on the depiction of the fish, which were neither loose enough nor precise enough. While a freehand cut image worked well with a painterly background in the image of the fish swimming in the reeds (Figure 3), here a cleaner image was needed to fit the more minimal background; however, in this early image, the character Sammy began to come about.

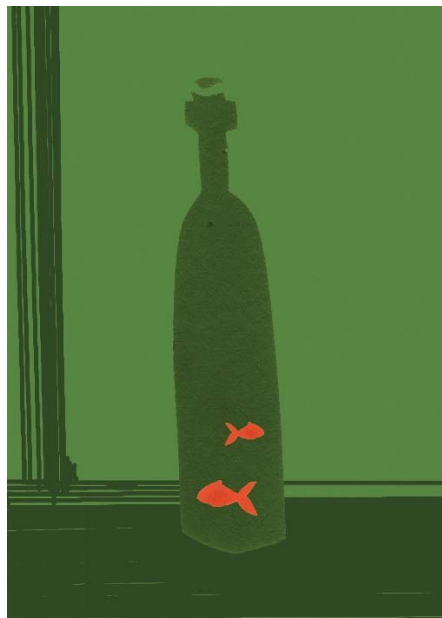


Figure 5 Fish in a bottle

I trimmed the edges of the shapes of the fish, making the body an oval and the tail two triangles. While using a single triangle for the tail created a simpler shape, it made the left-side of the image too heavy. In contrast, two triangles provided delicately pointed tips to the end of the tail and created a more centrally-balanced image.



Figure 6 Orange Fish

Adding some tonal variation in the form of stripes, some shading on the fish's belly and shadows to suggest fins gave the fish a more three-dimensional feel (Figure 7). These additional details helped to create a convincing character for the purpose of this project. While Sammy contains some figurative elements, the image is intended to look 'fish-like' in a non-specific way. As this book explores the use of minimal visual information, I wanted to avoid using a particular type of fish, or creating a complex visual representation. Sammy needed to contain enough detail to be recognised as a fish and to allow the reader / viewer to relate to him, but sufficiently few details that he remained a blank canvas onto which the reader / viewer might project. Representations of his character and emotions are implicit, based on suggestion and his placement on the page.



Figure 7 Sammy the Fish

*Sammy the Fish* is a story that describes the protagonist, Sammy's, daily life. Originally, it was intended to be a visual description of life underwater, in which Sammy would swim around and meet crabs, lobsters and shoals of other types of fish. With this idea in mind, I introduced Sammy to some background scenery (Figure 8). The shapes that create the background are based entirely on circles, ovals, triangles and rectangles. In chapter 3, flat colour is discussed in relation to the creation of the empty grey backgrounds that follow after the wolf's consumption of the young kids. Similarly here, the use of a digital swatch of flat colour created quite a dreary image. To counter this, I used an airbrush to create pages of colour. The sprayed quality of the ink gave a slight texture and variation to the colour, which offered a sense of depth to an otherwise extremely flat image. Different shades of colour were collaged together digitally to emphasise this, and stripes were added to the fish and the reeds. The background in this image is flat colour overlaid with a series of lines in a slightly different shade to create a slight impression of movement in an otherwise static image. This image was more interesting, but the amount of visual information on this page did not concur with my aim of restricting myself to minimal images or sets of images.



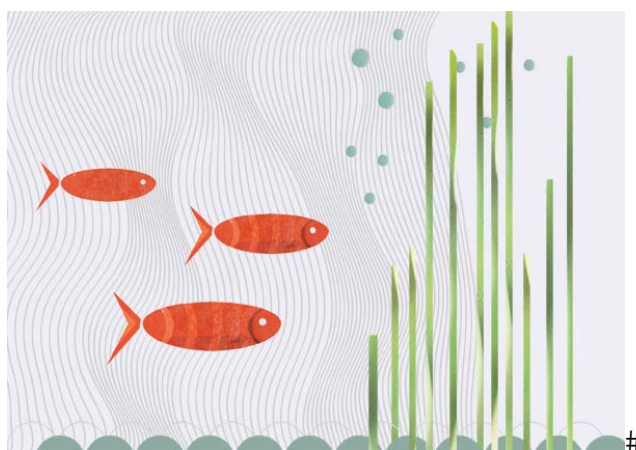


Figure 8 Swimming fish

Reverting to my original idea of the fish in a bottle, I took the image of the fish and placed it in a fishbowl. A simple plant was added to give slight variety to the image, and Sammy the Fish was created (Figure 13). Throughout the book, the only objects that appear are the bowl, Sammy, the plant, a net and some bubbles. Over 32 pages, I explored the creation of a simple story in a set place: Sammy never leaves his bowl. Visually, the challenge was to enable the images to remain interesting without any particularly dramatic interludes.

In accordance with the gestaltists' suggestion that yellow or orange are colours which our eyes are initially drawn to on a page (Arnheim, 1974), Sammy becomes the main focal point. The two secondary colours used in this book, orange and green, are contrasting colours which offer a clear visual difference between the two main objects. The shape of the leaves on the plant is reflected in the shape of Sammy's body, creating a visual sense of the two images complementing each other. Circles are also echoed in the images of the bowl and the bubbles. This use of geometric shapes is echoed in my earlier work, for example, in *Little Red Cap*, where I looked at ways in which abstract shapes such as letters could be used to depict characters. Looking back at the characters in *Little Red Cap*, while the use of letters created unforeseen tensions between visual and verbal language which were not entirely resolved in the artwork, the use of simple graphic shapes felt appropriate to my style of working. In chapter 3, I discussed the more figurative depictions of the wolf and the mother goat and the decisions affecting their characterisations. Here a simple, static shape is used to create a semi-figurative character. Compared to an actual goat, the stencilled image contains several details which are not particularly 'goat-like', for example, the neck is too short, the horns are the wrong shape, the ears are in the wrong position and the legs are unrealistic. However, the narrative elements of the fairy tale will enable a reader / viewer to engage with the book and the visuals created within it. The addition of

imagery around the character as shown below (Figure 11) similarly contextualises the character within its environment.

