ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC PICTUREBOOK: A PRACTICE-BASED INVESTIGATION INTO THE EXPRESSIVE POTENTIAL OF THE FORM

JOO HONG LOW

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ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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My research aims to: advance the understanding of Singaporean society through the creation of autoethnographic picturebooks; and investigate the expressive potential of the picturebook form for autoethnographic inquiry. Current research studies on Singaporean society are almost exclusively conducted by social scientists; my arts-based research could supplement these studies with a more nuanced understanding of the Singaporean way of life and thinking.

Basing my inquiry in the literature of arts-based research, I harnessed the evocative power of the arts (i.e. the picturebook) to express contents that are visceral, non-discursive and intuitive. I created four original picturebooks—*Lemonade Sky*, *The Second-Hand Vespa*, *Random Luck*, and *Mr Goodchild*—for my study. Each book embodies a distinct aspect of the reflection on my lived experience and Singaporean society.

Practice-based research provides unique opportunities to discover the expressive potential of the art form. The dynamic relationship between thinking and making is revealed through the examination of works from other artists and scholars, and experimentation with various art-making processes in the studio. Contrary to conventional belief, creative ideas are not developed solely through cognitive activities; they are also developed through the act of

making. Visuals from exploratory work such as preliminary studies and experimental sketches are instrumental in shaping creative ideas. Artists do not just conjure up ideas in their minds and turn them into an art form, but rather express their ideas through the practical process of making the art form.

My study demonstrates that the picturebook form, which is often associated with entertainment commodities for children, has the potential to carry content of social significance in artful and poetic ways through its dual semiotic mode of visual and verbal texts. I hope it could offer other arts-based researchers an alternative and refreshing way to conduct their inquiry and express the outcomes of their studies.

Key words: arts-based research, autoethnograhpy, picturebook, practice-based research.

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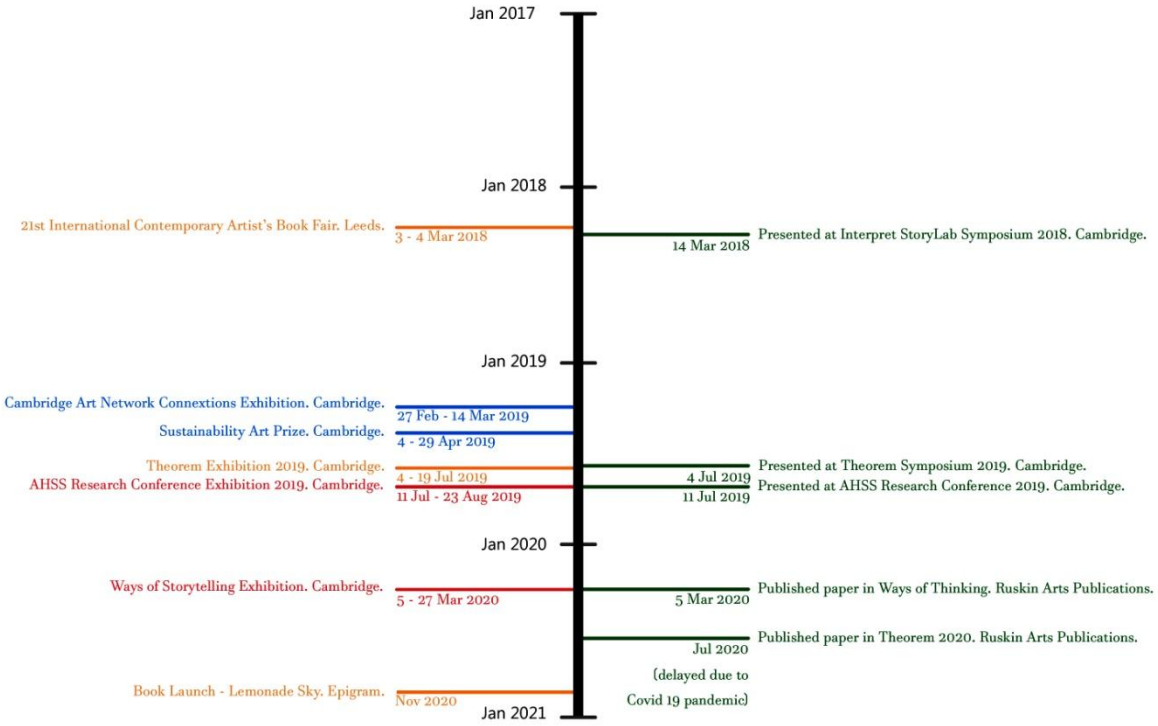
Glossary of Terms

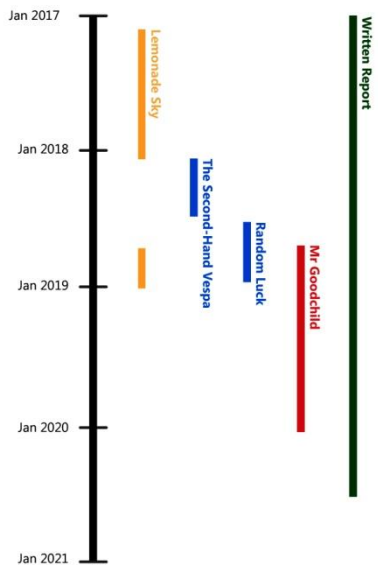
Autoethnography	A type of qualitative research in which researchers use the reflection of their personal lived experience as data for the writing of autobiographical stories that have wider cultural, political, and social significance.
Arts-Based Research	A type of research in which the creation of expressive artworks is both the primary method of inquiry and, at least to some extent, the final outcome of the research.
Graphic narrative	A genre of narrative that uses visual and verbal texts, often collaboratively, to convey meaning (with the exception of the wordless graphic narrative). It includes, but is not limited to, narrative forms such as comics, graphic novels, and picturebooks.
Mise-en-scène	An expression used in theatre and film settings to describe the artful arrangement of the scenery, backgrounds, props, and other such components that contribute evoking the themes of the production.
Narrative-of-viewpoint	A term I coined to describe a method of narration with visual and verbal texts focused on conveying different aspects of a nuanced emotion, instead of advancing the narrative in a progressive timeline.
Picturebook	A compound word (for 'picture book') commonly used in academic writings that reflects "the compound nature of the artefact itself" (Lewis, 2001, p.xiv).
Picturebook-poem	A term I coined to describe a kind of poetry written in the picturebook idiom that uses visual and verbal texts, double-page spread and page-turning as its main tool to express meaning.

Chronology of Events

Outreach Programmes



Work Schedule



Chapter 1 – Introduction

The picturebook is widely regarded as a product for children's consumption. Its use as a medium of choice for sophisticated artistic expression is scarce when compared to other types of art form such as painting, poetry, and film. Scholarly studies of the picturebook, especially by practitioners who use art-making as a method of inquiry, tend to focus more on its practice (such as syntax, format, and genre) than its content. However, in recent years, the growing number of published picturebooks as an expressive art form for both children and adults has blurred the line between the picturebook as a commercial product for children and an art form.

This thesis presents findings that emerged from reflexive, exploratory, and creative activities in the art studio, which led to the production of four original autoethnographic picturebooks. Through the use of art practice (creation of picturebooks) framed within the philosophies of arts-based research (ABR) and autoethnography, this thesis aims to develop further understanding of the picturebook as an art form for expressing content with social and cultural significance.

Framing the picturebook within the philosophies of ABR and autoethnography brings its potential as an expressive art form under close scrutiny. This creates an authentic platform from which to further the understanding of the relationships between ABR, autoethnography and the picturebook; it also opens up new possibilities for the use of the picturebook as a

form of artistic expression for cognitive content beyond that of children's material. The creation of multiple autoethnographic picturebooks through practical studio work can provide insights in two distinct but related ways: (1) it contributes to the understanding of the wider social and cultural context through the original art contents created; (2) it allows the emergence of creative methods that could further the understanding of the picturebook as an art practice.

1.1 Artwork and Practice

My research journey has shown me that an inquiry method based on the act of art-making would almost inevitably involve both the artwork and the art practice; the two are inseparable, just as content and form are inseparable in art.

My thesis submission contains two parts: a body of creative work and this written report. Both parts were done concurrently through the course of the inquiry. Creating picturebooks and writing the report at the same time could be difficult and disruptive as they require different frames of mind. However, they could also create a virtuous circle where critical reflection could serve to inform practice and vice-versa. This is the great benefit of having a dual practitioner-researcher role; theory and practice become two intricately entwined strains, coming together to further the understanding of the human world.

The body of creative work is the 'artwork' of practice-based research and it is an important outcome of my research. It comprises four autoethnographic picturebooks: *Lemonade Sky*,

The Second-Hand Vespa, *Random Luck*, and *Mr Goodchild*. Each picturebook embeds an aspect of my autoethnography that is based on my lived experience as a Singaporean; each book invites the readers to co-participate in the reflection and interpretation of specific issues about Singaporean society.

Another outcome of my research is documented in this written report. Using art-making as a process of inquiry enables me to study the various phenomena in the art studio critically. Examining the thought processes, preparatory sketches, and creative solutions directly from the practitioner's perspective could lead to insights that might otherwise be hidden from an outsider. The search for creative solutions could drive artists out of their comfort zone, push them to challenge existing conventions, and steer them to new creative possibilities. Through solving the various creative challenges encountered during the art-making process, I was able to gain a better understanding of picturebook practice, and deepen my knowledge of the picturebook as an expressive art form. By documenting my critical reflections in the written report, I hope to share insights about picturebook practice that could benefit future researchers and picturebook-makers.

1.2 Contribution to Knowledge

The study of Singaporean society in academia is currently dominated by social scientists. ABR on Singaporean society is sparse and to the best of my knowledge, no such research has been done in the picturebook form. Therefore, this thesis could be the first of its kind where Singapore's socio-cultural issues are framed within the discourse of ABR and autoethnography, and expressed through the picturebook form.

In this regard, my research aims to make a contribution to knowledge by achieving the following:

(1) produce original autoethnographic contents in the picturebook form which could help readers gain a more nuanced understanding of Singaporean society;
(2) develop a framework for the creation of autoethnographic picturebooks; and
(3) develop a better understanding of the creative practice of the picturebook form for autoethnographic study through practical hands-on studio work.

1.3 Outlines of the Written Report

This written report consists of eight chapters, including this introduction. Chapter 2 provides a synopsis of the historical context and philosophies of ABR and autoethnography. It outlines the unique strengths of ABR as a method of inquiry and investigates its potential relationship with autoethnography.

Chapter 3 examines the picturebook as an expressive art form and takes a close-up look at how it functions as a graphic narrative idiom. Emphasis is given to three of its characteristics, i.e., visual and verbal texts, double-page spread, and page-turning.

Chapter 4 introduces the Framework of the Autoethnographic Picturebook Artist-Researcher which I developed based on Frayling's (1993) three types of art research and Cross's (1999)

three sources of design research. This framework provides an overview of my inquiry method and could serve as a guide for other autoethnographers, ABR researchers, and picturebook-makers.

Chapter 5 provides the background context for *Lemonade Sky*. It suggests how a segment of my lived experience is linked to the criticism of Singaporean society as lacking in creativity. It also details how problem-solving in the art studio led to the discovery of narrative-of-viewpoint, which is used as a key narrative strategy in *Lemonade Sky*.

Chapter 6 discusses two picturebooks[1] (*The Second-Hand Vespa* and *Random Luck*), how they are linked to my childhood experience growing up in a working-class Singaporean family, and how this might have influenced certain attitudes I have towards life. This chapter also details how I tried to develop a new picturebook idiom—the 'picturebook-poem'—for my autoethnography.

Chapter 7 shows how my reflection as a Singaporean parent inspired the story of *Mr Goodchild*. It also gives an account of the different narrative strategies used in this picturebook, such as using multiple viewpoints to convey a story, combining the picturebook syntax and comic syntax to create drama and suspense, and borrowing the concept of *mise-en-scène* from film to create an evocative narrative.

[1]*The Second-Hand Vespa* and *Random Luck* are submitted together as part of my thesis under the heading *The Autoethnographic Picturebook-Poem* as the two picturebooks are discussed together in Chapter 6.

Chapter 8 reflects on my research journey, summarises the outcomes of the research and offers suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2 – Arts-Based Research and Autoethnography

> So we must begin with small things, in diverse ways, helping one another, discovering one's own peace of mind, waiting for the understanding that flashes from one peaceful mind to another. In that way the separate cells will take shape, will be joined to one another, will manifest new forms of social organization and new types of art. From that multiplicity and diversity, that dynamic interplay and emulation, a new culture may arise, and mankind be united as never before in the consciousness of a common destiny.
>
> Herbert Read (1948, cited in Thistlewood, 1994, p.11)

I began my research with a desire to express my thoughts and feelings about the psyche of Singaporean society through the creation of artworks in the form of picturebooks. Despite being a long-time art educator and a published picturebook-maker, I never had an opportunity to create picturebooks in a fully committed, uninterrupted way due to other life commitments; making picturebooks had always been something I did for leisure, as a hobby. PhD study gave me the time and space to learn about the picturebook as an art form, engage in deep reflection, sharpen my thoughts, and exercise my artistic craft. I was excited by the opportunity to create picturebooks that could provide insights into Singaporean society.

This should align well with the objectives of a PhD. However, as my PhD journey progressed, it became increasingly clear to me that things were more complicated than I initially thought. I was ignorant of the epistemological landscape, its many spoken and unspoken rules, and the

inconsistent attitude towards art in and outside the canons of research. Everything I had learnt as an art student, an art educator, and a published picturebook-maker informed me that art could encapsulate valuable, transferable knowledge that could contribute to human understanding. However, I soon discovered that the notion of using art-making (and artworks) as a research method (and outcome) is contentious in academia. Despite its ubiquitous presence and cognitive traditions in today's society, the place of art in academia remains an uncomfortable one.

This chapter aims to provide the philosophical and epistemological context of my inquiry based on two distinct but overlapping research conventions. The first is commonly known as arts-based research (ABR) (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Leavy, 2015; Yuan & Hickman, 2015; Wang et al., 2017). ABR is a term first coined by Elliot Eisner (1993), which I use throughout this thesis. It is worth acknowledging that ABR is not a universally accepted term. Many groups of ABR researchers (also known as artist-researchers) who use similar methods of inquiry have bespoke names to distinguish themselves—A/R/Tography (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005), Arts-Informed Research (Cole & Knowles, 2008), Arts-Based Research (McNiff, 1998; Barone & Eisner, 2011; Leavy, 2015), Art Practice as Research (Sullivan, 2010), and Aesthetic Inquiry (Latta & Baer, 2010). For my thesis, I will be using the term ABR, not least because it is the most widely recognised term but also because it is the most inclusive term as it embraces inquiry methods involving art forms of all genres, including creative writing, poetry, film, music, performing arts, fine art and so forth.

The second research convention is autoethnography (Ellis, 2004), a branch of inquiry method that evolved from ethnography, which became more prominent in the early 1990s (around the same time as ABR). The rest of this chapter will be devoted to discussing the conventions and philosophies of ABR and autoethnography.

2.1 Arts-Based Research

German theoretical physicist Werner Heisenberg, Nobel laureate for pioneering work in quantum mechanics, writes:

> The positivists have a simple solution: the world must be divided into that which we can say clearly and the rest, which we had better pass over in silence. But can anyone conceive of a more pointless philosophy, seeing that what we can say clearly amounts to next to nothing? If we omitted all that is unclear we would probably be left with completely uninteresting and trivial tautologies. (1972, p.213)

What Heisenberg alludes to is that scientific methods of inquiry, while good at providing a clear explanation of phenomena in words, are not adequate in providing a full understanding of the human world because understanding also requires us to tap into 'the rest' and 'all that is unclear'. Kenneth Beittel (1972) echoes similar ideas by arguing that it is 'understanding', not 'explanation' that is the most important outcome of a research. It seems it is not sufficient to rely only on words to communicate the full understanding of the human world. Fortunately, mankind has also developed a range of artistic idioms (such as painting, song, dance, poetry, film and literature) by tapping into a spectrum of sensory modalities to help people communicate in ways that otherwise could not be done effectively with words (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p.1). Susanne Langer (1957) makes a distinction between discursive knowledge and non-discursive knowledge; she posits that artists generate non-discursive knowledge by

giving form to their ideas with their artistry. These art forms possess the power to express concepts and evoke feelings that words alone cannot reveal.

As a method of inquiry, ABR first appeared in the early 1990s with a few fragmented groups of artist-researchers who experimented with using art-making as their main method of inquiry. These artist-researchers were either dissatisfied with the limitations imposed by conventional quantitative and qualitative research methods (Leavy, 2015, pp.1-2) and/or wanted to explore how art could be used as an inquiry method in research (Sullivan, 2010). Through education, conferences, and publications, these groups of artist-researchers exchanged ideas, strengthened their methodologies, and formed communities of like-minded individuals. ABR gained momentum and its growth accelerated from the mid-2000s, with an explosion in the number of published journals, articles, and some landmark books such as *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues* (Cole & Knowles, 2008), *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in Visual Arts* (Sullivan, 2010), *Arts-Based Research* (Barone & Eisner, 2011), and *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice* (Leavy, 2015). Collectively, these publications established a firm epistemological, theoretical and methodological foundation for other artist-researchers to pursue similar methods of inquiry. While its history is a relatively short one, the emergence and subsequent fast-paced development of ABR has brought a sense of exuberance to academia.

In hindsight, the enormous growth of ABR is only natural. There are several plausible reasons for this, which I will briefly address. The first involves a macro shift in societal values that came with the developments in postmodernism (and other such movements like

post-structuralism, critical thinking, interpretivism, and feminism) in the latter half of the twentieth century (Sullivan, 2010, pp.45-51). These movements engendered large-scale changes across all segments of society, politically, socially and culturally. Their impacts on anthropology and epistemology are especially profound, as methods of inquiry in social sciences shifted towards a complication of knowledge, construction of situated and multifaceted realities, and a more nuanced approach to human understanding (Eisner, 2008, p.7). Many previously accepted beliefs, practices and norms face renewed scrutiny as their validity and legitimacy were re-negotiated. As a result, new insights are found, new theories formulated, and new methods of inquiry invented. Conventional methods of inquiry were no longer enough to meet the demands of the postmodern era.

Another reason for the rapid growth of ABR could be as a result of pent-up frustration caused by the systemic marginalisation of art in academia over decades (Sullivan, 2010, pp.33-43). As dissatisfaction with the rigidity and limitations imposed by conventional quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry grew, an increasing number of researchers began to turn to art in search of new inquiry methods and creative ways to express their research outcomes. To many artist-researchers, art offers a more nuanced understanding of the different realities in people's lives, which has the potential to subvert existing mainstream narratives and lead to new insights (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p.16); art also has the power to suggest new possibilities and new ways of understanding the human world (Graham, 2005, pp.62-72). In addition, the evocative power of art to carry and convey meanings in ways that could not be done previously in academia offers artist-researchers alternative ways to express their thinking and connect with their audiences (Barone & Eisner, 2011, pp.1-2; Leavy, 2015, p.21).

Yet, despite its growing presence, ABR is still a relatively young and fringe inquiry method in comparison to more established quantitative and qualitative methods. Consequently, its position in epistemology continues to be met with scepticism and doubt even today. Still, the rise of ABR is undeniable, with some experts (Sullivan, 2010; Barone & Eisner, 2011; Leavy, 2015; Wang et al., 2017) calling for it to have its own epistemological paradigm with a bespoke framework, standards and criteria for assessment.

The dominance of the quantitative and qualitative paradigms in academia is well documented, hence an elaborate explanation is not necessary for this thesis. Instead, I give a brief account of the core tenets of these two dominant paradigms to provide a better understanding of ABR from an historical perspective. The quantitative paradigm (began in the late 1800s), often synonymous with positivism, is the most dominant research method in academia (Sullivan, 2010, p.35; Leavy 2015, pp.7-8). Positivists believe in the existence of a reality independent of what human beings do and hence the researcher's job is to discover the 'truth' about this reality, often through large-scale empirical studies involving processes such as observation, analysis, hypothesis, testing, and verification. The qualitative paradigm emerged in the 1920s (Leavy, 2015, pp.8-9) and has established a strong foothold in social sciences. The qualitative paradigm mostly involves the use of ethnographic methods performed on small samples of individuals (often from minority, subjugated and/or oppressed groups) to uncover hidden 'realities' in various communities. As these realities are dependent on human perceptions, they are thus often culture- and time-specific. Together, the quantitative and qualitative paradigms form the canons of academia; they heavily influence what are considered

acceptable research methods. Some of the staple characteristics common to the quantitative and qualitative methods include:

(1) researchers taking all necessary measures to safeguard their position as an objective observer of 'truth';
(2) research methods and outcomes that are generally based on empirical studies; and
(3) research outcomes that are generalisable and presented in propositional writings.

As a research method, ABR does not have these three characteristics. Firstly, artist-researchers do not perceive themselves as passive observers of the inquiry process; instead, they embrace their personal subjectivities—biases, opinions, influences, interpretations—and coalesce them with other aspects of their inquiry work (Sullivan, 2010, pp.38-40). Artist-researchers make explicit their passion and personal opinions in their research, usually via the act of art-making and the artworks they produced. The explicit acknowledgement of 'self' in the inquiry work is acknowledged by Leavy, who writes:

> As researchers, we are often trained to hide our relationship to our work; this is problematic for some, impossible for others. ABR practices allow researchers to share this relationship with the audiences who consume their works. (2015, p.3)

Secondly, while some artist-researchers also include empirical research in their inquiry, it is not a point of emphasis. Data in ABR is often 'created' instead of 'found', i.e. data is not collected from fieldwork or laboratory experiments but created by artist-researchers through their creative practice in the art studio (Sullivan, 2010, pp.51-53). This type of data could be unique and self-referencing and thus not empirical in nature. Nonetheless, data like this could still embed and communicate knowledge through expressive art by triggering self-reflexivity (Feige, 2010; Eisner, 2008) or empathetic responses from the audience (Barone & Eisner,

2011, pp.8-9). Thirdly, artist-researchers have little interest in presenting their research outcomes in an objective and literal way. On the contrary, they celebrate the use of creative works of art, most of which have idioms with their own inner logic (Graham, 2005, p.60; Feige, 2010, p.134; Barone & Eisner, 2011, p.2). This implies that meanings in artworks are fluid and non-absolute; they are subjected to multiple interpretations by the audience. Instead of clarity, artist-researchers welcome ambiguity and nuance. Artist-researchers do not seek a linear, didactic relationship with their audience; they invite their audience to co-participate in the creation of meanings through the sharing of their artworks. In this sense, research outcomes in ABR are not necessarily generalisable; artist-researchers prefer adumbrations in which meanings are "construed via interpretation" (Feige, 2010, p.135) of their work.

Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner describe ABR as "an effort to extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication in order to express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable" (2001, p.1). They go further to suggest that by engaging ineffable modes such as emotions, intuition, and instinct, works of art could trigger an empathetic response in the audience and improve human understanding (pp.8-9). For example, compare the reading of a factual report on cruelty in World War 2 Nazi prison camp to watching the 1994 movie *Schindler's List.* The factual report might present accurate data regarding loss of life, but the movie might have a more profound impact in terms of connecting with the audience at an emotional level, which could then lead to reflection and actions. This is not to say that making a movie is a better method of inquiry than writing a factual report: they are just different methods that provide different readings of the same subject. However, this example shows that a pluralistic landscape of methods of inquiry is a good thing, because multiple

points of view could supplement each other and help to make human understanding more complete.

By using art as a method of inquiry, artist-researchers are liberated from limitations imposed by conventional research methods; they can now express their personal opinions through expressive art forms and delve into non-discursive knowledge. Leavy, who started her academic career doing conventional qualitative research, shares her motivation and experience in ABR:

> I wrote an arts-based novel titled *Low-Fat Love*. Through the fiction format I was able to deliver the content, layer more themes, portray composite characters sensitively, create empathetic understandings, promote self-reflection in readers, create longer-lasting learning experiences for readers, and most important, get the work out to the public … This is the power of arts-based research … it is different than other approaches to research, but no less rigorous or valid. (2015, p.2)

Many artist-researchers also consider ABR an alternative type of social research that promotes understanding by unsettling things through the practice of art. This group of artist-researchers use artistic inquiry as a method to subvert mainstream ideologies, to unearth issues about social bias, prejudice, discrimination, and give voice to the subjugated (Finley, 2008; Barone & Eisner, 2011; Leavy, 2015). Barone and Eisner describe ABR as a method of inquiry that instils disequilibrium. They write:

> Instead of contributing to the stability of prevailing assumptions about these phenomena by (either explicitly through statement, argument, portraiture, or implicitly through silence or elision) reinforcing the conventional way of viewing them, the arts based researcher may persuade readers or percipients of the work

> (including the artist herself) to revisit the world from a different direction, seeing it through fresh eyes, and thereby calling into question a singular, orthodox point of view. (2011, p.16)

As a method of inquiry, the value of ABR lies not in its ability to explain phenomena in a propositional way, but in its ability to prompt us—through vexing, piquing our curiosity, invoke our empathy, or otherwise—to raise questions, engage in dialogue, think differently, and/or come out with possible creative answers. Much like postmodernist artists, artist-researchers demand that we look for ruptures in seemingly ordinary events, probe deeper into underlying power dynamics, be sensitive to nuances, and deconstruct and re-interpret phenomena around us.

2.2 Autoethnography

As a research method, autoethnography began in the 1970s as a sub-genre of its more mainstream relative, ethnography. In its early days, autoethnography was used by a small number of researchers who used their biographies as a way to study their own cultures, which were often marginalised due to factors such as language barriers, geographical accessibility, or inherent exclusiveness within certain communities (Hayano, 1979). In the 1980s, as postmodernist ideologies began to spread to all spheres (social, cultural and political) of society, some researchers began to scrutinise and challenge the notion of objectivity and impartiality in ethnographic research (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). In the 1990s, alternative methods of social science inquiry started to take root. Social scientists looked beyond standardised surveys, interviews, and statistics; they began to experiment with unorthodox methods of inquiry such as unstructured interviews and the use of personal

narratives as research data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Ethnography began to rupture as new ethnographic practices started to surface, a process Anderson describes as "diversification" (1999, p.453). Autoethnography emerged as a spin-off from traditional ethnography as an inquiry method that embraces individuality and subjectivity through personal introspection and lived experience.

Carolyn Ellis, a pioneer in autoethnographic research, describes autoethnography as a "research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" (2004, pp.xix). Influenced by the doctrine of doubt within postmodernism, autoethnographers are sceptical about representation by the 'third party' or 'outsider' and apprehensive of generalisable theories (Anderson, 2010). Ellis and her husband Bochner (also a renowned autoethnographer) believe that the key goal of autoethnography is not to abstract generalisable knowledge but to create a resonance with the readers by dwelling in "the flux of lived experience" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p.431) and evoke care and empathy in the reader. In a similar vein, Denzin writes that the main aim of autoethnographers is to evoke "an epistemology of emotion, moving the reader to feel the feelings of the other" (1997, cited in Anderson, 2010, p.377). Hence, as autoethnographers seek to connect their personal lived experience to wider cultural, social, and political context, they do so with the intent of making the readers feel involved and engaged (Denzin, 2014; Duncan, 2004; Ellis, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Humphreys, 2005; Crawley, 2012). In the words of Ellis and Bocher:

> Autoethnography shows struggle, passion, embodied life, and the collaborative creation of sense-making in situations in which people have to cope with dire circumstances and loss of meaning. Autoethnography wants the reader to care, to feel, to empathize, and to do something, to act. (2006, p.433)

During the earlier stages of its development, autoethnography researchers used mostly evocative writings to record their lived experience, with a focus on self-reflexivity. However, given its emphasis on self-reflexivity and literary style, it is hardly surprising that many autoethnographers began (in the late 1990s) to experiment with various art forms (such as poetry, performance arts, film, and visual art). For example, Karen Scott-Hoy uses painting for her autoethnography because it is "emotional and cognitive, deep and spiritual" (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008, p.131); Elizabeth Chaplin uses photographs accompanied with written annotations for her autoethnography because she claims that "[b]y presenting readers with a particular 'image and words' combination, readers can construct a connection between what they see and other stuff in my mind that they don't see" (2011, p.246); Laurie Eldridge creates collages for her autoethnography because the art-making process makes her realise "how [her] teaching practice had been changed not by [her] but by powers beyond [her] control" (2012, p.76).

This glut of artistic experimentation brings autoethnography into the territory of ABR. As a research method, autoethnography and ABR share many similarities. Like ABR, autoethnography embraces the subjectivity of the researcher, uses self-reflexivity as a key method of inquiry and prioritises the evocative nature of the research over the need to produce generalisable knowledge. Also, both autoethnography and ABR have a similar 'unity of process and outcome' that is expressed through an 'artwork'. In one of her autoethnographic studies, Ellis investigates the topic of grief by writing about the loss she felt when her partner Gene passed away in 1984, based on the field notes she made during his illness (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008). Ellis's example illustrates that the process of

autoethnography (which involves the act of writing about the personal lived experience) and its product (the writing itself) are inseparable (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). This same 'unity of process and outcome' is observed in ARB where both the art-making process and final artwork must be considered as a comprehensive whole when evaluating the quality of the research (Sullivan, 2010). My study has led me to think that there could be an implicit relationship between autoethnography and ABR; it could be proposed that autoethnography could be considered a subset of ABR.

2.3 Artists Meets Social Scientists

Through my investigation, I discovered that artist-researchers could be generally classified into two groups. One group considers themselves primarily as social scientists; they use art to express the outcomes of their research. The other group sees themselves as artists whose main goal is to express socio-culturally related issues with their art. Consider the case of Elizabeth Chaplin, who belongs to the first group. Chaplin is an academic with thirty years of experience in traditional ethnography before she took on her first autoethnographic research, titled *The Photo Diary as an Autoethnographic Method* (2011). Chaplin created a photo diary to document her daily lived experience. In her writing, Chaplin explicitly states that, while aesthetics are an important element in her research, it is not art. Chaplin clearly sees herself as "operating within the discourse of social science rather than art, [such] that aesthetic force cannot be allowed to overwhelm the social argument" (2011, p.244). Laurie Eldridge, on the other hand, is an art educator and is familiar with the process of creating artwork; she belongs to the second group. In her research paper *A Collaged Reflection on My Art Teaching: A Visual* Autoethnography (2012), Eldridge details how she created a mixed-media collage for her autoethnographic study. Chaplin's and Eldridge's approaches to autoethnography are as

similar as they are different. They are drawn by the evocative power of the visual image and have chosen to use it for their autoethnography. However, Chaplin does not see herself as an artist and does not consider her photo-diary as a work of art; to her, art is a means but not an end. Eldridge, on the other hand, considers herself an artist; she uses art-making as a method of inquiry and clearly cares about the artistic quality of her collage, both as a work of art and as autoethnography.

The difference between Chaplin and Eldridge can also be observed in other examples of ABR during my background reading, although it is often not a point of emphasis. Barone, Esiner and Leavy are among leading ABR scholars who posit that ABR is a form of social research (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Leavy 2015). However, Michelle Forrest (2007) protests against the use of contributions made to the social sciences as a justification for using art-making and art as research. Forrest urges art to take its "distinctive place in the field [academia] and thereby supporting the sceptical project not easily assimilated into science, social or otherwise" (2007, p.13). Likewise, Sullivan (2010) advocates that art as a kind of research should have, among other things, its own unique framework so that debates and discourses about the topic could be "located and critiqued within [its own] dimensions of theory and domains of inquiry" (2010, p.99).

Whether there is indeed a divide that separates artist-researchers into the social scientist group and the artist group will require further investigation, but there is a noticeable difference between the attitudes of the two groups towards art and its practice during the research process. In this regard, I see myself both as a practising social scientist working on

issues about Singaporean society and an artist. My focus is not so much on which of the two disciplines (social science or art) should take the lead; rather, my interest lies more in how art practice is being positioned within the discourse of ABR, i.e. how important is the aesthetic merit of the artwork in ABR? What role, if any, does creativity and craftsmanship have in the inquiry process of ABR? I tried to answer some of these questions in Chapter 8.

2.4 Conclusion

As a method of inquiry, ABR and autoethnography have a relatively short history. They remain fringe research activities under the dominance of quantitative and qualitative paradigms. Notwithstanding this, they have a sound philosophical and epistemological foundation mainly attributed to the cognitive traditions of art, in particular in the domain of non-discursive knowledge. ABR and autoethnography could supplement traditional research by offering new points of view, thus making human understanding more holistic. Their unique evocative nature facilitates a connection with audiences both in and outside the academy by probing them to reflect on various social and cultural issues.

I found solidarity among these groups of like-minded scholars in my research. These techniques and their growing influence in academia is undeniable; they are found in "sociology, education and psychology, published by mainstream journals, and taught in universities" (Pickles, 2017, para. 6). ABR and autoethnography researchers do not seek to undermine existing mainstream research methods; on the contrary, they see themselves as complementary partners that could add to the diversity of inquiry methods and lead to better human understanding (Hickman, 2011, p.20). My research project should be viewed in the

same light; the study of autoethnography through art practice was a rigorous exercise that involved thought-provoking reflexivity, creative studio practice, and critical reflection. My inquiry revealed aspects of my own emotions that I was not cognizant of previously; in so doing, it sensitised me to the connections between my lived experience and the wider cultural, social and political context that shapes individuals in Singaporean society. Like Ellis's autoethnography, my picturebooks do not aim to produce generalisable knowledge (about Singaporean society). Instead, they embody the deep feelings I have for Singapore and my thoughts about the Singaporean psyche in the form of non-discursive knowledge.

Chapter 3 – The Picturebook as ABR

> There is no art for children, there is Art. There are no graphics for children, there are graphics. There are no colours for children, there are colours. There is no literature for children, there is literature. Based on these four principles, we can say that a children's book is a good book when it is a good book for everyone.
>
> François Ruy-Vidal (cited in Beckett, 2012, p.5)

With the expansion of ABR in the academy, more and more scholars have opted to use art as both a method of inquiry and the outcome of their research. There is already a sizable body of examples, most commonly found in art forms such as photography, performing arts, creative writing, poetry, painting, film and so forth (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Leavy, 2015). However, the use of graphic narratives, especially in book formats such as comics, picturebooks, graphic novels, and other such art forms in ABR remains scarce. A possible reason could be that when it comes to books, visual images "are often regarded merely as a process of embellishment" (Salisbury, 2019, p.64) or that graphic narratives are often construed as carrying contents that are "easy to read and disposable" (Salisbury, 2019, p.64). Notwithstanding this, more and more graphic novelists, comic writers, picturebook-makers, and other graphic narrative creators are increasingly treating visual images as the equal partners of (if not more important than) written words. This means visual images are increasingly taking on a bigger role as a content carrier in books, including content of a serious intellectual nature. In the academy, there are emerging researchers who are using graphic narratives as academic papers. Nick Sousanis's (2015) doctoral thesis was a comic book titled *Unflattening*; Elys Dolan also used the picturebook form as an experimental

academic paper (2017). Furthermore, there is also a small but growing group of researchers from Anglia Ruskin University who use artistic practice as their main inquiry method, creating creative graphic narratives as part of their PhD theses. This group laid the foundation for my inquiry. Through the creation of four autoethnographic picturebooks—*Lemonade Sky, The Second-Hand Vespa, Random Luck, and Mr Goodchild*—I hoped to express my thoughts and feelings about Singaporean society. To the best of my knowledge, no arts-based autoethnographic research had been conducted with the picturebook as the medium. Hence, my research may be the first of its kind in this regard.

3.1 The Picturebook

There has been an explosion in picturebook research in the last two decades. This is evident in the large number of academic papers presented at the Synergy and Contradiction: How Picturebooks and Picture Books Work Conference hosted by Homerton College Cambridge in September 2018. Many papers presented at the conference involved the investigation of the function of the picturebook (Beauvais, 2018; Escovar, 2018; Skyggebjerg, 2018) and the relationship between pictures and words in the picturebook (Aggleton, 2018; Athanasiou-Krikelis, 2018; Druker, 2018; East, 2018). Studies like these play an important role in negotiating and re-negotiating the expressive potential of the picturebook form and help to advance the understanding of the role of the picturebook in our society.

Any attempt to define an art form is problematic, not least because the essence of art is creativity. Artists are inherently driven to transgress the boundaries of art forms in their relentless search for creative solutions; they work in a liminal space between what Rachel

Jones called “knowing and not knowing” (2009, p.2). On the one hand, artists must know (and master) the techniques and conventions of their art form; on the other, they have to work with a certain degree of not knowing how the final artwork will turn out, often breaking and reinvigorating the rules and limitations imposed by these same techniques and conventions. Hence, the definition of an art form is likely to be transient as old rules are broken and new ones introduced. The quest to define an art form gets even more problematic as artists often borrow ideas, conventions, and materials from multiple art forms and cross-pollinate them.

Graphic narratives are no exception to the problem of definition. Scott McCloud’s (1994) *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* is a case in point. McCloud refreshingly used the syntax of the comic idiom (in the form of a comic book) to define what a comic is. Yet, despite its comprehensive nature, McCloud’s definition is as problematic and limiting as it is thorough and enlightening. With the wide array of possibilities for what ‘counts’ as a comic—a sequential narrative with frames, speech balloons, comic strips for the masses, implied readers, the blend of words and pictures, et cetera—and new and hybrid comic forms emerging all the time, it seems impossible to define in absolute terms what a comic really is. Meskin (2007, cited in Palmer, 2015, p.34-35) questions the need for a definition at all, suggesting one should instead focus on the typicalities of comics, which could be more helpful in enhancing our understanding of its purpose and idiom. In the same light, for the purpose of understanding the picturebook as an art form, I highlight some typicalities of the picturebook by looking at its function and the way it works as an idiom.

3.2 Function of the Picturebook – Children and Beyond

One way to understand an art form is to examine its functions. John Dewey (1934) describes art as providing an experience that is connected to everyday life; Gordon Graham (2005) categorises art under various functions (such as hedonistic, expressive, and cognitive) as intended by its creator; and Daniel Martin Feige (2010) posits that the function of art is in its reflexivity. In her *American Picturebooks from Noah's Ark to the Beast within*, Barbara Bader also uses functions in her description of the picturebook: "A picture book is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historic document; and foremost, an experience for a child" (1976, p.1).

Bader speaks of the picturebook both as a social-cultural product and a commercial artefact, of which the main function is to provide an experience for children. Perry Nodelman, too, describes the picturebook as "intended for young children" (1988, p.vii). Bader's and Nodelman's perspective is shared by many picturebook-makers, publishers, teachers, and researchers of the picturebook. It has often been assumed that the implied readers of the picturebook are, by default, young children who are not ready to handle more sophisticated content written in words alone. In some cultures, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, the term 'picturebook' often suggests 'children's books', giving the impression that content in the picturebook is naturally and only aimed at children. It could be said that such an assumption might have given the picturebook a (false) reputation of being child's play, basic, and trivial. With increased research and understanding in recent years, the picturebook is now widely recognised as a sophisticated entity that plays an important role in children's verbal and visual literacy education, character development, and learning of social mores. Indeed, when it comes to the picturebook, research has often focused on the use of verbal and

visual texts to communicate content intended for children (Lewis, 2001; Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007; Villarreal, Minton & Martinez, 2015; Palmer, 2015).

It is no surprise that the vast majority of picturebooks in the commercial world are produced with children as their intended readers. Many publishers (such as Anderson Press, Flying Eyes Books, and Maverick Publishing) that accept unsolicited submissions of picturebook manuscript explicitly request that the content is catered specifically for young children. In fact, the picturebook is often used as a preferred medium to simplify and paraphrase otherwise more complex content for the consumption of children; non-fiction narratives are often adapted into the picturebook format to make them suitable for the child reader (Beauvais, 2018). For example, *Anne Frank* by Josephine Poole (2005) and illustrated by Angela Barrett and *Long Walk to Freedom* abridged by Chris van Wyk (2011) and illustrated by Paddy Bouma are two such books. Many books about the natural sciences such as *Boy, Were We Wrong About Dinosaurs* by Kathleen V. Kudlinski (2005) and illustrated by S.D. Schindler, and *Living Sunlight: How Plants Bring the Earth to Life* by Molly Bang and Penny Chisholm (2009) are also reworked into picturebooks for children's consumption. There are also picturebooks, such as *A Poke in the I* by Paul Janeczko (2001) and illustrated by Christopher Raschka that use paratexts (often involving the creative use of verbal and visual texts) to help children understand poetry that is otherwise beyond their age (Neira-Piñeiro, 2016).

However, not every picturebook is made exclusively for children. As early as 1949, one of Japan's pioneer publishers, Yasoo Takeuchi, claimed that a picturebook is "a work of art in

itself, and is therefore not intended only for children" (cited in Beckett, 1988, p.10). Yasoo Takeuchi's view is echoed by literary creators like François Ruy-Vidal and Clive Staples Lewis. In a speech in 1952, Lewis says:

> … the only one (way of writing) I could ever use myself (as an author), consists in writing a children's story because a children's story is the best art-form for something you have to say. (1952, cited in Popova, 2014, para. 10)

Ruy-Vidal and Lewis are strong advocates of the idea that it is the integrity of the artist, not the desire of the target consumers, which should guide the creative direction of the artwork. It could therefore be argued that the picturebook could also carry content suitable for all age groups. In the words of Maurice Sendak, "I don't write for children, […] I write—and somebody says, 'That's for children!'" (1952, cited in Popova, 2014, para. 1). Viewed in this light, the picturebook could be an artistic expression of its maker rather than a mere utility product that serves the function of educating and/or entertaining children.

Cherie Allan writes:

> The enterprise of postmodernism has always been to challenge, question, and/or subvert all totalizing systems that led to literary texts that interrogated established beliefs and understandings about truth, reality, and history, whereby dominant ideologies, rather than being naturalized within the narratives, are laid bare. (2008, p.201)

With its doubting doctrine, postmodernism places all types of representations under renewed scrutiny; it blurs the schism between popular and high cultures and rekindles a spirit of experimentation and exploration in the arts. This provides the impetus for the role of the

picturebook to be re-examined and helps to unlock its potential as a medium for artistic expression. As Marie Ommundsen writes:

> Picturebooks are a major art form in contemporary society, and many artists who would previously have exhibited their artwork in museums and galleries now exhibit their art in the picturebook format. (2017, p.220)

The Masters programme in Children's Book Illustration at Anglia Ruskin University has seen significant growth in its student numbers over the last twenty years. Many of the students are graduates from fine art courses and the picturebook becomes a popular expressive form for their creative ideas (Salisbury, 2008, p.24). More and more artists are using the picturebook as a medium for their artistic expression. This trend is congruent with developments in the publishing industry, where an increasing number of contemporary picturebooks in the market now carry content that reflects sophisticated social and political issues. These picturebooks could be categorised into two types: (1) crossover picturebooks; and (2) picturebooks for adults.

3.3 The Crossover Picturebook

While the picturebook market continues to be dominated by books that cater for children, the attention given to its role as a medium for artistic expression has increased steadily since the 1990s. This has resulted in a shift of attitude towards viewing the picturebook as an art form with the potential to carry sophisticated content, rather than a specialised commodity made exclusively for children's consumption. Consequently, there has been an explosion in the variety of published picturebooks, especially in the last decade. One genre of picturebook that

has grown in popularity is what Sandra Beckett calls the ‘crossover picturebook’, a form of picturebook that could be suitable for both children and adults. Beckett describes crossover picturebooks as, “multi levelled works that are suitable for all ages because they invite different forms of reading, depending on the age and experience of the reader” (2012, p.16) and argues that “children, adolescents, and adults read crossover picturebooks from their various perspectives, but they can all take equal pleasure in the reading experience” (2012, p.16). It is worth noting that although the crossover picturebook has only become more widespread in the last two decades, it has actually been around for a long time. One of the most famous and earliest crossover picturebooks is Maurice Sendak's (1963) *Where the Wild Things Are*, a book that has sold over 19 million copies and is enjoyed by readers of all ages.

