the *Shandean*

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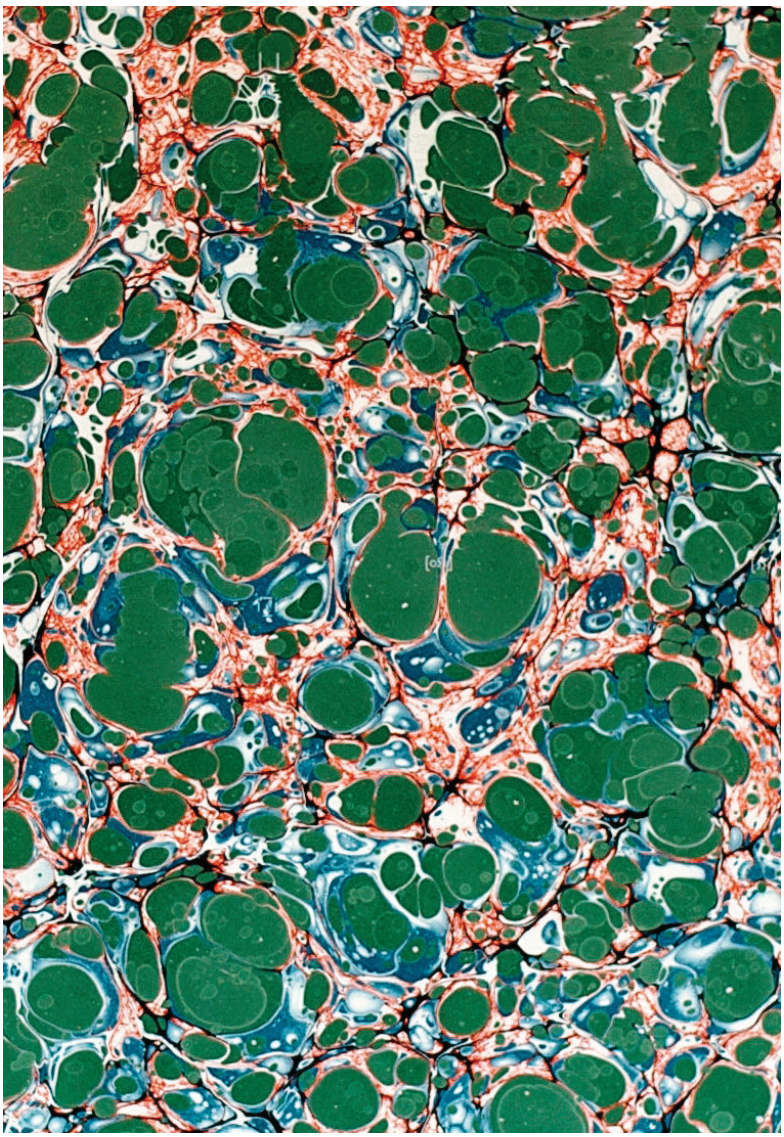

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The marbling on the cover is from a 2013 design by conceptual artist Nick Thurston.

The logo of *The Shandean* is taken from *Tristram Shandy*, volume 1 (1759), p. 154, l. 5, enlarged.

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26 Laudando, *op. cit.*, 219.
27 Alexis Tadié, *Sterne's Whimsical Theatres of Language: Orality, Gesture, Literacy* (Aldrshot: Ashgate, 2003), 84.
28 Gombrich, *op. cit.*, 331.
29 W. B. Gerard, *Laurence Sterne and the Visual Imagination* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 94.

Unprinted Matter: Conceptual Writing and Tristram Shandy's 'chasm of ten pages'