When the images of the kids are compared with the more geometric approach I used in *Sammy the Fish*, Sammy appears as a more confidently described shape. By approaching the image in a purely geometric way it becomes more stylised. A geometric approach to the background similarly created a stronger image, which will be discussed in a comparison of the trees in *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* and the plants in *Sammy the Fish* below.

### **Environment: trees and plants**

In *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*, the images of the trees were initially created as a woodcut. The image below (Figure 9), taken from a sketchbook, integrates the grain of the wood into the image of a tree. When repeated as a pattern, the marks made by the woodcutting tool add to this impression. In most instances, I was cutting with the grain of the wood, allowing the material to influence the shape of the image, which created some gentle curves. However, the forest in the fairy tale is an intimidating place, which this image does not fully capture, compared, for example, with the dark, menacing forest in *Little Red Cap* (Figure 10 Trees from *Little Red Cap*)

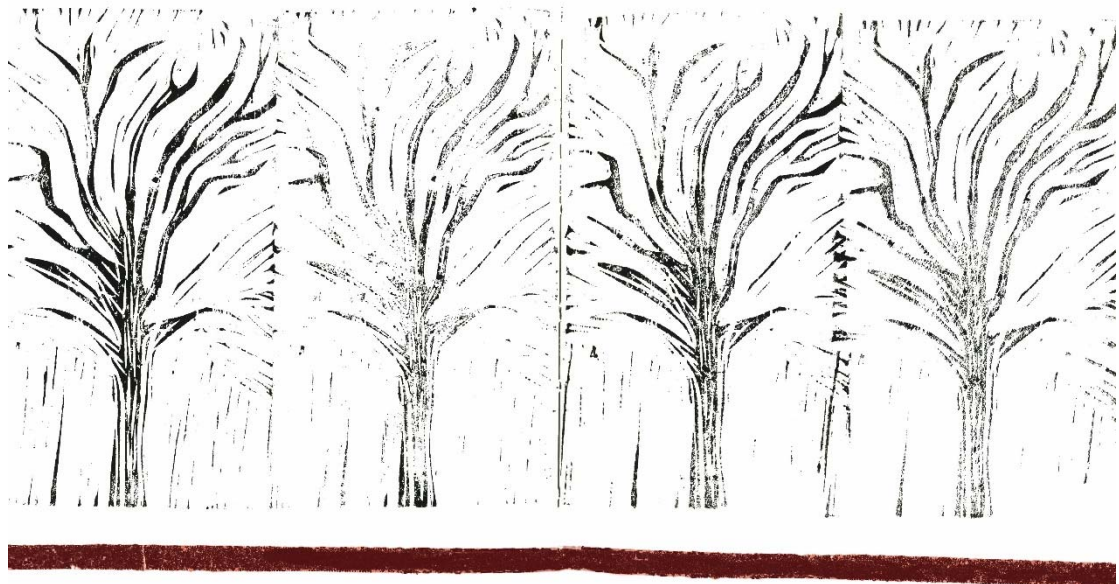


Figure 9 Woodcut trees



Figure 10 Trees from Little Red Cap

Overlaying paper cut-outs of trees to this image created a more three dimensional feel, with the woodcut trees becoming part of the background (Figure 11). As the grain of the paper was much less pronounced than the grain of the wood, some of the shapes created by the woodcut were mimicked in the paper cutouts in an attempt to blend the two materials together. While the black paper provided a harsh contrast to the white background, suggesting greater depth on the page, the curves in the branches are exaggerated beyond figurative impressions. While this distortion could be seen as a representative of a dream-like sequence, which would not be entirely improbable in a fairy-tale, the resulting image is neither sufficiently realistic nor stylised enough to be fully successful.



Figure 11 Trees



When creating the plant in *Sammy the Fish*, I was aiming for a cleaner shape than that of the trees in *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*. The purely geometric shapes comprising a repeat pattern of ovals and a rectangle created a stylised image of a plant (Figure 12). This image is not a realistic portrayal of how a plant looks, however, as a stylised image the execution feels deliberate. The leaves are intentionally placed asymmetrically. Some are shown as growing on the front of the stem and other are hidden behind it, but they are not skewed to create the impression of perspective. In a sense, the flatness of the plant offers a more authentic feel of it as an image in its own right than the trees in *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*.

Using the same series of shapes throughout *Sammy the Fish*, all of which are either circles, ovals, rectangles or triangles, created a coherent world or environment in which the characters reside. It creates a different atmosphere compared to the forest in *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* or *Little Red Cap*; it is happy or jaunty rather than menacing.

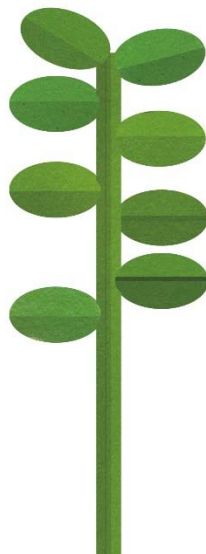


Figure 12 Plant

### **Depicting characters' emotions**

In *Little Red Cap*, I drew heavily from theories of visual perception; the shapes, positioning and weight of the characters are used to create visual tension in the images. Elements of this approach can also be seen in *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*, however, while in *Little Red Cap* I chiefly used geometric shapes, more abstract backgrounds were incorporated in *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*. Elements of both of these approaches

were successful. In *Little Red Cap*, there is a clean, graphic quality to the marks; the visual effect is reliant on shape, scale and positioning.

In a study of children's visual literacy, Lori Ann Prior *et al* examined ways in which children interpret visuals to draw character inferences. They found that:

... they [the children] were particularly attentive to pictorial story content, such as character actions, facial expressions, and body posture, and the way in which characters related to one another (Prior, Willson and Martinez, 2012)

This emphasis on pictorial story content is perhaps natural in the development of an understanding of reading images and words together within a picturebook, yet the possibilities for artistically complex and subtle nuances in how the elements identified by Prior *et al* might contribute to the depiction of a character are not examined in depth in this paper. Nikolajeva (2012) takes a more in-depth approach to this topic, investigating the relationship between words and pictures in identifying emotions and reading the characters' minds in a picturebook.