The crossover picturebook is often characterised by its radical and experimental nature, often involving the use of unorthodox visual narrative strategies such as genre blending, metafiction, intertextuality, and parody. One of the reasons for this is that crossover picturebook-makers often view themselves as artists (Sendak, 1988, p.192; Tan, 2004, para. 2); they see the picturebook as an expressive art form to convey their ideas and thoughts, rather than merchandise. The 2011 Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film and the 2011 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award winner Shaun Tan writes this about who he thinks picturebooks are for:

> I suspect that much art in any medium is produced without a primary concern for how it will be received, or by whom. It often doesn’t set out to appeal to a predefined audience but rather build one for itself. (2004, para. 2)

Tan describes his picturebooks as “not specifically children's literature and [they] appeal to a general audience” (n.d.-a, para. 1). He writes about *The Lost Thing* (2000) as a “nonsensical story” about “all sorts of social concern[s], with a rather ambiguous ending” (n.d.-b, para. 1). Given its content, it is clear that appropriateness for children is not a criterion in Tan’s work. Tan simply wanted to say something about the society and the picturebook was the medium he chose to say it. In *The Lost Thing* (2000), Tan uses a range of visual narrative-strategies to make the fantasy story relatable and convincing. The text, written in colloquial style from a first-person perspective, tells of a young man (the protagonist) helping a freakish tentacled animal to find its way home. Through the use of intertextuality, genre blending, thoughtful peritexts, and clever interplay between words and illustrations, Tan has created a graphic story that is both enigmatic and ambiguous, where the task of meaning-making is left to the reader’s own imagination and interpretation.

3.4 The Picturebook for Adults

The difference between the picturebook for adults and the crossover picturebook is that, while the latter targets readers of all ages, the former is made specifically for adult consumption. As a genre of graphic narratives, the picturebook for adults belongs to a rare category. Most graphic narratives that cater to adult readers come in the form of comics or graphic novels; the picturebook for adults is a relatively new genre in graphic narratives. Ommundsen writes that, “[p]icturebooks for adults represent a new literary trend that emerged in Scandinavia in the early 1990s” (2017, p.220). Ommundsen also points out that many picturebooks for adults carry a label (‘A picturebook for adults’) on their cover. There could be several reasons why such a heading is necessary: the illustrations might not be appropriate for children (such as those with explicit sexual and/or violence visuals); the

words might be too difficult for children; the content (e.g. political, philosophical) is beyond children's ability to comprehend; and so on. Whatever the reason, the objective of the label is to make it clear to consumers that these picturebooks are not meant for children.

Salisbury claims that there is a "growing awareness of the intellectual demands that narrative pictures can make" and hence, "[a]dults are increasingly buying picturebooks for their own consumption" (2008, p.32). Sandra Beckett also points out that "in the past, adults were generally seen only as co-readers or mediators of picturebooks, but now they are being recognized as readers in their own right" (2012, p.13). The growing popularity of the picturebook for adults in recent years, especially in Europe and East Asia, means that there is an increasing appetite for such content. Some examples of picturebooks for adults include: *Fuck You Sun* by Matt Cole and illustrated by Rigel Stuhmiller (2011) with its dirty humour; *Pat the Zombie: A Cruel Adult Spoof* by Aaron Ximm and illustrated by Kaveh Soofi (2011) with its grotesque characters and disturbing plot; *Love Awaits You* by Fabian Negrin (2009, cited in Allan, 2017, p.227) with its accordion-style book format and erotic content; *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (2007) with 128 pages of wordless illustrations depicting the experience of a migrant worker in a fantasy world. All these picturebooks subvert the conventional notion of what a picturebook should be and/or could be, both in terms of content and form. Of the four picturebooks I created for my enquiry, *Lemonade Sky* is a crossover picturebook. *The Second-Hand Vespa*, *Random Luck*, and *Mr Goodchild* are picturebooks for adults; these four books cover complex themes ranging from religion, social stratification, and existential issues beyond the frame of reference of young children. For example, *Random Luck* uses a poetic combination of words and pencil drawings that would require readers to

have a certain level of maturity and life experience in order to interpret its meanings (*Random Luck* is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 6).

3.5 The Postmodern Picturebook

Kristeva writes that "texts cannot be separated from the larger cultural and social textuality out of which they are constructed" (Allen, 2000, cited in Pantaleo & Sipe, 2008, p.1) and Lewis claims that the evolution of the picturebook is tied to the social and cultural forces of the time (2001). With the coining of the 'crossover picturebook' and 'picturebook for adults' being fairly recent events (even though examples of such books could have existed much earlier), there is no doubt that both genres are highly influenced by the postmodernist movement. Hence, they are also often called postmodern picturebooks. However, it is necessary to point out that the postmodern picturebook does not comprise only the crossover picturebook and the picturebook for adults: it is a much wider genre. Cherie Allan describes postmodern picturebooks as "cultural artefacts that reflect aspects of the prevailing social, cultural, and political conditions of a particular time in literary history" (2017, p.201). Viewed in this light, postmodern picturebooks adopt the subversive and eclectic characteristics of postmodernism. The postmodern picturebook encompasses all types of picturebooks that seek to disrupt conventional children literary discourses that are designed to, as Allan writes, "enculturate children into the cultural and social norms of the prevailing society" (2017, p.205). Sylvia Pantaleo and Lawrence Sipe (2008), while acknowledging the indeterminacy of the definition of the postmodern picturebook, conclude that the postmodern picturebook generally exhibits some or all of the following characteristics: intertextuality, parody, pastiche, subversive, multiplicity of meanings, and self-referentiality, many of which are also found in crossover picturebooks and picturebooks for adults.

The crossover picturebook is for readers of all ages; the picturebook for adults is for adults only. As affiliates of the postmodern picturebook, both these genres have subverted the conventional notion that the picturebook is only suitable for children, even if this continues to be a major part of the picturebook market. Their growing presence has invigorated new explorations of the picturebook as an idiom for artistic expression. Artists from diverse practices—writers, fine artists, illustrators, designers, et cetera—are drawn to the new possibilities offered by the picturebook, in particular, its use of verbal and visual texts, i.e., "dual codes of words and pictures" (Allan, 2017, p.204). In Salisbury's words: "the union of words and pictures and the blurring boundaries between the two […] is an attractive prospect for any artist" (2008, p.24).

3.6 The Picturebook Idiom

Eliot Gattegno writes that "prior knowledge […] may be the most important aspect of "creativity". […] 'being creative' starts to depend heavily on what we already know" (2017, Can creativity be learned? para. 2). Viewed in this light, it is incumbent on picturebook-makers to have a certain degree of understanding and proficiency in the picturebook idiom if the objective is to use the picturebook as a creative art form to express ideas. As a form of graphic narrative, the rich historical and cultural conventions of the picturebook have established it as a unique idiom. In recent years, scholars have placed increased emphasis on the typical characteristics of the picturebook, trying to distinguish it from other types of visual narrative idioms such as artist's books (Little, 2015; Drucker, 2017), comics (McCloud, 1994; Saguisag, 2017), and illustrated books (Bird & Yokota, 2017). One of the characteristics of the picturebook idiom is its length.

Pan Macmillan publishes its submission requirements on its webpage for The 2019 Macmillan Prize. Below is an abstract of the format for the picturebook submission:

> Picture books should be 32 pages long, including the front and back endpapers, a title page and a copyright page. Books with novelty elements (e.g. flaps, fold-out pages) should not exceed 24 pages. Pop-up books should not exceed 6 double-page spreads. (Sibila, 2019)

The 32-page format requested by Pan Macmillian is the industry standard. This 32-page format could be a convention shaped by a variety of reasons, such as financial considerations of publishers, the physical weight and size of a picturebook suitable for the child reader, and the child reader's readiness in terms of the scope of its narrative (Palmer, 2016, p.66). However, with technological advancement in printing techniques and growing market appetite for more ambitious content, the 32-page standard is no longer something that contemporary picturebook-makers and publishers adhere to strictly. In fact, The 2020 Macmillan Prize has, for the first time, changed the required format to 24-40 pages, reflecting a more flexible attitude to the format of the picturebook. The physical format of the picturebook could also change in response to changes in technology, market needs, and the creative impulse of picturebook-makers. A classic example is Shaun Tan's (2007) *The Arrival*, which contains 128 pages of masterfully rendered wordless illustrations. Notwithstanding this, the vast majority of picturebooks still have a relatively condensed format, usually between 32-48 pages.

Other than the aforementioned condensed length, the picturebook idiom also has other characteristics such as the peritext (Wolfenbarger and Sipe, 2007, p.274) and words that are

intended to be read aloud (Palmer, 2015, p.49). For the purpose of my research, I will only focus on three specific characteristics that involve the use of the picturebook idiom as a visual narrative strategy: visual and verbal texts, double-page spread, and page-turning. These characteristics are stressed by Barbara Bader:

> As an art form [the picturebook] hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page. On its own terms its possibilities are limitless. (1976, p.1)

3.6.1 Visual and Verbal Texts

Salisbury and Styles write,

> [t]oday's picturebook is defined by its particular use of sequential imagery, usually in tandem with a small number of words, to convey meaning […] meaning emerges through the interplay of word and image, neither of which make sense when experienced independently of the other. (2012, p.7)

As an idiom, the picturebook relies on the use of both word and image (with the exception of wordless picturebooks) to advance its narrative. There is a wide variety of ways in which words and images in the picturebook can be used to create a relationship that brings to life the narratives they carry. Sipe (1998, p97-98) lists different ways critics describe the coming together of word and image in the picturebook: duet, counterpoint, contrapuntal, antiphonal, interference, plate tectonics, polysystemy, relaying, congruency, and deviation. Sipe argues that these creative methods of working with visual and verbal texts create a synergy in which the result is greater than the sum of its parts. Similarly, Wolfenbarger and Sipe posit that "[i]n a picturebook, words and pictures never tell exactly the same story" (2007, p.274), instead, there is always a dissonance between them that requires the participation of the readers to make meaning. Nikolajeva and Scott propose (2001, cited in Wolfenbarger and Sipe, 2001,

p.274) five ways that words and images could work together in the picturebook: symmetry, complementary, enhancement, counterpointing, and contradiction. María del Rosario Neira-Piñeiro (2016) describes the picturebook as a multimodal art form; she claims that the presence of verbal and visual texts gives the picturebook a double nature "in the transmission of content, due in turn to its differing semiotic nature" (2016, p.6). Similarly, Sandra Beckett opines that "[t]his unique feature [dual semiotic system of words and images] of picturebooks is what makes them one of the most exciting and innovative contemporary literary genres" (2012, p.2).

The popularisation of the postmodern picturebook means there are now even more picturebook-makers who treat the picturebook as an expressive art form rather than a commercial commodity. These picturebook-makers constantly test the boundaries of the dual semiotic system of the picturebook by experimenting with different ways of combining images and words, creating new and radical visual narrative strategies. Such explorations of and experimentations with visual and verbal texts were a big part of my practice-based inquiry. The dynamics and synergies between images and words were a constant point of deliberation in my search for new visual narrative strategies with the picturebook idiom, which I could use for my autoethnographic study.

3.6.2 Double-Page Spread

The double-page spread characteristic of the picturebook idiom is what Bader describes as "the simultaneous display of two facing pages" (1976, p.1). The double-page spread provides readers with a radial pathway of reading (Bearne, 2004), much as our eyes will move around

a painting. Every double-page spread can function as a whole canvas in itself with images and words layout across the two facing pages in creative ways; this gives readers the opportunity to "linger and ponder over 'the static image'" (Wolfenbarger and Sipe, 2007, p.279). Readers have more time to pause, wonder and reflect on the images and words of each double-page spread, immersing themselves in an aesthetic experience. This stands in contrast to the comic idiom (Palmer, 2016) where the narrative is advanced through sequential frames at a much faster pace, with each frame making a much more fleeting impression.

The double-page spread is an important characteristic of the picturebook idiom that guided my studio practice. While developing the storyboard for my autoethnographic picturebooks, I was always mindful not to only pay attention to the progression and pacing of the narrative but also to be equally focused on providing the aesthetic experience that each double-spread brings to the readers.

3.6.3 Page-Turning

Unlike a written novel or a comic book, the picturebook does not drive its narrative forward solely in a sequential manner. Instead, the picturebook advances its narrative primarily through a mechanism that Bader calls "the turning of the page" (1976, p.1). Page-turning in a picturebook is similar to opening and closing a stage curtain; each double-spread reveals a scene in which the images and words are the performers. Each time readers turn the page, a whole new experience awaits them in the following double-page spread. Hence, page-turning

is also often used as a narrative strategy to present readers with a sense of drama and surprise.

Relying on page-turning as the primary device to advance a narrative presents picturebook-makers with both challenges and opportunities. Given that most picturebooks only have a limited number of pages, readers would only turn the page a few times. As such, picturebook-makers have to be very deliberate in choosing what they want to include in each double-page spread. This would require them to be extremely focused on the essence of their narratives, stripping back any non-essential element; picturebook-makers must also possess aesthetic sensibility and technical mastery to bring their creative vision to fruition. Sendak encapsulates the challenges confronting picturebook-makers:

> [the picturebook] is a damned difficult thing to do, very much like a complicated poetic form that requires absolute concentration and control. You have to be on top of the situation all the time to finally achieve something that effortless. (1988, p.186)

Because the picturebook usually only has a limited number of pages, the gaps between adjacent double-page spreads could be relatively wide; hence, the picturebook-maker often needs to tap into the reader's participation to fill these gaps so as to advance the narrative in a smooth and coherent manner. This is often achieved by creating the space for readers to bridge the gap with their prior experiences and personal interpretations. Such a narrative strategy could result in a richer and more nuanced narrative that has the potential to engage readers at a deeper level, emotionally and cognitively.

3.7 Conclusion

The emergence and classification of genres such as the crossover picturebook, the picturebook for adults, and the postmodern picturebook can be confusing given the wide-ranging types of picturebooks in the market. There will undoubtedly be many picturebooks that do not fall neatly into any of these genres; it is therefore necessary to understand that the boundaries of any such classification are porous and often ambiguous. Notwithstanding this, such classification plays an important role in my research.

As a published picturebook-maker, I have always been making children's picturebooks (such as *Lost in the Gardens* (2015) and *A Thief in the Night* (2016)) that were targeted at children. While creating picturebooks for children is fulfilling in itself, I had always thought that the picturebook could offer a lot more as an expressive art form. Based on the philosophy of ABR, I tried to bring together autoethnography and the picturebook in my research; this gave me the opportunity to discover the potential of the picturebook in expressing sophisticated content for all age groups.

One of the outcomes of my research was to discover and share different creative picturebook practices that could be used for autoethnographic study. A big part of my practice-based inquiry was the investigation, experimentation and exploration of different visual narrative strategies with the picturebook idiom, frequently involving the aforementioned characteristics of visual and verbal texts, double-page spread, and page-turning. In my search for creative solutions, I also tried to combine the picturebook idiom with idioms of other art forms, such as poetry, visual arts, and cinematography.

Through the creation of four original autoethnographic picturebooks, I hoped to problematize, ask questions, and open up new possibilities with regard to issues related to Singaporean society, particularly those that were difficult to express through conventional propositional writings. In the words of Pantaleo and Sipe, I wanted to invite readers "to generate multiple, often contradictory interpretations and to become co-authors in ways that traditional picturebooks do not offer" (2008, p.4).

Chapter 4 – Framework of the Autoethnographic Picturebook Artist-Researcher

> I never made a painting as a work of art, it's all research.
>
> Pablo Picasso (n.d, cited in McNiff, 2008, p.29)

Chapter 2 lays down the philosophical and epistemological context—based on ABR and autoethnography—of my research; Chapter 3 discusses the picturebook potential as an expressive art form and some of its characteristics as a visual narrative idiom. This chapter explains how I developed a theoretical framework (which I named the 'Framework of the Autoethnographic Picturebook Artist-Researcher') based on my research experience and guided by Frayling's (1993) three types of art research (research into art and design, research through art and design, and research for art and design), Cross's (1999) three sources of design knowledge (people, processes and products), and Schön's (1983) principles of the reflective practitioner (knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action).

4.1 Three Types of Art Research

Christopher Frayling (1993, p.5) describes three types of inquiry for art and design:

(1) ‘Research into art and design’ where art is the object of study, i.e. it primarily involves theoretical study such as historical research and/or aesthetic research that are submitted in the form of PhD theses or MPhil dissertations;

(2) ‘Research through art and design’, which involves the researcher using studio practice as the method of inquiry and the outcomes are usually new discoveries regarding the practice of the art medium; and

(3) ‘Research for art and design’, which refers to research where the artworks are the actual outcomes of the research.

Frayling opines that the last type of inquiry, research for art and design, is problematic:

> The thorny one is Research for art and design … Research where the end product is an artefact – where the thinking is, so to speak, embodied in the artefact, where the goal is not primarily communicable knowledge in the sense of verbal communication, but in the sense of visual or iconic or imagistic communication. (1993, p.5)

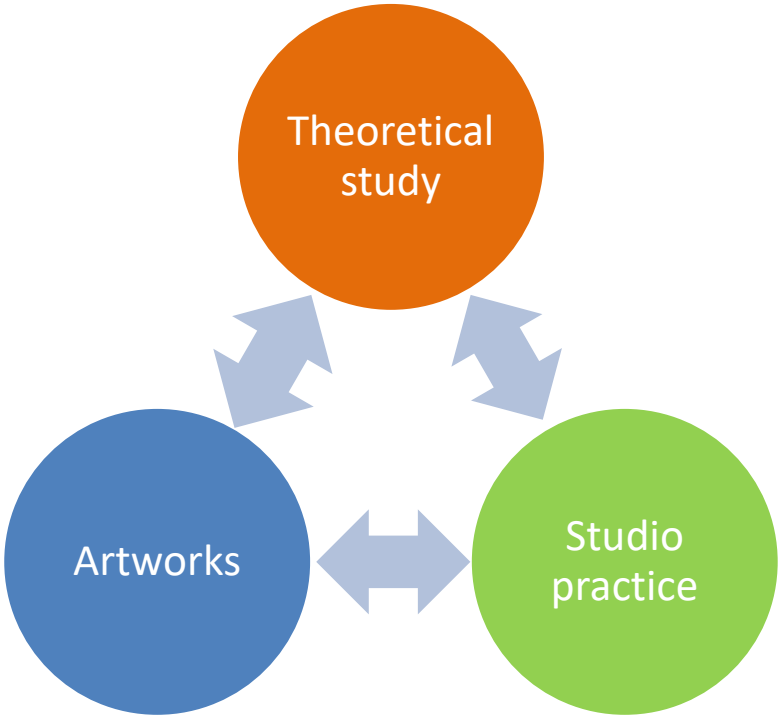
Frayling is not alone in his concern. The idea that artworks could be considered a kind of knowledge does not fit well with the epistemological conventions of research, especially given that content in artworks is usually non-discursive and thus often not generalisable. In contrast, research into art and design and research through art and design are much less controversial, as their inquiry methods involve primarily report writing and systematic analyses of empirical data that can be used to build objective, generalisable hypotheses.

While Frayling’s paper provides a comprehensive description of the three types of research in art and design, it could sometimes give the false impression that they are mutually exclusive.

Joyce Yee (2010) argues that many practice-based design research projects involve methods and outcomes that span the three domains of theoretical study, studio practice, and artefacts. Although Yee focuses primarily on the discipline of design, the concepts she addresses are very much applicable to practice-based art research as well; her paper suggests that more than one of Frayling's three types of art research could be applied to practice-based art research.

My own research experience is congruent with Yee's argument. As I experimented with the various creative possibilities of the picturebook idiom for my autoethnographic study, I often found myself having to learn more about the conventions of the picturebook (research into art and design), discover new methods of using the picturebook to create original content (research through art and design), and make available my picturebooks to both the academy and the public as a product of autoethnography (research for art and design). In this sense, all three types of art research are covered in the course of my inquiry, where the theoretical study, studio practice, and artworks come together in a fluid and dynamic manner to inform and complement each other (see Diagram 1).

Diagram 1



4.2 People, Processes, Products

Nigel Cross writes that "forms of knowledge peculiar to the awareness and ability of a designer" (1999, p.5) can be found in three areas: people, processes and products. Cross argues that to understand design, one must first study how people design: what are the behaviours of designers, what is their thought process, what are the reflections they harboured during their work? Secondly, one must study the processes of design: what are the problems identified, how are ideas generated, what techniques are used to bring the designs to fruition? Thirdly, one must investigate the products because there is design knowledge residing in them: what problems do the products solve, what design principles are used to solve these problems, could the design of the products be better?

Cross's arguments are direct and convincing. His paper is written for the study of design research but it is also relevant to my inquiry, albeit in slightly different ways. For my research, I needed to study the thoughts and work processes of other picturebook-makers, learn about the conventions of the picturebook, reflect on my own studio practice, produce the autoethnographic picturebooks, solicit feedback from peer-reviewers, find ways to publish and exhibit my picturebooks, et cetera. All this requires the learning of people, processes and products.

4.3 The Reflective Practitioner

In his landmark book *The Reflective Practitioner*, Donald Schön (1983) uses three ways to describe the work process of a practitioner:

(1) Knowing-in-action: where a practitioner applies knowledge that is already familiar to him/her in the work process;

(2) Reflection-in-action: where a practitioner reflects on and devises solutions to problems encountered in the midst of the work. Schön explains: "When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories or established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case" (p.68); and

(3) Reflection-on-action: where a practitioner reflects on the work after it is completed to discover how "knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome" (p.26).

Schön's taxonomy of the reflective practitioner applies to all aspects and phases of the work process of all professionals, whether they are engineers, doctors, teachers or artist-researchers. It is therefore implicit that knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are constant, on-going processes throughout my research journey, inside and outside the art studio, although some of these processes could be more accentuated at different stages of the research. This is explained in further detail in the latter part of the chapter.

4.4 The Framework of the Reflexive Practitioner

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, I developed the Framework of the Autoethnographic Picturebook Artist-Researcher (see Table 1) based on the theories of Frayling, Cross, Schön and my own research experience. This framework takes into consideration the 'pick-and-mix' nature (Yee, 2010) of my research methodology as I tried to assimilate autoethnography with the picturebook idiom. It focuses on the actions I took during my research journey and gives them a theoretical basis. As with most frameworks, the Framework of the Autoethnographic Picturebook Artist-Researcher might give the impression that all the domains are clearly organised and neatly sequential; this is far from true in practice. The framework is useful insofar as it provides a broad overview of my work process but it must be noted that things are much more organic and free-flow in real-life. The actions in one domain often overlap with those in another. Furthermore, the actions described in the different domains are not exhaustive and must not be understood as such. Many other things happened throughout the course of the research, especially in the studio, some of which will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Table 1 - Framework of the Autoethnographic Picturebook Artist-Researcher

Cross (1999) – 3 areas of focus / Frayling (1993) - 3 types of research projects	People	Processes	Products
Research into practice	Analyse the thoughts of the picturebook-makers, researchers, critics.	Study the studio processes of the picturebook practice.	Examine the semantics and contents of published picturebooks.
Research through practice	Conduct self-reflexivity by reflecting on lived experience.	Create original picturebooks in the studio with an emphasis on the visual narrative strategies i.e. verbal and visual texts, double-page spread, page-turning.	Reflect and analyse the studio practice with the objective of sharing insights useful to other picturebook-makers and artist-researchers.
Research for practice	Solicit and analyse feedback from peer reviewers.	Create original picturebooks in the studio with an emphasis on their contents i.e. the autoethnography.[2]	Assess the quality of the original picturebooks[3]; develop an outreach strategy to share the picturebooks (e.g. public exhibition, online sharing, and/or publication).

The rest of this chapter will be devoted to explaining my enquiry method in relation to this framework, drawing on the philosophies of ABR and autoethnography, picturebook conventions and my experiences as appropriate.

[2]The two blue domains are discussed together (instead of separately) in 4.6.2 because of the unity of content and form in art.
[3]Guided by Yuan's and Hickman's criteria for judging poetic research (see Table 3).

4.5 Research Into Practice

Frayling describes research into practice as “the most straightforward, and […] by far the most common” (1993, p.5) type of research in art and design. Part of the reason for this is that outcomes of research into practice are generally some form of communicable knowledge based on the study of art and design, usually from an outside-in perspective. Martin Salisbury writes that in such an enquiry, “the voice of the illustrators tends to be heard through interviews and […] through the work itself” (2008, p.25). The artist whose life and work is being studied is often relatively silent as extrapolation and interpretation are left to the third-party researcher. Given the highly personal and subjective nature of art, such a method of enquiry might not always be satisfactory; as such, there is value when the researcher is also the artist whose life and work is the centre of the study i.e. practise-based art research. However, this does not mean that practice-based art researchers should only be concerned about their own art practice.

Even though my research is practice-based, the methods employed are not confined only to art practice in the studio. The creation of the picturebook, as with the creation of other types of artwork, is a lengthy and complex process that involves a plethora of experimental and technical activities. It is incumbent upon the artist-researcher to learn about the picturebook in sufficient depth not only through the act of practice, but also through the study of its cultural and social conventions and the work of other picturebook-makers, so as to better understand how the picturebook idiom can function as an expressive art form. By studying the people, processes and products in the realm of the picturebook, the artist-researcher could make more informed choices and be more experimental in his/her own practice. Practice-based artist-researchers do not just make art inside their studios: a significant part of their

enquiry also involves finding out more about their art form through accessing information from the wider knowledge pool both within and beyond the academy.

4.5.1 Research Into Practice—People

As shown in Table 1, research into practice focusing on people could involve the study of picturebook-makers through interviewing them. However, if the relevant people cannot be accessed, then the artist-researcher could turn to writings (e.g. academic papers, books and news articles) for information. An example is Martin Salisbury's *Play Pen: New Children's Book Illustrations* (2007) where he records his interviews with thirty picturebook-makers; another example is *Children Reading Pictures: Interpreting Visual Texts* by Evelyn Arizpe and Morag Styles (2003), which analyses the responses of child readers to the verbal and visual texts of the picturebook.

4.5.2 Research Into Practice—Processes

Research into practice focusing on processes is relatively more challenging than research into practice focusing on people because it is difficult to find materials on the work process of the picturebook-maker. In fact, most picturebook-makers do not make their exploratory sketches and preliminary drawings available; many of them might consider such sketches too crude or not fit to be shown to others. What the public often sees are the finished products only. However, the proliferation of the internet and growing online culture have blurred the boundary between private and public spaces; more and more work-in-progress sketches are now accessible online where picturebook-makers showcase their storyboards, manuscripts,

dummy books and other such preliminary work. Among renowned picturebook-makers who publish their sketches online are David Wiesner,[4] George Shannon[5] and Tara Lazar.[6]

4.5.3 Research Into Practice—Products

Research into practice focusing on products is the study of completed, usually published, picturebooks. A completed picturebook embeds at least two things: (1) the content; and (2) the picturebook idiom used to communicate that content. When the average readers look at the picturebook, they read the narrative and take away the content. In this way, every picturebook contributes to our understanding of something. This is one of the key reasons why children's picturebooks are used widely at homes and in schools as an educational tool. For example, a reader of Francesca Sanna's *The Journey* (2016) will have the chance to understand some of the trials and tribulations of migrating refugees and develop some empathy towards their predicament. What is often less obvious to the average reader is how the picturebook idiom is used to communicate the content. Picturebook-makers go to great lengths to explore different visual narrative strategies to make their picturebooks creative and interesting; part of the artist-researcher's job, then, is to uncover these visual narrative strategies and advance understanding of the picturebook idiom as an expressive art form. David Lewis's landmark book *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks: Picturing Text* (2001) analyses selected award-winning picturebooks and develops a taxonomy of the different types of visual narrative strategies used in them.

[4] [online] Available at: <http://www.davidwiesner.com/work> [Accessed 12 Dec 2018].
[5] [online] Available at: <https://georgeshannon.wordpress.com/> [Accessed 12 Dec 2018].
[6] [online] Available at: <https://taralazar.com/> [Accessed 12 Dec 2018].

To trained eye, a finished picturebook could also contain information beyond the content and the picturebook idiom, about the publishing market and the wider conventions of the picturebook in specific cultures. The practice-based artist-researcher's work is not only confined to art-making in the studio: research into practice is also an important enquiry method for the practice-based artist-researcher.

4.6 Research Through Practice

Many artist-researchers are drawn to ABR because it provides them with an alternative method of enquiry through which to understand the human world with the potential to engage a wide audience-base (Wang et al., 2017, pp.7). Central to the practice of ABR is the act of art practice, whether it is writing a novel, doing a performance, composing a piece of music, or, as in my case, making a picturebook. For this reason, research through practice is a key domain for practice-based artist-researchers. Research through practice brings the focus to the artist's actions in the studio i.e. the creative process used to bring an idea into a physical form known as art; practice becomes the method of enquiry from which new discoveries could emerge (Yee, 2010). The outcomes of research through practice are usually innovative methods of practice or process-related methodologies.

4.6.1 Research Through Practice—People

In his influential book *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry as Visual Arts*, Graeme Sullivan writes that, "The artist is the key figure in the creation of new insights and awareness that has the potential to change the way we see and think" (2010, p.70). Hence, in ABR, the artist-researcher's self-reflexivity plays a central role in the method of enquiry. For the

autoethnographic picturebook artist-researcher, the main subject of research through practice focusing on people is himself/herself. This is not only because of the autoethnographic nature of the research—which by definition means the researcher uses his/her own lived experience as the basis for eliciting knowledge—but also because the method of enquiry involves the creation of picturebooks by the artist-researcher.

Self-reflexivity for the autoethnographic picturebook artist-researcher could involve examining key moments of his/her lived experience, or in Denzin's words, "[epiphanies] that have effects at the deep level of a person's life" (2008, p.120). These epiphanies need not be memories of actual events (although they could be); they could also be states of mind or feelings that one previously held in response to the context at the time. In my own practice, I began by reflecting on certain enduring mindsets I held in the past (which might still linger in me today) and examined them through the perspective of the 'current me'. I thought about the thoughts and emotions I used to experience and what caused me to think that way. I found such reflexive activity a powerful and surreal experience, as if a 'conscious me' (now) is speaking to an 'unconscious me' (of the past). Denzin likens this experience to a person entering "those strange and familiar situations that connect critical biographical experiences (epiphanies) with culture, history, and social structure" (2008, p.121).

The thoughts and feelings generated through self-reflexivity could, as Sullivan argues, offer "the potential to improve our capacity to undertake inquiry that reveals the fuller dimensions of human processes and actions — and many of these are captured in pictures and can be likewise rendered in images" (2010, p.52). As the autoethnographic picturebook artist-

researcher reflects on their lived experience, they also discover more about themselves as an individual and the world that they occupy. Reflexive activities of this kind generate the raw materials that the artist-researcher can use to create the narratives for his/her autoethnography with the picturebook. Such reflexive practice, embedded and manifested through the picturebook, could in turn be a form of knowledge for both future artist-researchers as well as for members of the public.

4.6.2 Research Through Practice/Research For Practice—Processes

> For it is plain that all speculations about painting are academic, just as all art criticism takes place after the event, and to suppose that in framing words around a work of art its mystery can be probed is a fallacy built up by art criticism, and one which we, involved in the practice of painting, are only too keenly aware. For a Cezanne cannot be described, if it could there would have been no need for it to have been painted ... (Minton, 1952, p.5)

This section is different from the rest of this chapter because I will be discussing two domains in Table 1 together: research through practice focusing on processes (where the emphasis is on the practice of the picturebook) and research for practice focusing on processes (where the emphasis is on the content of the picturebook). I am doing this because of the unique characteristic of unity of content and form in art (Graham, 2005; Feige, 2010). Imagine that (as suggested above), instead of showing you the actual paintings, someone tried to verbally articulate the meanings of Paul Cezanne's 1895 painting *Mont Sainte-Victoire seen from Bellevue* or Picasso's 1937 painting *Guernica*. To understand the meaning of an artwork, one must treat its content and form as one fused entity: the meaning of art cannot be paraphrased. This means that an artist could not make an artwork without considering its content and form

together during the creative process. As the artist manipulates the form to express the content, the content would inevitably and intuitively influence how the form is shaped. The two are inseparable.

If research through practice focusing on people is the main domain where raw materials for the autoethnographic picturebook are generated, then research through practice focusing on processes and research for practice focusing on processes are two domains where these raw materials are put together into a narrative and given a physical form with the picturebook idiom. These two domains occur in the artist-researcher's studio where most of the creative work leading to the completed picturebook is done.

There is no lack of research that tries to explain what exactly happens in the artist's studio i.e. what goes on during the creative process. Components like decision-making, divergent and convergent thinking, and affective factors are examined and often explained in terms of models, phases and paradigms. For example, based on their observation of sixteen professional visual artists working in their studio, Mary-Anne Mace and Tony Ward (2002) develop an art-making process model comprising four main phases: artwork conception; idea development; making the artwork and idea development; and finishing the artwork. However, such empirical study (especially when done by researchers who are not artists themselves) is inevitably criticised for oversimplifying the creative process, which would almost certainly involve many intangible and unobservable activities such as cognitive thinking, intuition, imagination and other mental activities. The real issue, though, might be that the human creative process is simply too complex to be pinned down definitively as it varies from

culture to culture and person to person. Hence, instead of trying to explain this complicated concoction of various mental and physical activities known as the creative process, I will focus on the two key tasks of the autoethnographic picturebook artist-researcher in the studio: (1) to create a story based on the artist-researcher's lived experience i.e. content creation; and (2) to create a picturebook to tell the story i.e. practice application.

To create a story, artist-researchers must first decide how to string together the key moments of their lived experience generated during the self-reflexive exercise into a coherent, evocative, and artistic narrative that would appeal to readers. It is not dissimilar to how a doctor would explain a medical condition to a patient or how a lawyer would present a criminal case to a jury. Mark Freeman writes, "the phenomenology of human temporality requires it as a condition of the very intelligibility of experience" (1998, p.457, cited from Banks, 2008, p.157). Freeman posits that our notion of self-identity and the exchange of social meanings are made possible because of narrative. Christopher Booker shares similar idea to Freeman when he writes, "one of the deepest human needs met by our faculty for imagining stories is our desire for an explanatory and descriptive picture of how the world began and how we came to be in it" (2004, p.485). The innate desire for and the inevitability of constructing narratives, as a way to discover, communicate, and understand knowledge, is central to the work of autoethnographers.

Conventionally, a story is often categorised (in libraries and bookshops) as fiction or non-fiction. The former is linked to notions of 'fabricated truth' and the latter, to 'fact'. Tom Barone (2008) rejects this dualistic categorisation. Barone cites (p.107) examples from the

work of Clifford Geertz and Elliot Eisner to argue that fiction and non-fiction writing can each be valid methods of research. He posits that there is benefit in having a hybrid entity that has the dual qualities of reliability and ambiguity, truth and imagination, fact and evocation. He calls this genre of expression creative non-fiction. In the same vein, Banks (2008) challenges the conventional thinking of fictional writing as purely made-up. He claims that "writing literary fiction can be a productive, even revelatory, practice for communicating scholarship" (p.155). The autoethnographic picturebook artist-researcher inhabits the liminal space between fiction and non-fiction i.e. the space of the creative non-fiction. This liminal space is flanked by two opposing forces: centripetal (where the mode of communication is perceived as authoritative, truthful and objective) and centrifugal (where the mode of communication is perceived as imagined, subjective and ambiguous) (Barone, 2008, pp.108-110). By mixing the self-reflexive outcomes of their lived experience with other ingredients such as imagination, intuition and external influences (especially influences from the arts), autoethnographic picturebook artist-researchers could conjure up a story that leans more towards either side of the two forces (centripetal or centrifugal) depending on the kind of dialectic tension they want to create with the picturebook.

Having developed the story, the autoethnographic picturebook artist-researcher then needs to decide how to tell the story with the picturebook idiom. This involves, more than any other domain in Table 1, the act of making something in the art studio i.e. applying a medium to create an artefact. A big part of the creative process is decision-making and problem solving (Robinson, 2011; Taylor, 2013; Sawyer, 2012): the task of the artist-researcher is to generate creative solutions with various visual narrative strategies, often via a process of exploration and experimentation with the different characteristics of the picturebook idiom such as visual

and verbal texts, double-page spread, and page-turning (as discussed in Chapter 3). In *The Second Hand Vespa* (see Chapter 6), I experimented with an interplay of poetic words and illustrations to convey a childhood memory that raises questions about wider influences, leading to issues like an inferiority complex and naval-gazing. The poetic words are more centripetal, while the illustrations are more centrifugal. The tension between the two, in Iser's words, "tends to manifest itself in a somewhat diffuse manner, in fleeting impressions that defy our attempts to pin it down in a concrete and stabilized form" (1993, p.3). When I was writing the words and making the illustrations, I was constantly engaged in knowing-in-action (recalling pre-existing skills that I possessed as a published picturebook-maker) and reflection-in-action (exploring creative ways of using visual narrative strategies to convey my story).

4.6.3 Research Through Practice—Products

Research through practice focusing on products takes place when the autoethnographic picturebook is completed. At this stage, the artist-researcher could investigate and reflect on their own creation (applying Schön's (1983) principle of reflection-on-action). Reflecting on the completed book allows the artist-researcher to examine their creative process from a third person's perspective. Often, creative decisions made during the art-making stage might look right at that moment but become less than ideal from a 'rear-view mirror' point of view. Using *Lemonade Sky* as an example (see Chapter 5), I made significant changes to the finished book a year after I had initially 'completed' it. The time away from the completed book provided the impetus for fresh insights and new ideas on how to improve the book.

Through reflecting on their own artwork, the artist-researcher could conduct an enquiry into their own practice in several areas, such as the application of art media; the use of texts; the arrangement of signs and signifiers (Barthes, 1967); and the overall design and feel of the artefact. This reflective method of enquiry supports Frayling's claim that all artists are involved in some sort of research about "the science of semiotics" (1993, p.4). In the context of the autoethnographic picturebook, reflection-on-action has the potential to generate insights with wider significance such as creative methods pertaining to the practice of the picturebook and/or different ways of using the picturebook for autoethnography; this aligns well with my research objective, which is to develop a better understanding of the creative practice of the picturebook form for autoethnographic study. Knowledge of this kind is developed through practice in the studio, embedded implicitly in the completed picturebook, and becomes explicit through the reflection-on-action of the artist-researcher.

4.7 Research For Practice

Research for practice, according to Frayling (1993), is when the outcome of the research is embodied within the artwork, where the artefact is also used to communicate the result of the scholarly inquiry. This philosophy is widely embraced by ABR researchers (Sullivan, 2010; Barone & Eisner, 2011; Leavy, 2015). The arts have a long history in the cognitive domain (Frayling, 1993); mankind has always used art to communicate ideas, particularly those that concern the non-discursive and affective domains that cannot be satisfactorily conveyed in words alone. Leavy writes:

> By connecting people on emotional and visceral levels, artistic forms of representation facilitate empathy, which is a necessary precondition for challenging

> harmful stereotypes [...] and building coalitions/community across differences. (2015, p.26)

What Leavy means is that works of art have the capacity to shape people's thoughts and behaviours by engaging our different sensory modes. Daniel Martin Feige agrees and shares more detail on how art could affect our thoughts and actions, positing that the most important function of art is reflexivity:

> The internal function of art is neither providing an aesthetic experience in hedonic terms nor gaining knowledge about the world. In contrast works of art are candidates for our self-understanding and thus part of a reflexive practice. (2010, p.134)

Feige argues that the function of art is not to impart knowledge, which can be more effectively explained via conventional means. For Feige, art connects with us emotionally and helps us understand complex meanings dealing with the human world through reflexive practices. Eisner shares the same thinking as Leavy and Feige and stressed empathy as a key outcome of ABR:

> Experiencing a situation in a form that allows you to walk in the shoes of another is one way to know one aspect of it. Empathy is a means to understanding, and strong empathic feelings may provide deep insight into what others are experiencing. In that sense, the arts in research promote a form of understanding that is derived or evoked through empathic experience. (2008, p.6)

4.7.1 Research For Practice—People

Artworks are an important research outcome in ABR because they connect with our emotional and visceral domains, evoke a sense of empathy, and encourage us not only to make sense of the meanings embedded within them, but also to create new meanings and possibilities from our own point of view. According to Finley, "arts-based researchers

renounce the role of expert and fully accept the communities of participants and audiences as co-equal collaborators in doing Research" (2008, p.75). For this reason, the reflexivity of the readers as they read the autoethnographic picturebooks matters in my research process. This is the domain of research for practice focusing on people where the autoethnographic picturebook artist-researcher solicits and examines responses from readers to get a sense of the impact of their picturebooks. It is, however, not always a straightforward process to solicit the readers' views, not least because these views could differ widely depending on who the readers are but also because platforms available from which to gather these views are not easily available. The picturebook is a commercial commodity that is sold to the public through the distribution channels of the publisher. This makes it impossible to track who the consumers are, making any credible assessment of the impact of the picturebook highly challenging.

Notwithstanding this, the artist-researcher could still engineer certain methods to get a sample of how readers respond to their picturebooks. The method I used for my enquiry involved posting my picturebooks on social media and inviting close friends (from various backgrounds ranging from education, the media, IT and engineering among others) to share their comments with me. I would like to express my gratitude to them for taking the time to give their thoughts about my work. It would be unwise to make any generic claims if the sample size used was small, but it nevertheless gives the artist-researcher an indication of how readers might respond to their autoethnography. This could pave the way for improvements in the artist-researcher's enquiry method and art practice during the research process.

4.7.2 Research For Practice—Products

One of the main functions of the picturebook is to communicate its content or story, which in my context, is autoethnography. In research for practice focusing on products, the autoethnographic picturebook artist-researcher looks back at completed picturebooks, tries to assess their quality and takes proactive steps to showcase their work to the public.

The main reason many ABR artist-researchers choose art as the medium through which to communicate their research outcomes is because of its evocative quality. Works of art can evoke a sense of empathy from their audience (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Leavy, 2015). For this reason, any assessment of the quality of an autoethnographic picturebook should also be connected to the notion of empathy. Yuan and Hickman (2015) develop a framework for the assessment of ABR research. In Table 2, Hickman presents a criteria-based assessment framework for judging the three paradigms of research, where the paradigm for poetic research could be equated with the paradigm for the arts in general.

Table 2 – An Adjusted Version of Hickman's (2013) Framework for Judging Three Paradigms of Research

Guiding Principle	**Quantitative Research**	**Qualitative Research**	**Poetic Research**
Worthwhileness	Utility	Value	*Insightfulness*
Veracity	Internal Validity	Credibility	*Authenticity*
Applicability	External Validity	Transferability	*Empathic Strength*
Consistency	Reliability	Dependability	*Formal Coherence*
Persuasiveness	How Convincing	How Compelling	*Expressiveness*
Neutrality	Objectivity	Confirmability	*Distinctiveness*

While it is not clear whether it is one of its intentions, this framework seems to cater to both content-quality (Insightfulness, Authenticity, Empathic Strength) and form-quality (Formal Coherence, Expressiveness and Distinctiveness), which are both necessary and essential given the unity of content and form in art. This framework could be used as a guide when assessing the quality of an autoethnographic picturebook.