'Where's the rest of this book?'
Google Books

Although we find a variety of experiments conducted throughout his 'Life and Opinions' the only portion of the text that Tristram Shandy consciously labels an 'experiment' is chapter 24 of volume 4. Simply put, chapter 24 is not there. Neither its text nor its pages. Unlike the two blank pages in the ninth volume, the pages that comprise chapter 24 are entirely left out. What Tristram's experiment shows us is quite literally nothing – the dimensions of nothing. Nothing not simply as a lack, but as a force exerted from within the book itself. The chapter may be physically absent, but not physically unaccounted for. Traces remain. What we see in the chapter's absence are the results of absence itself when carried by the printed artefact. When Tristram begins chapter 25, he draws attention to the lacuna immediately: '– No doubt, Sir – there is a whole chapter wanting here – and a chasm of ten pages made in the book by it' (*TS*, 4. 25. 372). Here Tristram speaks about the 'book', not the 'story', and at this point we may begin to question whether those two concepts are as interchangeable as we thought. In fact, during the book's attempt to catabolize and absorb this missing chapter, we even sense that text and pages are not quite the same thing. What, after all, is a 'page'? Do the numbers that mark them belong to the physical book or to the textual ideal of which the book is only one possible manifestation? Do they refer to the manifest or to the concept? And when precisely does the concept manifest?

Even a book as given to deferral, uniqueness, and incompleteness as *Tristram Shandy* aims to conceal the evidence of its making. The great virtue of *Tristram Shandy* is that it always feels, as we read it, still in the process of being created. Yet this feeling is in tension with its status as a finished object, a book. A slow-motion description of our experience of the 'chasm' in the first edition might run like this: as chapter 23 draws to a close, we leave Toby just as he orders Trim to dry his regimentals by the fire overnight. The full stop of the chapter's final sentence is not followed

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hard by a new chapter, as every previous chapter had been, even though the page offers room for at least seventeen lines of text. Instead, we get the equivalent of fourteen lines of space before we see a catchword, 'CHAP.', placed curiously high on the page, with two lines of blank space beneath. Because we expect a new chapter, 'CHAP.' does not itself cause distress. As soon as we let the catchword take us across the gutter, however, we find that we have skipped forward ten pages. Or, rather, skipped over nine. Pages 147-155 are gone. Missing pages or miscollated quires are not unheard of in eighteenth-century binding, but nine missing pages in an octavo book does not compute. The page on which chapter 23 concludes is the verso of the first leaf of signature L. In our move across to the recto, the signature continues uninterrupted with L^2, though the pagination has jumped. We see '[156]' and, below it, 'CHAP. XXV.' A lost chapter and nine missing pages, with the added unease of inaugurating the volume-long process of what Peter de Voogd has termed 'typographical alienation': rectos that seem like versos, and vice versa, until the end of the volume.[1] We might see this left/right confusion in light of the discussion of the *sinister* and *dexter* bends in the regimentals that become a topic in chapter 25.

When we begin reading chapter 25, we have the relief of an explanation that assures us the gap is intentional. Tristram's missing chapter is an 'experiment'. In this experiment, however, he violates experimental protocol by presupposing his own conclusion. He leaves out a chapter because he has already decided that we do not need it. Not only does he forestall our conclusion that this 'chasm' might be an imperfection, but he argues that it in fact makes the 'book' – not, as we might expect, the 'story' – 'more perfect and complete by wanting it, than having it' (*TS*, 4. 25. 372). Its removal makes no narrative difference. After all, gaps in a narrative's *fabula* can be easily mended by flashbacks along the way. Consider Tristram's starting a chapter in volume 3 by going 'back to the ******----- in the last chapter' (*TS*, 3. 14. 217). Such anchoring, however, becomes frustrated in Tristram's experiment by the fact that the stated 'ten pages' do not correspond to the actual size of the book's gap. These are 'ten pages' of the manuscript he is writing, certainly, but they have a precise effect on the book. Elsewhere Tristram prefers the round number to messy textual reality when he says, on page 159 of the first edition's first volume, that he should have laid out Walter's preference for systematic thinking and 'ad infinitum' parsing 'a hundred and fifty pages ago' (*TS*, 1. 19. 169).