By omitting facial expression in *Sammy the Fish* and minimalizing character actions in the narrative, concentration could be focused on character positioning, and how the characters related to one another as a way to attempt to capture a sense of personality for Sammy.

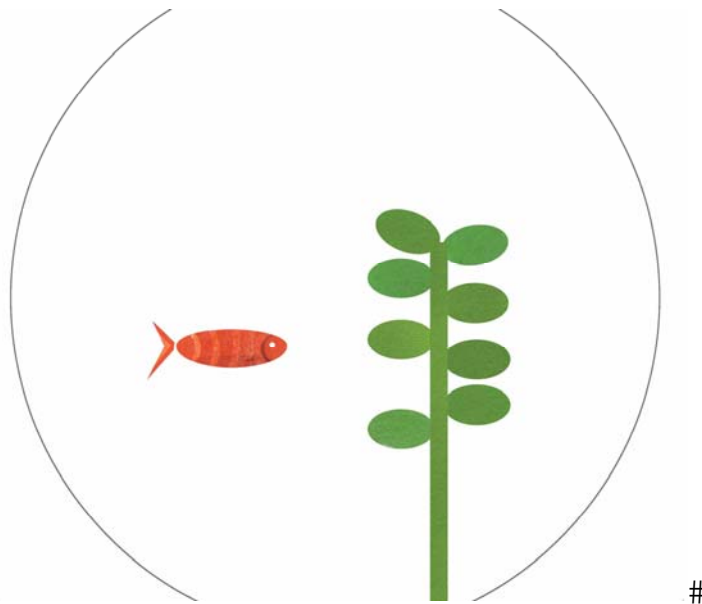


Figure 13 Sammy in his bowl

The use of minimal imagery within this book resulted in challenges in creating a pictorial narrative. The repetitive imagery became monotonous in a way that was unsustainable over a number of double page spreads. The inclusion of a written textual element offered a

solution to this. The text complements the imagery to offer an additional layer to the visually duplicative elements of the book. In terms of narrative, Werner Wolf suggests that resorting to the written word can be used as a way of compensating for the absence of spoken language in pictorial representations (Wolf, 2004:100). In this instance, the role of the text was less a compensation for the absence of spoken language than a way of reinforcing the images. For example, in the text, Sammy loves exploring. He likes to swim around and around. He likes looking at the plants he finds and blowing bubbles. An ironic reading to this can be seen in the counterpoint of the images, which show Sammy swimming around in circles in his fishbowl, exploring the same space and the same plant over and over again. On most double-page spreads, the edges of the bowl are also shown, but there are a few close-up spreads where it occurs off the edge of the page. However, each page contains the same images of Sammy and the plant.

### **The formal arrangement of shapes on the page**

In these images, Sammy's positioning on the page became an essential part of the book design. To reinforce the idea that he is contained within a bowl, his whole body is shown in each instance; the bowl and the edges of the pages combine as representations of enclosure. Literature on how characters are positioned on the page in children's picturebooks suggests that a left-to-right progression of a character across the page is not uncommon, e.g. Nodelman, 1990:22. As in *Sammy the Fish* there is little else on the page beyond Sammy and a plant, a steady left-to-right progression throughout the book was visually uninteresting. In relation to character positioning, Nodelman describes the positioning of characters on the right-hand page as typically depicting or suggesting movement. Joseph Schwarcz suggests that a character's movement towards the left of a page could be interpreted as a sign of the character's introversion or withdrawal (Schwarcz, 1982). However, given the textual context of the story, which describes Sammy swimming around and around in his bowl, these possible readings of the image are not applicable. To capture the sense of Sammy swimming in circles around his bowl, I placed Sammy facing both left and right on both pages. Sammy's positioning on the left and right hand pages on subsequent double page spreads mirrors the textual description of him swimming around.

While constructed with a series of geometric shapes, Sammy is asymmetrical. The curve of his belly is longer than that of his back and his tail is a different length at the top compared to the bottom. Arnheim has observed that asymmetry is not uncommon in images, where

it is used as a counterbalance, to create harmony (Arnheim, 1974:22). He suggests that a left-to-right reading of an image can result in an image losing its meaning if presented as a mirror image, a point he exemplifies using a sketch of Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* (Arnheim, 1974:34). However, for Sammy to swim around in circles, I needed an image that would work visually if presented as a mirror image. In order to do this, Sammy's asymmetry is based around the horizontal x-axis. If I turn the image upside down (see below), it will appear discordant.



Figure 14 Sammy inverted

To an extent this discord is due to the visual information, such as the stripes and shading on the body of the fish, no longer matching in a predictable manner. If I remove this information and present the shape of the fish as a silhouette, the image becomes less discordant, but the impression of the fish's character changes. The image on the right appears more subdued with its eye placed closer to the bottom of the image.



Figure 15 Silhouette of Sammy

## Angles

Changing the angle at which an object is placed can create a very different impression of the image. Molly Bang describes how triangles placed at an angle can create an imposing, dynamic image when compared to how they appear when they are placed upright (2001:46-47). In *Sammy the Fish*, angles are used as a way of capturing a sense of Sammy's mood as he swims around. For example, in the double page spread shown below (Figure 16), Sammy is looking at a plant (the text describes how he likes looking at the plants he finds when he is exploring). This spread shows pages 13 and 14 of the book: it features the first time Sammy is not placed parallel to the bottom of the page. By angling his body towards the plant, an impression of his curiosity is formed. The darker shading on the underside of Sammy's belly lines up with the darker shading on the underside of the leaf,

creating a gentle visual angle, shown by the blue arrow in Figure 16, down towards the bottom right hand corner of the page, and inviting a page turn.