Artist-researchers in ABR are not satisfied that their research projects are only circulated among a small number of specialised people within the academy (Leavy, 2015, p. 27). As works of art use artistic texts that target our emotional domain, it is not necessary to have special skills to understand them: they are able to reach a broad audience base that includes nonacademic stakeholders. In fact, it is imperative for artist-researchers to reach out to the public with their artworks as much as possible.

According to Leavy,

> exposure to the final research representations [the artworks] have the potential to jar people into seeing and/or thinking differently, feeling more deeply, learning something new, or building empathetic understandings. (2015, p.20)

For this reason, the autoethnographic picturebook artist-researcher should share their picturebooks both in and outside the academy. Conducting presentations at conferences, showcasing artworks in exhibitions, and having papers or picturebooks published are viable platforms through which to get the scholarship and picturebooks 'out there'. Table 3 below chronicles my outreach effort from 2018 to 2020 to showcase my research and picturebooks.

Table 3 – Outreach Activities For My Research

2018	2019	2020
• Conducted a presentation on Autoethnographic Picturebook at 'Interpret'-StoryLab Symposium (14 Mar 2018). • Exhibited *Lemonade Sky* in the *21st International Contemporary Artist's Book Fair 2018* (3-4 Mar 2018) at The Tetley in Leeds.	• Exhibited two prints from *The Second-Hand Vespa* and *Random Luck* at Cambridge Art Network Connextions 2019 (27 Feb-14 Mar 2019). • Exhibited three prints from *Random Luck* at Sustainability Art Prize 2019 at the Ruskin Gallery (4-29 Apr 2019) • Conducted a presentation on Autoethnographic Picturebook at Theorem Symposium 2019 (4 Jul 2019). • Exhibited *Lemonade Sky* as a digital book at Theorem Exhibition 2019 (4-19 Jul 2019). • Conducted a presentation on Autoethnographic Picturebook at AHSS Research Conference 2019 (11 Jul 2019). • Exhibited 2 prints from *Mr Goodchild* at AHSS Research Conference Exhibition (11 Jul-23 Aug 2019). • Signed a book contract with Epigram Books to publish *Lemonade Sky* in Nov 2020.	• Published abstract from *Random Luck* in *Ways of Thinking* 2020 (5 Mar 2020). • Exhibited 12 prints from *Mr Goodchild* in 'Ways of Storytelling' art exhibition at Ruskin Gallery by three PhD students, including myself (5-27 Mar 2020). • Published a 3000-word paper on *Lemonade Sky* in *Theorem 2020* (Jul 2020 – delayed due to Covid-19 pandemic). • *Lemonade Sky* book launch in Nov 2020.

4.8 Conclusion

All ABR research projects involve two tightly intertwined entities i.e. the investigation of some social phenomena, such as gender equality, minority oppression, or cultural blind spots (Barone & Eisner, 2011) and the expression of that investigation through an artistic process and art form. Such research could potentially yield at least two bodies of knowledge: one pertains to the social phenomena being investigated; the other, to the creative use of the texts (of the chosen art form) as a medium of expression. The Framework of the Autoethnographic Picturebook Artist-Researcher provides the autoethnographic picturebook artist-researchers with a detailed guide as to how they could configure their research method and scope their research outcomes.

I chose to use autoethnography to investigate the social phenomena of Singaporean society and the picturebook as the medium to communicate my scholarship. My research is not confined exclusively in any one of Frayling's three types of art and design research. Instead, the methods and outcomes of my research are dispersed across all the three types of inquiry, residing mostly in the domains marked with '**X**' in Table 4. Understood in this context, ABR is a highly rigorous and systematic process in which the artist-researcher is required to perform at a high level, both in the theoretical and the practical aspect of the enquiry, to generate outcomes that are creative, engaging and insightful.

Table 4 – Domains Covered By The Enquiry Method Of The Autoenthnographic Picturebook Artist-Researcher

Cross (1999) – 3 areas of focus / Frayling (1993) - 3 types of research projects	**People**	**Processes**	**Product**
Research into practice	X	X	X
Research through practice	X	**X**	**X**
Research for practice	X	**X**	**X**

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 will take a critical look at the background context of my autoethnographic picturebooks and the various visual narrative strategies used in each of them, to provide more clarity on how the Framework of the Autoethnographic Picturebook Artist-Researcher works in practice.

Chapter 5 – *Lemonade Sky*

> My book is meant to offer a more inclusive vision of Singapore's history, one that encourages readers to look at all narratives with a critical eye.
>
> Sonny Liew (n.d., cited in Johnson, 2017, para. 7)

I began this research journey as a Singaporean educator, artist, picturebook-maker, and a citizen who wanted to contribute to the understanding of Singaporean society through ABR, by sharing insights from my own lived experience. The underlying principle of my inquiry is that every individual's lived experience is a piece of a larger jigsaw puzzle. When such experiences are processed, analysed and documented, they can galvanise dialogue, germinate ideas, and raise awareness, thus contributing to the overall understanding of the social world. The decision to use ABR in my inquiry came from my deeply-held belief that the best way to understand complex issues is through a multipronged approach that engages the learner cognitively and affectively. As a student of the arts, it is my conviction that it offers different ways of understanding the world from the kinds that are found in mainstream quantitative and qualitative methods. As a published picturebook-maker who creates content for children, I was intrigued to explore the potential of the picturebook form as a medium for ABR i.e. how could the picturebook be used for autoethnography? What are the various meaning-making possibilities that the picturebook form could offer to readers of all ages?

5.1 Lived Experience in Imagined Narrative

As an autoethnographer, I approached my inquiry by reflecting on episodes of my lived experience, focusing on events that have significant meaning to me now as a middle-aged man. Norman Denzin (2008) calls this inquiry method 'interpretive biographical research'. By recalling past events in a deliberate and ruminative way, I was able to re-engage with my past and create new ways of thinking about it. In bringing back and juxtaposing fragmented past memories with current impressions, I interrogated the relationship between my history and my autobiographical present. Richard Hickman writes that "[w]e can never really know the 'other' and familiarity with one's own history, desires and motives, while impossible to view objectively, can shed light on issues that might be of value" (Hickman, 2011, p.20). By telling the story of my past, I wanted to create the impetus to re-think the present, to reveal hidden features in the society, and to disrupt conventional narratives.

Conventional autoethnography, while often written with an emotive overtone, largely stays within the confines of a factual account of one's previous lived experience. However, I chose to create a fictional diegesis, a made-up story that embeds my reflections in an imagined narrative. This story eventually became the first picturebook of my practiced-based research: *Lemonade Sky*. Raymond Mar and Keith Oatley opine that "[e]ngaging in the simulative experiences of fiction literature can facilitate the understanding of others who are different from ourselves and can augment our capacity for empathy and social inference" (2008, p.173). My own lived experience as a child is congruent with their argument. As a child, I read many martial arts and chivalry novels written by Louis Cha Leung-yung (popularly known by the pen name Jin Yong). I attribute many of my character traits today to the influence of various protagonists from his novels. This is not dissimilar to how stories from

children's books influence children's values and how they come to understand the world around them (Kimmel, 1970). In a study by Fehl Shirley (1969) conducted on 420 high school students, one of the key findings shows that there is no meaningful difference in influence (on the children's thinking and behaviour) between fiction and non-fiction stories (Kimmel, 1970, p.211).

Fictional narratives offer readers simulations of the social world through abstracting and/or concentrating events from real life. They provide readers with immersive experiences that have the power to alter the way events in the social world are perceived, and change readers' mindsets and behaviours (Mar & Oatley, 2008). This is an important reason for the creation of *Lemonade Sky*. My aim was to produce a fictional story that mimics the feelings I had while growing up in Singapore and invite readers to reflect on their circumstances. Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky claims that "it is the role of the poet to make the stone stony and that to do so one first has to make it strange" (Forrest, 2007, p.4). What the poet would do to the stone is what I had done with the story of *Lemonade Sky*. By intentionally making the plot strange and enigmatic, I hope that readers will be encouraged to scrutinise various elements embedded in the story, connect them with their personal experiences, and in the process discover hidden aspects of Singaporean society that they might otherwise be oblivious to.

5.1.1 My Singapore Story

Lemonade Sky is based on my lived experience growing up in 1970s and '80s Singapore. I was born into a family that struggled financially throughout my childhood. Both my working-class parents had to work long hours to make ends meet. I remembered my father had to leave

home in the wee hours of the morning for work, returning home after midnight; my mother had to work round the clock looking after me and my brothers while also sewing clothes, which she brought home from a factory, to supplement the family income. Their life was filled with hardship and incessant worries about money. My world, on the other hand, was relatively blissful and generally filled with a sense of optimism. If a country had a life trajectory, the 1970s and ’80s was like the adolescence of Singapore. During this time, Singapore embarked on a ferocious pace of nation-building, resulting in rapid cultural, social, and economic change. I experienced some of the nation-building strategies of those times, in particular various government national campaigns. These were usually launched by high profile officeholders and propagated through the media and local community centres. I remembered the banners, logos, slogans, mascots, theme songs and TV advertisements used in these campaigns vividly to this day. For example, there were campaigns to keep Singapore clean, to plant more trees, to spread family planning, to be courteous, to raise the productivity of our workforce, to encourage the speaking of Mandarin, to use good English, and finally to save water. I agree with Tin Seng Lim, who writes that, “Singapore’s campaigns and their mascots have become an idiosyncratic and often nostalgic part of our national heritage” (2013, p.4). Of course, at that young age, there was no way I could have known that these campaigns were used, for the most part very successfully, by the government as part of a wider instrument to implement public policy.

Every year, my childhood calendar was filled by one national campaign after another. I found myself constantly looking forward to the next new campaign, its ads on TV, its catchy theme songs, and its banners displayed all over the neighbourhood. Being good at drawing from a young age, I took part in many children’s art competitions (winning many prizes along the

way) organised by community centres near my home as part of the drive to support these campaigns. This experience built my confidence and interest in art. However, love for art was not the only thing that the national campaigns had forged in me; they also instilled in me a strong sense of purpose with their uplifting and virtuous messages. In my young mind, I felt I had a good idea of the qualities of a responsible Singaporean i.e. do not litter, do not spit, speak Mandarin, be courteous, do not waste water, et cetera. I had a real sense of obligation to the wider community. Part of this could be due to the naivety of a child but it was also a validation of the success of a city-state that was single-minded and relentless in influencing its residents in certain ways of thinking and behaviour. Lim echoes this sentiment, writing, "No other country has embraced campaigning as much as we have" (2013, p.4).

Singapore enjoyed a sustained period of high economic growth in the 1970s and '80s. By the 1990s, it had become one of the wealthiest nations in the world. The Singaporean government was instrumental in this success, receiving high praise from all over the world. The Washington Post commended Lee Kuan Yew, the founding father of the Singapore governing political party, for transforming the "tiny Asian country of 3 million from a colonial backwater to an international economic powerhouse with clean streets, low crime and peace" (Roberts, 1996, para. 3). Looking back, I feel a deep sense of gratitude to Singapore for providing me—a playful child from a working-class family—with the opportunity to gain an education and to live a relatively good life.

From childhood to young adulthood, spanning much of the 1970s and '90s, I developed a deep faith in the Singapore government. As a young man in my twenties, I had unwavering

trust in the government's intention and ability to improve the lives of Singaporeans. I questioned hardly any of the government policies. I believed that when the government advised families to stop at two children (a campaign launched in 1972), it did so for the welfare of those families; when the government encouraged Chinese people to speak Mandarin instead of regional dialects (launched in 1979), this was because doing so would be good for the Chinese community; when the government fined people for littering and banned the sale of chewing gum (in 1992), this was necessary to keep Singapore clean. Even as a mature man now, I still have a high level of trust in the Singapore government, and I am not unique in this regard. In a newspaper article published in The Straits Times on 18 March 2019 titled "Singapore fares better in trust than other developed countries: Report" (Rekhi, 2019), it was revealed that Singaporeans had more trust in the government than populations of other developed countries. In fact, this strong trust between the people and the government remains a great strength behind Singapore's triumphant story.

However, the success of the Singaporean government has also developed an attitude of (over-) reliance that persists in Singaporean people to this day. Indeed, the city-state has become so successful that its people are accused of being complacent. The *Economist* published an article on 18 Jul 2015 titled "Singapore's biggest danger: complacency" (Gabriel, 2015). As early as 2003, Paul FitzPatrick writes this about Singaporeans:

> Relying upon others [the Singapore government] to organize our lives by telling us what we can and cannot do may also undermine the basic principle of innovation, which is developing a sense of self-reliance, a belief in oneself, and, of course, a willingness to take control of one's own life. (2003, p.22)

I believe many Singaporeans would agree with FitzPatrick. The Global Innovation Index 2016 report revealed that Singaporeans underperformed in the creative industries. Much of the discussion of creativity (or the lack thereof) is often framed within the educational and economic domains (Sinniah, 2017; Fitzgerald, 2018) and how the Singaporean government should address it so as to make Singapore more competitive on the global stage. My autoethnographical reflection, however, focuses on the social and psychological domains i.e. how growing up in a city-state that is so well governed might stifle one's creativity; how a society that is so well regulated might cultivate (maybe unintentionally) a habit of mind to obey instructions and follow a pre-set pathway without exercising independent thinking. More than thirty years on, I still find myself chronically trapped inside an invisible cocoon, always trying too hard to conform to mainstream expectations, and with an unabating desire for security and certainty.

My inquiry does not intend to analyse the causal relationship between the social context of Singaporean society and its effect on me and Singaporeans in general. As an ABR researcher and autoethnographer, my primary concern is to use my picturebook to create a response in my readers based on my lived experience. The readers are responsible for making meanings from their reading themselves. In Chapter 2, I cited Barone's and Eisner's concept of ABR, which is to "extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication in order to express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable" (2011, p.1). My objective is for *Lemonade Sky* to connect with readers on a cerebral and visceral level. Meaning is not only made via cognitive means: we also have enormous potential to make meaning with our senses. Eisner posits that this sensory mode of meaning-making (through the arts) "opens the door

for multiple forms of knowing" (2008, p.5) and helps to make the understanding of the human world more complete.

5.2 In Search of a Story

My autoethnographic inquiry is, from the onset, tied to my choice of medium i.e. the picturebook. The conventions of the picturebook influence how readers interpret the narrative (some of these conventions like peritext, counterpointing of words and pictures, double-page spread, and page-turning were discussed in Chapter 3). Furthermore, all readers are beset by reader expectations linked to their own cultures. For example, British and American readers might expect picturebooks to be written in a way that facilitates the reader to read aloud, whereas such expectation might not be as pronounced in Asian cultures such as Japan and Singapore. These conventions and reader expectations constrained how I could express my thoughts with the picturebook form, but the constraints could also become stimuli for improvisation and creativity during the creative process, as new solutions were generated through the act of practice.

During the early developmental stage of *Lemonade Sky*, I was confronted with creative paralysis. I could not find a story for my autoethnographic picturebook; I could not match the content to the form. Part of the problem was that my reflection was not focused on a single event. Instead, what I had were diverse fragments of many memories. It seemed I had too many things that I wanted to say. Could my story be 'too big' for the picturebook form? I had considered creating a series of short vignettes to capture the different memories, a method used by Aline Kominsky-Crumb in her brilliant autobiographical graphic narrative *Need*

More Love (2007), and Sonny Liew in his award-winning book *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye* (2015), which offers readers an alternative interpretation of Singapore history that differs from the mainstream narrative. I rejected the idea eventually, because I felt such an approach was better suited to the form of a comic (instead of a picturebook), where panels with speech balloons filled with colloquial dialogue are employed to communicate events in the story (McCloud, 1994; Palmer, 2016). Besides, it had never been my intention to provide a detailed account of my life; what I wanted instead was to use fictional narratives to provide readers with a structure for reflection and meaning-making. As a picturebook-maker, my natural inclination was to create stories that could have "greater affordances for the 'subjunctification' of experience" (Marshall, 2018, n.p.). I felt that fictional stories offered more flexibility in my art-making process. Instead of capturing a factual account of my personal life, what I hoped to achieve was to create a different kind of autoethnography through a fictional story based on data drawn from my lived experience. I did not want readers to consume my story as passive bystanders reading about someone else's life. I wanted them to be immersed in a creative narrative as active participants, perhaps imagining themselves as the protagonist; to feel the emotions I experienced as I reflected on episodes of my past embedded in the story; to connect with the story by bringing in their own lived experiences; to make their own meanings from the story.

With very few exceptions, most picturebooks are designed to contain 32-48 pages. The picturebook convention of brevity limits the amount of information the picturebook-maker can put into the book. Having to pack so much (content) into so little (form) is a tall order, especially if the picturebook-maker is also aspiring to accomplish it with a high degree of aesthetic sophistication. This could be why Sendak describes the picturebook as "a very

difficult thing to do, very much like a complicated poetic form that requires absolute concentration and control" (1988, p.186). Sendak's comparison of the picturebook with poetry is an apt one and in Chapter 6, I further explore the relationship between the picturebook and poetry and how the two could come together as a (new) kind of art form. As a literary object, the picturebook mesmerises readers with its elegance and brevity, with the best using it to convey deep and profound meanings. Some of the best picturebooks prompt readers to be more participatory, encouraging them to fill in the gaps between pages, and giving them more space to interpret the narrative differently (Palmer, 2016, pp.62-89). However, I take a broad view that the limited number of pages in a picturebook is more a convention than an essential quality, as exceptions like *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (2007) and *The Arrival* (2007) have shown. This is discussed further in Chapter 7, as I reflect on *Mr. Goodchild*, which is a more lengthy picturebook.

5.2.1 An Aesthetic Experience

One of the strategies I used to develop *Lemonade Sky* is what Schön calls 'generative metaphors', which means the carrying over of creative approaches from one area of art practice into another. This strategy of making links across different domains allows practitioners to reconfigure a problem in a new light by bringing in new frames of reference that could generate new solutions and inventions. Hence, after many days of failed attempts to conjure up a suitable narrative, I decided to try something different by turning to my experience and skill set as a fine art painter.

Fig. 5-1

It Feels Good, 1999
150 x 150 cm
Acrylic paint on canvas

Fig. 5-2

Self Portrait, 2001
150 x 150 cm
Acrylic paint on canvas

As a fine art painter, I worked by selecting various motifs, which I used as signifiers in my painting. I would arrange them into a composition and paint it with my choice of medium, usually acrylic paint on canvas. The creative process involved a combination of cognitive thinking and visceral intuition. The finished painting was left to the interpretation of the audience. Figs. 5-1 and 5-2 show paintings I created in 1999 and 2001 respectively. Fig. 5-1 is a representation of the consumerist lifestyle of Singaporeans in the 1990s, and Fig. 5-2 is my reflection on the nature of Singaporean corporate society during that time.

I applied the approach of a fine art painter to the autoethnographic picturebook problem by making random sketches in response to the nebulous feeling I had while reflecting on my lived experience. I chose motifs of personal significance and composed them into images freely and intuitively. Figs. 5-3, 5-4 and 5-5 are some examples of the random sketches I produced. Similar to my large-size acrylic paintings, all these drawings were made as independent, standalone images. Figs. 5-3 and 5-4 both include buildings reminiscent of a Singaporean street scene. In the former, I aimed to project the stale feeling I experienced on a day-to-day basis with the enormous dead sloth suspended in the sky casting a shadow over stacks of Singapore HDB[7] flats; in the latter, I tried to express a sense of apathy by sketching people in the street carrying on with their normal activities, paying no attention to the mysterious gigantic figure who sits floating in the air in the middle of a crossroad. Fig. 5-5 shows a group of people with strings tied to their limbs like puppets and a boy wearing a helmet, perhaps to shield himself from a destiny that is out of his control.

[7] HDB flats are public housing managed by the Housing and Development Board of Singapore, which housed about 80% of Singapore's population.

Fig. 5-3

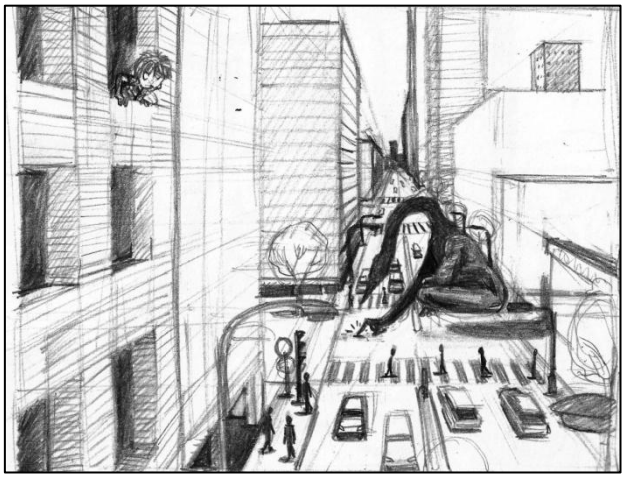


Fig. 5-4

Fig. 5-5

These sketches suggested ideas like isolation, manipulation and apathy. As more and more images began to appear on paper, some fuzzy ideas started to take shape in my head. These ideas provided the impetus for further exploration. I was reminded of Schön's (1983) theory of knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action as I continued my search for a story. My method of making random sketches was not a linear one where one idea led to an even better one in a continual clear trajectory; there was little, if any, order to the strategies I employed. I jumped from one idea to another randomly; some rejected ideas were revived at a later stage while others, despite showing potential at the beginning, ended up nowhere and were discarded. 'Good solutions' were often a result of serendipity.

The dead sloth, the HDB flat and the boy with the helmet resonated with me very strongly. Hence, I explored these motifs further and eventually created a painting with them (see Fig. 5-6). I was satisfied with the painting as I felt it captured the nebulous feeling I had when reflecting on my lived experience. To me, this painting was my autoethnographic study.

I showed the painting to some close friends and was encouraged by their responses. While they could all relate to the stale ambience and the familiar Singaporean backdrop, each one of them also provided a more nuanced interpretation of the painting. One of my former students made the comment, "This is so you!" Her response surprised me because I had not informed her that the painting was an autoethnographic work. Another friend remarked that the painting reminded him of his own experience in the workplace where he felt oppressed and frustrated. My friends' responses convinced me that my painting had given them an 'aesthetic experience', which Eisner describes as a response that animates our imagination and pervades

our emotions (2002, p.xii). As an artist-researcher and an art practitioner, it is important to me that my readers do not just take information from my picturebook, but are also engaged with it by creating their own meanings. In Eisner's words, "Perception is, in the end, a cognitive event. What we see is not simply a function of what we take from the world, but what we make of it" (2002, p.xii).

Fig. 5-6

Untitled, 2017
Digital painting

5.2.2 Found Narrative & A Narrative-Of-Viewpoint

Encouraged by the responses to the first painting, but still without a story for my picturebook, I continued creating more standalone paintings that encapsulated my feelings about Singaporean society (see Figs. 5-7, 5-8, 5-9 and 5-10).

Similar to Fig. 5-6, Figs. 5-8 and 5-10 were created using motifs that had personal meaning to me. Each painting was made based on the emotion I felt as I reflected on my lived experience. When I placed the finished paintings side-by-side, I began to see them as double-page spreads in a picturebook. As I turned from one double-page spread to another, it was as if a new piece of my autoethnography was revealed to me, each closely related to the other yet subtly different. There was no suggestion of time lapse between the pages (since the paintings were created as standalone images), which seemed to invite readers to focus on the emotional quality of the sequence rather than on the progression of events. I began to see a non-time-based narrative involving a shift in viewpoint (of different aspects of an emotion) rather than a narrative showing a progression of time.

Fig. 5-7

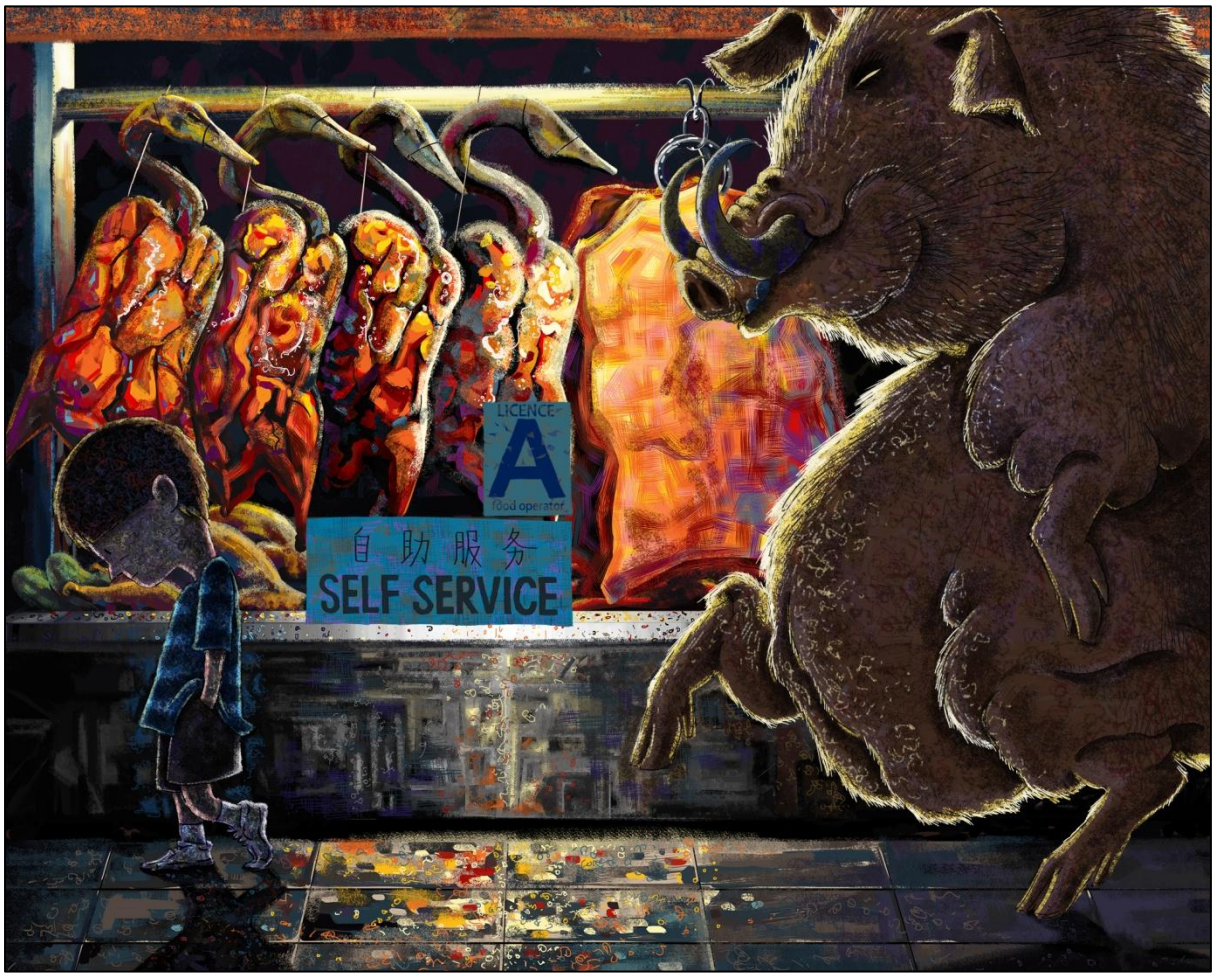


Fig. 5-8

Untitled, 2017
Digital painting

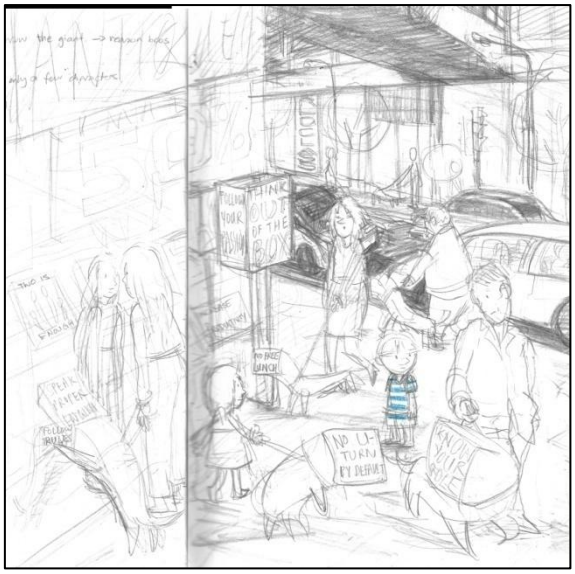


Fig. 5-9

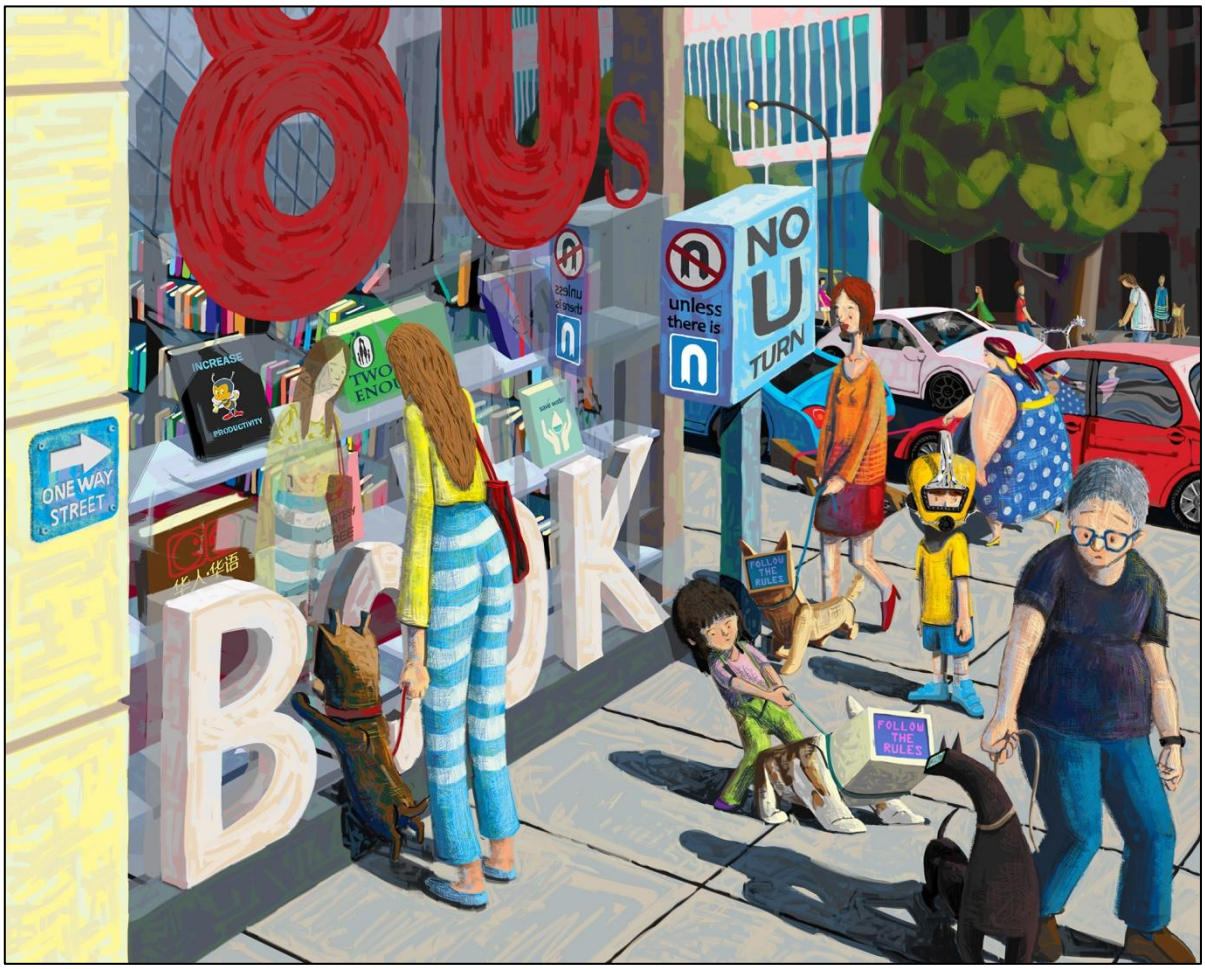


Fig. 5-10

Untitled, 2017
Digital painting

There are two phenomena here that warrant further examination. The first is the concept of a 'found' narrative derived from my experience via creating and looking at images. This is a clear example of how a practice-based method could yield new insights. I would not have found the narrative for *Lemonade Sky* without first involving myself in the act of creating the three paintings, even if the connection between the three paintings and my objective (of finding a narrative) was not clear initially. It seems the act of creating and experiencing creative works could potentially spark new creative ideas, which could in turn lead to new creative activities, a virtuous circle of reflexive creativity. This may explain why I always feel it is important to expose myself to a wide variety of artworks and new life experiences, attending exhibitions and reading widely. This phenomenon of a 'found' narrative contradicts my initial perception that a narrative develops and progresses from content to form. We do not merely draw out the ideas in our head. The notion that content must precedes form is not always right: there might be instances in which form gives birth to content. The two are intricately bounded like a twisted braid where the pathway of one would inevitably influence the course of the other.

The second phenomenon is the idea of a non-time-based narrative involving a shift of viewpoint. Each of the three paintings (Figs. 5-6, 5-8 and 5-10) conveys an aspect of a nuanced emotion that is subtly different from one another, yet collectively, they emit an overwhelming feeling of constriction and staleness that gives them coherence as a series of images. It does not make much difference how the three paintings are organised in terms of their order in a book, as the focus of the narrative is not a time-based sequence of events; instead, the focus is on different aspects of an emotion revealed through a series of images. This kind of non-time-based narrative prompts readers to linger on each double-page spread

longer, as one would when examining a painting. I named this kind of narrative a ‘narrative-of-viewpoint’ because it unveils different dimensions of the same theme to the readers in a coherent way as they turn the page. This discovery of a narrative-of-viewpoint is a good example of how a practice-based inquiry could lead to new insights. However, it must be noted that as a narrative strategy, the narrative-of-viewpoint and the more commonly used time-based narrative are not mutually exclusive: they could be used concurrently depending on the needs and skills of the picturebook-maker. This new insight into a narrative-of-viewpoint provided the breakthrough I needed for my autoethnographic picturebook. I could finally move on to the storyboarding stage.

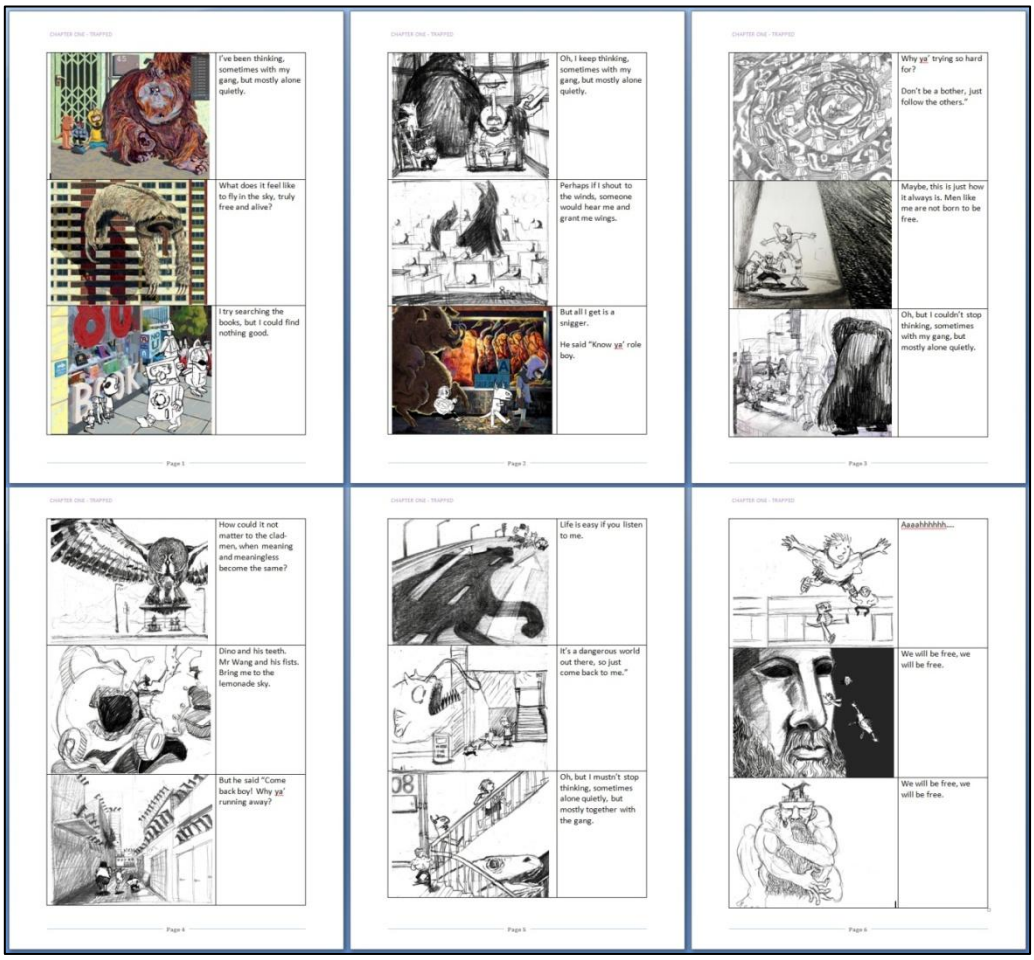


Fig. 5-11

Fig.5-11 shows an iteration of the storyboard

Fig. 5-11 shows one of several iterations of my storyboard. As I modified and shifted my ideas, individual illustrations and words underwent many changes, but the overall style and structure of the narrative remained largely consistent. The earlier phase of the story moved at a slower pace, utilising more elements of the narrative-of-viewpoint; this allowed readers time to linger and experience the emotion of each double-page spread. As the story progressed, the emphasis shifted towards a more time-based narrative; the pace of the story picked up and the focus was shifted towards anticipation of what might happen next. The story finished open-endedly, leaving readers feeling dissatisfied and prompting them to think more deeply about the complexity of the theme of the story.

As I reflected on the *Lemonade Sky* in the post-production phase and in particular, the discovery of the narrative-of-viewpoint, Chris Van Allsburg's (1984) *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* and Shaun Tan's (2001) *The Red Tree* came to mind. *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* is a collection of standalone illustrations, each accompanied by its own words. They are held together not by a narrative but a common theme of cryptic and supernatural experiences. The book does not have a story that develops through a passage of time; in fact, Allsburg could have rearranged the illustrations in different orders without the book losing its appeal.

Shaun Tan describes *The Red Tree* as "a story without any particular narrative" and "a series of distinct imaginary worlds as self-contained images" (n.d.-c, para. 1). *The Red Tree* is an excellent example of how a narrative-of-viewpoint could work concurrently with a time-based narrative. In *The Red Tree*, a little girl leaves her room, takes a walk (in unknown

settings), and returns to the room; this time-based narrative contains a progression of time that has a beginning and an ending, thus projecting a normal and complete loop to the story. However, in essence, the narrative method in *The Red Tree* is much more sophisticated. Shaun Tan uses a method that is more akin to the syntax of film, especially in Bollywood movies, where the backdrops of the protagonists change from one scene to another without a clear and consistent theme; directors of such movies prioritise the creation of mood (through a change of setting) over a sense of realism (by keeping to a fixed location that provides a convincing space that the characters occupy). As readers turn the pages of *The Red Tree*, they find themselves confronting artworks with a different, and often ambiguous, time and space from the previous one. It is the lingering emotion of loneliness and sorrow conveyed through Shaun Tan's different illustrations that makes *The Red Tree* a poignant and unique picturebook. I remembered spending a long time staring at every page of *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* and *The Red Tree*, mesmerised by the beautiful illustrations and simple words, and the different possible stories that are embedded in each of them. However, it was only through the hands-on experience of making *Lemonade Sky* that I acquired a deeper level of understanding of the visual narrative strategies used in the picturebook idiom. Discovering the connections between *Lemonade Sky*, *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* and *The Red Tree* helped me to see vividly the connection between my own practice and the knowledge gained through reading and studying the creative works by other picturebook-makers.

As I transited from the frame of mind of a fine art painter back to that of a picturebook-maker, an unexpected but interesting insight emerged. Being right-handed, my natural inclination was to work from the left side of the canvas to the right, and as a result, the subjects in my paintings tended to face towards my left, which could be seen in the sloth in Fig. 5-14 and the

boy and pig in Fig. 5-12. However, when these paintings were reworked into illustrations for the picturebook, I found myself having to flip the subjects, to conform to the convention of the picturebook (in Western culture) of reading from left to right. This subtle change gives the feeling that the character is leading the reader to the next page as the page is turned (see Figs. 5-13 and 5-15).

Fig. 5-12

Fig. 5-13

Fig. 5-14

Fig. 5-15

5.2.3 Pictures and Words

The process of making *Lemonade Sky* began with the reflection of my lived experience, followed by the creation of three standalone paintings, which subsequently inspired the content of the story. It could be said that *Lemonade Sky* is a picturebook where the visual text takes the lead over the verbal text. In fact, most of the words only emerged during the storyboarding stage. However, my initial attempts to write the words were disappointing; the text was dry and didactic. I found writing for the autoethnographic picturebook very different from writing for the children's picturebook, so my experience in the latter did not help much. Taking advice from the annual review panel members, I arranged to attend a ten-week undergraduate creative writing course. It was a very enriching experience that gave me the confidence to structure my creative writing. Also, purely by chance, I found another source of inspiration that helped me in my writing. I was agonising over the words one day when I heard Bob Dylan's song 'Blowin' in the Wind' playing over a YouTube commercial; it suddenly dawned on me that I could look to song lyrics for ideas. With their limited words, rhythmic form and the ability to evoke emotions, song lyrics appeared to be a suitable form of writing for my narrative. With guidance from my supervisor (because I do not know many English songs myself), I looked at various song lyrics, in particular those written by The Beatles. I especially liked 'Yellow Submarine', which inspired the title for *Lemonade Sky*.

This chance encounter with song lyrics triggered further research, which revealed that the picturebook has a long established relationship with music. In her PhD thesis, Rebecca Palmer writes, "Creators of comics and picturebooks often use musical metaphors to describe the 'composition' of words and images that communicate in tandem" (2016, p.52). Scholars have long been using 'counterpoint' to describe the relationship between the visual and

verbal texts in the picturebook (Sipe, 1998; Wolfenbarger and Sipe, 2007; Salisbury & Styles, 2012). Counterpoint is, of course, a musical term for the arrangement and harmonising of different melodies into a single piece of music. In the picturebook context, counterpoint is, according to Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, the use of visual and verbal texts to provide "alternative information or contradict each other in some way" (2006, p.17), which results in several different readings.

Drawing ideas from song lyrics and taking into consideration the use of counterpoint, I wrote from the first-person point of view in my own voice, as a man in his forties. By juxtaposing the words of a middle-aged man with colourful illustrations that are traditionally associated with child readers, I wanted to create a dissonance between the visual and verbal texts that would prompt readers to think more deeply about the meanings of the narrative.