Tristram evidently does not share his father's concern over precisely dividing the 'matter' of knowledge. In fact, in the case of the experimental 'chasm', knowledge and matter prove truly separable. Tristram dresses

the wound of chapter 24's removal immediately in chapter 25 by giving us knowledge of the absent text. What we missed, evidently, was Walter's description of 'uncle *Toby*'s, *Trim*'s and *Obadiah*'s setting out and journeying to the visitations at ****'. Our return from the deferral of the missing chapter contains a subsequent deferral in the form of four asterisks. But because the events of the excised chapter can be so efficiently summarized, the question becomes not one of what is represented, nor what lies beyond the stars of deferral, but how that representation needs to follow a logic of expressive consistency, not narrative exigency. Completeness, for Tristram, is a matter best understood stylistically. Parity among chapters must be achieved through a consistency of style. The 'stile and manner' of the missing chapter, Tristram tells us, is out of harmony with the rest of the work. After so high a transport, descending from the rare air of such a 'perpendicular precipice' back to the recitative hum of narrative depreciates the whole. The missing chapter was 'so fine, so rich, so heavenly' that it proves, by its precipitous elevation of diction, 'wholly cut off from the rest of the work' and thus worthy of being literally cut out. Here we might recall Walter's 'experiment' of parsing a sentence of Erasmus by literally paring it down with a penknife. Tristram and Walter show a family resemblance in their desire to radically erase text in the service of breaking apart style and content, even if they each value precisely what the other seeks to disregard in the process.

In a move that would seem to exculpate the fabricators of the book, Tristram assures us that 'the book-binder is neither a fool, or a knave, or a puppy'. There was no clumsiness in the assembly of the volume, but no mention is made here of printer's hand in the matter, as there would be two chapters later when the discussion directly turns to the 'sanable particles' of print. And of course the subsequent editions of the novel not overseen by Sterne reveal the tremendous challenges imposed upon the printer. Publishers of *Tristram Shandy* have attempted all manner of presentations of the missing chapter. The *Novelist's Magazine* of 1781 inserts a blank page so as to keep the pagination regular. In 1815 a four-volume edition of *The Works of Laurence Sterne* offers in place of the missing chapter a stack of four lines of nine asterisks. In 1886, 'Morley's Universal Library' presents an edition that condenses the size of the gap, causing pages 155 to be followed immediately by 158, a reduction that is accompanied by an actual change of text in which the 'chasm of ten pages' becomes a 'chasm of two pages'.[2] Martin Rowson's 1996 graphic adaptation leaves 5/4 of a page of blankness straddling the opening between chapter 23 and 25, reproducing the literal oddity of the original gap while heightening the value of what is missing – in this case a '25 page Fold-out Mixed Media

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Panorama'.[3] Even the earliest convergence of conceptual art and *Tristram Shandy* in the Arion Press edition illustrated by conceptual artist John Baldessari still keeps its distance from the gap.[4]

In the most direct attempt yet to give priority to Sterne's bibliographical innovations, Visual Editions employed the London design agency 'A practice for everyday life' in 2010 to revivify Sterne's tricks of presentation. This edition offers, in place of the missing chapter, a tuft of 5 perforation stubs deep in the gutter between pages 322 and 333, suggesting not only the fact that the chapter was 'torn out' but also, in the chadless hemstitched regularity of the perforations, that the pages were at one point placed in the book *in order* to be removed. The joke changes slightly in response to new attempts to materially contain the idea of the gap. So too with the marbled page. Even in this edition, Sterne's struggle against standardization cannot be realized without approaching the marbled page as an individual problem. Visual Editions' take on the marbled page involves the 'motly' of CMYK benday dots as they overlap to produce an image that is the same across all printings: a face cropped to include only the edge of a nose and mouth, with the oral commissure forming the dark centre of the image in a posture meant, it seems, to indicate a resolutely blank expression. Every attempt to manifest *Tristram Shandy*'s ludic physicality reveals a new length of distance between materiality and concept. Stepping away, backing up, and viewing the gap from afar may be our only way to come to terms with it.