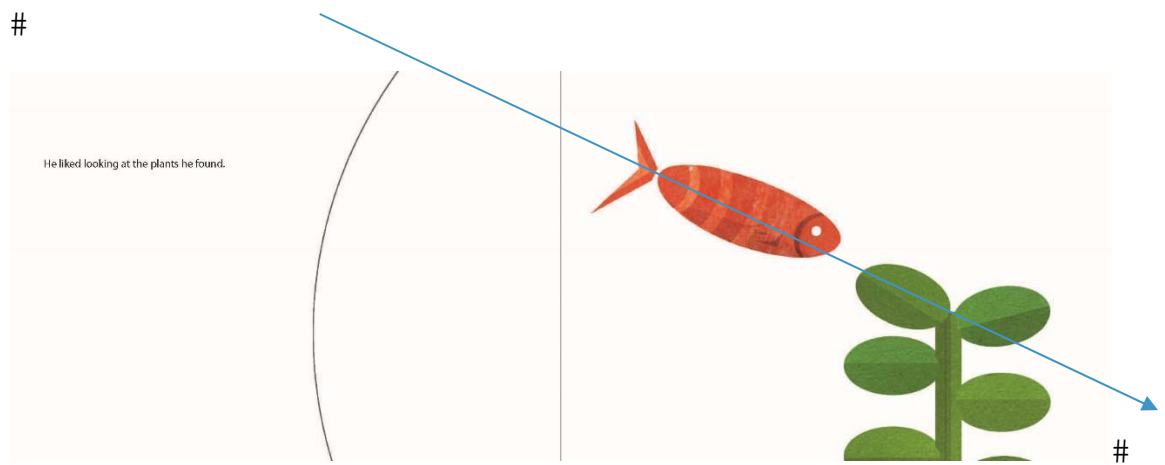


Figure 16 Sammy looking at a plant

In *Blue Book*, discussed in chapter 2, I explored the use of the visual weight and positioning on the page of geometric shapes to guide progression through the book and influence page turning. There are similarities between the formal arrangement of shapes and their positioning on the page in *Blue Book* and the disposition of objects in *Sammy the Fish*, although as *Blue Book* has no direct narrative, the arrangement of shapes on the page in *Sammy the Fish* has the potential for different interpretative possibilities. Sammy's character is linked to his environment. I was interested in exploring the extent to which a sense of character could be created for Sammy based purely on how he is positioned on the page. In order to do this, I introduced a second character, Sammi, so that Sammy could interact with another character as well as with his environment. For example, reverting to the images shown above of the silhouette of Sammy and an inverted image, there are two fish shown. While they were initially positioned side-by-side for the purposes of comparison, where they are both positioned on the same line, a relationship between the two shapes is implied.



Figure 17 Implied relationship

This relationship will change depending on the disposition of the shapes on the page, for example, if they are placed closer together.

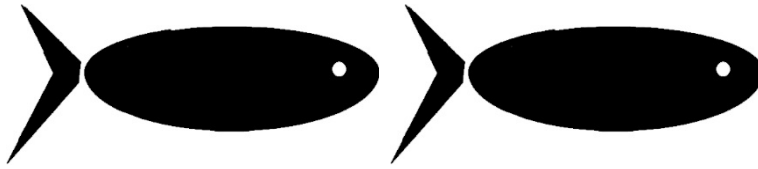


Figure 18 Spatial relationship

Or facing one another.

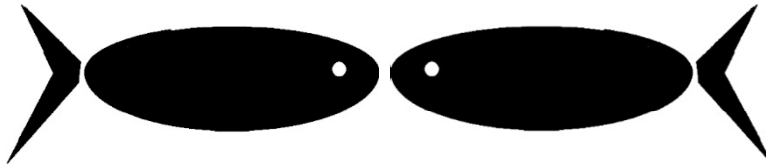


Figure 19 More direct interaction

Or if the scale between them changes.

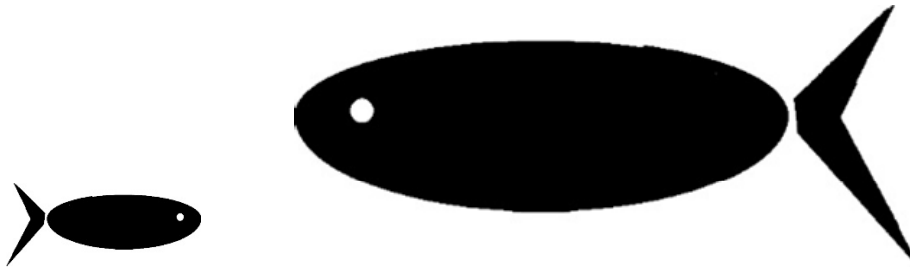


Figure 20 Scale

In chapter 2, the narrative qualities of Malevich's *Red Square*, *Black Square* are mentioned. In W.J.T. Mitchell's quote, he explores symbolic as well as emotive readings for the image, and the relationship the squares have to one another (Mitchell 1989:359). This sense of narrative is heightened when the 'character' takes a more tangible form, for example a fish instead of a square.

## Character interaction

In *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* there is a clear protagonist and antagonist. As one might expect in a fairy tale, the story is based on a dramatic encounter in which good wins over evil. Visual depictions of the characters and their environments reflect this, so that the Wolf, for example, is typically depicted on bleak, black and white backgrounds, while areas of colour appear in the idyllic, sylvanian scenes of the young kids.

*Sammy the Fish* presents a whimsical contrast to *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*. When he is on his own, the text and images describe how Sammy swims around, explores, looks

at plants and blows bubbles. When Sammi is introduced they swim around, look at plants and blow bubbles together. The dynamic of their relationship is based on a growing sense of togetherness; this is largely captured in how they are positioned on the page in relation to one another and where they are placed across the spreads. Visually, Sammi is slightly smaller than Sammy, but otherwise she is the same. Following the introduction of Sammi (Figure 21) to the fishbowl, the angles at which Sammy and Sammi are positioned becomes important in visually describing the dynamics of their relationship.