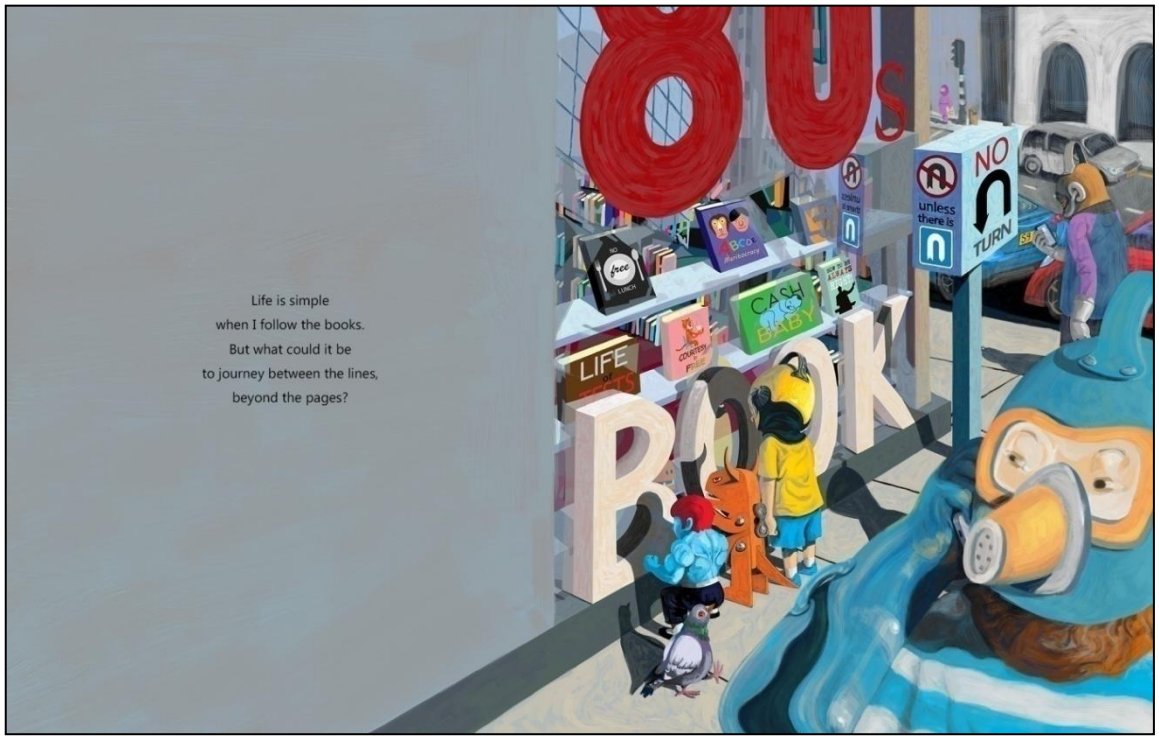


Fig. 5-16

The relationship between my illustrations and words is not straightforward; it is often disconnected and sometimes deliberately ambiguous. For example, in Fig. 5-16, the illustration shows people in the street wearing weird helmets and gloves, but this is not mentioned in the words. The readers are left to figure out who these people are and why they are wearing such outfits. One reader asked why the boy does not wear gloves like the others. In addition, the book covers displayed behind the glass panel are parodies of various Singapore national campaigns in the 1970s and ’80s. Readers who recognise this parody might be able to forge added layers of meanings between the illustrations and the words.

While the words in *Lemonade Sky* are written in prose, I had also borrowed from the convention of the chorus in song lyrics, which gives songs their comforting and familiar character and enhances their rhythm. Just as choruses are often sung repeatedly, there are several pages in *Lemonade Sky* that contain, with slight variations, the words “thinking, sometimes alone but mostly together with the gang”. An orang-utan is depicted in the illustration each time these words appear. Many readers commented that these pages gave the narrative a nice rhythm and got them to pause and think about the meaning of the story. They were also curious about the role of the orang-utan in these pages.

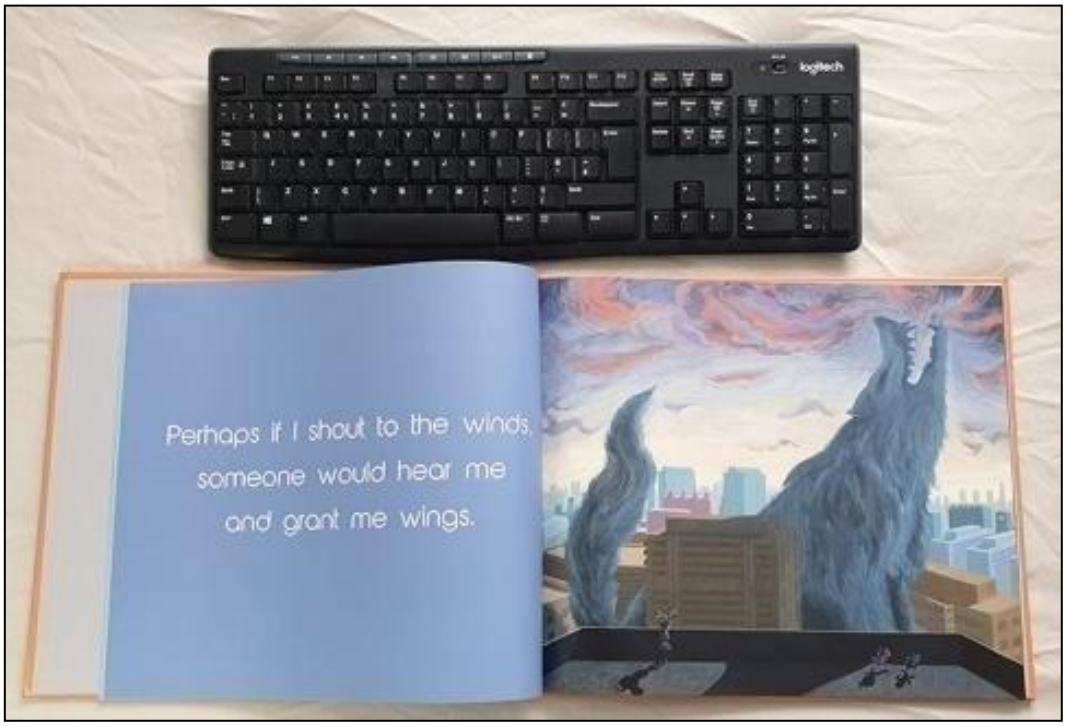


Fig. 5-17

The first *Lemonade Sky* hardcopy prototype book is 65cm x 28cm when flipped open (see Fig. 5-17 showing the scale of the book against a keyboard). I wanted the large size to bolster the majestic feel of the illustrations, allowing words and illustrations to play an equal role in the narrative. I also placed them on either side of the double-page spread, i.e., the large billboard-like words on the left, and a full-page illustration on the right.

When I showed *Lemonade Sky* to readers, the feedback was generally positive; many of them indicated that they especially liked the cryptic nature of the story. I was satisfied with the book and readily moved on to other projects. However, when I revisited the book some months later, I sensed that the words and illustrations felt detached. I recalled the original vision I had for the book when I first made the three standalone paintings and the feelings these paintings conveyed. Sharing a double-page spread with the words took away some of

the visual impact those earlier paintings had on me. I started to ask, “What if an entire illustration is to occupy the full double-page spread? How might that change the way one experiences the book?”

I selected one of the pages from the book, reworked it, and compared the two versions (see Figs. 5-18 and 5-19). In Fig. 5-18, while the words were more prominent, the reading experience felt more distant. The words were competing with the illustration for attention; information was given to readers in a way that was too blunt and too quick. In Fig. 5-19, the reading experience was more immersive as readers were now presented with the entire illustration in its full glory. Having the words spread out within the illustration also encouraged “spiral reading” (Palmer, 2015) that allowed readers to linger around the page longer, giving them more time and space to ponder the content. It became apparent to me that Fig. 5-19 was the better choice. It was painful to make such major changes to the entire book since all the illustrations had to be reworked to accommodate the new scale and also, the layout of the words had to be reconceptualised, but it was the right thing to do. While making the changes, I was reminded of Schön’s theory of reflection-on-action: sometimes, it was helpful for creators to step away from their ‘finished’ artwork for a period of time before revisiting it so that they could see it with a renewed perspective. It took a lot more time and effort to finally complete *Lemonade Sky* but the end result (the final version submitted in this thesis) is one that I feel very proud of.

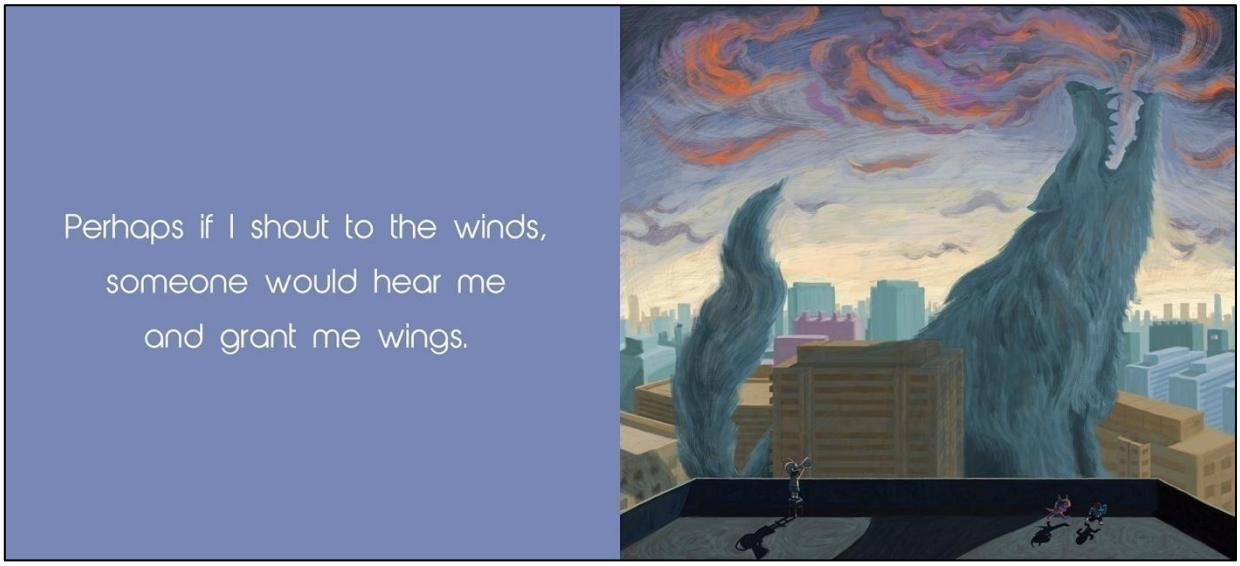


Fig. 5-18

Fig. 5-19

5.3 Co-Creation of Knowledge

Patricia Leavy notes that, in recent years, there has been a push in academic circles to "go public or perish" (2015, p.27). In ABR, artist-researchers are, as the name suggests, both a researcher and an artist. It is therefore not sufficient for artist-researchers to only conduct inquiry through the creation of artworks; it is incumbent on them to implement an outreach plan that brings their artworks into the public domain, thereby increasing their chance to have an impact on the community and society. In a workshop 'Communicating Research' organised by StoryLab Research Institute on 10 Jun 2019 at Anglia Ruskin University, Professor Jane Pavitt from Kinston University echoed the same need for ABR to be shared in the public domain. With *Lemonade Sky*, my primary stakeholders would be fellow ABR artist-researchers and Singaporean readers. Notwithstanding that, anyone who reads the book and finds a connection with it is also my target audience.

Marcel Duchamp says: "the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act" (1957, cited in Popova, 2012, para. 20). Duchamp's view that art is completed by the viewer is congruent with Roland Barthes' (1967) idea that the readers' interpretation of a text is just as, if not more, relevant than the intentions of its author. Duchamp and Barthes are two of the pioneers whose thinking is central to the postmodern critical theory of meaning-making, a fundamental concept that heavily influenced the production of *Lemonade Sky*. When I was spontaneously creating illustrations and words in the studio, I was also mindful of Edward Hopper's words: "If you could say it in words there would be no reason to paint" (Leavy, 2015, p.228). I did not want my narrative to do too much storytelling; I wanted to leave space for readers to

make their own meanings from the narrative. For me, both my intended meaning and the meanings generated by the readers were equally valid. View in this light, an autoethnographic picturebook like *Lemonade Sky* could be both a source of and means to achieve meaning-making. Such meaning-making activity that prioritises imagination and open-ended interpretation, in Sullivan's words, "has the capacity to transform human understanding" (2010, p.xix).

I presented my enquiry (while still working on *Lemonade Sky*) at a workshop on practised-based research organised by StoryLab at Anglia Ruskin University on 14 Mar 2018. After the first prototype hardcopy of *Lemonade Sky* was printed, I exhibited the book at the 21st International Contemporary Artist's Book Fair on 3-4 Mar 2018 at The Tetley in Leeds. When the final version of *Lemonade Sky* was finished, I sent it to the publisher of my previous children's picturebooks. My publisher declined to publish it, saying that "the market for such a book [one that does not cater to the child reader] is small and they [the distributors] do not expect to be able to sell many copies" (Appendix 1). I then sent *Lemonade Sky* to Epigram Books, "a Singaporean independent publisher of well-designed and thought-provoking titles" (Epigram, n.d.), on 10 Dec 2018. Its assistant editor Sylvia Tsai replied on 25 Jan 2019, remarking that "the illustrations are absolutely captivating!" and that "*Lemonade Sky* seems more appropriate as an all-ages art book, so we would be moving in this direction" (Appendix 2). We subsequently agreed to publish *Lemonade Sky* in Nov 2020. I was very excited about the opportunity for *Lemonade Sky* to be made accessible to the Singaporean public, as well as to other places through Epigram Books distribution networks in the ASEAN region and London. I also undertook a presentation for Theorem Symposium 2019 titled 'Autoethnographic Picturebook' organised by Anglia Ruskin University on 4 Jul

2019 (see Fig. 5-20), and published a 3000-word essay on my presentation. *Lemonade Sky* was also exhibited from 4 Jul-23 Aug 2019 in Theorem Exhibition at the Ruskin University (see Fig. 5-21). Several readers (both from Singapore and from the United Kingdom) of *Lemonade Sky* commented that they were able to experience the thoughts and feelings of the protagonist at a personal level and they intuitively connected their own life experiences with the narrative.

Fig. 5-20

My presentation on 'Autoethnographic Picturebook' at the Theorem Symposium 2019

Fig. 5-21

A digital book version of Lemonade Sky exhibited as part of the Theorem Exhibition 2019, 4 Jul-23 Aug 2019

5.4 Conclusion

Lemonade Sky is a crossover picturebook for all ages. The stylised design of the characters and the vibrant and colourful illustrations make obvious reference to children's literature but the words are written as the self-reflexive monologue of an adult with occasional interruptions from the voice of an omnipresent figure. The plot is never really clear. The boy protagonist is seeking an answer to a question that is never revealed and the ending of the story is enigmatic, leaving the reader wondering what might be happening.

The making of *Lemonade Sky* involved a myriad of recursive cerebral, visceral, and physical activities. Through the creative process of reflecting, reading, cross-referencing, sketching, experimenting, and re-making, my understanding of the picturebook idiom developed in tandem with the sophistication of the content I wanted to express. This was not a simple linear progression in which a hypothesis was assumed, tested, rejected/accepted, and improvements made accordingly. Many solutions to creative problems encountered were the results of serendipity, spontaneity, and chance occurrences during the act of art-making, just as many solutions arose from external sources such as reading books or watching movies. In the early stages of creating *Lemonade Sky*, my focus was to use the picturebook form for autoethnography. In my search for a creative expression, my understanding of the picturebook idiom deepened as new knowledge emerged through practice; equipped with the new knowledge, I re-conceptualised and re-positioned my initial content, which in turn created new creative problems that required new solutions. The creative process was a spiralling confluence between content and form as they shifted and adjusted to each other until a finished artwork was reached.

Even though scholars like Graham and Feige talk about the unique unity of content and form in art, they seldom elaborate on how this unity is achieved. From my perspective as a practitioner, I propose that this unity of content and form is a fusion that occurs during the creative process itself. Through the practice of art-making and by critically reflecting on the creative process, a practiced-based art researcher could discover insights that shed light on the enquiry. Sullivan describes such knowledge creation as "recursive and constantly undergoes change as new experiences 'talk back' through the process and progress of making art in research setting" (Sullivan, 2010, p.110).

Chapter 6 – *The Second-Hand Vespa & Random Luck*

> Poetry exists partly to undermine the certainties of an accepted intellectual system, by opening a fissure of awareness at which the reality of the unconquered world may enter.
>
> Germaine Greer (n.d., n.p.)

Author-illustrator Edward Gorey once said this about his work:

> I'm beginning to feel that if you create something, you're killing a lot of other things. And the way I write, since I do leave out most of the connections, and very little is pinned down, I feel that I am doing a minimum of damage to other possibilities that might arise in a reader's mind. (n.d., cited in Acocella, 2018, para. 1)

Gorey's words capture many things I wanted to achieve with *Lemonade Sky*: I wanted readers to be able to participate in the narrative actively, bring in their own imagination, and make meanings of their own. The narrative-of-viewpoint, minimal written text and stylised illustrations are strategies used to express my lived experience through a fictional story in a way that could engage readers, connect with their feelings, and get them to reflect on issues about Singaporean society. The experience of making *Lemonade Sky* made me understand at a deeper level how a picturebook, with its usually brief form, can be a powerful means of storytelling that opens up space for the reader's interpretation; it seemed that more could be

said with less. This realisation led me to poetry, a literary form that embodies intense feelings in a condensed form.

6.1 Poetry in Arts-Based Research and Autoethnography

Poetry is a literary form known for its unity of content and form; it is also often known for its power to incite feelings and emotions, often through the use of poetic devices such as rhythm, metaphor, rhyme, imagery, space, condensed language and so on. Art (poetry included) can contribute to the understanding of the human world by engaging the audience's emotional domains, as described in Chapter 2. Notwithstanding this, I would like to reiterate this point with a focus on poetry in order to demonstrate how it can be used as a vehicle for philosophical content.

I. A. Richards (2001) asserts that poetry cannot be separated from one's lived experience: it is a way of coordinating diverse kinds of human impulses into a unified work of art, and the aesthetic experience readers received from reading poetry could help them understand themselves and the world they occupy. Peter Lamarque (2009) makes a similar point, claiming that poetry is capable of embodying deeper meanings and abstract notions such as our values, and issues that surround us, which could be uncovered through reflection and rumination. Abbot (2018) posits that poetry, as a human convention, is a mode of expression that could convey knowledge, and it does so through what he calls 'poetic thinking'. Abbott claims that poetry engages our feeling and empathy, which "might participate irreducibly in cognition" (2018, p.231). In an interview with Richard Marshall, Karen Simecek also says that "there is potential for poetry to engage readers in philosophical thinking during the

reading of and reflecting on the poem" (Marshall, 2018, n.p.); she opines that poetry has the potential to offer alternative perspectives that could contribute to our overall understanding of human life and experience.

Abbott's and Simecek's argument about poetry and its relationship with knowledge is consistent with the philosophy of ABR. Leavy describes poetry as, "a form that itself brings attention to silence (or as a poet might say, to space) and also relies on emotional evocation as a part of meaning-making while simultaneously exposing the fluidity and multiplicity of meaning" (2015, p.79).

Using poetry as a method of inquiry is thus not new. Over the last two decades, many artist-researchers have opted to use poetry as a way to conduct, and express, their research. According to Leavy (2015, p.80), 50% of research-driven poetry is, what Monica Prendergast (2009, cited in Leavy, 2015, p.80) calls "researcher-voiced". Ronald J. Ricci's (2003) *Nickys Boy: A Life in Two Worlds* is an autoethnographic study of his childhood experience growing up in two families with distinct ethnicity and cultures. Ricci describes poetry as an art form that provides "meaning, density, aestheticism, and reflexivity" (2003, para. 1); he claims that his poetry offers "the reader insight into [his] 'culture', 'situation', 'way of life'" (p.594). Ricci also posits that his poetry is subjected to "the politics of interpretation" which is "limitless insofar as readers bring their own lenses through which to share in at least some part of its meaning" (p.594). While Ricci's point is specifically about poetry, it could be applied to other art forms.

Ricci's example demonstrates how poetry could be used in autoethnography. Like Ricci, I wanted to explore the use of poetry for my autoethnographic study but instead of using verse as the medium, I wanted to use the picturebook. This could be awkward at first glance but poetry and the picturebook are not that far removed from each other. Maurice Sendak writes that, "A true picture book is a visual poem" (n.d., cited in Marcovitz, 2006, p.64). A key quality of poetry is its ability to incite images in the mind of readers, hence; if we took a broad view of what kinds of medium could be used for poetry, there could be space for the visual text to play a more prominent role. In my mind, there could be a kind of artistic expression in which the picturebook and poetry conjugate to become a single artefact i.e. the artefact is both a poem and a picturebook. This artefact will be a poem that is not written in verse but written in the picturebook idiom; I called it a picturebook-poem. The picturebook-poem will be a kind of picturebook that is also a poem; it embodies poetic sensibility, possesses reflexive quality, and can prompt readers into poetic thinking.

6.2 The Picturebook-Poem

I began my search for the picturebook-poem by examining the relationship between poetry and the picturebook. I looked at many picturebooks associated with poetry. Picturebooks such as *The Usborne Book of Poetry* (Taplin, 2007) introduce children to poetry; this genre of picturebooks often involves the publishers paying illustrators to produce images to accompany famous poems. There are also picturebooks, such as Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* (1964), that are often described as poetry because of their literary value and lyrical form but they are really more like short stories than poetry. These picturebooks did not match my idea of the picturebook-poem; they were either picturebooks about poetry or picturebooks of

short stories that felt like poetry. I was looking for a kind of book in which the picturebook is the poem and the poem is the picturebook.

In *Defence of Poetry* published in 1840, Percy Bysshe Shelley defines poetry as "the expression of the imagination" (Poetry Foundation, 2009, para. 5) and therefore, "all the arts are poetry because they render imagination" (Kakarla, 2017, p.28). However, Shelley also argues that "rhythmical language provides the highest kind of poetry, since language is itself created by imagination and is a medium in its substance intellectual" (Kakarla, 2017, p.28). In the postmodern era where all types of text are perceived to have the power to convey meanings in their own right, critics might not agree with Shelley's elevation of the status of language. Notwithstanding this, his liberal view that "all the arts are poetry" was very advanced for his time. Shelley's opinion that all artworks created by painters, sculptors, and musicians could be considered poetry is astonishingly contemporary and bold; in this light, poetry is almost synonymous with art, and could be expressed in all kinds of text such as verbal, sound-based, visual, performing, film-based et cetera. From this perspective, there is no reason to assume that poetry could only be expressed through written words. As it turns out, nearly a century after Shelley's death, the emergence of modernism ignited a myriad of non-word-based art forms that associated themselves with poetry.

Will Hill writes:

> For Modernist poets, visual and graphic form developed as a means of exploring the relationship between language and its subject, extending or redefining the expressive scope of the written word (2009, p.10).

The merging of verbal and visual texts in poetry, and in the arts in general, during the early twentieth century (Hill, 2009) created a complex tension between representation and description; readers have to come up with new ways of interpreting this new type of hybrid text. Hence, new opportunities for meaning-making are created. One outcome of this development was the emergence of concrete poetry (also known as visual poetry) where visual text is added to the materials of poetry. Lewis Carroll's ‘The Mouse's Tale’ is probably the first concrete poem where written words are arranged in a typographical format that adds to the meaning of the words. Salisbury and Styles write this about ‘The Mouse’s Tale’: “the text exists in the shape of a tail and plays on the tale/tail spelling. In other words, it is formatted to visually resemble its theme” (2012, p.100). In *A Poke in the I: A Collection of Concrete Poems*, illustrator Chris Raschka (Janeczko, 2001) arranges the words of Robert Froman's poem ‘Easy Diver’ to mimic the plunging motion of a pigeon, and its eventual smooth landing from the top of the roof, to match the meaning of the written words. Raschka places the elongated typographical design of the poem beside an illustration of a slender building to give it a different layer of meaning.

In the process of my research, I also looked at a highly creative art form: the hybrid novel. The intermingling of visual and verbal texts in the hybrid novel is probably more complex than that of concrete poetry. In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Jonathan Safran Foer uses a myriad of verbal and visual methods that combine graphic design principles, written words, and photographs to empower readers to not only read but also experience the narration (Sadokierski, 2010, pp.95-138). Foer masterfully uses typesetting and spacing to mimic the physical and emotional states of his characters and control the pace and rhythm of the story,

for example: he uses large empty gaps after every full-stop in Grandma's 'My feelings' chapter to show the old woman's breathy speech pattern; he also uses a letter comprising long sentences that go on and on without any paragraphing to portray a distressed writer who is anxious to explain himself.

Concrete poetry and the hybrid novel have vastly expanded how visual text, verbal text, and graphic design can be used as forms of creative expression in literary work; they are important parts of the modernist movement in which the materiality of texts is viewed as an important contributor to the meaning of a narrative (McGann, 1993). The idea that typographical elements and graphic features could add to the poetic sensuality of poetry becomes a key strategy in my eventual formulation of the picturebook-poem. However, the extent of my method differs in that, unlike concrete poetry, which is usually expressed within a single page or a few pages, the picturebook-poem is expressed in a book format; the hybrid novel, on the other hand, is not quite poetry, it is, as the name suggests, a novel. In addition, verbal text remains the main content deliverer, both in the case of concrete poetry and the hybrid novel.

The expressive art form I had in mind for the picturebook-poem was a kind of poetry in which visual text and verbal texts were equal partners in conveying the content; it was poetry expressed through the format of a book comprising pictures and words, in which the content (feeling, lyrical quality, and poetic thinking) of poetry conjugated seamlessly with the idiom (verbal and visual texts, double-page spread, and page-turning) of the picturebook. It became clear to me that I had to find the solution to the picturebook-poem in the art studio. By

experimenting with different creative visual narrative strategies, I might be able to develop a kind of text that could satisfy my idea of what a picturebook-poem could be like.

Stefan Themerson writes:

> Language is one species of the genus of sign and pictorial representations are another species of the same genus. These two species can be wedded to one another. They can be wedded either politely and conformably (as when an illustration is wedded to a text or a caption to a drawing) or they can start an illicit liaison, so intimately integrated that one doesn't know any more who is the bride and who is the bridegroom. (1940, cited in Hill, 2009, p.11)

Themerson suggests that different kinds of text, when combined creatively and thoughtfully, have the potential to become a new type of text; a text that comprises various elements that are so conjugated that it would require a totally different approach to make meanings out of it. Viewed in this light, the picturebook-poem could also be a (new) species of the genus of sign, or a (new) sub-genre of the picturebook. The picturebook-poem could potentially offer an alternative text (other than language and concrete poetry) for artists to create poetry. In the next stage of my research, I used a practice-based inquiry method to test out the potential of the picturebook-poem; after all, the best way to find out what a picturebook-poem looks like is to create one. Through the creation of two experimental picturebook-poems, *The Second-Hand Vespa* and *Random Luck*, I sought to answer questions like what does the picturebook-poem look like as a form of poetic expression? How is it different from other picturebooks? Could it be classified as a kind of poetry?

6.3 *The Second-Hand Vespa*

According to Pelias (2004, cited in Leggo, 2008), poetry writing begins "in the desire to write from the heart"; poetic research aims to create a voice that is "emotionally evocative, linguistically vulnerable and sensuously poetic"; poetic scholarship "fosters connections, opens spaces for dialogue, heals" (p.166). Leggo writes that, "the poetic process is an experience of lingering with memory and emotion and heart ... a process of attending sensually and sensitively to life" (2008, p.172). Poets are creative people with a keen sense of their surroundings; they draw ideas from their lived experience, make connections to phenomena with their logical mind and intuition, and use their imagination and creativity to express their ideas and feelings. In this sense, the working method of a poet is not dissimilar to that of an autoethnography artist-researcher.

6.3.1 At the School Gate

I began my first picturebook-poem experiment by reflecting on a very specific part of my primary school days i.e. the time when my father sent me to school in the morning. Primary school was a long time ago; I could not explain why this trivial event still lingered with me, but it did. The primary school I attended was a very popular school; many students there came from affluent families. I remembered watching my schoolmates' parents sending them to school in big cars every morning; I also remembered feeling nervous and anxious when these parents spoke to me in English, a language I could barely understand let alone respond in at that time, as my parents spoke Mandarin at home. Notwithstanding this, my mother often reminisced about how lucky she was to enrol me in such a prestigious school. The school was not close to my place of residence; as an eight year-old, I had to walk for thirty minutes to get there every morning. I remembered having to navigate many busy roads and

crowded streets on my own. Neither of my parents could take me to school; my mother had to stay home to sew clothes, which needed to be delivered to a garment factory in the afternoon and my father had set out for work much earlier.

However, on the few occasions when my father had a schedule change, he would take me to school on his tattered second-hand Vespa. He was probably trying to relieve me of the physical strain of walking, or maybe he just wanted to spend more time with me. I remembered my father would always help me to put on an over-sized helmet before I got on the scooter. We would engage in small talk on the way while I clung on to his huge waist with my outstretched arms. Little did he know about the discomfort and embarrassment I felt every time we reached the school gate. *The Second-Hand Vespa* is a picturebook-poem about the nebulous feeling of awkwardness I experienced then. I used this experience to reflect on a combination of factors that shaped my character and personality during my formative years, how these factors might have influenced the way I think and make decisions, and the role they played in the relationship between me and my father.

6.3.2 Subverting Character and Plot

From the outset, I had not intended *The Second-Hand Vespa* to be a story in the traditional sense, but rather a moment, a reflection of an experience, and an expression of a feeling. I started by writing in verse, keeping the sentences condensed, and expressing the feelings I had as I reflected on that moment when I got off my father's scooter outside the school gate. As I wrote and re-wrote, images began to appear in my head; I made quick sketches of these images in my sketchbook to keep a record of my ideas (see Figs. 6-1, 6-2 and 6-3). Most of

these drawings were made in response to a specific stanza of my writing but not a direct visual depiction of what was written.

Fig. 6-1

Fig. 6-2

Fig. 6-3

Figs. 6-1, 6-2 and 6-3 are samples of sketches I made during the writing of the first stanza of *The Second-Hand Vespa*

During the art-making process, I experimented with the verses and drawings freely by matching them, amending them, tearing down existing ideas, and creating new ones. The process may appear random and subjective as I made aesthetic decisions based on my own intuition and discretion. However, on reflection, the decisions I made and my work process might not have been entirely without structure. From the beginning, I organised my materials (both the verses and the drawings) by stanza, a practice that was influenced by the conventions of mainstream poetry. In addition, the focus of my drawings was to express the feelings of their accompanying stanzas instead of a literal visual representation of the written words; I was less concerned of how the different drawings would work as sequential images. In fact, in the later stages of the art-making process, I was deliberately trying to break up the sequence of the drawings; I did this by denying readers a recognisable character that they

could follow in the narrative. This was achieved by concealing the faces of all the human characters and using a different animal character in every double-page spread (see Figs. 6-4 and 6-5). By making the continuity across pages ambiguous, I hoped to subvert the character and plot of the picturebook-poem. The disjunction the reader experiences each time they turn a page is an attempt to create a pause, giving the readers a moment for contemplation in which to engage with the text via their own imagination. By breaking away from the usual narrative structure, I hoped to prompt readers to look harder—by focusing on the visual and verbal texts within each double-page spread and the connections between different pages—in their search for meaning in the picturebook-poem, often by tapping into their prior experiences and intuition. Every double-page spread is like a standalone snapshot of a moment; most of the flow and rhythm in *The Second-Hand Vespa* is provided, in a subtle but important way, by the words, supported by a small, plain typeface. By matching the 'small and quiet' words with the 'large and loud' images, I was trying to create a dissonance between verbal and visual texts, and a peculiar sort of rhythm, interjected with pause and silence.

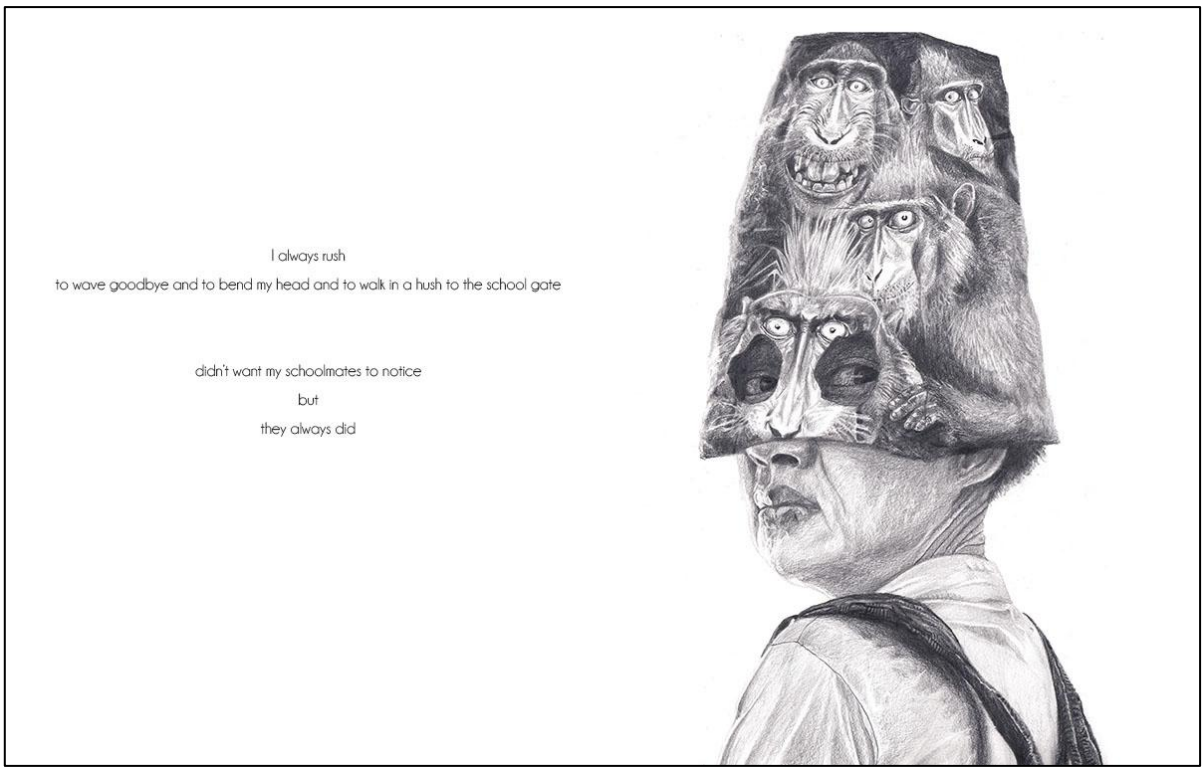


Fig. 6-4

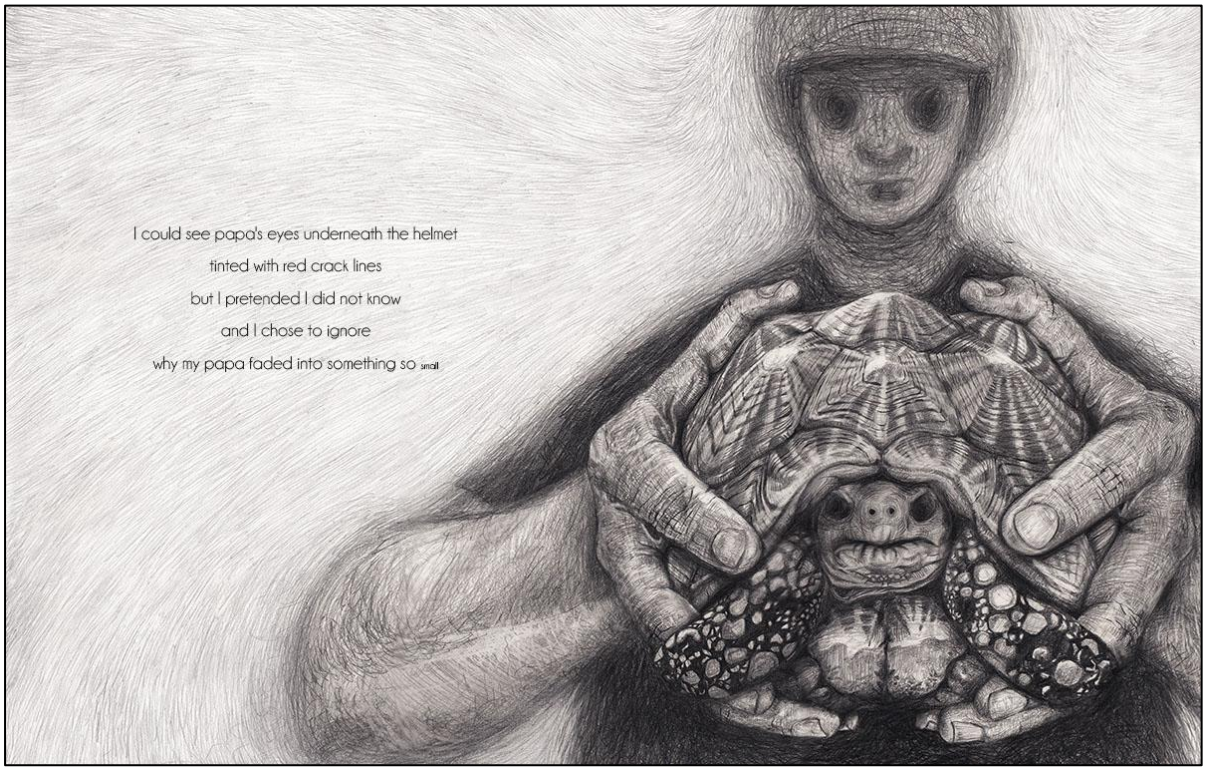


Fig. 6-5

Figs.6-4 and 6-5 show a 2-page sequence from *The Second-Hand Vespa.* The human characters have their faces 'masked'; the animal characters respond to their accompanying verses but demonstrate no clear connection to each other.

6.4 *Random Luck*

My first experiment—*The Second-Hand Vespa*—produced a picturebook-poem that is short even by picturebook standards; the structure and coherence of the book was also not to my satisfaction. While I was excited by some of the creative approaches I had developed to integrate poetry and the picturebook into a single entity, I felt I needed to take on a second, more ambitious project, by creating a 32-page picturebook-poem that is more representative of the format of mainstream picturebooks. Hence, for my second experiment, I created *Random Luck*. Building on the experience of *The Second-Hand Vespa*, I began *Random Luck* by reflecting on a wide range of experiences spanning several years of my childhood. This reflexive exercise led me to the notion of destiny and how it was positioned within the framework of contemporary ideologies of liberalism, equality and democracy.

6.4.1 Intergenerational Divide

The rapid transformation of Singapore from a slum to a First World city-state is a marvel to many countries. As spectacular as it is, it has also created some unique intergenerational divides among Singaporeans. *Random Luck* is a picturebook-poem about these intergenerational divides. To take language as an example, my parents speak Hokkien (a Chinese dialect) with each other, but they speak Mandarin with me; I speak Mandarin with my spouse but English with my daughters; my daughters (both in their late teens) speak English with their circle of friends and will likely be speaking English with their future partners and children. Even within the small unit of my immediate family members, there are three generations of people who had lived or are still living with one another, each using a different ‘first’ language. Such a language divide is disruptive to the traditional means of heritage transmission from one generation to the next as experiences and values across family

members become complicated. Intergenerational divides like this are not unique to my family; they are also common to my friends, colleagues and acquaintances. These divides are strongly linked to the rapid pace of change in Singaporean society (Göransson, 2009). Currently, research studies on Singaporean intergenerational issues are almost exclusively done by anthropologists and even then, as Göransson notes, "intergeneration relations remain an underdeveloped topic" (2009, pp.5-6). *Random Luck* aims to supplement this area of social research by providing an arts-based, poetic response to social issues.

Random Luck is my autoethnographic response to being born into and growing up in a working class family in 1970s Singapore. My father did not have any formal education; he spent his childhood helping my grandfather (whom I never met) in a small Indonesian fishing village repairing nets, hunting crab and fish, and selling their catch to villagers. Like many migrant workers in the 1950s, my father travelled to Singapore in search for work; he was around eight years old. He found his first job as an apprentice mechanic in a motor-cycle shop; he soon managed to get a permanent residence permit to stay in Singapore. My mother was born in Singapore in the late 1940s to a middle-class family. I was told that her father passed away when she was a small child and the family went into a financial crisis. My grandmother remarried a self-employed painter (of buildings), which brought some stability to the family. My mother was able to complete her GCE O-Level Education and get a job in a sock factory named Swan Socks, where she met my father. I was born in October 1971 in the attic of a traditional shop-house that my parents rented. My memory of the place had become vague. The thing I remembered most clearly about the attic was that it was infested with rats and cockroaches. My father spoke of having to chase them away every night so that we could sleep in peace.

The conditions were so bad that when a python slithered into our house and coiled up on one of the ceiling beams, my father did nothing to get rid of it as the python was effective in reducing the rat population. The snake stayed for months. I remembered the commotion next door, albeit very faintly, when the python finally decided to move over to their place; the number of rats in my house had fallen so much that it must had been difficult for the python to find food. Alarmed and frightened, my neighbours called in the police. The police wanted to shoot the snake but my father managed to persuade them to let him deal with it. He caught the snake with his bare hands and sent it to a nearby Taoist temple, where it was kept as a holy creature. Most of this story was told to me by my father as I was too young to remember it for myself but, I did get to see the same python some years later outside a temple kept in a cage.

My brother was born two years after me, around the time when the python was sent away. When I was four, my family moved into a rented one-room HDB flat in Geylang, not far from the infamous red-light district.[8] Two years later, both in their early thirties, my parents finally bought our first home – a three-room HDB flat[9] also located in Geylang. Shortly after moving in, my second brother was born; we did not move again until I was seventeen. As a child, I experienced the world as a progression, moving from a gloomy attic into a one-room rented flat and then to a three-room mortgaged flat. As the fortunes of Singapore improved from the 1970s to the 1980s, the fortunes of my family seemed to have improved with it. However, that was not really the case, as my parents remained stuck in the bottom 10% of

[8] Some years ago, I learned that the flat had been demolished to make way for newer ones; I remembered feeling quite sad.

[9] A three-room HDB flat only has two bedrooms, and a four-room HDB flat only has three bedrooms. I do not quite understand this discrepancy; it could be that the HDB considered the sitting room to be a bedroom as well.

Singaporean household income; relatively, their financial position was no better than before; in fact, it might have worsened. My father worked for many years as a mechanic in Swan Socks; after the factory shut down, he found a job as a delivery driver for car parts. My mother supplemented the family income by sewing clothes at home (so that she could look after me and my brothers) for a garment company. From the early 1970s to the late 1980s, spanning my developmental years, our family was always living from pay cheque to pay cheque. What prevented us from sinking into the abyss of poverty was the work ethic of my parents and their frugal living habits, even though money was always a constant struggle for them.

My family experience was hardly a special one. Many Singaporean families had a similar journey. Even though many Singaporeans enjoy a high standard of living today, a segment of society continues to struggle. You Yenn Teo (2018) describes the life of a group of low income Singaporean residents as modern day poverty. She provides evocative, ethnographical accounts of the lived experience of people from this lower social-economic stratum: their daily struggles and obstacles, their aspirations and their hopes for their children. When I read these accounts, I could see my parents among them; the book made me reflect on my own life, and those chronicled in it. *Random Luck* is a picturebook-poem about how a person's life could be influenced (consciously or subconsciously) by the kind of family the person is born into. Many seemingly innocent factors such as one's language, religion, and address could become predictors, though not necessarily determinants, of one's future destiny.