In what follows, I attempt to identify the conceptual contours of this gap by examining two artistic responses to it that have emerged in the tercentenary year of Sterne's birth: the American poet-critic Craig Dworkin's narrative insert of 'Chapter XXIV' and visual artist Nick Thurston's series of marbled imposition spreads of the missing pages in 'The Visitations at ****'. The particular brand of conceptual writing practiced by Dworkin and Thurston has increasingly seen itself in relation to Sterne's work. As artists in the collective Information as Material, Dworkin and Thurston are, like all conceptualists, concerned with the selection and reassignment of textual 'information'. However, they distinguish themselves from other practitioners through their shared interest in what that displacement can reveal about our often unexamined conception of the 'material' book itself, particularly the book as it is fetishized in the realm of the 'literary'. As much emphasis is placed on the container of new information as on the information itself. Begun by the artist Simon Morris in 2002, Information as Material promotes 'work by artists who use extant material – selecting it and reframing it to generate new meanings – and who, in doing so, disrupt the existing order of things'.

Such a characterization could easily include Sterne. In fact, for the past several years Sterne has indeed been something of a poster child for their particular brand of experimentation. So much so that Sterne is featured on the cover of the collective's 2012 manifesto, an 18-page *livre de poche* titled *DO or DIY* and written by Morris, Dworkin, and Thurston.

In the compelling case presented by *DO or DIY*, *Tristram Shandy* constitutes the *terminus a quo* for the innovative spirit that, failing to be recognized by institutions, must find a place for its unconventional works outside the established economic conventions of book production and distribution.[5] The manifesto's polemically arranged collection of anecdotes constitutes the 'concealed history' of early self-publishing ventures by writers as diverse as Hawthorne, Whitman, Proust, and Stein. 'Institutions cannot prevent what they cannot imagine', so the strapline goes. While self-publication in this way allows a backing up out of the imaginative ruts of prescribed notions, it also helps to identify the contours of the rut by producing works that demonstrate the presuppositions and entailments of book culture. Often the wrappers of their books imitate the presentation of the 'extant material' they rework; likewise with the insides, which imitate the fonts, the *mise-en-page*, and even the paper quality of, say, a Penguin edition of Kerouac's *On the Road*. While the effect is ultimately defamiliarization, the initial affect is one of recognition of reinstated textual features as they hold a new framing of the text within the supposedly non-importing 'accidentals' of the original's presentation. Such is what we find in Morris's 2010 *Getting Inside Jack Kerouac's Head*, a page-by-page retyping of the Penguin *On the Road* that presents itself backwards, with the last-page-first logic of a blog, and features on its cover Morris and Thurston in the positions of Kerouac and Neal Cassady from Carolyn Cassady's famous 1952 photograph.[6] Among the things that this edition brings into visibility is how Kerouac's 120-foot fluid scroll of teletype paper on which he composed the novel never quite fit the codex form to begin with. What we have is what the publishing world makes of a unique project, a fact that can be seen when the process of typesetting is fitted to the presentation of a blog that 'scrolls' back in time, not forward.

However willingly it was adopted, Sterne's do-it-yourself approach assured that he had a hand in every stage of *Tristram Shandy*'s production. Thus he saw the stages, the process. The conceptual writer's emphasis likewise is on the stage – the stage of concept, of composition, of production, of consumption. It draws its philosophy of display from the art of conceptual reframing, as in Duchamp's readymades, and its theoretical armature from Sol Le Witt's revaluing of the artistic concept over aesthetic concerns. Le Witt's 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' still

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determine the stepwise nature of conceptual progress: 'if the artist carries through and makes it into visible form, then all the steps in the process are of importance. The idea itself, even if not made visual, is as much a work of art as any finished product. All intervening steps – scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed works, models, studies, thoughts, conversations – are of interest'.[7] With any artistic decision, potential realizations are cut away, as the etymology (*de*, from + *cædĕre*, to cut) attests. The space around any 'finished' text therefore is littered with the invisible corpses of 'what ifs' and 'might have beens'. Again, the book aims to conceal the evidence of its making. Such 'what ifs' are often the sites of expansion for what, after Alfred Jarry, has come to be known as 'pataphysics, the science of producing imaginary solutions. Seeing artistic process as consisting of stages allows a conceptual artist to isolate a stage of the process of an extant work and introduce a change that can produce a new and newly revealing result. The conceptual writer takes us back to a presupposition within an early stage of the artistic work or a cultural phenomenon, makes a revealing change, then methodically follow its entailments to a new manifestation of the initial concept. Conceptual writers lay bare the stages of what, in viewing the finished product, might otherwise be considered a fluid process to artistic realization. They may differ from their predecessors in the visual arts through their impulse to deconstruct what 'texts' in all forms give us. They seek to remove the finish, to strip texts down, before building them up again. At any stage a conceptual writer can make inserts, reconceptualise, and see what the consequences are to the finished product as it regains its status as a work of art. This is where the writer is aided by computer technology, with its ability to copy and hold text, to strap it to a virtual clipboard in raw and unrealized form, and to 'paste special' into new typefaces, containers, and forms.