When Sammi is introduced (Figure 21), she is placed in the middle of the left hand page, parallel to the bottom edge. A glimpse of a net at the top of the page suggests where she has come from. In earlier versions of this image, I placed Sammi peeking out from behind the plant; however, the overlapping shapes were visually distracting and it suggested a shyness to the character which was not the effect I wanted to create. This impression was lessened by positioning Sammi above the plant, rather than behind it, but she is still closely framed between the edge of the bowl and the leaves of the plant, offering a visual sense of security for the character (Moebius, 1994); she seems to be seeking comfort from an enclosed space in her new environment, although she is not totally hidden. Sammy is positioned on the opposite page, his tail quite close to the edge of the bowl, creating a wide distance between the two fish. Visually, this impression is extenuated by the gutter of the double page spread; there is one fish per page. They are nearly as far apart as the bowl will allow, though Sammy is placed slightly further towards the centre of the bowl than Sammi. This is his fish bowl and he is depicted as more confident in his environment. Sammy is angled downwards towards Sammi, creating a dynamic between the two characters. By facing towards Sammi, Sammy looks curious, however by placing him on the top right hand page, pointing towards the lower left contradicts the left-to-right flow of the page, forcing a pause on this spread. The textual narrative on the page reinforces this point, with a sentence closure ‘... he saw another fish!’. The ellipsis at the start of the text on this page leads back to the beginning of a sentence on the previous spread: ‘One day as Sammy was swimming around...’. The use of broken sentences in a picturebook as a page-turning device is discussed by Knowles & Malmkjaer (1995), who describe Beatrix Potter's use of semi-colons at the end of a page to create a sense of drama unfolding, with the sentence concluding on the following double page spread.

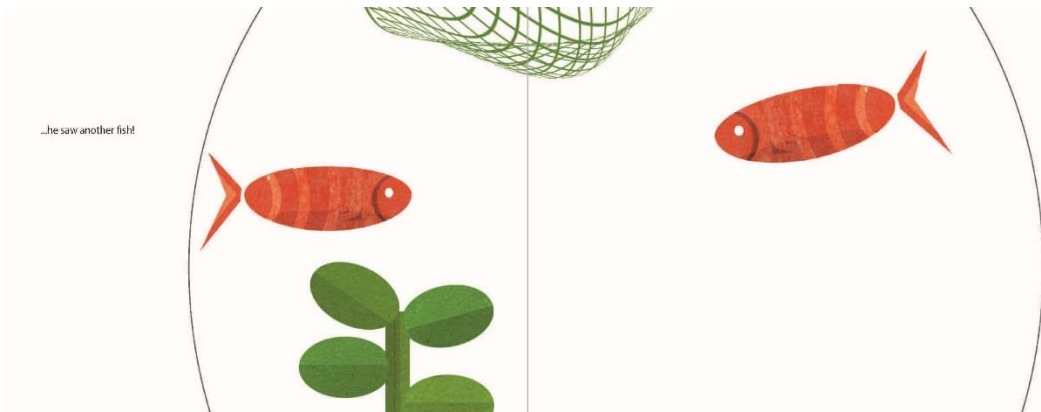


Figure 21 Sammy meets Sammi

The dynamic of how Sammy and Sammi interact with one another continues over the subsequent double page spreads.

The double-page spread following Sammi's introduction (Figure 22) moves the characters closer to one another, however the gutter of the book still creates an impression of distance between the two characters. Each fish is framed by other objects, the plant on the left-hand side of Sammi and the edge of the bowl on the right of Sammi. They are as far apart as their environment will allow, yet where Sammi has moved in front of the plant, they are physically closer than on the previous spread. The characters are both slightly angled towards one another, suggesting an awareness of each other and an impression of curiosity. In contrast to the previous double page spread, the overall movement on the page reverts to a left-to-right reading. The line of the leaf on the plant and the positioning of the two fish creates a slight gradient slope towards the lower right hand corner of the page (as shown by the blue arrow in Figure 22). This spread introduces a more direct interaction of the characters. The text reinforces this by introducing Sammi by name, stating: 'She was called Sammi too'.

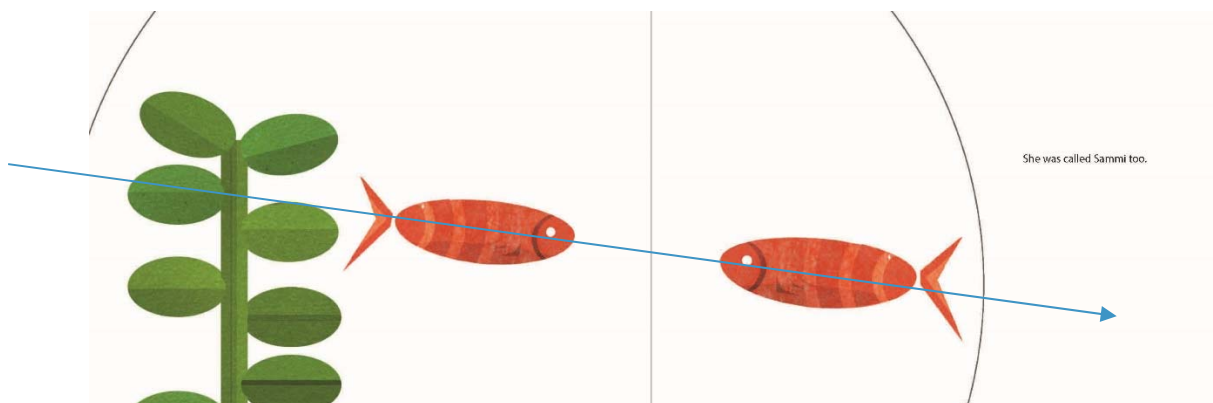


Figure 22 Sammy and Sammi



Over the next double page spreads Sammy and Sammi move closer together, both in their physical positioning on the page and emotionally. While they are often angled towards an object, such as the plant or the edge of the bowl, they are also always angled slightly towards one another. The physical positioning of the fish in relation to one another creates a sense of growing closeness and togetherness, culminating in the image of them blowing bubbles together. In this double page spread, a single cloud of bubbles collects above the two fish.