6.4.2 Poetic Sensibility

As with *The Second-Hand Vespa*, I began *Random Luck* by writing in verse and making drawings of whatever appeared in my mind. However, two key differences became apparent at an early stage. Firstly, instead of focusing on a specific event, the writing for *Random Luck* was more general and abstract; secondly, the drawings in *Random Luck* were not as disparate as those for *The Second-Hand Vespa*. I was able to see intuitively a natural connection between the drawings as certain visual motifs from my childhood—such as the cockroaches in the attic, my mother's sewing machine, the Dua-Pek-Kong[10] statuette in my house, and images of my parents—came together into a sequence. Due to the sequential nature of my thought process, I decided to make a storyboard to guide my work (see Figs. 6-6 and 6-7).

From the storyboard, each double-page spread was developed individually based on its own artistic considerations. Close attention was given to its role as part of a larger sequential narrative (see Figs. 6-8 and 6-9). This approach of developing a storyboard, refining each double-page spread, and considering the overall sequence of different pages is a common method in the making of a typical picturebook. It is also the method I used to create stories for my previous published children's picturebook. However, as a picturebook-poem, *Random Luck* does not have the conventional five-part structure of a story i.e. exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. Its sequence of events is not necessarily connected in a coherent manner that provides readers with a logical progression from one page to another. Karen Simecek (2015) argues that literary works (such as poetry) that do not have a traditional narrative structure are just as, if not more, effective in enhancing our understanding of the human world because they require readers to be more focused on their

[10] Dua-Pek-Kong is a Hokkien god, to whom believers pray to for peace and good fortune.

formal features to make sense of their content. Such literary works often use metaphors to bring certain perspectives to the centre of our awareness and downplay others at the fringes. In a similar way, *Random Luck* does not rely on a logical progression of events in its narrative to convey its message. Instead, it uses a free-form, memory-based, metaphorical narrative style that focuses on making an emotional connection with the readers. In *Random Luck*, the written words anchor the metaphorical images within a particular context where emotions, meanings, and perspectives could be formed and uncovered. This kind of non-traditional narrating method that uses free-form, memory-based images might be particularly useful to autoethnographers who want to explore the use of verbal and visual texts in their enquiry.

One of the main objectives of the creative project in this chapter was to devise methods that could create a poetic experience for the readers in the picturebook-poem. For this purpose, I used a combination of theory-based and practice-based enquiry methods: many of my creative solutions came from adaptations of ideas from other art practitioners and insights gained from the act of art-making in the studio (Schön, 1983).

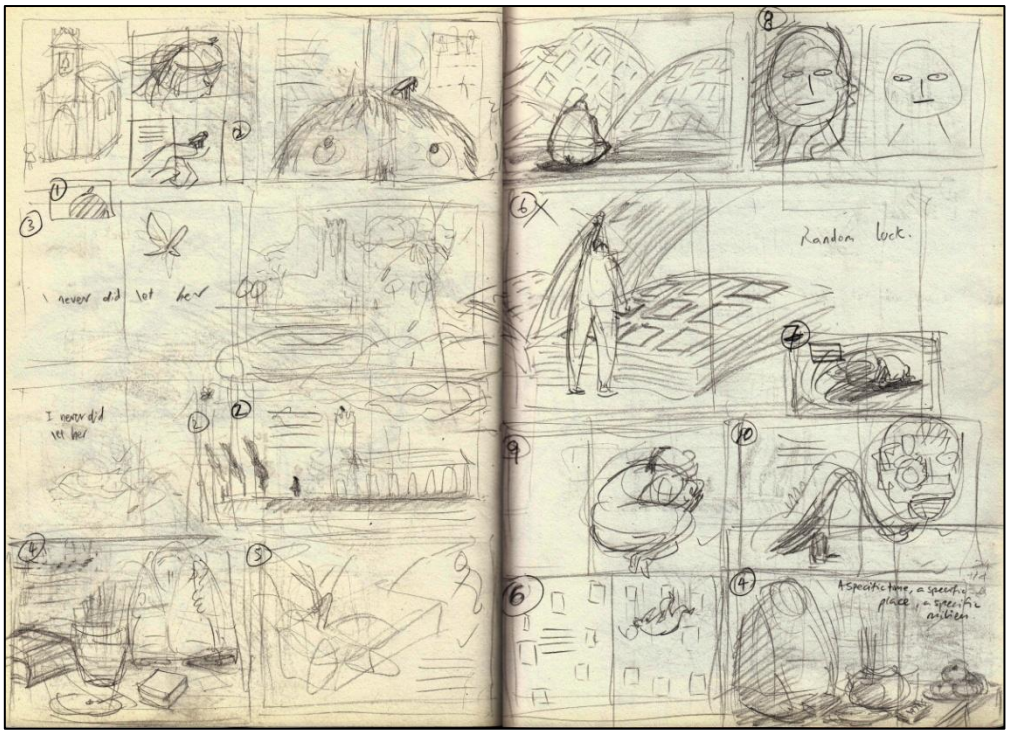


Fig. 6- 6

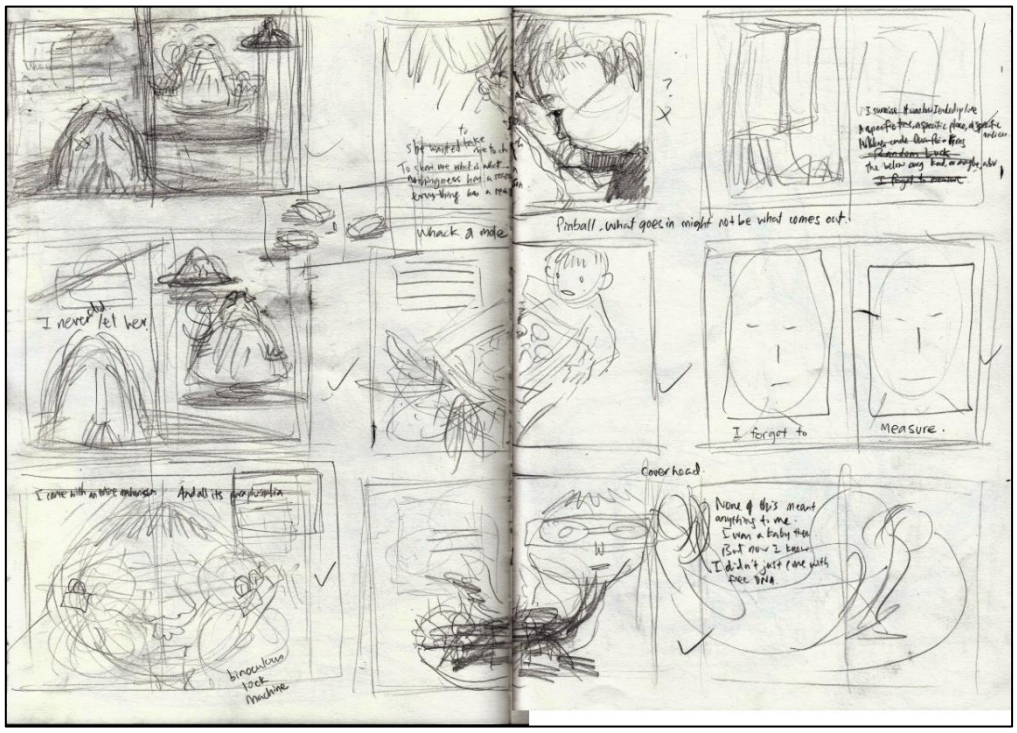


Fig. 6-7

Figs. 6-6 and 6-7 show two iterations of a storyboard at different stages of the creative process.

Fig. 6-8

Fig. 6-8 shows how a single double-page spread is developed based on its own artistic consideration.

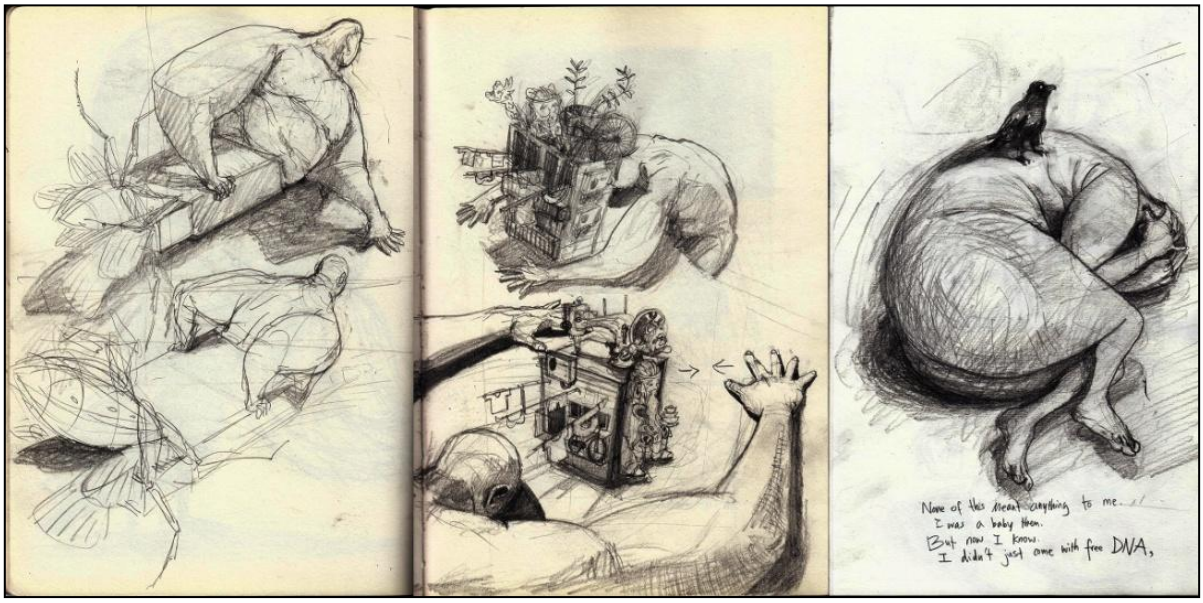


Fig. 6-9

Fig. 6-9 shows how different double-page spreads are developed in relation to their role as a sequence.

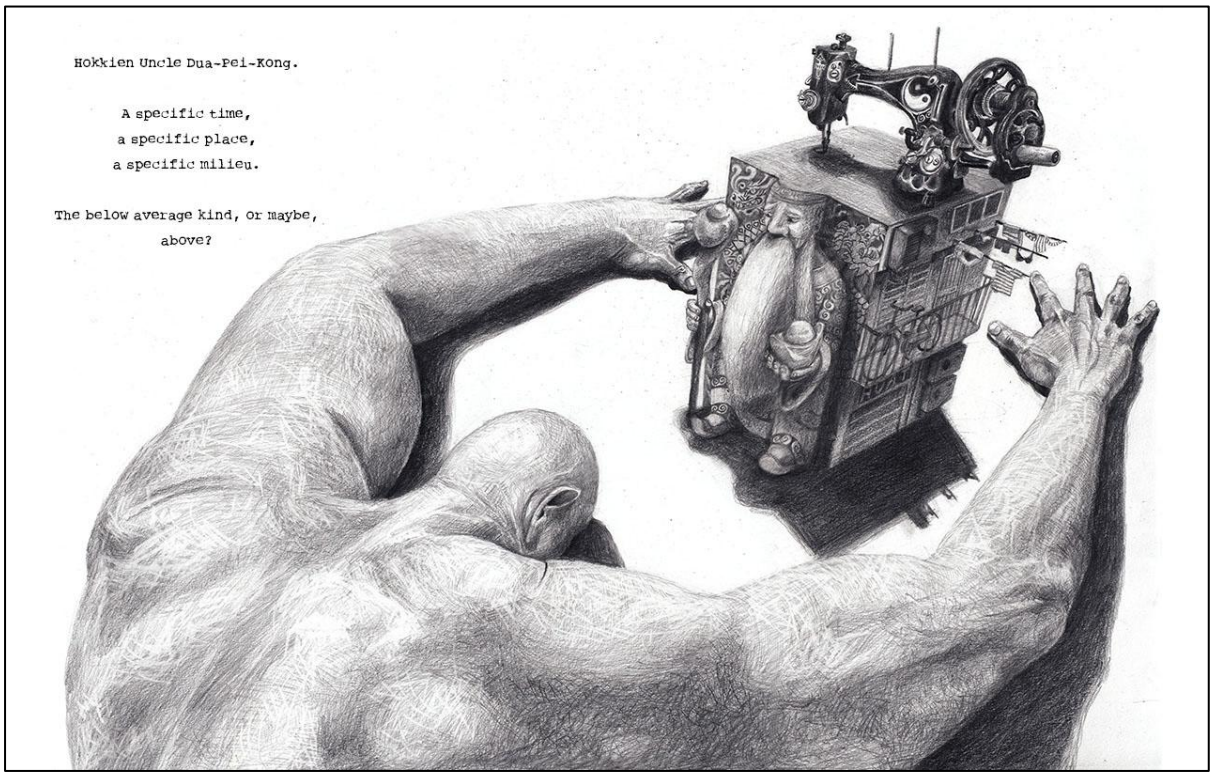


Fig. 6-10

Fig.6-10 combines real-life and imagined motifs to create a surrealistic image that could potentially engage readers at a visceral level.

Random Luck contains several motifs based on my childhood experience. In Fig. 6-10, the sewing machine reminded me of the unrelenting whirling noise produced by my mother as she worked all day to make extra money for the family; the bicycle was the vehicle my mother used to deliver the sewed clothes to the garment factory every afternoon; the Dua-Pek-Kong statuette was placed on a cupboard in the sitting room and my parents would pray to it for good fortune every evening. These real-life motifs from my childhood are a kind of visual autoethnographic study of my lived experience. By modifying these motifs and arranging them together with others drawn from my imagination, I created images with a surreal and dream-like feel; like the Surrealist artists and poets, I was trying to make reference to Freudian psychoanalysis. Fig. 6-10 makes a poignant counterpoint to a stanza of three verses that accompanied it: there is almost a sort of ‘iambic’ relationship between the

word and the image where the image acts as the second, stressed syllable and gives the picturebook-poem a poetic rhythm. The underlying assumption is that the picturebook-poem, when created with the intuition and poetic sensibility of the picturebook-maker, has the potential to engage the reader's conscious and subconscious mind to reveal deeper truths.

In my search for creative solutions, I came across Zoë Sadokierski's thesis (2010), which analyses how creators of hybrid novels use words, images and graphic design to create a text with multiple layers of meanings. Sadokierski's essay opened my thinking to the way graphic design could be used to create meanings and lift the poetic sensibility of the picturebook-poem. I began to explore different ways of using graphic design in my own practice, which led me to two discoveries. The first is that graphic design, when used creatively and thoughtfully, has the potential to enhance the poetic sensibility of the picturebook-poem. Fig.6-11 shows my initial illustration for the cover of *Random Luck* and Fig. 6-12 shows the revised version after reading Sadokierski's essay. Instead of seeing RANDOM as a written word, I started to see the alphabet as pieces of visual objects. Through the creative application of graphic design, the title 'RANDOM LUCK' could be embedded with both verbal and visual meanings as demonstrated by the 'randomness' of how the six letters are positioned in Fig. 6-12.

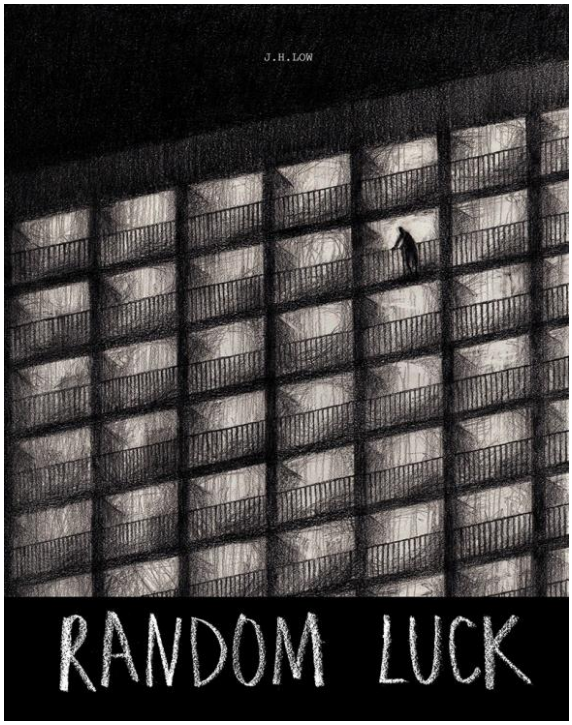


Fig. 6-11

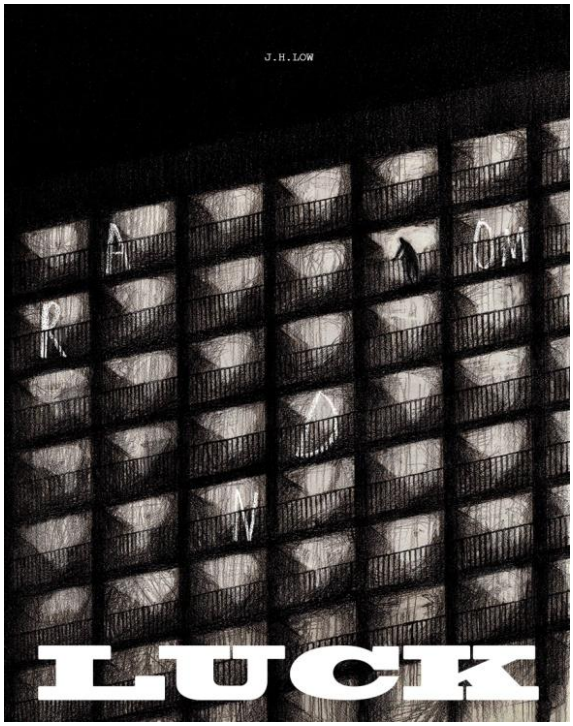


Fig. 6-12

Figs. 6-11 and 6-12 show how words could be used to convey meaning through visual means by the creative application of graphic design.

Graphic design could also be used to control the pace and rhythm of the picturebook-poem. Fig. 6-14 is a double-page spread consisting of nothing but four small words ‘I forgot to measure’. By using a small font size and giving a great amount of space between and around the words, I slow down the pace of reading, and subtly invite the readers to linger over the words, thus encouraging them to ponder the meanings of the text.

The second discovery is the potential of using the physical features of the book format to enhance the poetic quality of the picturebook-poem. In *Black Riders*, McGann (1993, p.83) writes about how the ‘composition’ of a printed page can be used as a semantic device. McGann posits that ‘composition’ could be approached from three different perspectives: that of the visual artist, the typographer, and the musician. While the first two perspectives are concerned with the visual format of the text, the musician’s perspective is concerned with the

auditory format. McGann describes "[t]he formatting of a text as a means for scoring the musical resources of poetry, including voice" (1993, p.83). McGann claims that the meaning of poetry is enriched when the composition of a printed page is considered not only in visual terms but also in auditory terms. I found similar compositional strategies in *Random Luck*, especially in the way I used page-turning to create rhythm and silence. Page-turning could serve a function similar to that of the breaks between stanzas in more conventional poetry. Consider three adjacent pages in Figs. 6-13, 6-14 and 6-15. There are no written words in Fig. 6-13; readers are confronted, almost abruptly, by two large, hyper-realistic, front-facing portraits of my parents. Making these two portraits was a profoundly emotional experience for me. As I studied and rendered every wrinkle on their faces (see Fig. 6-16), I had a sudden realisation of how old and frail they had become; many memories came to mind. It was truly an autoethnographic experience: no reader could feel the same way I felt towards these two drawings.

Despite the absence of written words, these two pages are 'loud' as I tried to inject an intense amount of emotion into this double-page spread. In a way, this double-page spread is like a climax at a pivotal moment of the picturebook-poem. This emotional high is further accentuated by the contrast of emptiness and silence when readers turn the page to Fig. 6-14: there is a sudden shift in mood and rhythm, giving readers space to breathe, to contemplate, and to gather themselves as the pace of reading picks up again when they turn the page to Fig. 6-15. As the readers turn the page from Fig. 6-13 to Fig. 6-15, they might have a similar experience to reading a musical score with its rhythmic flow of high and low notes, an analogy that might be useful to other autoethnographic picturebook artist-researchers.

Fig. 6-13

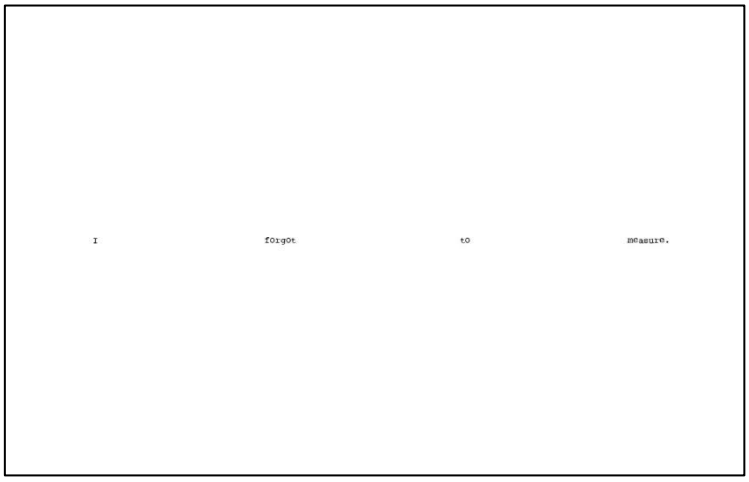


Fig. 6-14

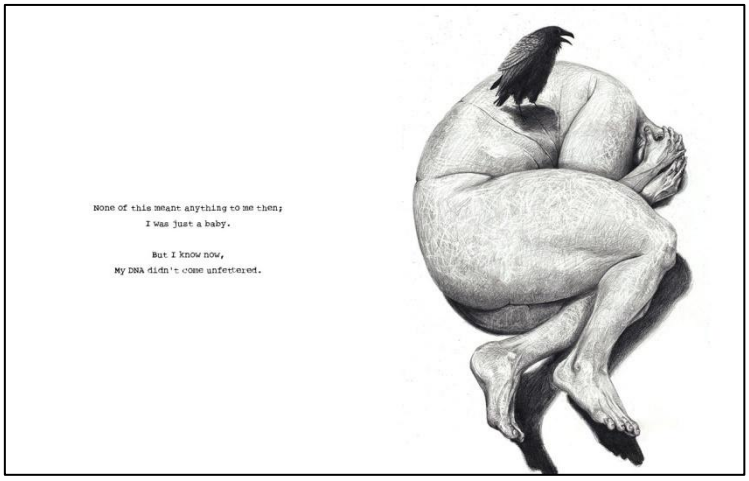


Fig. 6-15

Figs. 6-13, 6-14 and 6-15 show a three-page sequence from *Random Luck*.

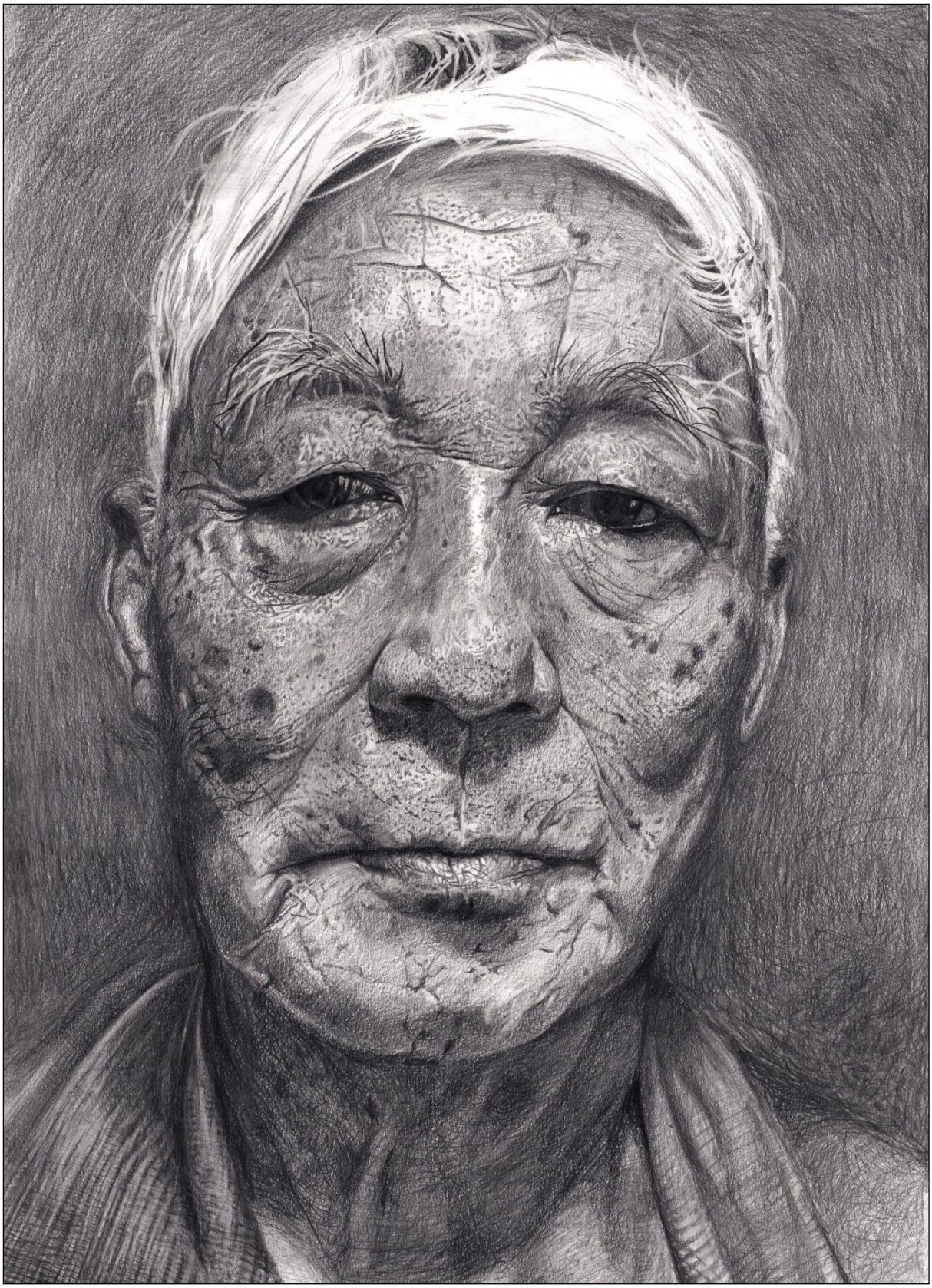


Fig. 6-16

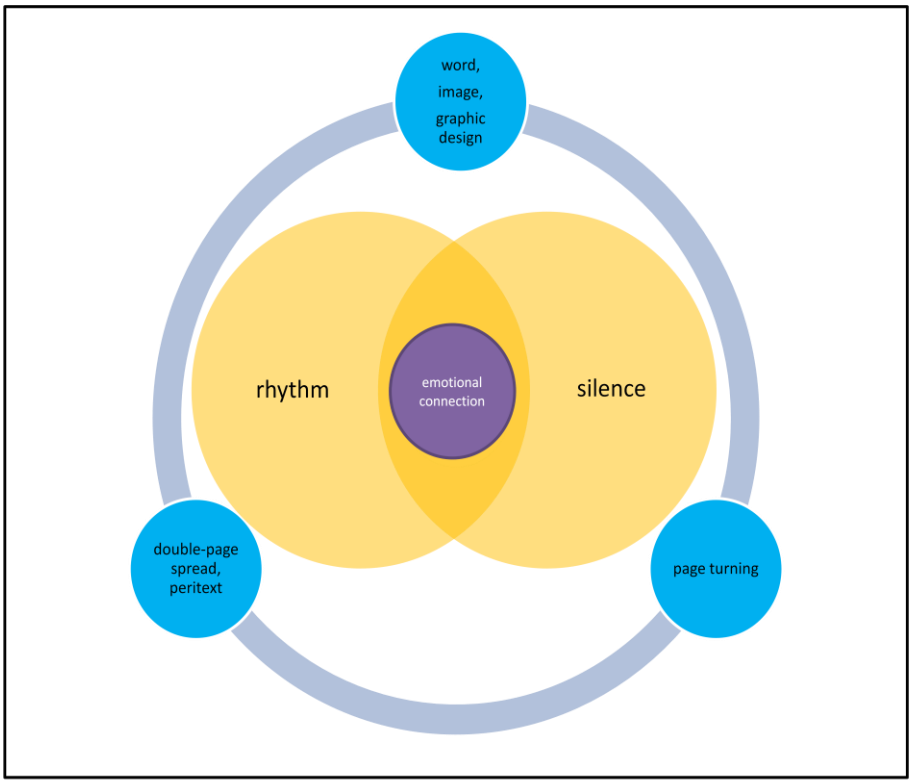
6.5 Instantiations of the Picturebook-Poem

Drawing ideas from existing sources such as the practice of Surrealists, famous poets and hybrid novelists, I attempted to create a new sub-genre of the picturebook through a practice-based enquiry method that I named the picturebook-poem. My approach was consistent with the Framework of the Autoethnographical Picturebook Artist-Researcher (see Chapter 4), which is built on Nigel Cross's theory that knowledge can be found in the three areas of people, processes and products, and Christopher Frayling's three types of art and design research.

In *The Second-Hand Vespa* and *Random Luck*, I explored using visual narrative strategies from the picturebook such as verbal and visual texts, double-page spreads and page-turning to create rhythm and silence in the picturebook-poem. Through this process, I discovered how graphic design could work with the picturebook idiom in refreshing ways to engage the sensibility of the readers. It is incumbent on the makers of the picturebook-poem to find the right words, create the right images, and use the best creative strategies to express their inner thoughts in a way that connects with readers emotionally. The purpose of my enquiry is not to develop a formula for the making of the picturebook-poem; all artists are and should be entitled to use whatever creative strategy they choose in their art-making. In fact, poets are well known to break grammatical rules and invent new words as they try to communicate ideas that might not be easily conveyed otherwise (Holzer, 2017). What I hope to do instead is to provide a framework that could be used by other autoethnographic picturebook artist-researchers in their creative practice. For this purpose, I designed the Instantiation of the Picturebook-Poem (see Diagram 2).

Diagram 2 illustrates how different elements work in dynamic ways in the Instantiation of the Picturebook-Poem. The black rectangular frame indicates that these elements are primarily taken from (1) the elements of the picturebook (represented by the three blue circles); and (2) the elements of poetry (represented by the two yellow circles). Within this frame, artists could explore the elements from the picturebook and poetry freely and creatively to construct various forms for the picturebook-poem. My earlier analyses of *The Second-Hand Vespa* and *Random Luck* have demonstrated how this could be done. The ultimate objective is to produce picturebook-poems that express their creators' poetic ideas, and prompt the readers into poetic thinking (Abbott, 2018). Such cognitive and intuitive associations between artists and readers could potentially lead to better understanding of the human world.

Diagram 2 - Instantiation of the Picturebook-Poem



6.6 Conclusion

I began this part of my autoethnographic study in search of a picturebook-poem that embodies memories and reflections of my childhood. I started with only a vague idea of what a picturebook-poem could be: an evocative artefact that is a conjunction of poetry and the picturebook, with the potential to evoke responses from readers at a cerebral and visceral level. This vague idea was given a form through a practice-based approach in the art studio where creative ideas were tested and amalgamated. Throughout the entire art-making process, I had to rely on my intuition and reflection to drive the creative practice forward. What started as a vague idea of a picturebook-poem became clearer through the act of practice; again, a testimony to how practice-based inquiry can be valuable in making a contribution to knowledge. By making two creative works, namely *The Second-Hand Vespa* and *Random Luck*, I touched on issues regarding social identity, entrenchment, stratification and mental health through expressing fragments of my lived experience. As with all kinds of artistic expressions, the text of the picturebook-poem is not fixed and could be configured and re-configured to shape meanings with a certain degree of indeterminacy. By deliberately using a non-traditional syntax that involves verbal and visual texts, I wanted to attend to the materiality of the picturebook-poem and invite readers to shape new connections between seemingly disparate parts and to create new meanings with their reading experience. Tzachi Zamir writes:

> values are embedded within experiences that determine the level of understanding. Knowledge is structuralized, meaning that if one does not undergo certain experiences, one never fully understands. (2007, cited in Marshall, 2018, p.201)

My focus was not so much on telling a story as expressing a feeling, creating an experience: an experience that is conveyed with poetic sensibility through the creative use of rhythm and silence. To get the readers to experience was also to get the readers to understand.

My enquiry method demonstrated how theory-based research could inform practice and how practice-based inquiry could, in turn, influence theoretical study. For example, I have drawn ideas from Freudian psychoanalysis and Sadokierski's research on hybrid novels for my creative practice; in return, I have created the 'Instantiations of the Picturebook-Poem' to provide a framework for other autoethnographic picturebook artist-researchers who might be interested to further explore the potential of the picturebook-poem as an expressive art form.

I am mindful of the limitations of this particular practice-based enquiry method, especially given my relative inexperience in the realm of poetry. Moreover, there are only so many creative strategies I could apply and share through the making of the two picturebook-poems. The visual narrative strategies shared in this chapter are by no means comprehensive or exhaustive. In fact, some might argue that the two picturebook-poems are not poetry at all. Nevertheless, by bringing authenticity, effort and creativity to my practice, I hope to engender interest in the use of the picturebook as a medium for autoethnographic study and poetic expression. To this end, I participated in exhibitions and conferences to showcase *Random Luck* and *The Second-Hand Vespa* (see Figs. 6-17, 6-18, and 6-19). Perhaps my enquiry could help to generate new ideas from other autoethnographic picturebook artist-researchers; just as importantly, I hope the two picturebook-poems could shed light on Singaporean society, create in readers a sense of empathy, and inspire further thought and action.

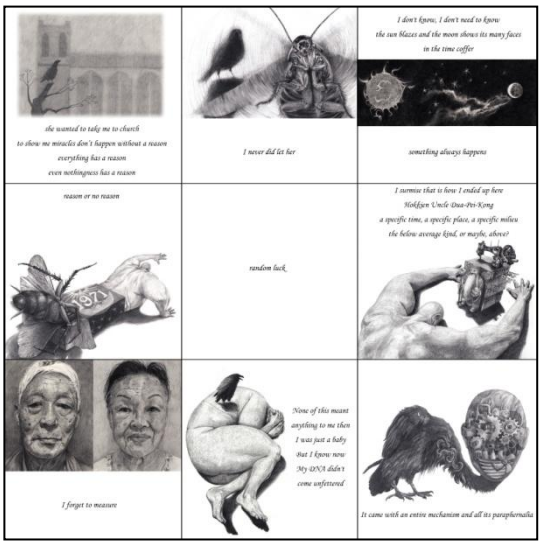


Fig. 6-17

Fig. 6-17 shows an earlier iteration of *Random Luck*, published in *Ways of Thinking* (2019), Ruskin Arts Publications

Fig. 6-18

Fig. 6-18 shows two adaptations from *The Second-Hand Vespa* and *Random Luck*, exhibited at CONNEXTIONS, 27 Feb-14 Mar 2019

Fig. 6-19

Fig. 6-19 shows a three-page sequence from *Random Luck*, shortlisted for exhibition in the SUSTAINABILITY ART PRIZE 2019, 4-29 Apr 2019

Chapter 7 – *Mr Goodchild*

> In the literary arts there is an expectation of two kinds of content: the immediate content of story or image, the subject of the work, and a broader thematic content that looks beyond particularities.
>
> Lamarque (2009, p.41)

My fourth and final picturebook *Mr Goodchild* is a story about an anthropomorphic sheep inspired by my reflections on my role as a parent in Singaporean society. Through this picturebook, I hoped to demonstrate (as in Lamarque's quote above) how a particular autoethnographic reflection could be connected to a wider thematic issue that has cultural, social and political relevance (Ellis, 2004; Lamarque, 2009). *Mr Goodchild* is also a picturebook in which I attempted to push the boundaries of picturebook conventions through incorporating and synthesizing different creative narrative strategies, an endeavour that yielded unexpected insights.

7.1 A Kiasu Parent

I had two wonderful daughters: obedient, sensible and diligent. The elder one was pursuing a law degree while the younger one was working hard to get into medical school. A lawyer and a doctor: two esteemed career choices among pragmatic Singaporean parents. It would be easy to assume that my two daughters were the products of the typical middle class

Singaporean family, the kind of family who would groom their children to choose stable and well-paid careers. However, my wife and I would disagree with such a stereotype. We considered ourselves liberal parents; we tried to encourage our children to be independent thinkers who would make important life choices on their own. We would be happy if they had chosen other types of careers, even if it meant less stability or lower financial returns. In fact, as art lovers ourselves, we deliberately exposed our daughters to all kinds of art from a young age. While my younger daughter demonstrated a strong interest in the visual arts, this faded after her GCSEs and she decided to drop the study of art completely when she progressed to the sixth form to focus on pursuing a medical career. As parents, we were of course supportive of her decision; we were proud that she took ownership of her own future. At the same time, we could not help but feel a sense of loss as she walked away from something that she used to love. The fact that neither of our daughters showed any real interest in aesthetics or a desire to pursue a career in the creative industry left us with feelings of unexplained regret.

Perhaps they were sensible to pursue careers that were more pragmatic and stable. As my wife and I reflected in more depth, we agreed that some of their personality traits today might be shaped by our influences, many of which were unintended. For example, while we exposed the girls to the arts early on in their formative years, we were also pushing them to work hard at their academic studies. We worried incessantly whether they were doing well in school and constantly monitored their performance, often comparing them with their peers. I remembered that each time my girls brought home a test result (which is very frequent in the Singaporean context), my wife would ask them how their classmates did. By gauging their results with that of their peers, we ascertained where they stood academically and used this as

a basis to steer them forward in their studies. In fact, much of their growing up years were spent doing homework and preparing for tests and examinations, maybe to the detriment of their growth in other areas. We wanted to prepare our children for their future the best way we could. We could see what the girls had gained through such a focused pursuit of academic excellence—good academic results, progress in education, good career prospects—but nonetheless, what we could not see was what they might have lost: a zest for life, a love for aesthetics, a gung-ho spirit. Reflecting on our parenting style was a revelation to me: we had always perceived ourselves as open-minded and supportive parents yet we had subjected our girls to certain unintended influences all these years. I wondered what effects these influences had on our girls, who were no doubt clueless about what they had been subjected to and the impact on them.

As I reflected on my role as a parent, I began to see connections between my behaviour and Singaporean society as whole. As a small city-state, Singaporeans were constantly reminded of how vulnerable they were and thus the dire need for them to always stay vigilant and competitive. In the headline news published on 9 Oct 2019, 'Singapore is world's most competitive economy: World Economic Forum', *The Straits Times* carries the following words: "It [Singapore] scored 84.8 out of a possible 100, beating the United States to the top spot in the ranking of 141 economies" (Aw, 2019, para. 2). The news also highlighted a Facebook post by Minister for Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing, that stated, "the ranking was encouraging as it reflected how strong economic fundamentals here continue to distinguish Singapore from its competitors" (Aw, 2019, para. 6). It dawned on me that the messaging from such news was similar to how my wife and I had asked our daughters to compare their test results with that of their peers. There was a sense that it was not enough to

state Singapore's achievement without making a comparison with other countries, just as it was not enough for my daughters to get good grades without knowing how they stood against their peers. This comparison mentality is deeply ingrained in Singaporean society.

Comparison and competition are not in themselves negative behaviours; they could be good for society because the fear of losing out could serve as a motivation to drive individuals to make progress. Comparison and competition are everywhere: government policy, in the corporate world, and in our everyday behaviours. Most universities use grades to differentiate students for admission; some countries use a point-based system in their immigration policy; many banks use income level to screen their clients; and so on. Yet, in Singapore, comparison and competition seems to have an even greater significance. The mainstream media inundates Singaporeans with news about how Singapore is ranked against other countries in wide-ranging domains (education, infrastructure, economy, etc.). Singaporeans pride themselves on thriving on the global stage in spite of their limited resources; they get nervous when they fall behind, even if only by a tiny margin. Recent headlines such as 'China pips Singapore to top spot in PISA education ranking' (Teng, 2019) and 'SIA slips to No. 2 in best airline list, wins top spot for its premium suites' (Yong, 2019) garnered widespread public interest: just two more examples of Singaporean's obsession with comparison and competition. This obsession runs deep in and can be seen in the behaviours of individuals. Singaporeans called this behaviour 'Kiasuism' which meant an excessive fear of losing out or falling behind. Kiasuism is a social phenomenon that all Singaporeans are familiar with and its presence is ubiquitous: it influences the behaviours of people without them being conscious of it. As I reflected on this issue, I began to wonder how much of my parenting style, and my other behaviours, was due to the subconscious influence of Kiasuism.

7.2 One Story, Many Voices

My reflection on my two daughters began with how their career choices had been shaped subconsciously by my wife and me. As I delved deeper, I started to draw connections between my parenting style and Singaporean society. This was a good example of how autoethnography could connect the individual to the social, cultural and political (Ellis, 2004). This reflexive exercise inspired the creation of *Mr Goodchild*, a story about the dynamic relationship between individuals and their socio-cultural context.

The making of *Mr Goodchild* was different from that of *Lemonade Sky* and *Random Luck*. With *Lemonade Sky*, I began by creating individual standalone paintings that led me to a narrative; with *Random Luck*, I was searching for a new picturebook syntax—picturebook-poem—to express a visceral response to my origins. The creative process of *Mr Goodchild* followed a much more conventional trajectory: I started with a specific theme for the story and developed an archetypal narrative structure comprising an exposition, rising actions, a climax, falling action and a resolution. However, having a story and being able to express it are two very different things; my biggest challenge was to find the right picturebook syntax with which to tell the story.

My creative vision for *Mr Goodchild* was to produce a picturebook with an immersive reading experience that could prompt readers to reflect on its content. To achieve this immersive experience, I felt a need to create an affinity between readers and the characters, in

particular the protagonist Mr Goodchild (an anthropomorphic sheep). I wanted readers to be able to sense the world around him and to read his inner thoughts in an intimate way. As I started my creative work in the studio, I began to realise just how difficult a task this was. Through my inquiry, I became aware that most picturebooks use a narrative style that enables readers to read aloud, usually by an adult reader to a child (Palmer, 2015, p.49). This convention could create a kind of detachment between the picturebook readers and the characters in the story. Readers are placed in a position where they are consciously mindful of their role as a storyteller/story-listener rather than as active participants in the story, as if they are third parties watching a performance on the stage. This is a convention that could make the creation of an immersive experience particularly difficult.

I conducted a small sample size piece of research using the eighteen picturebooks (all Emil Award winners from 1982 to 1999) picked by David Lewis (2001, pp.2-3) in his book *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks: The Contemporary Children's Picturebook*. I omitted two of the picturebooks (*Sleeping Beauty and Other Favourite Fairy Tales* retold by Angela Carter, illustrated by Michael Foreman (1991) and *Jack the Treacle Eater* by Charles Causley, illustrated by Charles Keeping (1987)), which are collections of multiple narratives, as I wanted to focus on picturebooks that narrate a single story with visual and verbal texts. Of the sixteen picturebooks, I found that twelve are written in the third person (including *The Man* by Raymond Briggs (1998), which uses speech balloons); and four are written in the first person (including *Have You Seen Who's Just Moved In Next Door To Us?* by Colin McNaughton (1991), which uses a combination of first-person viewpoint writing and speech balloons). The outcome of this simple piece of research was congruent with my earlier suspicions based on personal experience as a published picturebook-maker i.e. the majority of

picturebooks are written in the third person. Such a narrative style positions the reader as an omniscient narrator who has ultimate control of every character and event in the story; a position that is particularly suited for adults reading aloud to children. Similar to reading aloud, writing in the third person could also make readers feel like they are reading someone else's story and create an experience that is more distant and detached.