This of course involves a new relationship between the writer and reader, not unlike what Sterne himself sought to create. As the most dynamic theoretician of conceptual writing, Craig Dworkin writes criticism frequently edges into Shandean mode.[8] For example, in an essay titled 'Zero Kerning' Dworkin addresses the concept of the interval as expressed in the work of conceptual writing's most enthusiastic salesman, Kenneth Goldsmith. He does so in paragraphs of 111 words, in a nod to Goldsmith's early experimental work *No. 111 2.7.93–10.20.96*. Here Dworkin carefully blends in quotations from Oliver Goldsmith that, fitted to the subject of experimentation, render eighteenth-century metaphors 'the attention of the day' and 'no composition in the world' in a relevantly literal way to the living Goldsmith's work.[9] In this essay Dworkin also asserts conceptual writing's power to reapproach the familiar by revivifying it, limning

its pales and partitions, its suppositions and entailments, in a way that interpellates the reader as a participant in a dialogue, or what Goldsmith calls a 'thinkership'. The writer who structures an efficient new interval in a concept and the reader who approaches that interval 'have met topics half-way, on the common ground of structure'. If this sounds familiar, it may be because Tristram's philosophy of composition, in which 'writing' stands as 'but a different name for conversation', involves finding just such common ground in structure. 'The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding', Tristram says, 'is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself. For my own part, I am eternally paying him compliments of this kind, and do all that lies in my power to keep his imagination as busy as my own' (*TS*, 1. 11. 125-26). Tristram's desire to 'halve' the issue comes across as an arbitrary though equitable division of labour, but the ratio may also reveal Sterne's deep consideration of how ideation takes place. The reader's share could not be more.

For all the critical comment on the ways that Sterne's blank, marbled, and black pages aim to invite imaginative participation, readers, even Tristram's ideal ones, maintain the ironic detachment of consumers. They prefer to colour in scenes rather than sketch new lines. As David Brewer has shown, Sterne's original readers produce supplements as imaginative inserts only when those supplements can be enlivened by the comforting adjacency of existing detail. Brewer demonstrates the expected willingness of eighteenth-century readers to enter into the text – to meet Tristram's 'half' with their own supplements – while noting their resistance to doing so within the prescribed sites that Tristram leaves open.[10] Thomas Keymer likewise is sceptical, arguing that the blank page 'can only reinforce the emphasis on representational impasse'.[11] The black, blank or marbled focal points of imagination remain too superintended to offer the freedom that readers are willing to endure. Readers are uneasy doing what they are told, even when they are urged to engage with a concept. Rather than facing the daunting blanks, readers prefer to extend the visualizations already begun. The blank pages of the sixth volume on which readers are invited to 'conceive' the Widow Wadman remain pristine in most known copies of the book. As does the easily fillable 'void space' in the text Tristram leaves open for us to 'swear into' (*TS*, 7. 37. 639). The language remains broken open to offer sites that reinstate the concept of imaginative expansion, if not its actualization.

Conceptual writers seek more direct pathways to intellectual engagement. Instead of breaking language down and tearing it apart, as the late twentieth-century L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writers sought to do,