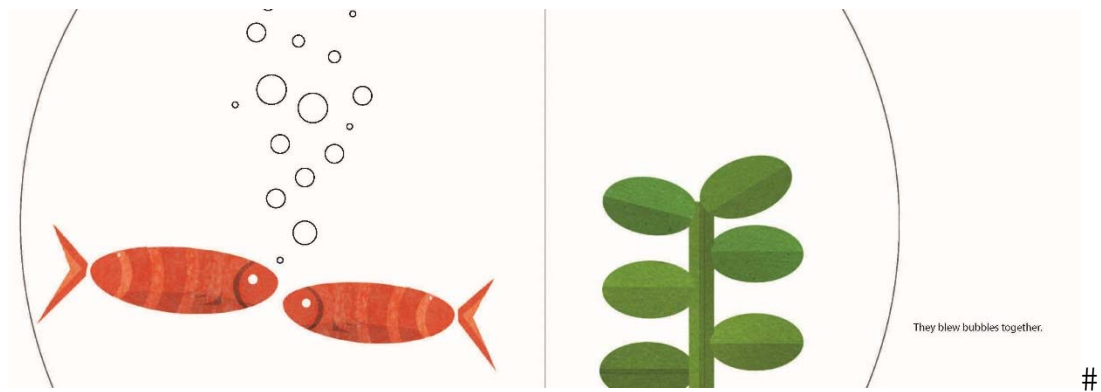


Figure 23 Blowing bubbles together

In an earlier version of this image, I spread the fish across both sides of the double page, with a single cloud of bubbles forming above them along the gutter of the page. On a flat surface, such as when viewed on screen, this provided a more balanced image than when both fish were positioned on one side of the page. However, when printed out and put in a mock-up book, the gutter of the page created too much physical distance between the characters to capture the sense of coming together. The cloud of bubbles was lost in the margin and the gutter of the book, which was visually distracting in a graphically simple double page spread. This example demonstrates how the physical form of the book can change how an image is viewed and shows how an awareness of the book form can be used to manipulate the effect of the image on visual storytelling. The images are positioned to work within the book; there is an awareness of the form, which acts as a complementary narrative device.

### Conscious awareness of the book form

In an appraisal of *Sammy the Fish* as a finished book, the physical form of the book does not necessarily appear at the forefront. In my outline of the relationship between artists' books and children's picturebooks in the introduction, I refer to the materiality of Russian avant-garde artists' books. In *Sammy the Fish*, the materiality and the physical form of the

book are quite neutral; it is digitally printed on white paper and bound in an A5 landscape format. Yet the way the images are placed within the book is highly relevant to the overall design of the book. If we take Barbara Bader's definition of a picturebook as

... total design ... As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page.' (Bader, 1976:1)

the physical qualities of the book format become apparent. Opening one double page spread hides the previous and subsequent spreads. At any one time, the reader is able to view only a fraction of the whole book; while this might sound self-evident, it is significant in terms of book design and the associated implications for page turning devices. There are spreads in *Sammy the Fish* where the disposition of objects on the page has been consciously used as a way of influencing page turning. As the story of Sammy swimming around in his bowl suggests a circular motion, the visual left-to-right linear devices I used in this book were limited to a few double page spreads; however, a linear progression through the book was maintained by means of the text. Broken sentences split in two parts over two subsequent double page spreads created a textual alternative to a visual page turning device. Visually, I emphasised the relationship between the left and right hand pages and used the gutter of the book as a way of separating or bringing images closer together. In the bound book, these distinctions reinforce the three dimensional nature of the book, with left and right hand pages divided at the spine, yet facing one another across the gutter of the book. These kind of considerations underline the subtleties of book design and the importance of conscious awareness of the book form when creating a book.



Figure 24 *Prohibited Vehicles*

In *Prohibited Vehicles*, an artist's book I made prior to starting this project, the images have visual similarities; they are from the same area in London so are linked together geographically as well as stylistically. The way I used the pages in this book was as containers for the images; the dynamics of how one image flows into another does not feature. To an extent, comparing this book to *Sammy the Fish* is reductive as the contents of the two books are very different, but with respect to my visual practice, a comparison demonstrates that how I view and work with the book form has changed and developed since I started to explore the picturebook form. Using minimal imagery in *Sammy the Fish* created a restrictive set of tools to work with, which forced me to develop a greater understanding of the subtleties and nuances of the physical form of the book.

## Narrative and audience

Concurring with Perry Nodelman's assertion that the images in a picturebook contribute information to a narrative (Nodelman, 1990:viii), I have discussed the storytelling and narrative elements of the picturebook with reference to the work I made while exploring the picturebook form. In terms of narrative, *Sammy the Fish* moves away from my earlier work in that the story is one which I devised myself, whereas *Little Red Cap* and *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* are both based on the fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm.

As a story, Sammy could either be taken as a whimsical tale of friendship and happiness, or read ironically; Sammy does not notice the boundaries that contain him and is unaware of the limited scope of his existence. In an earlier version, the final spread of the book was wordless. It showed Sammy and Sammi positioned closely together next to the plant. This image was close up, so that the bowl was not visible. In the final version of the book a sentence 'Life was good' was added to this page. In terms of dual audience, this inclusion is significant as it enforces the ironic reading of the book, of which the implied reader is an adult. However, Sammy's satisfaction with his existence allows the book to be read as a whimsical and sweet story without being overly sentimental. It is possible to empathise with Sammy's pleasure in the details of his life, while disregarding elements over which he has no control. The ability for the reader / viewer to project emotions onto Sammy and, to an extent, relate to him, suggests the possibilities of using a minimal visual language to represent a character and his emotions implicitly through his placement on the page.

## Conclusion

*Sammy the Fish* is significant in terms of my progression from artist's book to children's picturebook in that it shows development in both the pictorial depictions and the use of the book form in my work. In the introduction of this thesis, I explored some common areas between artists' books and picturebooks, identifying broad common criteria that include artistic freedom and experimentation and an active engagement with the book form, while retaining narrative as a focal point. While the use of anthropomorphism and the depiction of a simple tale of developing friendship are not uncommon themes in picturebooks, in *Sammy the Fish* my chosen visual vocabulary of minimal, geometric shapes is not compromised. Yet by exploring ways in which to utilise the visual design of the book through the placing of characters on the page, a narrative is constructed which contains scope for the reader / viewer to relate to, or empathise with, the protagonist. The pictorial use of geometric shapes in my earlier work became more pronounced in *Sammy the Fish*. Influence from picturebook design changed my awareness of the book form; the narrative suggested possibilities of exploring the subtleties and nuances of book design which are predominant in discussions of picturebooks. The next chapter will draw conclusions on the progression of my work over a number of books in the course of my investigation of picturebook design.