There are, of course, picturebooks that are written in the first person, which makes a story more immersive as readers see the story through the eyes of the characters, as if they are experiencing the events in the story themselves. The limitation of the first person, however, is that things and experiences that the protagonist cannot see or feel cannot be told, which could present challenges to the picturebook-maker. I made numerous attempts to write in the first and third person but none of the results were satisfactory. I almost gave up at one point; I thought it was impossible to use a picturebook to create the kind of immersive experience I wanted, especially since I could not find such a picturebook on the market. However, as I pondered the pros and cons of writing in the first or third person one day, I suddenly had the thought that the picturebook could, in fact, be particularly effective in circumventing the limitations posed by both writing viewpoints because of its use of visual and verbal texts. The picturebook syntax could allow it to tell something with words (in the first person) and show another thing with pictures (in a third person) or vice-versa i.e. it has a dual narrative capability that the syntax of language could not achieve. This dual-narrative capability is especially pronounced in Colin McNaughton's picturebook *Have You Seen Who's Just Moved In Next Door To Us?* (1992), in which McNaughton writes the words in first-person viewpoint but uses illustrations comprising characters uttering sometimes nonsensical jokes in speech balloons to show the personalities of various characters in the story, giving the

readers added layers of experience. In a similar way, the words in Marta Altes's *No!* (2011) tell the story from a first-person viewpoint (that of a dog), but the pictures reveal a very different story from a third-person viewpoint.

I was excited by the potential to use the picturebook to narrate a story from multiple viewpoints. I began to see the first and third person options not as an either/or choice but as possible collaborative strategies and I started to explore how words and pictures could be used in a seamless way to convey the immersive experience I craved. I found a solution by compartmentalising *Mr Goodchild* into five chapters: 'The Voice', 'The Beast', 'Same Old Same Old', 'Through the Peephole', and '...'. The first and third chapters are written in the first person; the second chapter is in the third person; the fourth chapter, which is also the longest chapter, is wordless and assumes a writing viewpoint that is between first and third person (readers would feel that they are watching the happenings inside a room as a third party but they may also feel that they are doing this through the eyes of Mr Goodchild); and the fifth chapter, while written in the first person, is from the viewpoint of a different character to that in the previous chapters. This switching of writing viewpoints allowed me to create many different 'voices' and bring the readers close to the worlds both inside and outside Mr Goodchild, creating the immersive experience I sought. It was particularly satisfying that friends I had invited to read the book did not find the switching of writing viewpoint awkward: in fact, none of them had taken any notice but read the narrative as a single coherent text.

The use of different writing viewpoints with visual and verbal texts is an insight I gained from practical studio work. While the underlying idea of leveraging on the dual semiotic characteristics of visual and verbal texts to convey a narrative from multiple viewpoints is the same (as the aforementioned examples of McNaughton and Altes), the way I had used the words and pictures to create an immersive experience in *Mr Goodchild* is different. I hope this technique could be useful to other picturebook-makers to create textures and nuances in a reader's experience.

7.3 Double-Page Spread and Comic Frames

It was always difficult to know exactly what form the narrative for a picturebook might take at the beginning of the creative work; all I had was a vague notion that I wanted *Mr Goodchild* to be a picturebook that provides readers with an aesthetic experience, plenty of drama and suspense. In the realm of aesthetics, this is where practice-based research can be indispensable. The search for a resolution to a creative problem (such as finding the right expression with which to narrate a story) does not happen only in the cognitive domain; often, the resolution is found through the act of hands-on exploration and experimentation, through casting ideas into forms. This can only happen in the studio. I made my first storyboard for *Mr Goodchild* with most of the pages filled with double-page spread illustrations (see Fig. 7-1). However, I was not satisfied with the results.

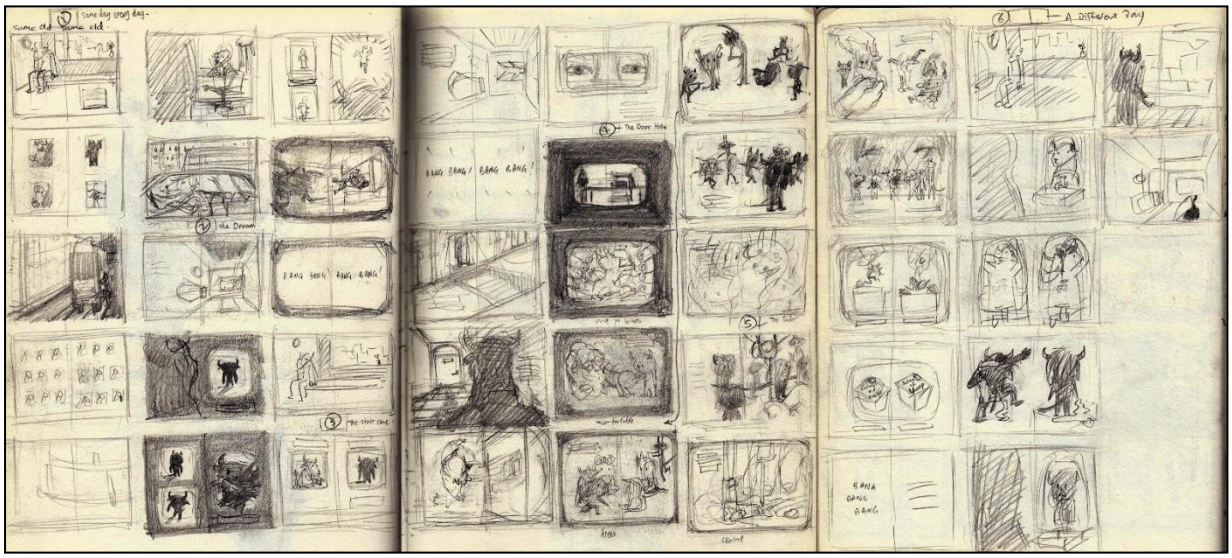


Fig. 7-1

The first storyboard for *Mr Goodchild*.

I wanted *Mr Goodchild* to be a picturebook story with many twists and turns, space for reflection, drama and suspense. The complexity of the plot demanded that it be considerably lengthier than the typical 32-page picturebook (as can be seen in the 82-page storyboard in Fig. 7-1). The length presented more challenges in terms of the progression and pacing of the narrative. I tried to adhere to the double-page spread convention of the picturebook in the storyboard, but I felt the pace of the narration became too monotonous as a result, causing it to lose the drama and suspense I wanted. Typically, the double-page spread feature of the picturebook is effective in giving an overview of events (such as the illustrations found in wimmelbooks (Rémi, 2011)) or displaying large single- or double-page illustrations that tease the reader. Progression of the narrative is achieved as much by the words and pictures as through turning the pages. For this reason, the picturebook is not effective in narrating content that involves the minute progression of time with many fine changes in action—an effect that could be very useful to convey drama and suspense, as it allows events to be revealed (or not) in a controlled way. The double-page spread convention means that it would

take the typical picturebook far too many pages to achieve this effect; a thick book with too many pages would be impractical and make the reading experience cumbersome.

There are, however, many picturebooks that have successfully circumvented the limitation of the double-page spread by borrowing from the syntax from another graphic narrative form: comics. Elliot Eisner defines comics as a form of sequential art (Eisner, 1985); Scott McCloud defines comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence" (1994, p.9). Both definitions are challenged by subsequent scholars but for the discussion in this segment, I would focus on what comics could offer that the picturebook cannot. One of the main things that differentiates comics from the picturebook is its use of frames or panels to juxtapose drawings to advance the narrative; comics also commonly use dialogue instead of narrative text, usually in the form of speech balloons, to communicate content, a practice rarely found in the picturebook. Rebecca Palmer (2015, pp.37-38) posits that the comic syntax allows the art form to achieve more dramatic effects, create more intimacy with its characters, and allow more control over the progression of time in comparison to the picturebook. Furthermore, drawings in comics are traditionally more simplified and stylised, a convention that could be a result of comic artists making a deliberate choice to compromise on aesthetic quality to achieve a more economical way of advancing the narrative. It is not uncommon to find comic books, especially Japanese serialised comics, with pages mostly printed in black and white with only a few pages (usually the book cover) of full-colour illustrations with a high degree of finish. Japanese comic readers seem to accept that drawings in comics do not need to be finished to the highest degree of aesthetic excellence provided they can communicate a narrative that is interesting and engaging. Picturebook readers, in contrast, expect a certain level of aesthetic experience for every double-page

spread; this might explain why every illustration in the picturebook is usually meticulously finished. However, recent developments in graphic narratives suggest that a growing number of artists are challenging this convention by producing more lengthy narratives, often with the comic syntax, entirely with high-quality artworks. This is a really exciting phenomenon for the graphic narrative scene.

Some of the most notable picturebooks that use the expressive quality of the comic syntax are Raymond Briggs's (1982) *The Snowman* and Shuan Tan's (2007) *The Arrival*. It is no coincidence that both books are wordless; Shaun Tan explicitly acknowledges the influence of *The Snowman* in *The Arrival*. Both books also use comic frames to advance their narratives. In *The Snowman*, the use of comic syntax is so pervasive that it can easily be mistaken for a comic book rather than a picturebook; its publisher at Hamish Hamilton, Iain Harvey, comments that the second print of the book did not sell well because of its lack of words, which prohibited it from being a bedtime story that could be read aloud. *The Snowman* is also considered a picturebook instead of a comic book because of its frequent use of full double-page spreads (alongside pages with comic frames); its attention to detail; the aesthetic quality of all its illustrations; and its primary target audience i.e. children. Similar to *The Snowman*, *The Arrival* uses a good mix of pages with comic frames, full single-page illustrations and full double-page spread illustrations. Tan fully exploits the expressive power of the comic syntax to portray subtle changes in the actions and emotions of his characters. He writes:

> my original idea for a fairly conventional picture book developed into a quite different kind of structure. It seemed that a longer, more fragmented visual sequence without any words would best capture a certain feeling of uncertainty and discovery I absorbed from my research. (n.d.-d, para. 9)

Tan describes *The Arrival* as “a graphic novel rather than a picture book”, although he acknowledges that “[t]here is not a great difference between the two” (n.d.-d, para. 13). What *The Snowman* and *The Arrival* have shown is that by combining syntaxes from different types of graphic narratives, picturebook-makers could expand the expressive qualities of the picturebook idiom that conventional picturebook syntax might not be able to achieve as effectively.

I started to explore the use of comic frames in the narrative of *Mr Goodchild*. I made several more iterations of the storyboard as I tried to incorporate comic frames into the double-page spread sketches; all the time, I was mindful that I wanted to create a picturebook, not a comic book. Finding a satisfactory picturebook syntax that could synthesize the double-page spread and the comic frames proved more challenging than I thought; there were times that I even considered making *Mr Goodchild* into a comic book (instead of a picturebook) as the comic syntax seemed a much better fit for such a lengthy story. However, comic books lack the kind of aesthetic experience and ruminative quality I love so much in a picturebook. I was stuck in a state of limbo for a couple of months as I went around in circles, unable to find a solution.

Then I came across Matt Madden’s *99 Ways to Tell a Story* (2006). Inspired by Raymond Queneau’s *Exercise in Style*, Matt’s book shows how the same story—of a man leaving his work at the computer to get something from a fridge—could be told in many different ways using graphic narrative. Madden's book prompted me to think: what if the narrative of *Mr Goodchild* was compartmentalised into different chapters and each chapter was told in a

different way? This strategy would also fit well with the technique of writing from different viewpoints, as discussed earlier. As I delved deeper into the combination of double-page spreads and comic frames in a single narrative, I developed a better grasp of the expressive potential offered by each type of syntax. I began to conceive the narrative of *Mr Goodchild* in compartments, each with its own pace and emotions, and each to be expressed in a syntax that suited its content. I reorganised my manuscript into five chapters and tried to tell the story for each chapter differently: I tagged each chapter to the writing viewpoint I would use, the kinds of emotion I wanted to express, and the pace I would like to create (see Fig. 7-2). I also introduced a separator page for each chapter, which helped to bridge the transitions between chapters. This new approach provided me with clarity in how I could construct the narrative of *Mr Goodchild* in a way that I did not see before; it also provided me with a structure with which to think about what types of syntax I should use and for what purpose.

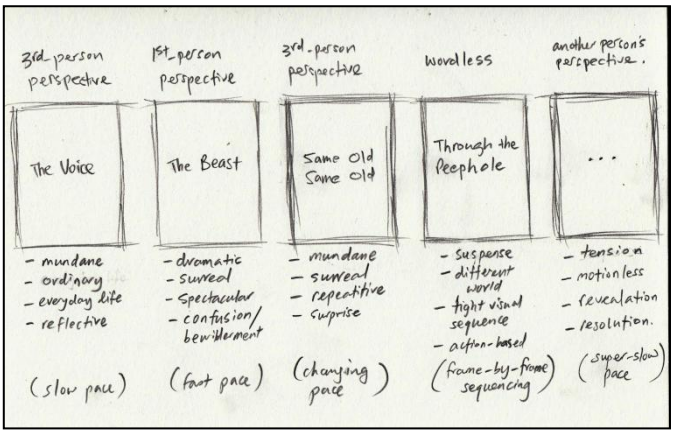


Fig. 7-2

Organising the narrative into five chapters.

Using Fig. 7-2 as a guide, I created a storyboard (Fig. 7-3) that provided the aesthetic experience of double-page spreads and the drama and suspense created by comic frames. While many of the drawings and ideas in this storyboard were subsequently changed in the

latter stages, this storyboard provided me with the initial breakthrough in my search for a new creative storytelling method.

Fig. 7-3

A storyboard for *Mr Goodchild* that synthesizes double-page spreads and comic frames.

Practice-based research allows researchers to synthesize theoretical knowledge, technical skills, and personal intuition to create new possibilities and discover new solutions. By examining the practice of other picturebook-makers (like Raymond Briggs and Shaun Tan), I was able to bring new ideas into my own studio practice that yielded new insights.

7.4 Mise-En-Scène

The picturebook and comics are often linked to an art form of an entirely different medium: film. Palmer cites the work of Amy Spaulding (1995, cited in Palmer 2015, p.39), who examines the similarities between the picturebook and the storyboard for film, which are both picture-based sequences of narratives. Palmer writes:

> making comics, or indeed picturebooks, can feel like transcribing continuous action, so that the narrative artist's task, as Ormerod (in Marantz and Marantz, 1992, p.173) says, is to decide "the absolute moment to freeze the frame so you can see what has just happened and what is about to happen". (2015, p.40)

It seems reasonable, then, to think of a picturebook as a selection of scenes in a film. However, such a comparison, if taken too literally, could be misguided. The picturebook uses visual and verbal texts, double-page spreads and page-turning to convey its narrative. What readers see inside a picturebook is finished artworks, all of which are designed to provide readers with a certain reading experience and to convey a story. Picturebook readers are still expected to fill in the gaps between pages, something picturebook-makers are very cognizant of during their art-making process. The storyboard for a film, on the other hand, comprises drawings usually done as rough schematic sketches; its purpose (together with the accompanying screenwriting) is primarily to guide film-makers in their shooting of the film. The storyboard for film is, in itself, not a finished product and it serves a very different purpose from the picturebook. Audiences are not expected to fill in the gaps between the frames in a storyboard for film; rather, these gaps would be filled in by the film-makers. The picturebook and the storyboard for film are fundamentally two different syntaxes that have to be treated differently despite their apparent similarities. Thus, it is highly unlikely that a picturebook would be a mere collection of freeze scenes in a film and I do not believe most picturebook-makers think or work this way. Perhaps it might be more apt to compare the storyboard for the picturebook with the storyboard for the film instead.

Notwithstanding the above, as an avid movie-goer, I was often drawn to the evocative power and immersive quality of film. I wondered how I could bring the experience of watching

films into the creation of picturebooks; *Mr Goodchild* provided an opportunity for me to experiment with this idea. Film has enormous power to create deeply immersive experiences for its audience because of its multisensory nature in which dialogue, music and moving images are integrated seamlessly to fabricate realities that could be aesthetic, evocative and convincing at the same time. Hence, instead of looking to the storyboard for film for ideas, I studied how a film conveys emotions and all its intended information to its audience via *mise-en-scène*, and tried to use this knowledge to help me make *Mr Goodchild*.

Mise-en-scène describes everything that is placed inside the camera scene (De Valk and Arnold, 2013, p.5). Good *mise-en-scène* creates an authentic feel of a setting, projects the appropriate ambience, and helps filmmakers communicate emotions and information to their audience. These are important considerations for many of the double-page spread illustrations in *Mr Goodchild*. For example, in Figs. 7-4 and 7-5, Mr Goodchild—a character who is rather monotonous and expressionless— is not really doing anything. Nothing much is really happening in either paintings. For double-page spreads like these, where there is a lack of animated characters with dramatic gestures (often found in both picturebooks and comics), *mise-en-scène* becomes an important vehicle in terms of conveying emotions and information. Even on pages where the character's action is dramatic and exaggerated, such as Fig. 7-6, *mise-en-scène* could help to lift the feeling of the artwork. Thinking like a film director in terms of *mise-en-scène* could help to focus attention on the evocative qualities (and their various nuances) in each illustration, and the kinds of settings that are best suited to convey the desired emotions.

A familiar voice lingered in Mr Goodchild's head
the moment he woke up every morning.

Fig. 7-4

The *mise- en scène* comprises a simple bedroom with minimal furniture, an old-fashioned alarm clock, and a small wash basin projects a humdrum lifestyle lacking in variety and excitement.

But Mr Goodchild could never hear it clearly enough
to make any sense of it.

Fig. 7-5

The *mise en scène* of an empty dining room, distant chimneys and industrial buildings emits a sense of isolation.

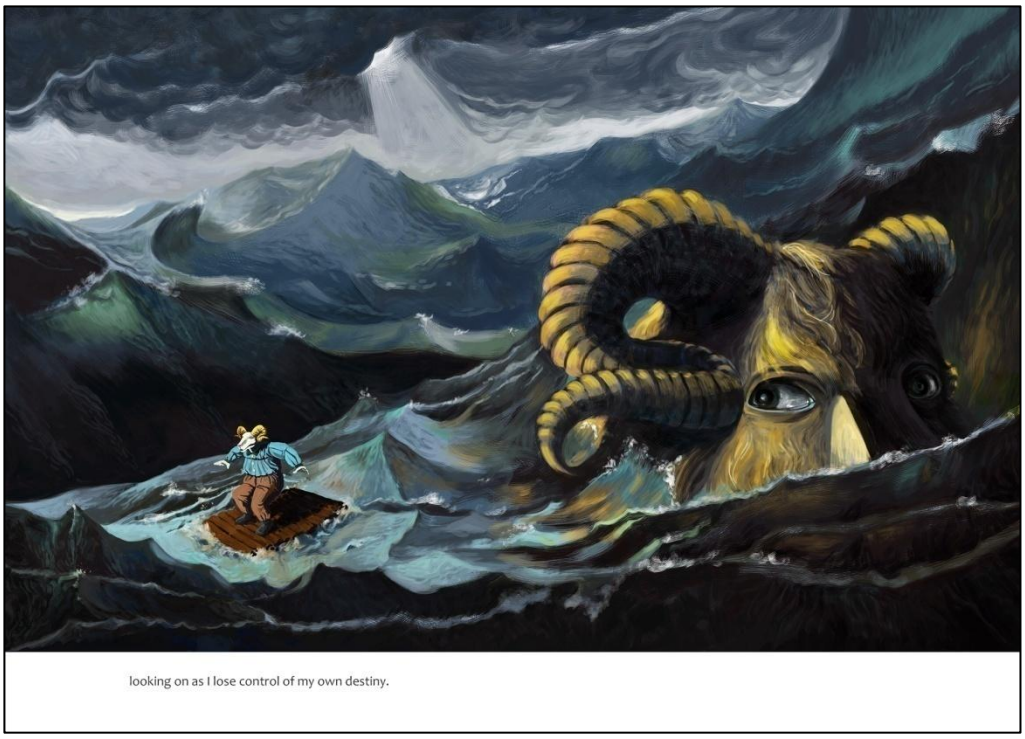


Fig. 7-6

The turbulent waves form a *mise-en-scène* that is coherent with the dramatic mood in the painting.

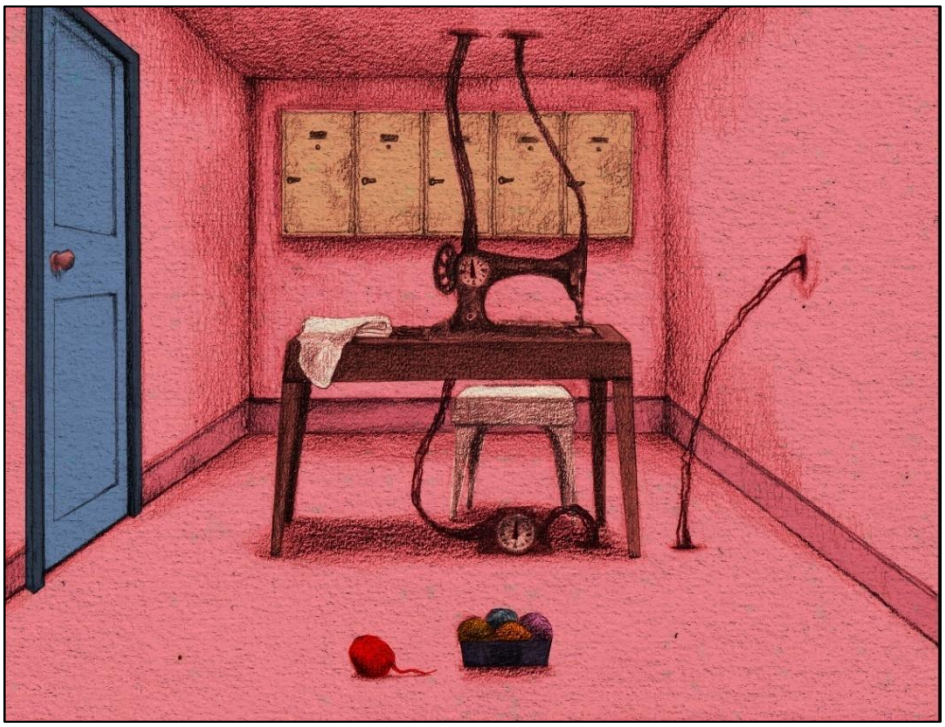


Fig. 7-7

The *mise-en-scène* through the peephole is an eerie room with a strange-looking sewing machine with wires reaching beyond the walls to unknown places.

The chapter ‘Through the Peephole’ deviates from the rest of the book in its use of comic frames; it is also wordless. I chose to use comic frames instead of double-page spreads in this chapter because I wanted to create the feeling that Mr Goodchild is watching something unfolding, and comic frames are far more effective in showing fine changes in the movement of characters over time (see Figs. 7-8 and 7-9). The *mise-en-scène* in Fig.7-7 shows a frontal view of an eerie room, which is also the view that Mr Goodchild would see through the peephole; the wordless pages portray a silent scene that accentuates the strangeness of the events unfolding and adding to the immersive experience of the narrative. It is as if the readers are looking through the peephole through Mr Goodchild’s eyes, and, just like Mr Goodchild, they cannot hear anything in the room because the door has blocked out any sound.

In the first few pages of the chapter, I deployed a consistent frontal view perspective (see Figs. 7-7 and 7-10) to create and sustain the immersive feeling of looking through the peephole. However, as readers become acclimatized, I shifted and adjusted the perspective (see Fig. 7-11) to enhance the drama and suspense of the narrative. I tested the shift in perspective by getting a few friends to read the chapter; they were all oblivious to the change in perspective until I pointed it out. ‘Through the Peephole’ was illustrated in an entirely different style from the rest of the book. The combination of pencil drawings with flat colours and a slight tint of pink overcast suggest that we are seeing a hidden world unknown to Mr Goodchild, perhaps from another space and time, or from our subconscious. As an artist, the opportunity (and challenge) of creating two very different kinds of illustration styles in a single narrative made the creative process fun and exciting. This was also my first serious

attempt at making a comic sequence; the experience could not have been more insightful and enjoyable.

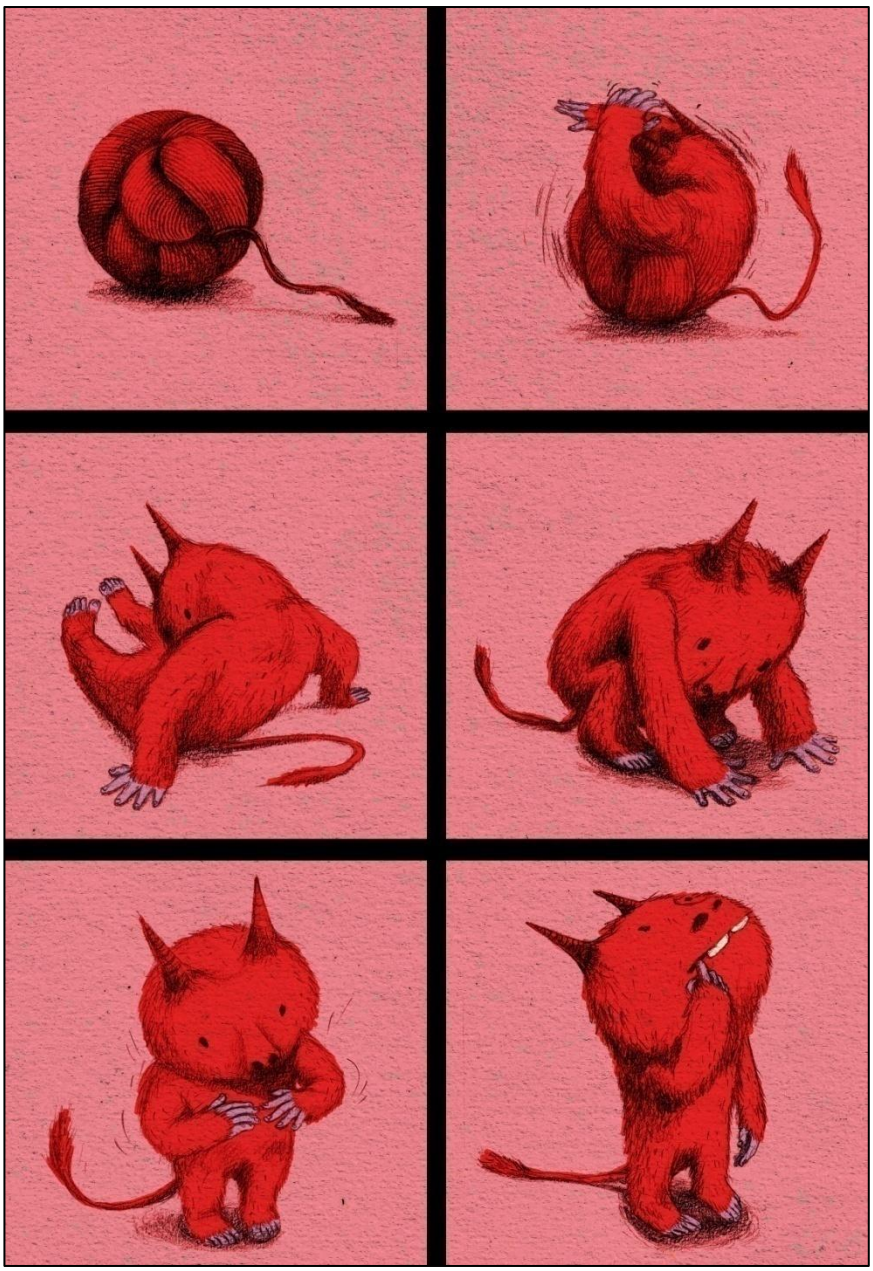


Fig. 7-8

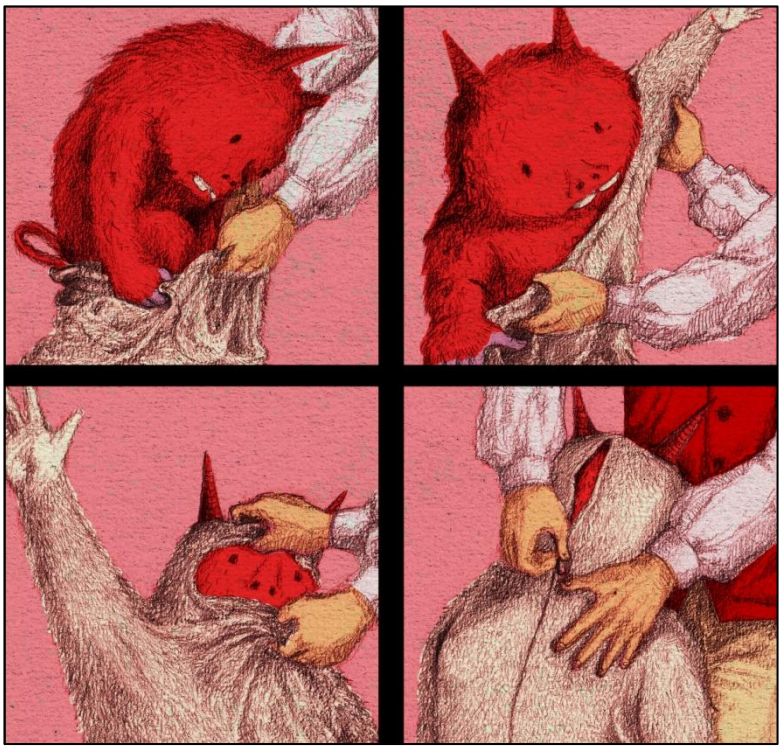


Fig. 7-9

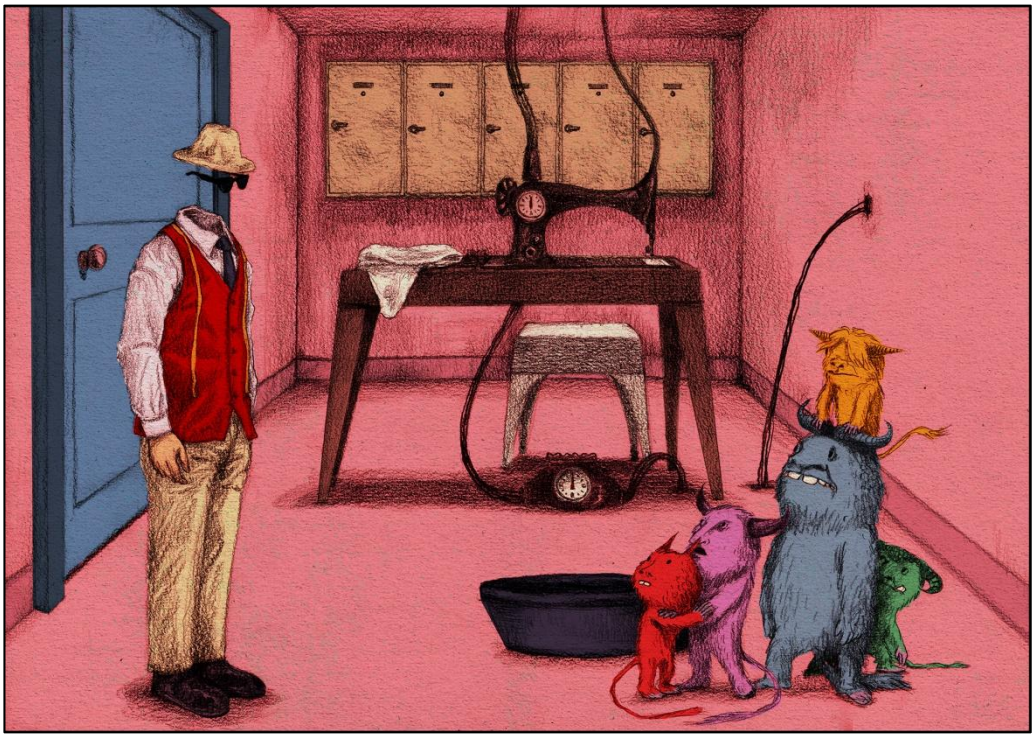


Fig. 7-10

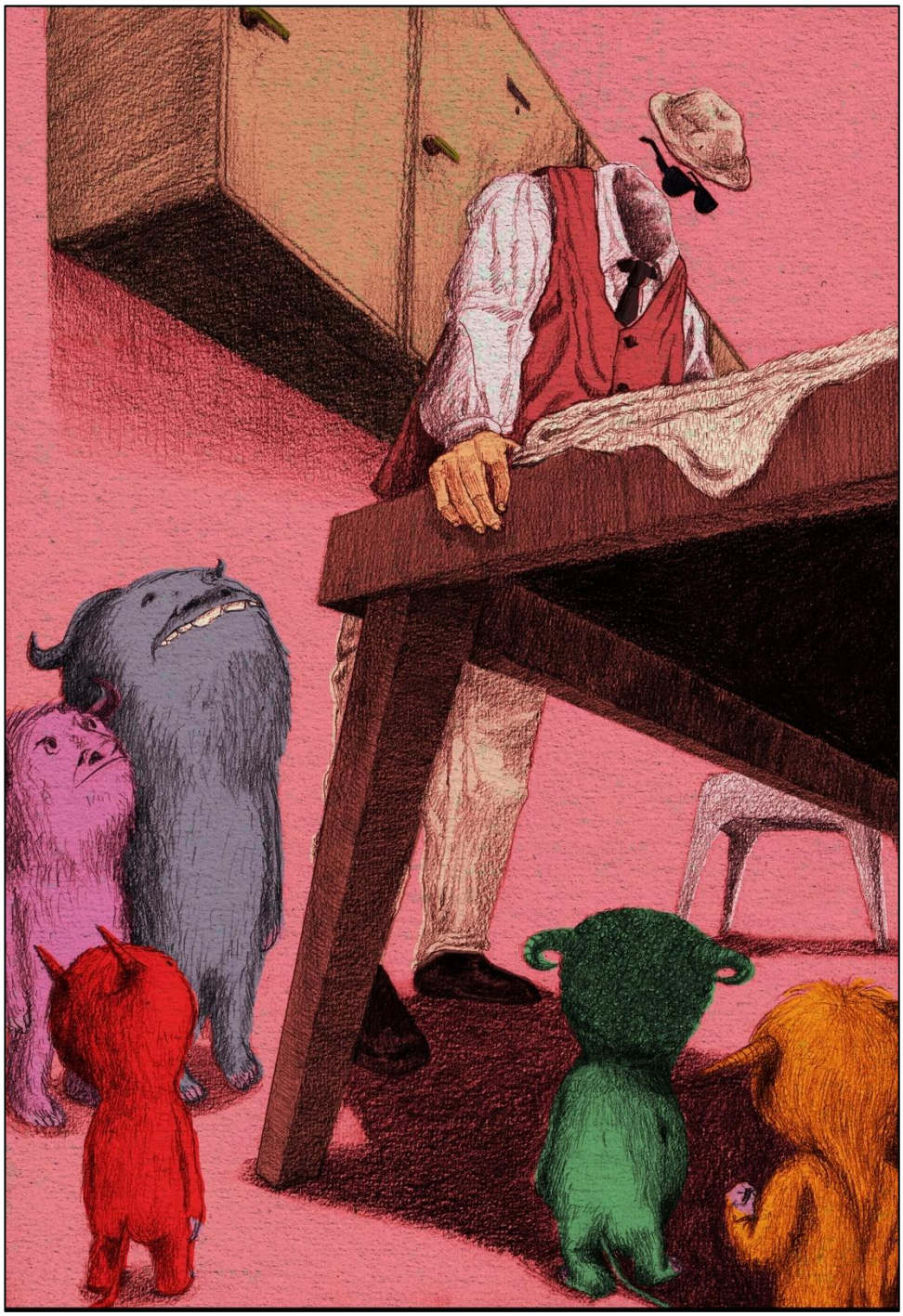


Fig. 7-11

7.5 Conclusion

Mr Goodchild is a picturebook for adults; it is a fictitious story about the life of an imagined character but it is also conspicuously political and philosophical. The story of *Mr Goodchild* was inspired by my autoethnographic study of my role as a parent, how I might have influenced my daughters in ways that I had not intended to, and how Singaporean society as a whole could, in similar ways, exert invisible influence on every Singaporean. Readers whom I invited to read the story had diverse interpretations of the narrative. One said the story made him felt both uncomfortable and empowered at the same time; another described the book as immersive and cinematic and made her reflect on the systems and structures surrounding her; another said the story provided a view of the society from the lens of an individual i.e. Mr Goodchild. While these interpretations might seem different, they shared a common underlying theme of a philosophical nature i.e. the influences and interferences of forces, known and unknown, on people at a macro level. Other readers might offer other interpretations. As an artist-researcher and the creator of the picturebook, I accept that all interpretations are valid in their own right. One of the key objectives of my picturebooks is, after all, for readers to play an integral part in the generation of meanings and insights.

In addition to the creative practices already mentioned in this chapter, I also used many other creative methods in the making of *Mr Goodchild*. For example, I studied the way Edward Hopper renders isolation and nostalgia in his paintings; I looked at Maurice Sendak's monsters in *Where The Wild Things Are* (1963) for the conceptualisation of the beast characters; I examined how Shaun Tan (2007) uses wordless comic frames in *The Arrival*. I was also heavily influenced by movies including *La Jetée* (1962), *Being John Malkovich* (1999), and *Paprika* (2006), which helped me to conceive the narrative for *Mr Goodchild*.

Creating *Mr Goodchild* was a truly gratifying experience. I learnt so much about different methods of storytelling with the picturebook, especially in the creation of an immersive experience for readers (not common in picturebook syntax). The test of a good narrative is of course to make readers so focused on the story and the characters that they do not consciously think about the storytelling methods. Methods like using different writing viewpoints, combining double-page spreads and comic frames, and the use of *mise-en-scène* are narrative strategies I discovered through the study of other people's work but also, crucially, from the act of practical studio work itself. My hope is that these creative methods could be useful to other picturebook-makers in the future, especially those who want to create an immersive experience for their readers.

As part of my outreach programme, I exhibited two prints from *Mr Goodchild* at 'AHSS Research Conference Exhibition' (see. Fig. 7-12) from 11 Jul to 23 Aug 2019, and exhibited twelve prints plus the entire book in the 'Ways of Storytelling' (Fig. 7-13) exhibition put on by three PhD students (including myself) at Ruskin Gallery from 5-26 Mar 2020.

Fig. 7-12

Fig. 7-12 shows the two prints from *Mr Goodchild* at the AHSS Research Conference Exhibition outside Mumford Theatre, 11 Jul-23 Aug 2019.

Fig. 7-13

Fig. 7-13 shows my exhibits of Mr Goodchild in the Ways of Storytelling Exhibition at Ruskin Gallery, 5-27 Mar 2020.

Chapter 8 – Reflections and Conclusions

I began my research with three goals that could make a contribution to knowledge (see section 1.2):

(1) produce original autoethnographic contents in the picturebook form which could help readers gain a more nuanced understanding of Singaporean society;
(2) develop a framework for the creation of autoethnographic picturebooks; and
(3) develop a better understanding of the creative practice of the picturebook form for autoethnographic study through practical hands-on studio work.

In this chapter, I would evaluate and reflect on how these three goals were achieved through a practice-based method of inquiry.

8.1 Original Autoethnographic Picturebooks

ABR provides the epistemological background for artist-researchers to conduct research through the process of art-making and the artefacts created; it offers an alternative method of inquiry that occupies a space outside the quantitative and qualitative paradigms. ABR does not necessarily base its research outcomes on empirical means; instead, it seeks to engage the audience's intuition and visceral senses, and invite them to co-participate in open interpretation and knowledge creation. Autoethnography connects a researcher's personal lived experience to the wider cultural and social context; through its evocative form, autoethnography seeks an empathetic connection with the audiences, prompting them to think

more deeply. The history and philosophies of ABR and autoethnography provided the basis for me to express my reflections on Singaporean society through an expressive art form: the picturebook; I was able to formulate a deeply reflective approach to making picturebooks in which I used my lived experience as 'data' to create fictional narratives related to Singaporean society.

I had successfully created four original autoethnographic picturebooks—*Lemonade Sky*, *The Second-Hand Vespa*, *Random Luck*, and *Mr Goodchild*—which could provide readers with a more nuanced understanding of Singaporean society. In the critical reflections on all these books, I provided the background context of my personal lived experience; I did not, however, try to explain or analyse the content of these four autoethnographic picturebooks. This was a conscious and deliberate decision. As a picturebook-maker, I believe the contents of the picturebooks should be communicated via the picturebooks themselves. I intentionally created narratives that were ambiguous and enigmatic, as I wanted readers to have their own interpretations, and create meaning and insights for themselves. Nevertheless, I should stress that a substantial portion of my research outcomes, which is autoethnographic and non-discursive in nature, resides in the four picturebooks. I hope that the four picturebooks I have created will enhance the understanding of Singaporean society and open up new arts-based inquiry methods that could supplement existing studies done by social scientists. It is my belief that all works of art in ABR must be underpinned by a sense of empathy for the human world; they should have the ability to prompt the audience to reflect, ask questions, open up dialogue, and think about different possibilities.

8.2 Framework for Autoethnographic Study with the Picturebook Form

Through a practice-based approach, I developed the Framework for the Autoethnographic Picturebook Artist-Researcher (see section 4.4) by drawing on Frayling's (1993) three types of art and design research and Cross's (1999) three sources of design research. This framework provided a structure in which theoretical studies, personal reflections and studio practices could come together to create autoethnographic picturebooks that could have social and cultural significance. In the current debate between practice-led and practice-based research, perhaps not enough attention is given to the fact that these two enquiry methods are not necessarily mutually exclusive; in my experience, they often co-exist in the context of ABR. The Framework for the Autoethnographic Picturebook Artist-Researcher demonstrates how the art practice and the artefact are integrally connected; a single research project could yield outcomes in both the practice (practice-led) and the artwork (practice-based) domains. My hope is that this framework could be useful for future artist-researchers and picturebook-makers.

8.3 Understanding of the Picturebook Form for Autoethnographic Study

My research journey had given me the opportunity to create picturebooks through a deeply reflective approach and provided me with a deep understanding of how the picturebook form could be used for autoethnographic study. I wanted to demonstrate how the study of autoethnography could be embedded in the picturebook form and to share insights about the practice of the picturebook. By focusing on the three narrative characteristics of the picturebook (visual and verbal texts, double-page spread and page-turning), I was able to

build narratives that connect my personal lived experience with the social and cultural context of Singaporean society. One of the key insights I discovered in my practice-based approach was the close connection between the picturebook and poetry. Both art forms can be so compact and yet so expressive at the same time, which brings to mind Edward Gorey's words: "doing a minimum of damage to other possibilities that might arise in a reader's mind" (Acocella, 2018, n.p.). Other key insights about the making of autoethnographic picturebooks include the discovery of the narrative-of-viewpoint (see section 5.2.2) and the use of different writing viewpoints with visual and verbal texts (see section 7.2), among other practical creative methods.

8.4 Future Research

In my opinion, good works of art should not be just about 'expression' (of the artist). They should also be as much, if not more, about 'communication': one that involves the exchange of ideas between the audience and the artist through the artwork. Feige (2010) calls this type of communication reflexivity. Therefore, a good level of competence in art practice is necessary to create an artefact that can embed and communicate its intended content. For this reason, I disagree with the view of some artist-researchers (see section 2.3) that the quality of art practice is less important than the quality of the content in ABR. In my enquiry, the art practice and the artefact are inseparable, intertwined like a twisted braid; the quality of one would inevitably affect the quality of the other. I developed my art practice skill as a picturebook-maker as I tried to express the thoughts generated through the reflection of my lived experience; these thoughts were eventually captured in the four picturebooks. My art practice directly influenced the content of my picturebooks in ways that I could not have envisioned prior to this research project. The practice did not cast a preconceived idea into a

form: it actually helped to shape the idea as the form morphed and changed during the process of art-making. In this way, the practice shaped the form and the form shaped the practice, creating a dynamic relationship, an inseparable bond. This is an important insight from my research which challenges the widely held perception that art creation is a linear process of first thinking through an idea and then giving it a physical form.