# Conclusion

The aim of this research was to create new insights into picturebooks from a practitioner's perspective. Originating in my background in book art, the insights I brought to this project were focused primarily on the form of the book and how content and form can be integrated. Through my exploration of a number of narratives, different approaches to image making and the use of the book form became apparent. The purpose of this research was not to provide a definitive description of either a picturebook or an artist's book or to irrevocably classify a book as belonging to either one category or the other, but rather to explore common ground around the form of the book across both artists' books and children's picturebooks. There is a vast amount of work that could be classified as artist's books and a similarly immense body of work that could be considered picturebooks. As such there is much scope for cross-fertilisation, both in terms of creative practice and also in relation to theoretical analyses that compare these two types of books. An exploration of areas in which one may influence the other can give rise to both new insights and practical outcomes. Below, I will summarize my conclusions arising from my practice-based work and outline the wider significance and implications of this research.

## Reflective summary

Based on the practice-based work discussed here, I have attempted to map my progression from creating artist's books such as *Blue Book* and *50 Full Stops* through to more explicit uses of the picturebook form, as seen in *Sammy the Fish*. In terms of creating a crossover artist's book and children's picturebook *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* is perhaps the most overt example in my work of the blurring of boundaries between an artist's book and a picturebook. This is partly due to the fact that it was created at a point between making two quite different pieces of work, one a typographical experiment and the other a pictorial one. *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* is experimental in its approach. The relationship between the narrative and the book form in this piece was explored over a number of versions of the book. The use of a fairy tale offered considerable freedom over the visual depiction of the narrative but created tensions between the visual and textual depictions on the page. My decision to remove the textual elements placed more emphasis on the role of the images in the book. Without text, the images needed to be more figurative to enable the narrative to flow. This resulted in a key moment in my progression,

from using the geometric imagery of typefaces to taking a more pictorial approach in the visual representations of characters. In my early attempts at creating imagery for a picturebook, for example, the sketch of the blue mice (page 46), the impression created was somewhat disingenuous; the attempts at anthropomorphism produced an over-sentimental effect. By using stencils in *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*, I captured a sense of shape that was sympathetic to my practice, while taking a loosely figurative approach. The use of schematic shapes which contain figurative elements was further developed in *Sammy the Fish*, where through computer manipulation my stencils became more geometric and precise. Changing and developing the depictions of the characters and their environment in both *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids* and *Sammy the Fish* heightened my awareness of how they were positioned within the book, affecting the way the book form was used to complement the narrative.

As a book artist, I had not anticipated my use of the book form to present significant creative challenges. While I regularly make mock-up books as part of my practice, it is usually possible to envisage fairly accurately how the images will work on the page. However, in exploring the picturebook form, I imposed a more direct story than I would usually work with and new possibilities of ways to use the book form emerged. For example, in *Sammy the Fish*, the gutter of the book significantly changed how the images were read. While the balance of images had worked on my original layouts, the spacing across a double page spread changed the relationship of the characters based on how they were positioned in relation to one another. In *Sammy the Fish*, research into picturebooks resulted in a greater awareness of the subtleties and nuances of how images can sit on a page, and thus in a change in how I made a book. In terms of my practice, *Sammy the Fish* is significant as in it I consciously used a knowledge of the book form and explored the narrative qualities that I identified in my literature review of the topic: character, environment, spatial and temporal sense and depictions of action. While there are other examples of books I have made that encapsulate these narrative qualities, *Sammy the Fish*, through its use of geometric shapes, formally arranged in a minimal layout also reflects my practice in an authentic manner; the arrangement of Sammy, Sammi and the plant on the page (see pages 89 and 90), for example, contains echoes of my artist's books *Blue Book* and *50 Full Stops*.

The parameters of this project are defined by my visual practice, presented here in a selection of books that span both artists' books and picturebooks. As a practitioner, my

exploration of a picturebook from a book artist's perspective led to an increased appreciation of the scope of the book form. My depictions of narrative became more directly pictorial, with the result that my use of the book form took on greater subtlety. While the work discussed here is an edited selection, efforts were made to discuss the thought processes, experimentation and rejected versions that contributed to the development of making a book, offering insights into the processes of creating and interpreting practical work.

The thoughts presented here are informed by personal creative practice, however, more generalised conclusions may be drawn. The wider implications will be outlined below in relation to three areas: practitioners and theorists who work with picturebooks, book artists and the publishing industry.

## **Implications**

As outlined in Chapter 2, one challenge of practice-based research is a perceived gap between creation and interpretation. Chris Rust's findings for the AHRC report on practice-based research, for example, highlight tensions between the discourse of the practitioner and the theorist. While there is a significant body of literature on children's picturebooks, within an academic context, the majority of these texts focus on the finished picturebook. Academic work by illustrators and artists is currently underrepresented in this field. I have attempted to explore this gap by applying the discourse of the theorist to the creative process. Using a combination of semiotic interpretations of picturebooks and narrative theory offered a way to discuss the thought processes behind the creation of images in a tangible manner: the discourse of the theorist suggested ways in which the tacit knowledge of the maker could become explicit. The findings from this approach are relevant to both practitioners and theorists working with picturebooks. This research aims to build on existing literature to offer insights from a picturebook maker's perspective into the often undisclosed thought processes underlying the work. For practitioners, it demonstrates the possibilities of taking an interdisciplinary approach to practice-based research in picturebooks and offers a tangible framework to explore and discuss practical work.

Regarding artists' books, the theoretical body of literature in this area is quite small. As outlined in the introduction, it has been suggested that there is a perceived gap in the theoretical underpinnings of the literature. This thesis demonstrates ways, relevant to both

practitioners and theorists, in which taking an interdisciplinary approach can be used to support discussions about artists' books.