All works of art have unity in form and content, hence the need for artist-researchers to have a high degree of mastery in the art practice. This is, however, not an attempt to build a fence to keep out researchers who are interested in ABR but who might feel inadequate in their art practice. On the contrary: it should be viewed as an invitation to encourage artist-researchers (whatever their background is) to give due attention to the technical aspects of art practice in their inquiry process so as to achieve a high level of competence in communicating their research through their artefacts. How important is the quality of art practice in ABR? What are the differences between social scientists and artists when the two groups embark on ABR? These are possible areas of study that warrant further research.

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Appendix 1

[redacted] 14/05/2018
to me

From [redacted]

To Joo Hong Low • lowjoohong@gmail.com

Date 14 May 2018, 05:08

Standard encryption (TLS).
See security details

Hi Joo Hong,

Thanks for following up on this.

We had a meeting with the distributor last week and I presented Lemonade Sky to them. They were awed with your illustrations, but they were also very open in pointing out that the market for such a book is small and they do not expect to be able to sell many copies.

I checked to confirm their stand again this morning before writing back to you and their position remains.

I would love to be able to publish Lemonade Sky, but it would be hard to push through if the numbers didn't work for us.

I am very sorry we won't be able to take on Lemonade Sky.

Warm regards,
[redacted]

Appendix 2

Lemonade Sky Follow Up

Inbox

[redacted] 25/01/2019
to me

From [redacted]@epigram.sg
To lowjoohong@gmail.com
Date 25 Jan 2019, 02:15
Standard encryption (TLS).
See security details

Dear Joo Hong,

Thank you for submitting *Lemonade Sky* to Epigram. The illustrations are absolutely captivating!
We think *Lemonade Sky* has potential to fall within a collection with some of your other stories/illustrations. Would you be open to exploring this idea?

To add, *Lemonade Sky* seems more appropriate as an all-ages art book, so we would be moving in this direction.
The text will need some work; but all of this we can discuss in more detail later.

Please let me know if you would be keen on the collection format, and if so, what other stories you would like to include.

Look forward to hearing from you!

Best,
[redacted]

[redacted] | Epigram

[redacted]
1008 Toa Payoh North #03-08, Singapore 318996
Facebook | Twitter | Instagram | YouTube

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC PICTUREBOOK: A PRACTICE-BASED INVESTIGATION INTO THE EXPRESSIVE POTENTIAL OF THE FORM

JOO HONG LOW

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

(part 2/4)

Submitted: August 2020

LEMONADE SKY

J. H. LOW

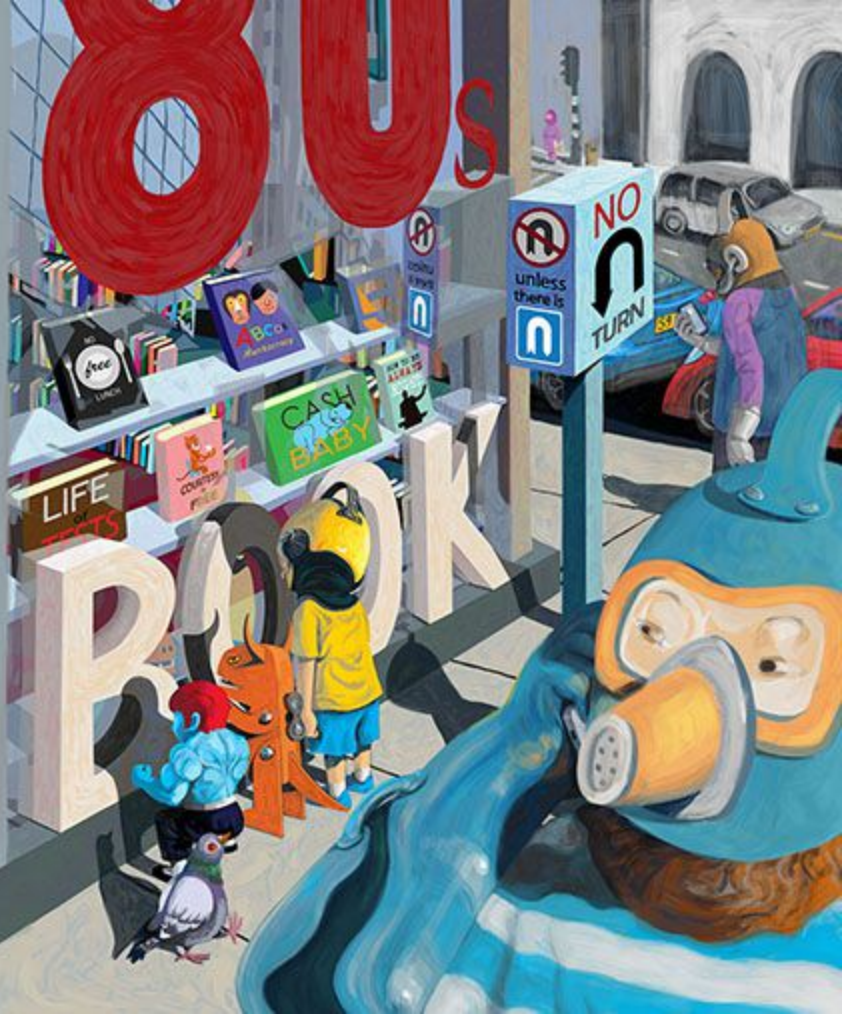
J·H·LOW
LEMONADE SKY

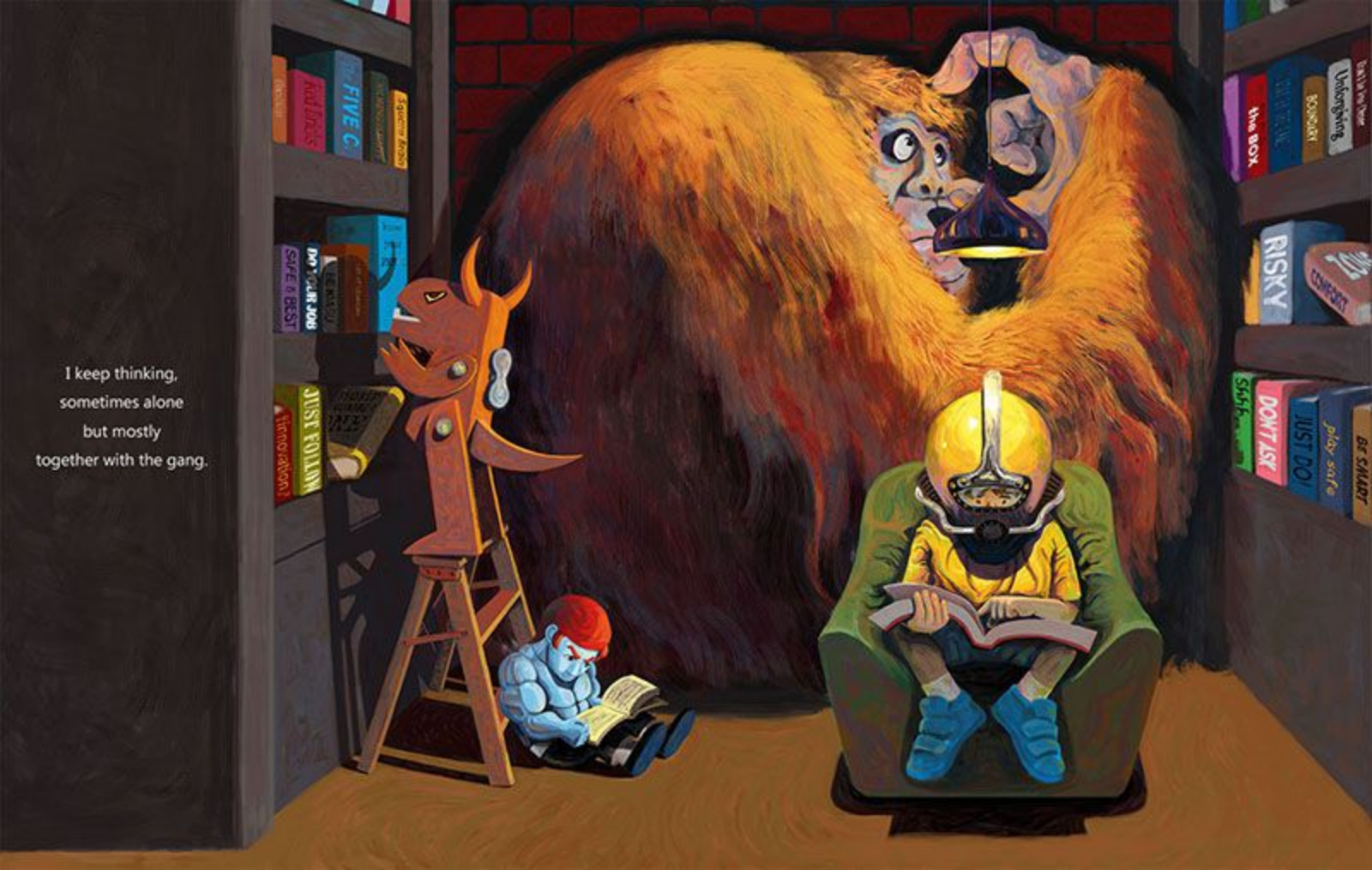
Written and illustrated by J.H.LOW

45
I've been thinking,
sometimes alone
but mostly
together with the gang.

What would it feel like
to fly
in the lemonade sky
and be truly free?

Life is simple
when I follow the books.
But what could it be
to journey between the lines,
beyond the pages?





I keep thinking,
sometimes alone
but mostly
together with the gang.

Perhaps if I shout in the wind
someone will hear me
and grant me wings.

He says,

"Why try so hard?
You'll be fine,
if you stay in the lane."

Staring at my looking-glass self
maybe it's meant to be.

I can't stop thinking,
sometimes alone
but mostly
together with the gang.
BUS

How could it not matter
when meaning and meaninglessness
become the same?

Dino with his teeth, bites and chomps.

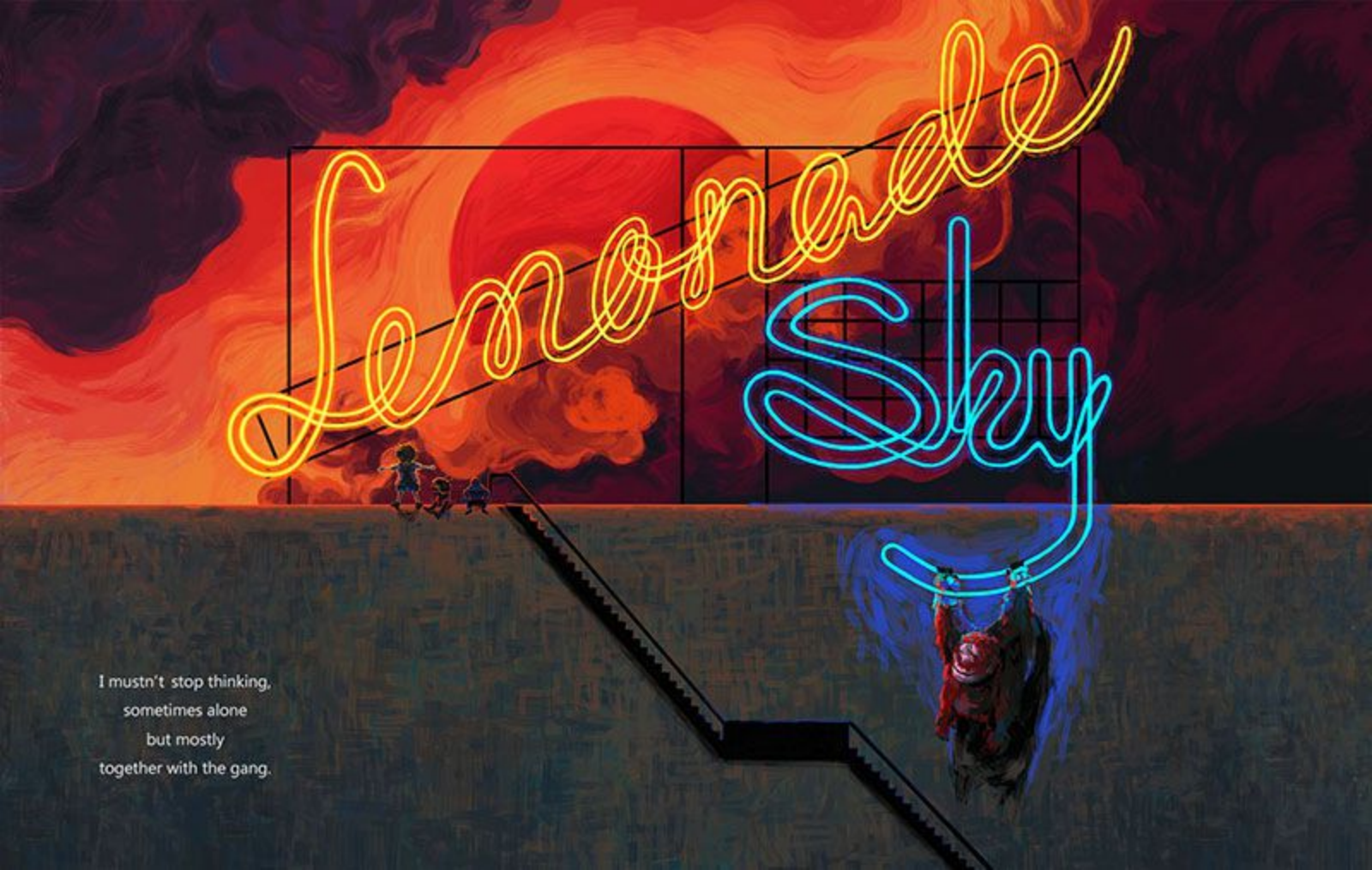
Mr Wang with his fists, tugs and pulls···

and set me free!

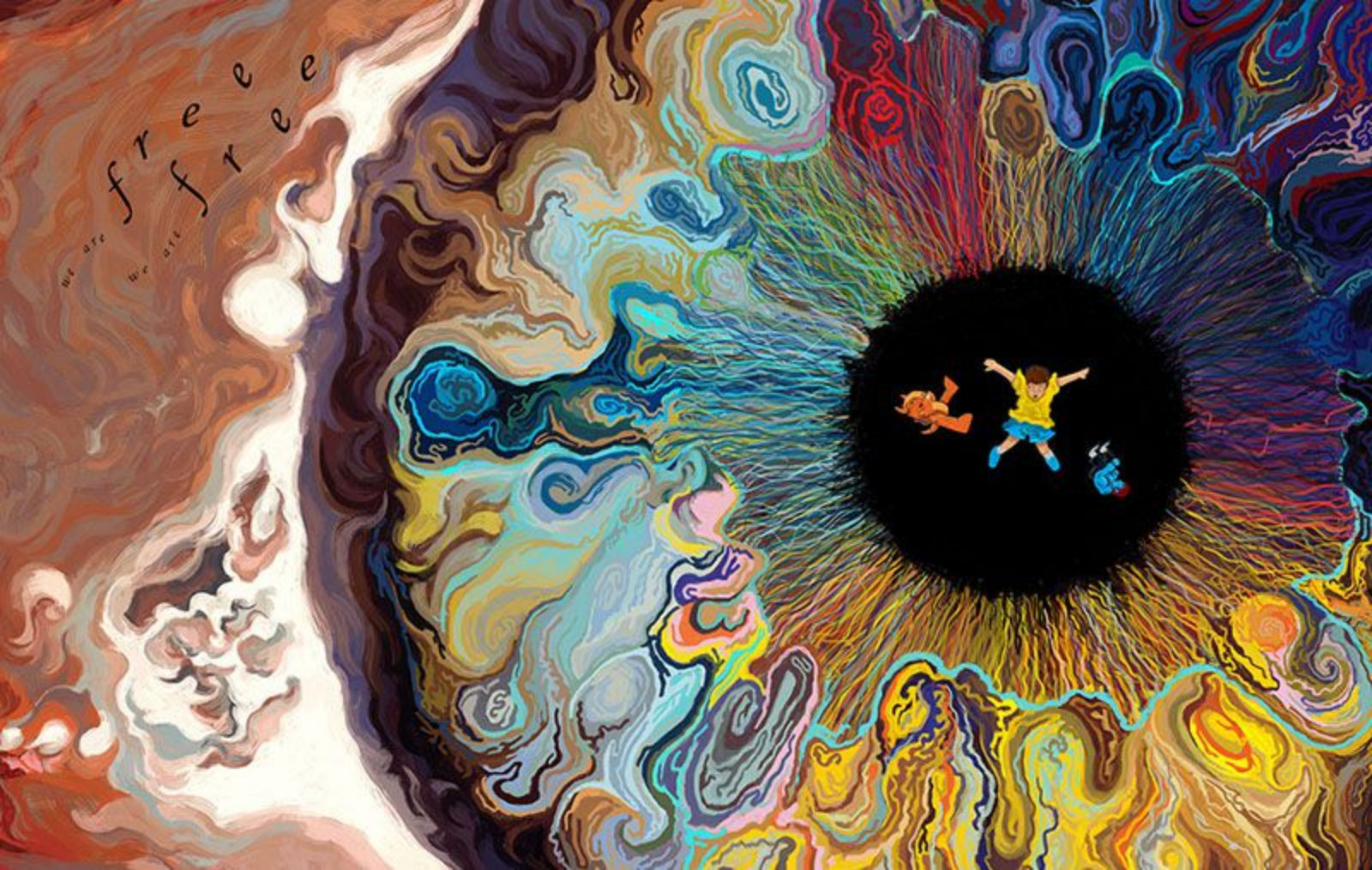
He says,

"Why run away?
Life is easy,
if you just listen to me."

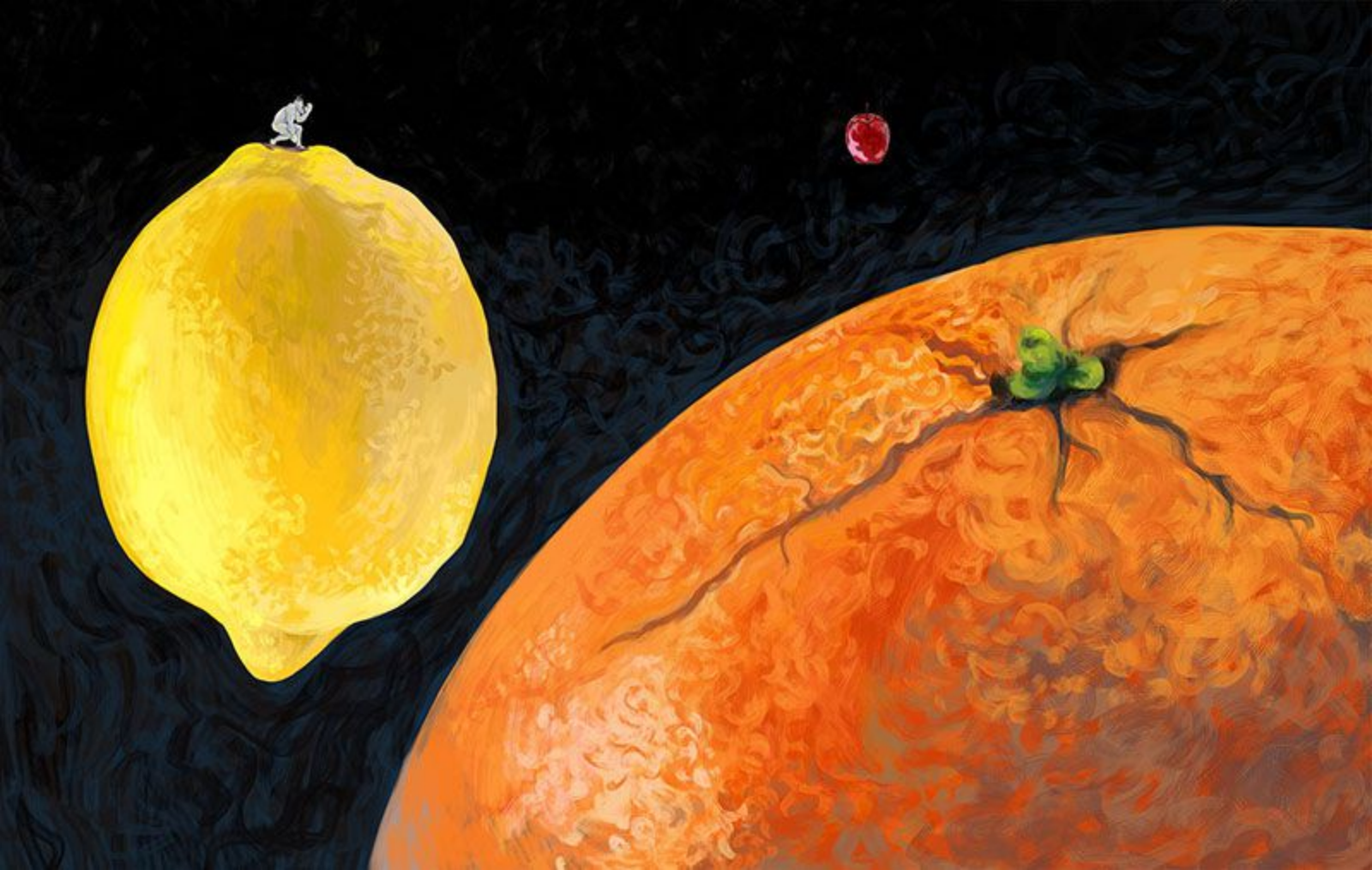
"It's a dangerous world out there,
come back to me."


Serenade
Sky
I mustn't stop thinking,
sometimes alone
but mostly
together with the gang.

aaahhh


we are free
we are free

flying in the *lemonade* sky



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THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC PICTUREBOOK: A PRACTICE-BASED INVESTIGATION INTO THE EXPRESSIVE POTENTIAL OF THE FORM

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A thesis in partial fulfilment of the
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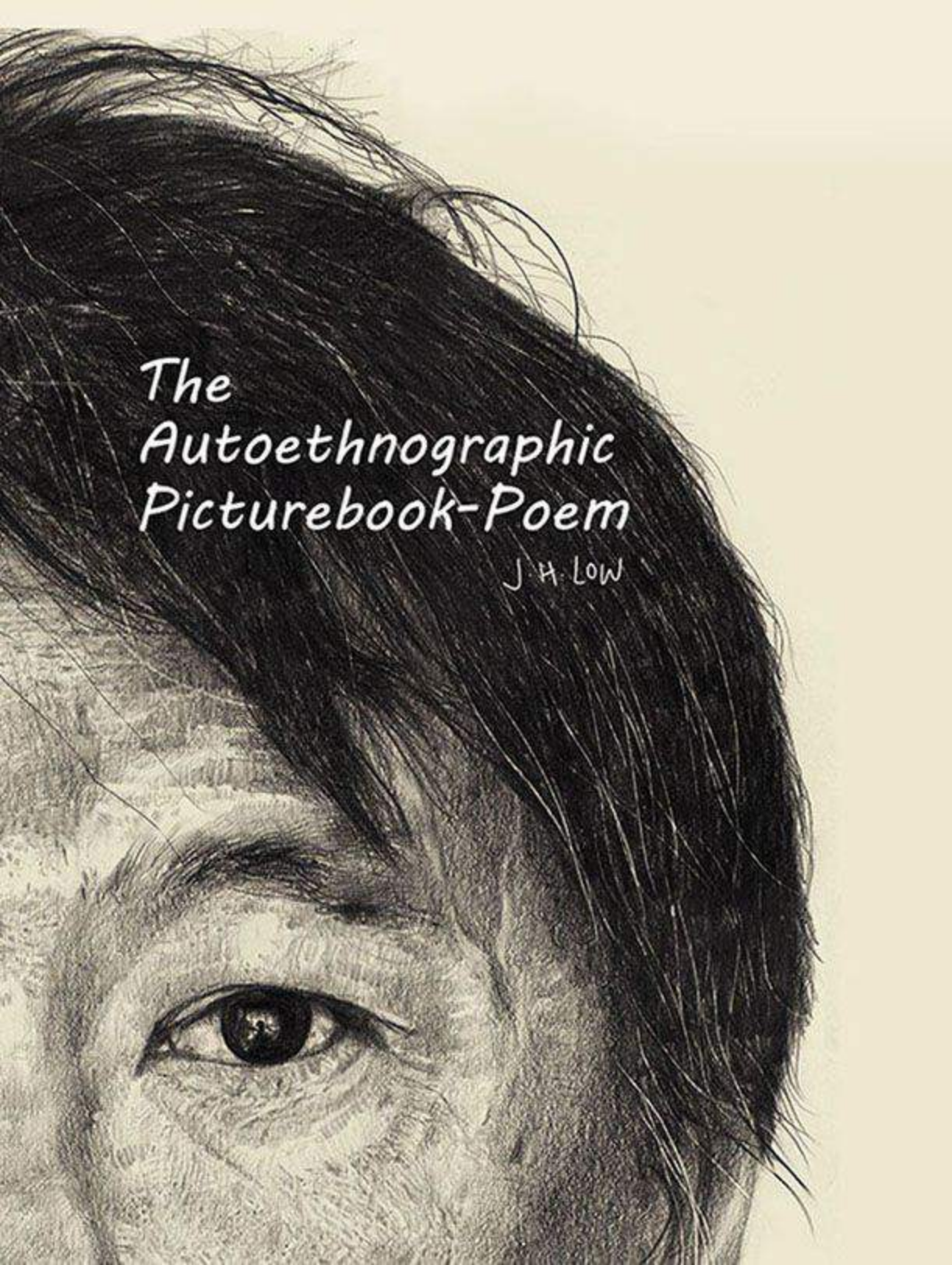

The
Autoethnographic
Picturebook-Poem
J.H. LOW

To dad and mum

The Second-Hand Vespa

Written and illustrated by J.H.LOW

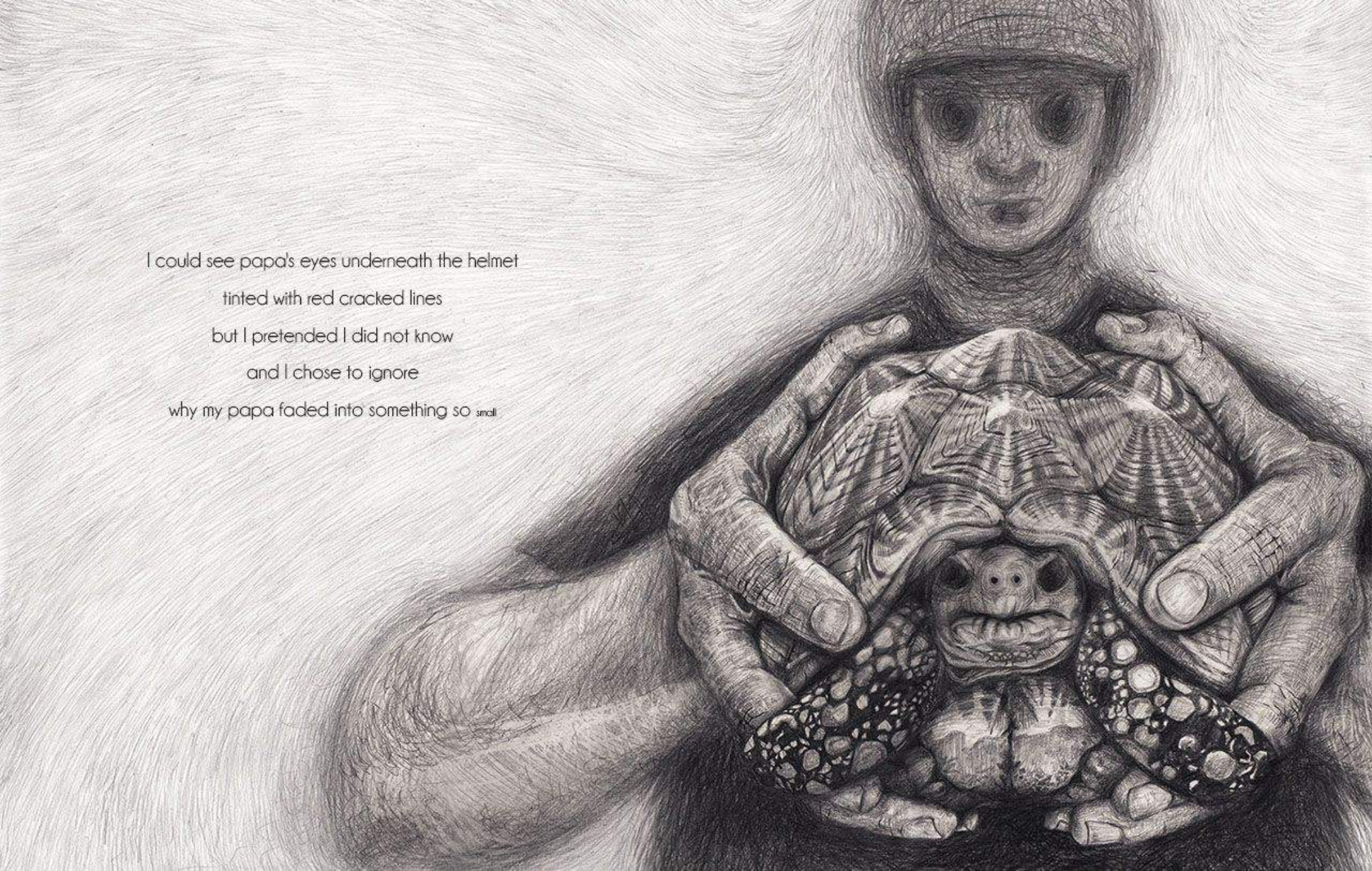
I always rushed

to wave goodbye and to bend my head and to walk in a hush to the school gate

didn't want my schoolmates to notice

but

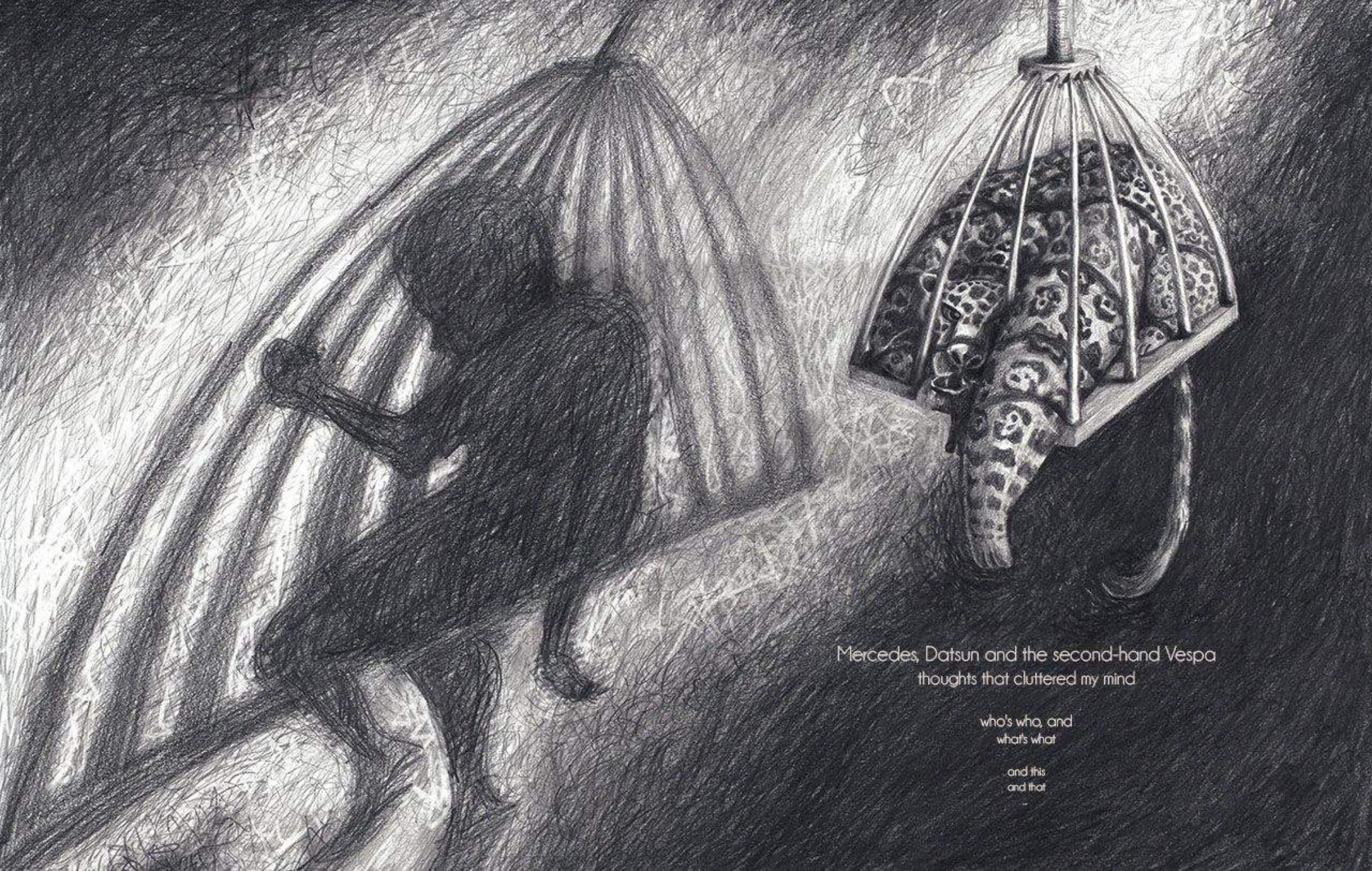
they always did

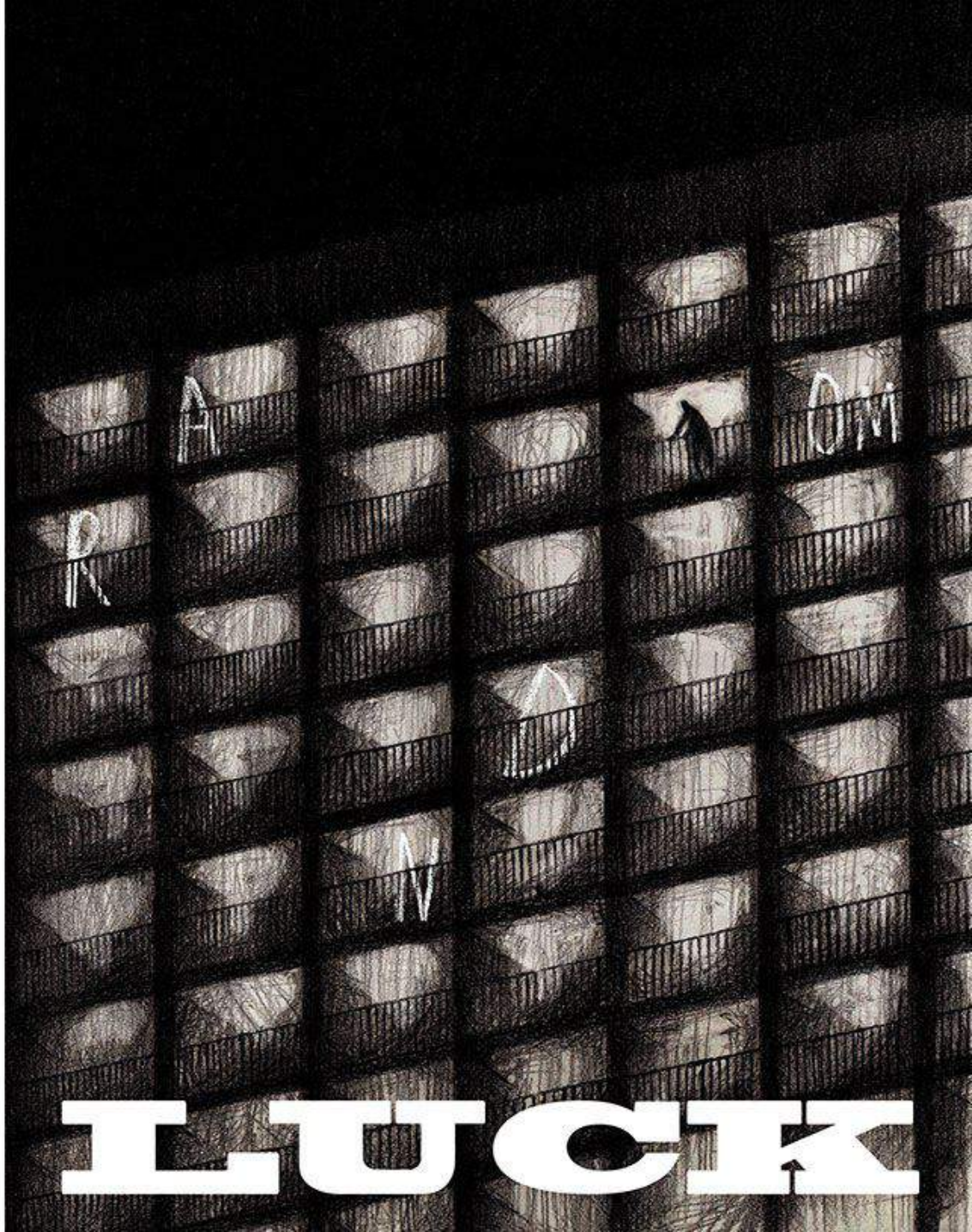


I could see papa's eyes underneath the helmet
tinted with red cracked lines
but I pretended I did not know
and I chose to ignore
why my papa faded into something so small

as the second-hand Vespa wobbled away
papa's back vanished into a dot
I breathed easy again

oh, why did I not see
the things that truly mattered to me?


Mercedes, Datsun and the second-hand Vespa
thoughts that cluttered my mind
who's who, and
what's what
and this
and that


LUCK

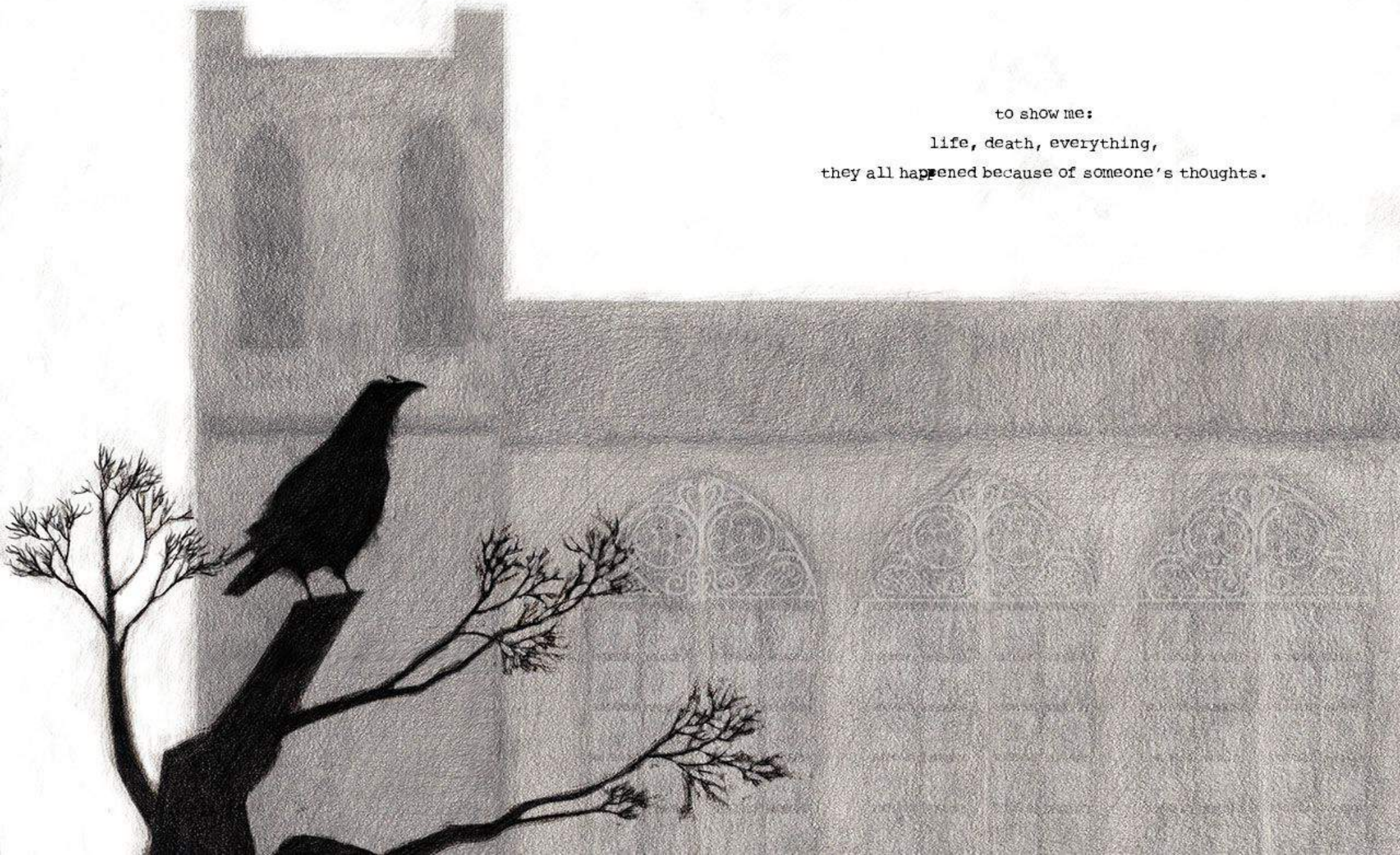
written and illustrated by J.H.LOW

She wanted to take me to church;

to show me:

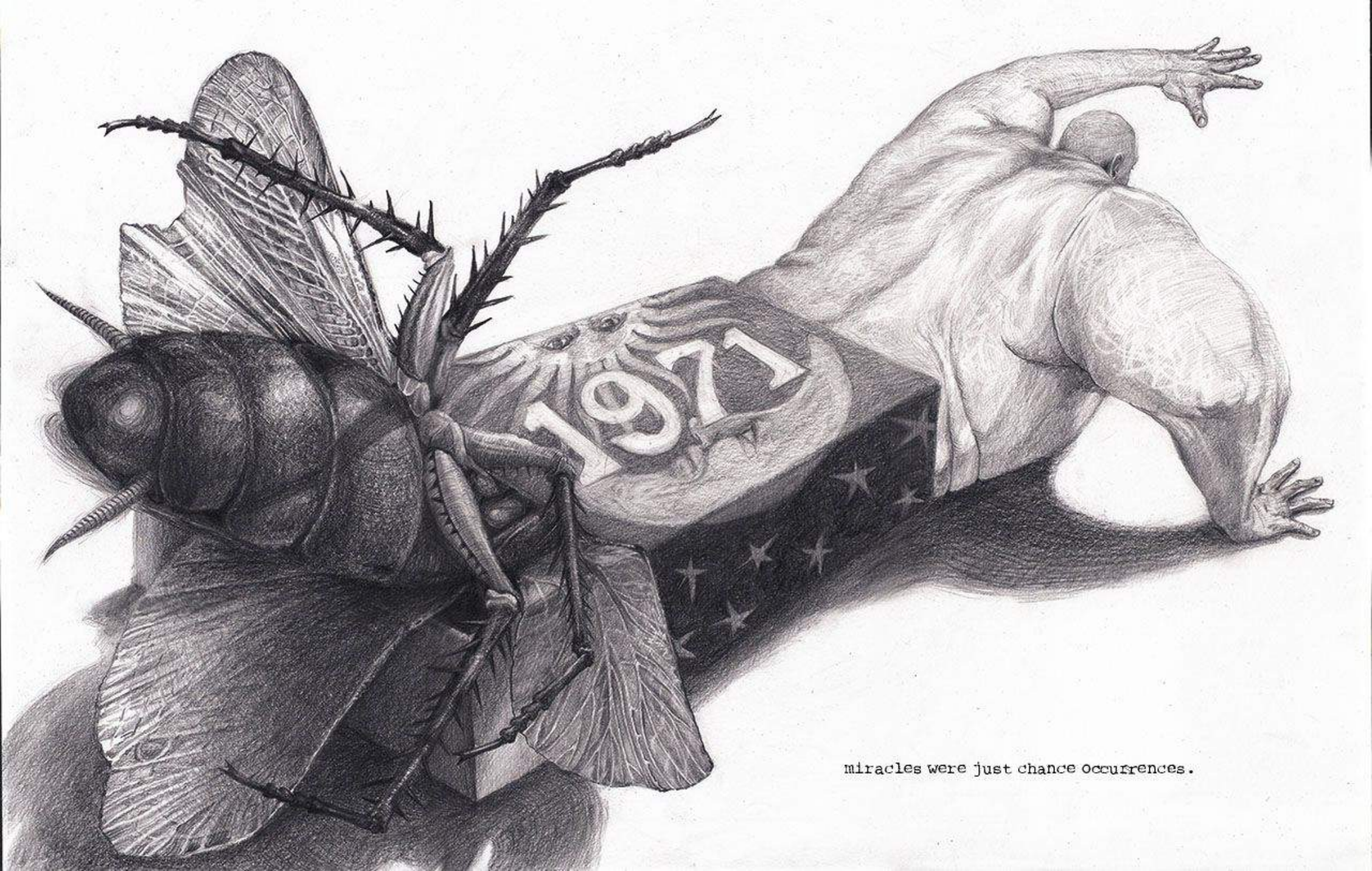
life, death, everything,

they all happened because of someone's thoughts.