As described in the introduction, commentaries on current trends in the publishing industry are to an extent speculative as developments in publishing are fast moving, causing rapid change in the industry. Yet it is possible to outline tentatively an increased preoccupation with form and content, leading to a greater desire to experiment with the physical form of the book in a commercial as well as a fine art context. This makes the physical qualities of a book highly relevant to the current publishing market. In the area of artists' books, the form of the book is an integral part of the artwork. By drawing on this element of artists' books and applying it to children's picturebooks, an author can begin to develop a different approach to the physical form of a book. There are a growing number of publishing houses which produce books that cannot be clearly classified as either an artist's book or a children's picturebook, for example, Corraini Edizione (Italy), MeMo books (France), Pato Logico (Portugal), Les Trois Ourses (France), One Stroke (Japan) and Some Books (Korea). While these books represent a small selection of picturebooks, it can be argued that the boundaries between the picturebook and the artist's book are becoming increasingly blurred. Given this background, research which explore the boundaries of the book and the relationship between form and content is highly relevant.

## **Further research**

While there are a number of projects that could follow on from this research, there are two main areas which have potential for development: a wider contextualisation of the relationship between artists' books and children's picturebooks with reference to the work of other practitioners and theorists, and additional exploration of the book form using digital technology, such as e-books, as well as print.

While I have outlined the relationship between artists' books and children's picturebooks in this thesis, due to space constraints I have not explored the wider historical context. As outlined in the literature review, the avant-garde in children's literature is a growing area of interest, with books such as *Children's Literature and the Avant-Garde* (Druker and Kümmerling-Meibauer, in press) due to be published shortly. In the introduction and Chapter 2, I mention the relationship between artists' books and Russian Constructivist picturebooks. This could be a fruitful area of further research that would provide a historical context and resulting insights. Initial archive work into the Horton Collection of



Russian picturebooks at the National Art Library in the V&A has been undertaken, and it is intended also to examine the extensive collection of Dadaist artists' books at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.

In relation to new practical work, the relevance of the physical book in the publishing industry, particularly with regard to picturebooks, has been mentioned. However, digital publishing remains an important part of the publishing industry. While the question of print *or* digital has become somewhat redundant in the past few years, the role of print *and* digital remains significant. The next stage of this project takes inspiration from *Pangur bán*<sup>1</sup>, an anonymous poem by a ninth-century Irish monk, who compares the process of writing to his cat, Pangur, hunting. Taking a reflective and playful approach, this project will consist of a book and a digital counterpart that reflects on the process of writing and drawing. The protagonist, Pangur the cat, will hunt and pounce on words and images to capture them for his book. This project is in stages of early development at the moment; initial plans involve an app, website or interactive e-book as well as a physical book.

The aim of this research was to create new insights into picturebooks from a practitioner's perspective, and it succeeded in doing this. Its contribution to knowledge arises from the conceptualisation of a practice-based approach to the process of making picturebooks, outlined within a theoretical framework. The research reflects the current fluid state of development in the publishing industry and offers considerable possibilities for further development.

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<sup>1</sup> For an English translation see <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poem/177882> [accessed June 2015]

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# Appendix: Research outputs

## Peer-reviewed publications

Little, L., [in print]. Shaping pictures: picturebook narrative from an illustrator's perspective. In: G. Lieber and B. Uhlig, eds., *Narration - Transdisziplinäre Wege zur Kunstdidaktik*. Munich: Kopaed.

Little, L., 2013. Who's afraid of the big bad wolf: Visual design of characters in a picturebook from the perspective of an illustrator. In: *Confia International Conference in Illustration and Animation Proceedings*. Porto, pp.135–146.

## Collections

Artist's books I made during this project have been acquired by the following collections:

- Tate Britain
- Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art
- BALTIC Archive, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art
- Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collection
- Vancouver Library Art Book Archive, Canada
- Edition Lidu art books collection, Czech Republic
- Limerick School of Art and Design, Ireland

## Conferences and panel discussion

- 10.2014    Project manager and speaker, *Pen to Page: making and creating books*, panel discussion held during the Limerick International Publishers' Salon, Ireland
- 09.2014    *Words as Pictures: a practice-based investigation on the use of typography in children's picturebooks*, Words and Pictures conference, Poland
- 07.2014    *Pen & Ink: examining narrative in a picturebook from the perspective of an illustrator*, (invited workshop) Pictures and Narrative conference, Switzerland
- 11.2013    *Who's afraid of the big bad wolf? Depictions of characters in a picturebook from the perspective of the illustrator*, Confia conference, Portugal

- 11.2013 *Visual pacing of narrative in a children's picturebooks*, Myth, Fantasy and Fairy Tales conference, Cambridge
- 06.2013 *Formalist approaches to picturebook structures from a practice-based perspective*, Anglia Ruskin University research student conference

## Exhibitions

- 10.2014 Limerick International Publishers' Salon, Ireland
- 05.2014 Turn the Page, artists' book fair, Norwich
- 03.2014 PAGES: Leeds International Artists' Book Fair
- 12.2013 Volume: Birmingham's Art, Book & Print Fair
- 11.2013 Dublin Artists' Book Fair, Ireland
- 10.2013 Manchester Artists' Book Fair, Manchester
- 10.2013 Tabook - Festival of Independent Publishers, Czech Republic
- 10.2013 Vancouver Art Book Fair, Canada
- 10.2013 Sheffield International Artists' Book Prize, Sheffield
- 06.2013 BALTIC Artists' Book Fair, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Newcastle
- 02.2013 Limerick International Publisher's Salon, Ireland

## Artist's books

- Little, L., 2015. *Little Red Cap*. London: Pink Parrot Press.
- Little, L., 2013. *This is an Artist's Book*. London: Pink Parrot Press.
- Little, L., 2013. *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*. London: Pink Parrot Press.
- Little, L., 2013. *Sammy the Fish*. London: Pink Parrot Press.
- Little, L., 2013. *Incidental ink*. London: Pink Parrot Press.
- Little, L., 2013. *Chance*. London: Pink Parrot Press.
- Little, L., 2012. *Magnus the Cat*. London: Pink Parrot Press.
- Little, L., 2012. *Cats*. London.
- Little, L., 2011. *I am Hungry*. London.
- Little, L., 2011. *Fifty full stops*. London.
- Little, L., 2011. *Circle ABC*. London.
- Little, L., 2010. *Blue Book*. London.