I never did let her.

I couldn't explain why.
Maybe,
in the coffer of time,



miracles were just chance occurrences.

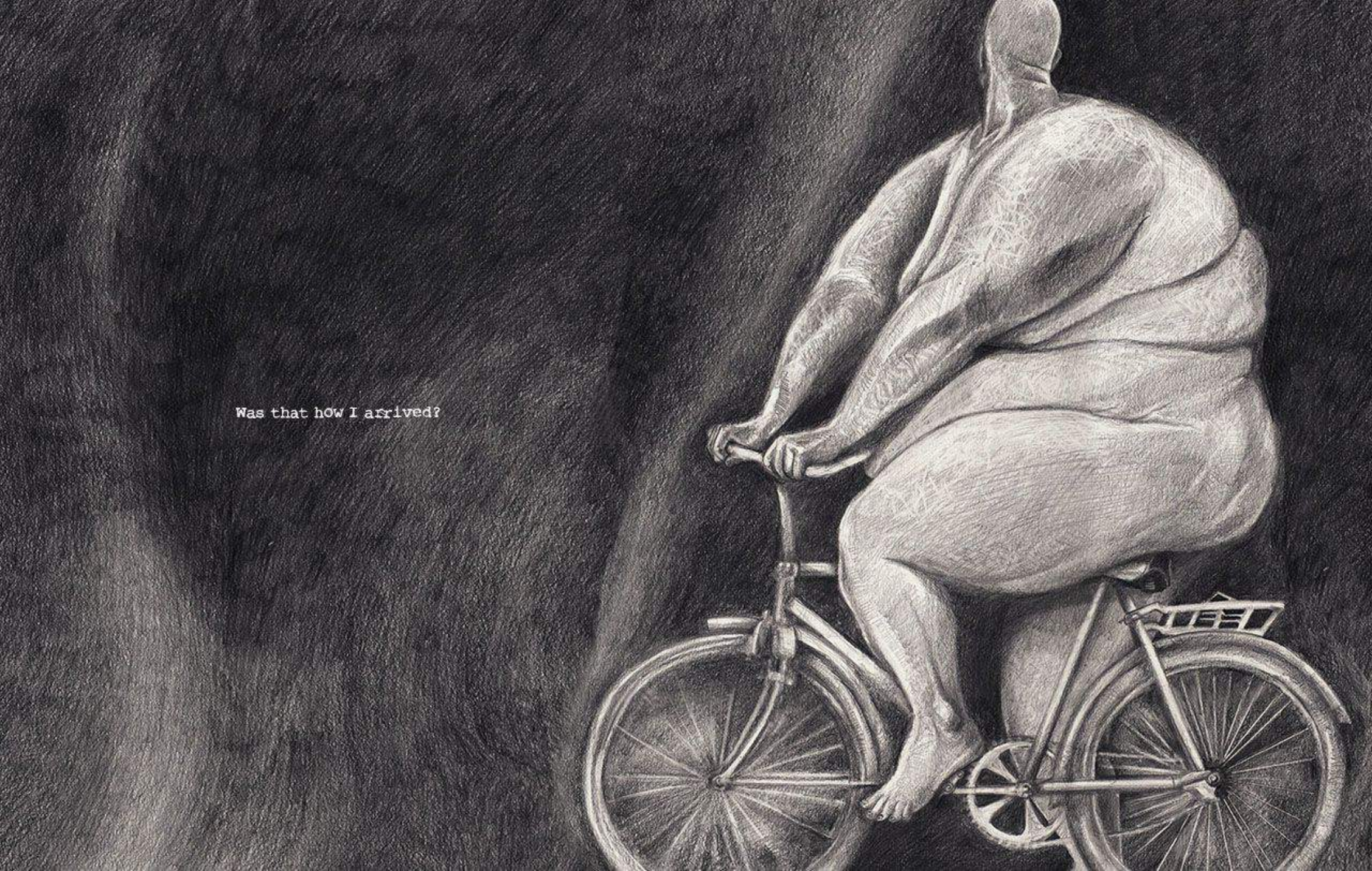
r

a

n

o

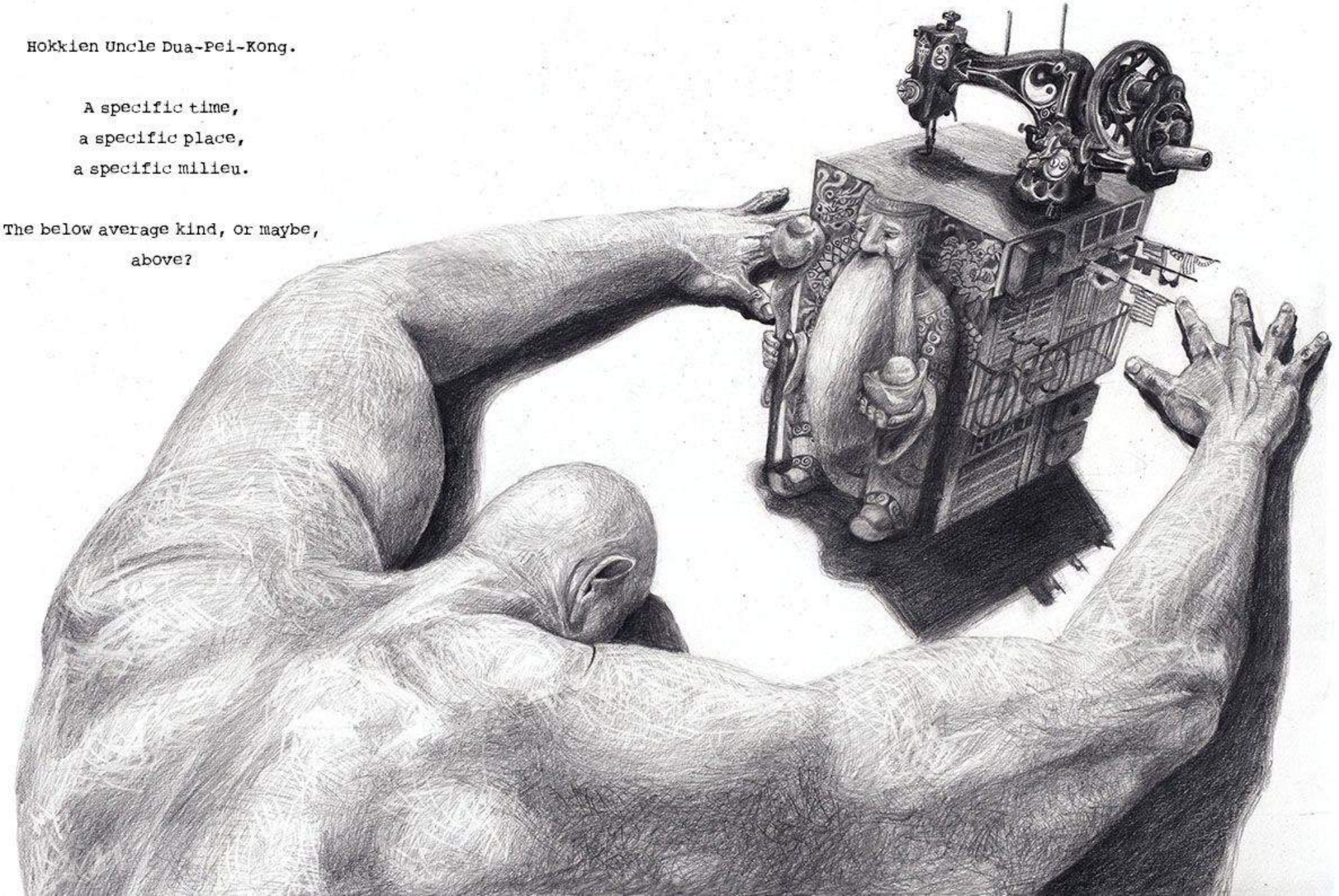
m


Was that how I arrived?

Hokkien Uncle Dua-Pei-Kong.

A specific time,
a specific place,
a specific milieu.

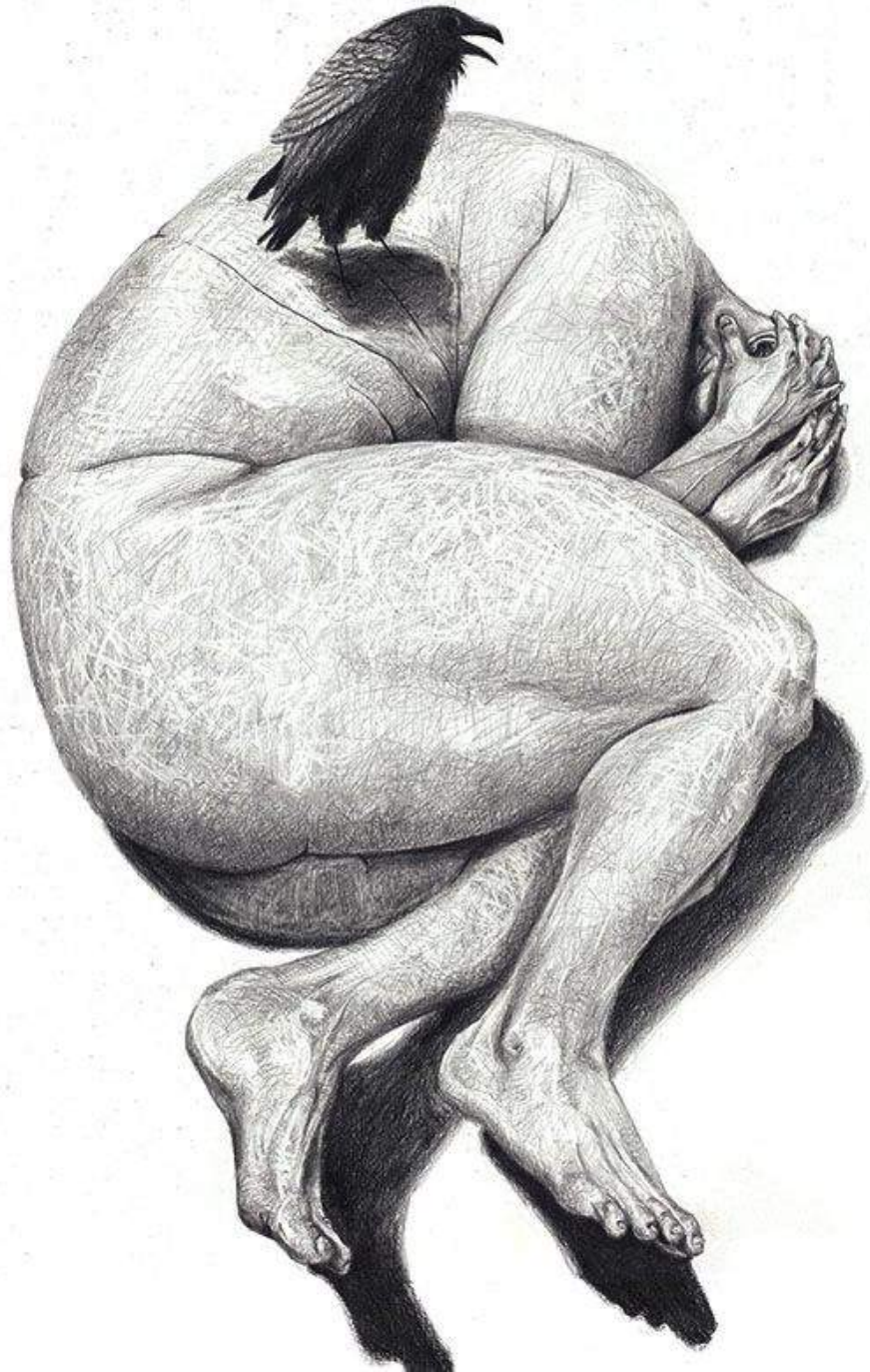
The below average kind, or maybe,
above?



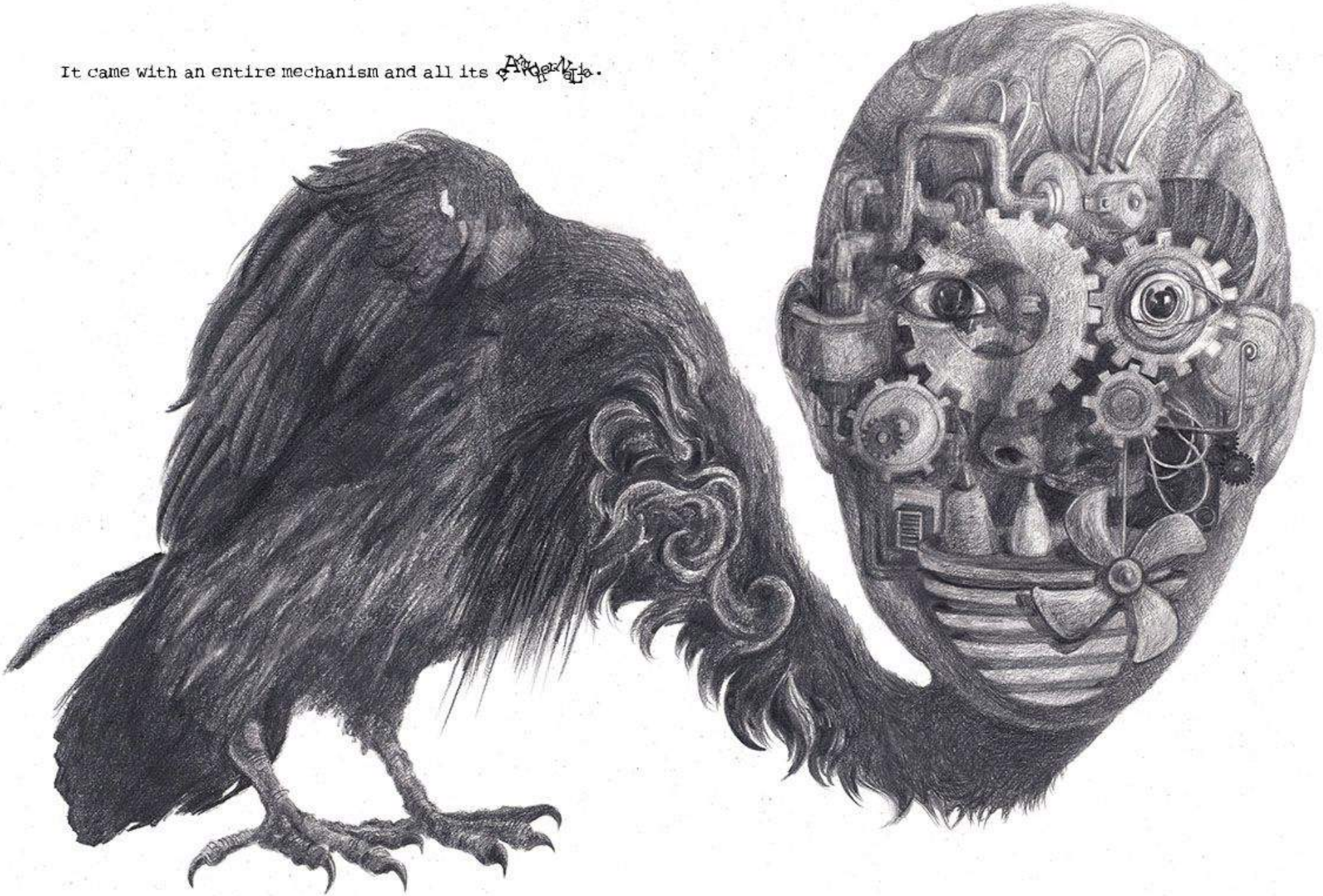
I forgot to measure.

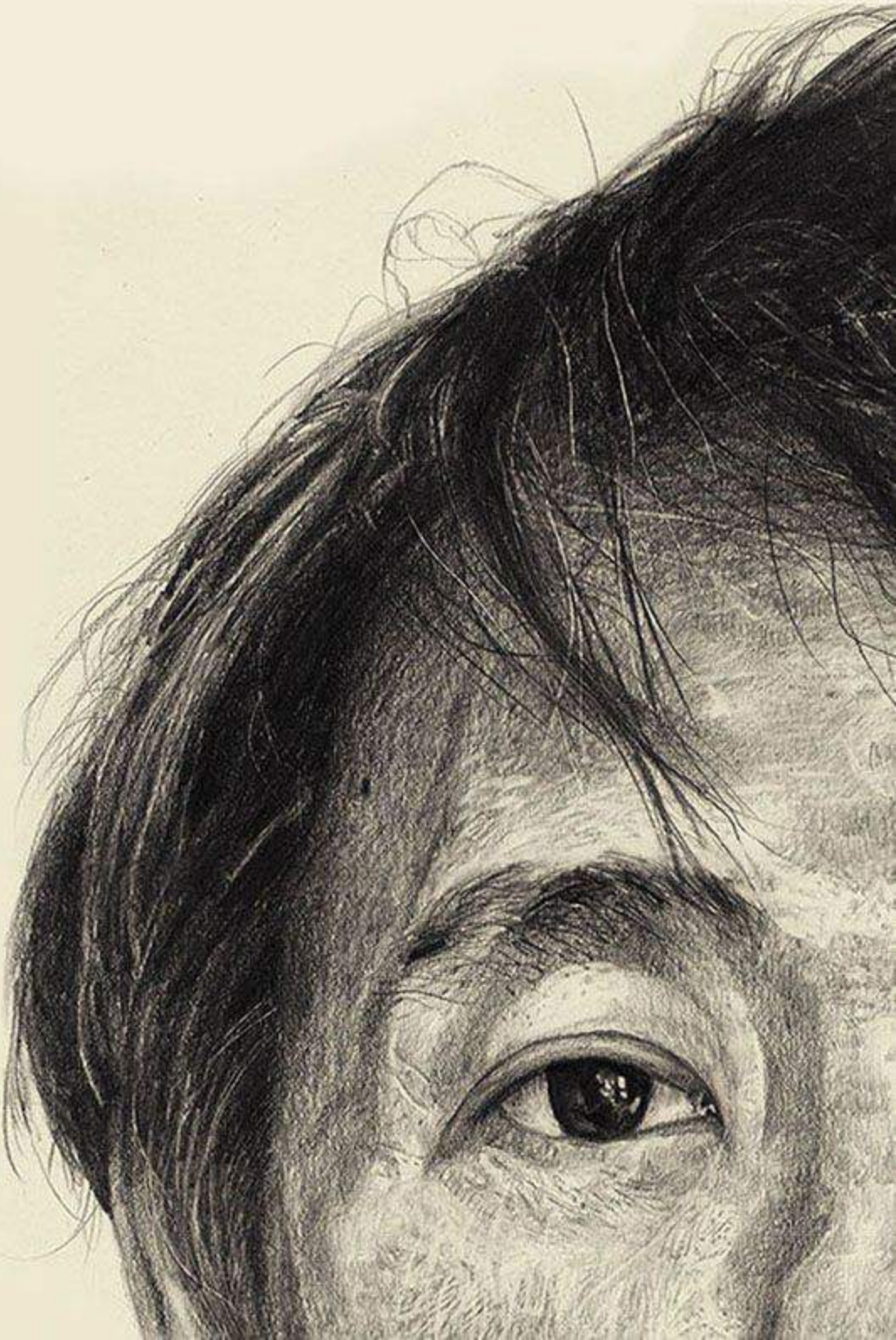
None of this meant anything to me then;
I was just a baby.

But I know now,
My DNA didn't come unfettered.



It came with an entire mechanism and all its [illegible].





ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC PICTUREBOOK: A PRACTICE-BASED INVESTIGATION INTO THE EXPRESSIVE POTENTIAL OF THE FORM

JOO HONG LOW

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

(part 4/4)

Submitted: August 2020

MR. GOODCHILD

MR. GOODCHILD

written and illustrated by J.H. LOW

"Within the monotony of the quotidian,
dreams and daydreams take on importance.
The lost infinity of the outside world is
replaced by the infinity of the soul."

Milan Kundera

THE VOICE

A familiar voice lingered in Mr Goodchild's head
the moment he woke up every morning.

It was muffled, indistinct.

It followed Mr Goodchild everywhere he went.

But Mr Goodchild could never hear it clearly enough
to make any sense of it.

He often wished that the voice would just stop and go away.

But it was constantly humming,
spiralling in Mr Goodchild's head like whirling wind.

THE BEAST

Is someone there?

I can feel you lurking.

Like an omniscient presence gazing down at me,

looking on as I lose control of my own destiny.

I know you are always there, hiding somewhere.

Leave me alone!

SAME OLD
SAME OLD

A new day.

The muffled voice began to hum in his ears again,
all day long, the same voice every day.

When he slept at night, the lurking beast returned to his dream,
the same dream every night.

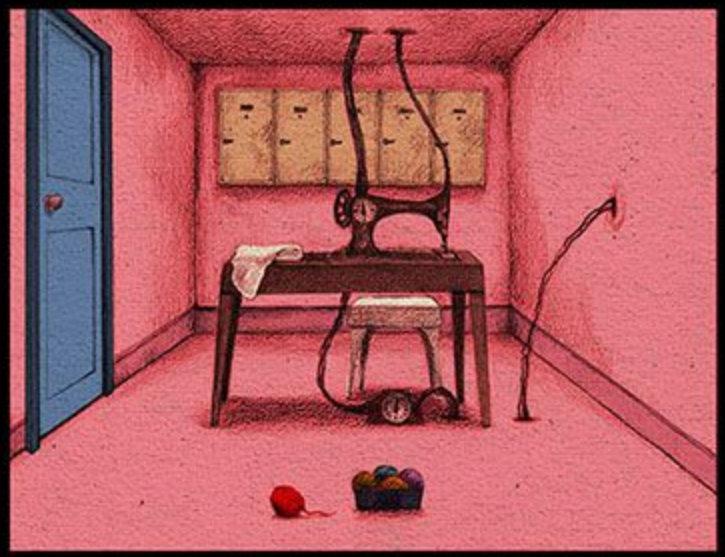
The voice, the beast; the voice, the beast;

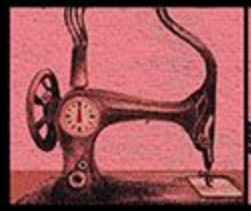
same old same old.

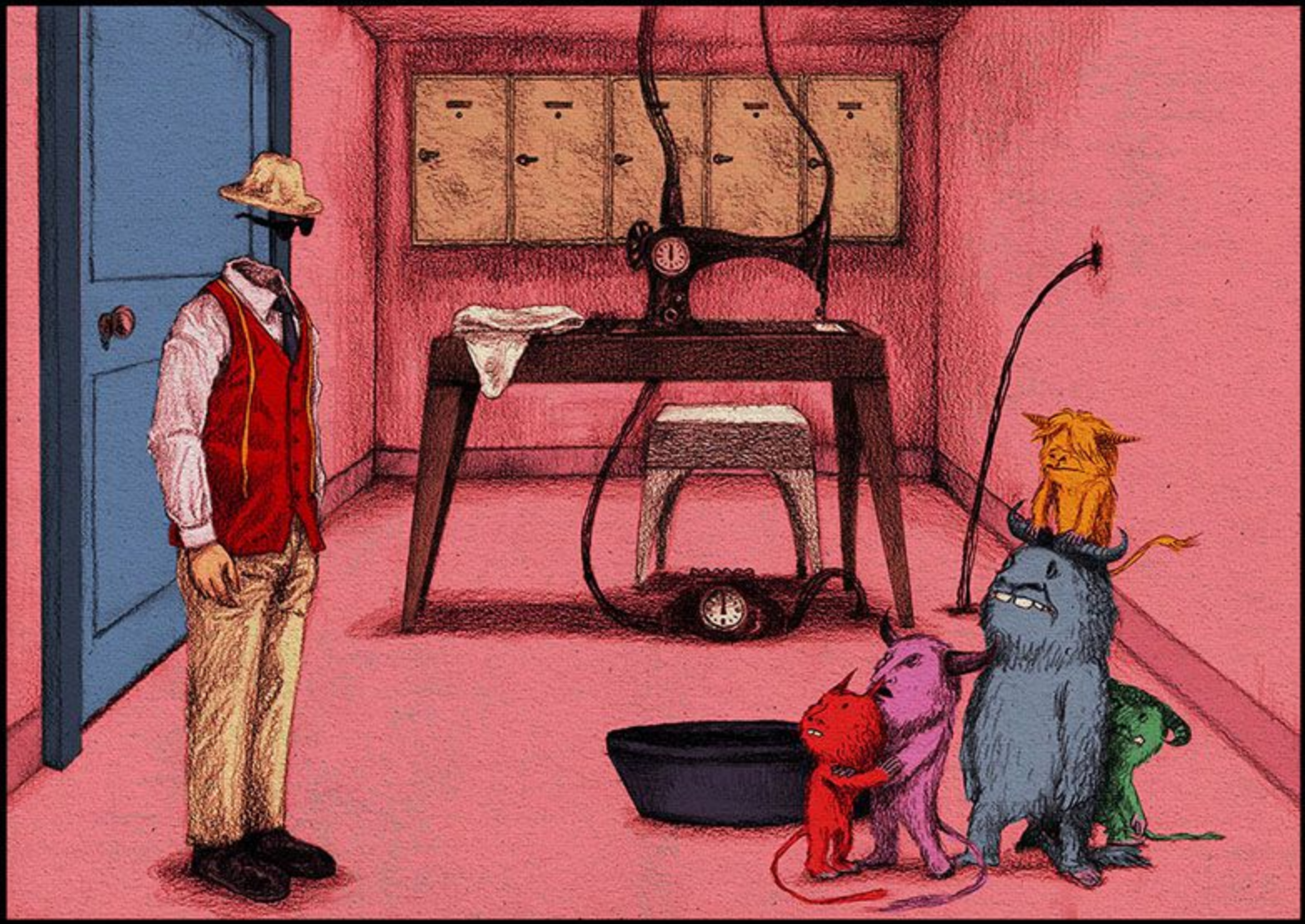
But everything changed one warm night;
it was so warm that Mr Goodchild could not sleep.

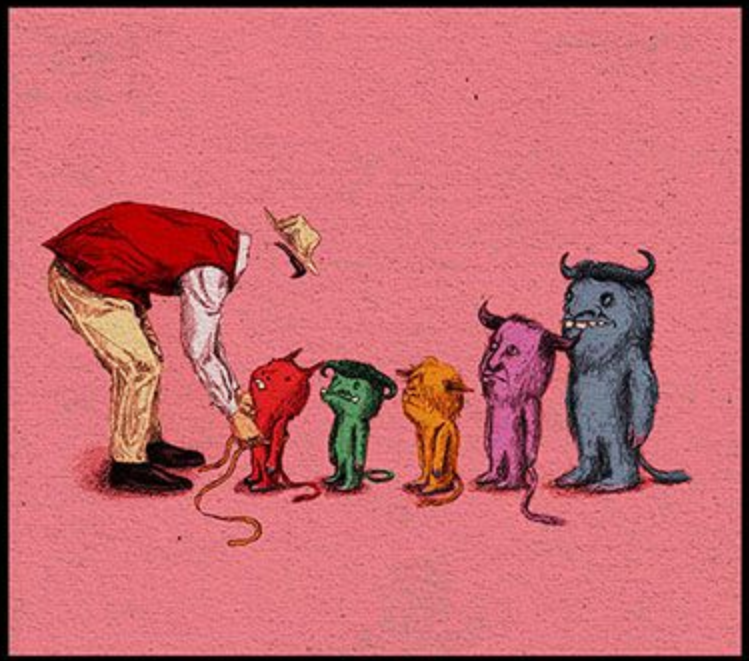
Suddenly, he heard noises.

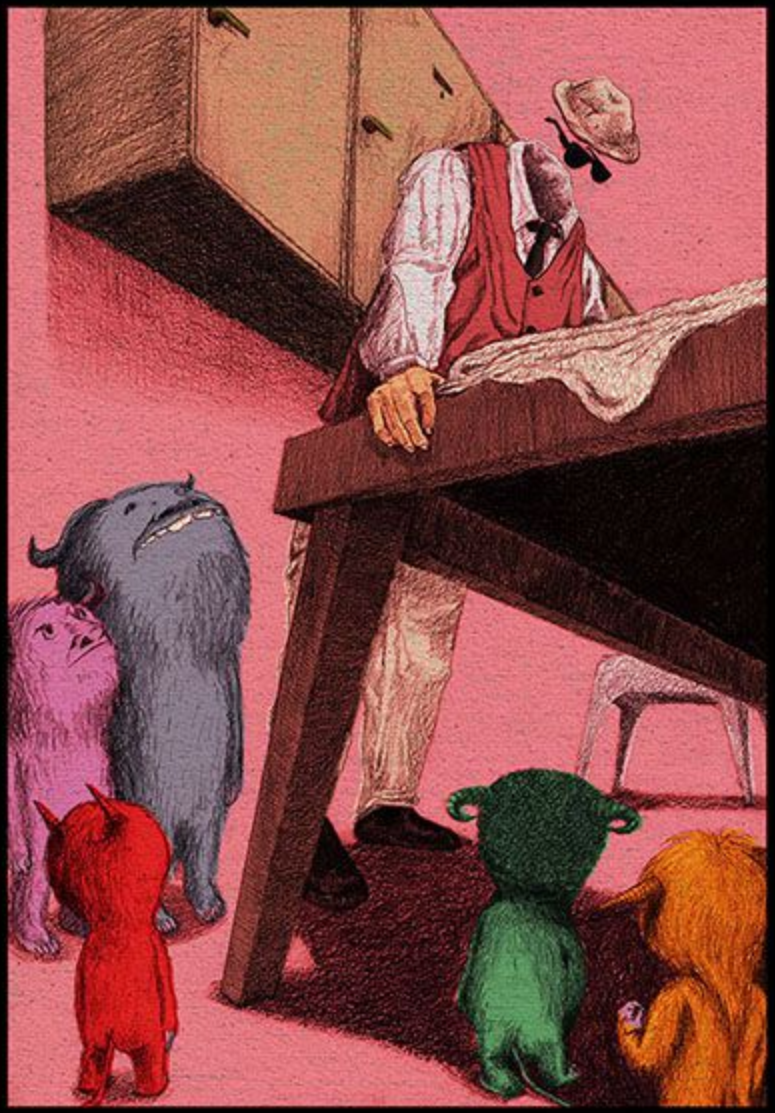
THROUGH THE PEEPHOLE











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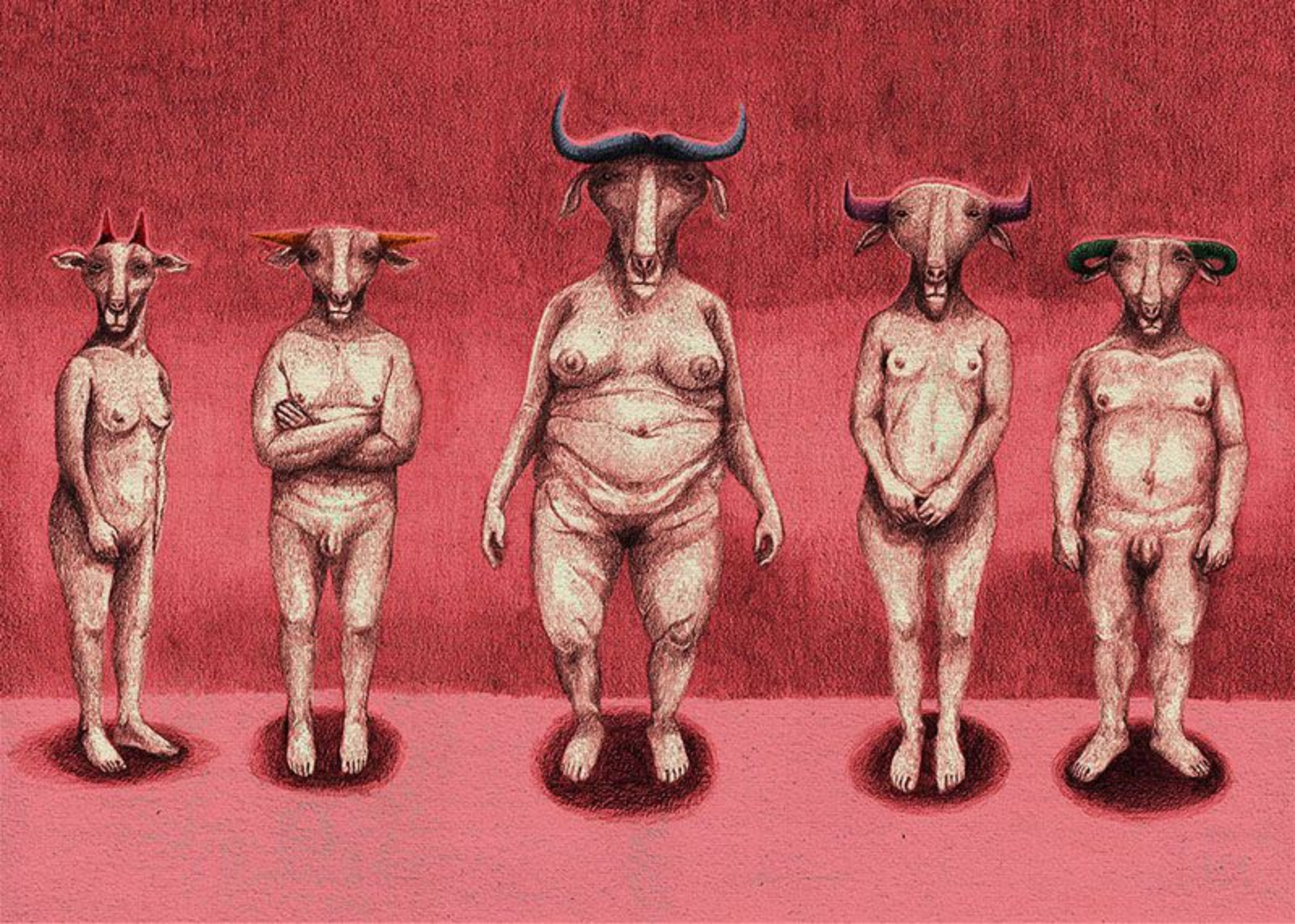

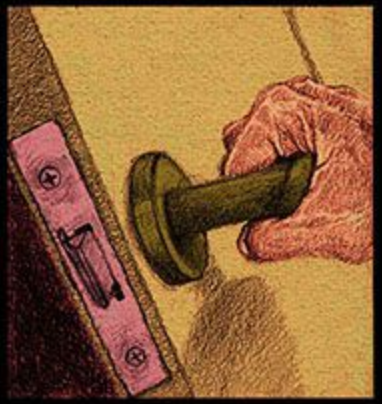

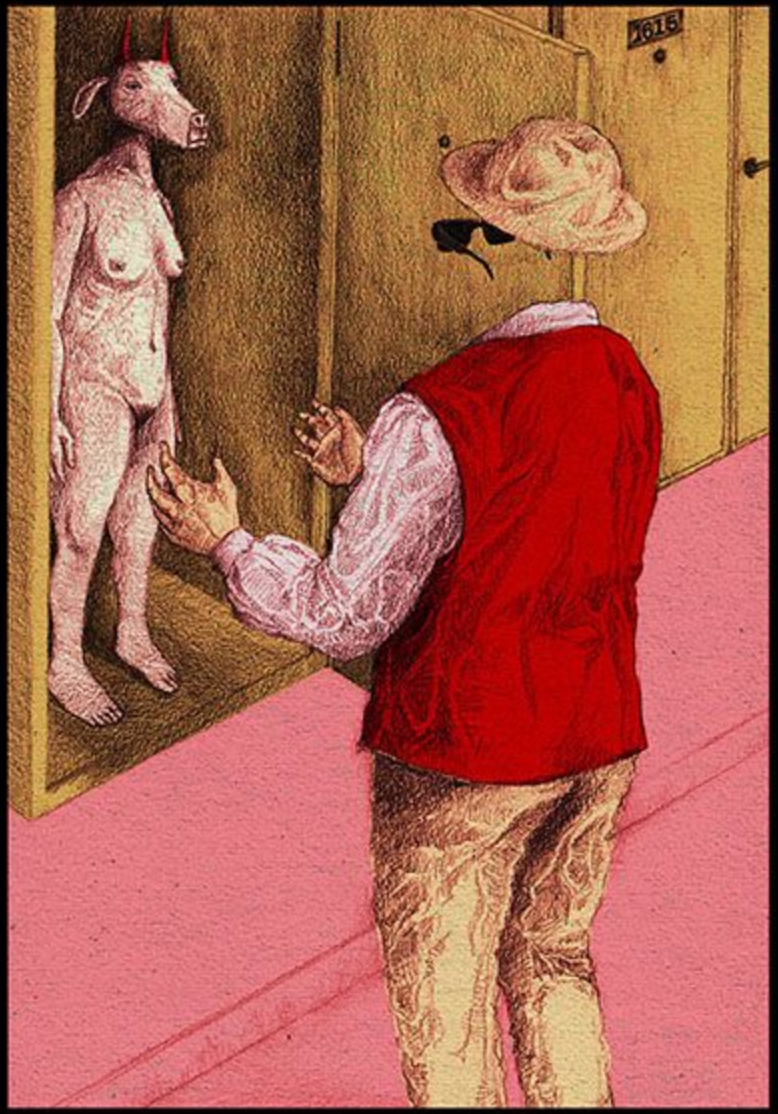
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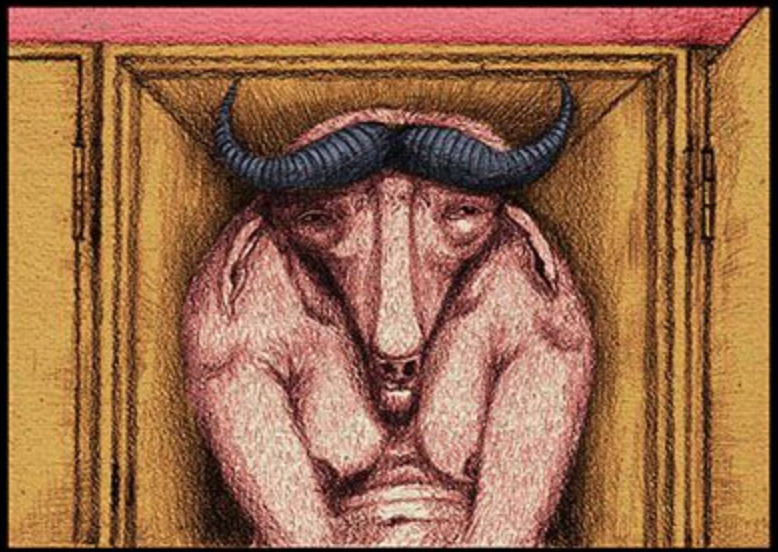

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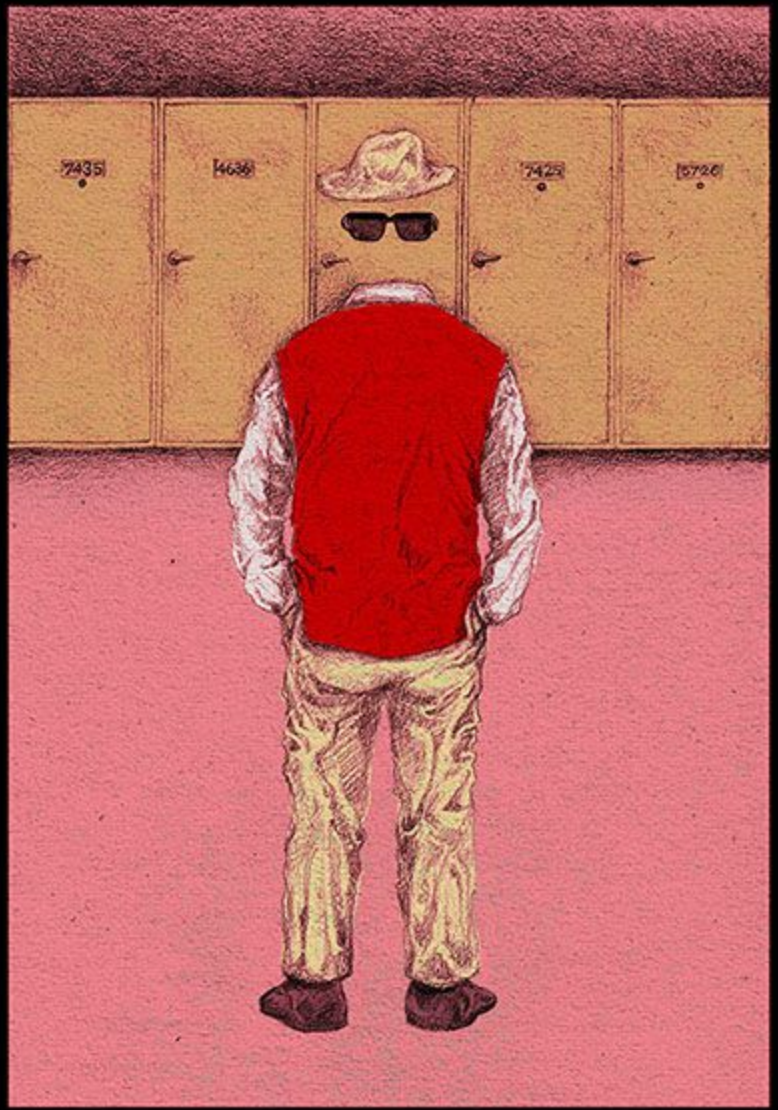
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...

Hello, hello.

Can you hear me?

I've been trying to tell you all this time ...