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conceptual writers seem more interested in breaking down processes to make a new whole. Consider Kenneth Goldsmith's *Fidget* (2000), a book in which that author announces and records every motion of his body over the course of a single day, a day that proves increasingly darkened by the burden of recording these motions. Its text aims to be as profoundly uninteresting as a description of it sounds. But as a miniature epic of self awareness, its interest lies not in the motions themselves, nor even in the way that unconscious functions may seem intentional under the pressure of description (as in 'Breathe').[12] Rather, the book makes interesting the way that any process that appears to the eye as fluid motion – the motion, say, of blowing one's nose, which is the main action of the first chapter – must be broken up into stages of action in order to be intelligible in language before the triumphant declaration that an action is recognized as finished ('Mucous out right nostril'). Even when – especially when – language is concurrently deployed during the action that Goldsmith dictates into his microphone, words cannot keep up. Language is strained to the point where it is out of breath, running backwards the final chapter in order to keep up. This final chapter reenacts precisely the first chapter, except backwards and with all its reversible actions reversed ('Swallow' becomes 'wollawS'). Interestingly enough, one of the most fluid motions of the body, the point at which the body indulges a great many of its muscles in slow-motion inhalation, Goldsmith renders simply and tersely as 'Yawn'. As signals of boredom, Goldsmith's five instances of 'Yawn' in the first chapter prove contagious. So long as one understands the concept and engages with Goldsmith in thinking through the ideas that a text merely frames as an occasion for thought, reading the text to its conclusion comes to be somewhat beside the point.[13] It becomes boring.

To court boredom in this way, then, is to force the text itself to occupy a kind of background while foregrounding the processes of its coming into being, particularly the conceptual presuppositions and perceptual partitions that gave rise to that text. Goldsmith's *Day*, on the other hand, through a straight transcription of a newspaper into linear text that disregards author, column, and section shows how the partitioning of information on the broadsheets of the *New York Times* contextually frames it in a variety of largely ignored ways.[14] Again, Sol Le Witt offers the most succinct elaboration: 'conceptual art is made to engage the mind of the viewer rather than his eye or emotions'. The incorporation of the aleatory and unpredictable is the function of giving over to the concept and its mechanical process of realization; 'it is the plan that designs the work', Goldsmith tells us.[15] This is not unlike what John Cage attempted to do in *4' 33"* by offering a silence that allows ambient noise to help us

define what silence itself means and what it means to fill that silence with a composition of sound that is divided into movements only by the closing of a piano's lid. By not giving us anything interesting to occupy our minds, boredom and its failure to appeal to our receptors of what's interesting takes us back to the theoretical spaces that attend production. Not to elicit a Bartleby-esque 'dead reverie' at the drudgery of our digital dragging and clicking of whole chunks of information, but to force us to back up and ask questions about how literature came to be seen with an emphasis only on its final product, a final product that conceals the signs of its making. The point is the process of backing up. And thought's own fluidity, even during artistic production, is precisely what material manifestations of thought cannot ever capture. The search is for a new and revealing way – a Sternean way – to disrupt expectation.

*

Of all the experiments Sterne does *not* perform in *Tristram Shandy*, perhaps most prominent among them is experimentation at the level of the letterform. Beyond the generally nervous effects of typography and spacing, the various lengths of aposiopestic dash, and the non-illuminating 'stars' Tristram decides to 'hang up in some of the darkest passages' (*TS*, 6. 33. 558), Sterne performs surprisingly few innovations with type itself. A relatively short list might include his use of two dots to indicate Trim's snapping his fingers in 5. 10. 436 and the real-time indexing supplied by the text's many manicules, which had, in any event, been used already in a novelistic context by Richardson in *Clarissa*. Now that 'The Unknown World', with its application of graphemes drawn from the symbolic vocabulary of alchemy, has been removed from the Sterne canon, there is no evidence that Sterne ever experimented with letterform.[16] However, there did exist *potential* for productive letterform confusion already in a typesetter's tray: the long s.

By Sterne's time the long s had already come to be seen as antiquated, a remnant of a manuscript practice that had itself even begun to abandon it by the mid-eighteenth century. Joseph Ames' 1749 *Typographical Antiquities* marks the first attempt to modernize its typeface simply by excluding the long s. Later, with the advent of didone fonts modeled after the Didot family's first entirely modern typefaces, the long s could finally be fully eradicated by the start of the nineteenth century. The growing dissatisfaction with the confusable letter reached its peak roughly 20 years after Sterne's death, when John Bell published the first issue of his newspaper *The World* on New Year's Day, 1787. However, it was Bell's

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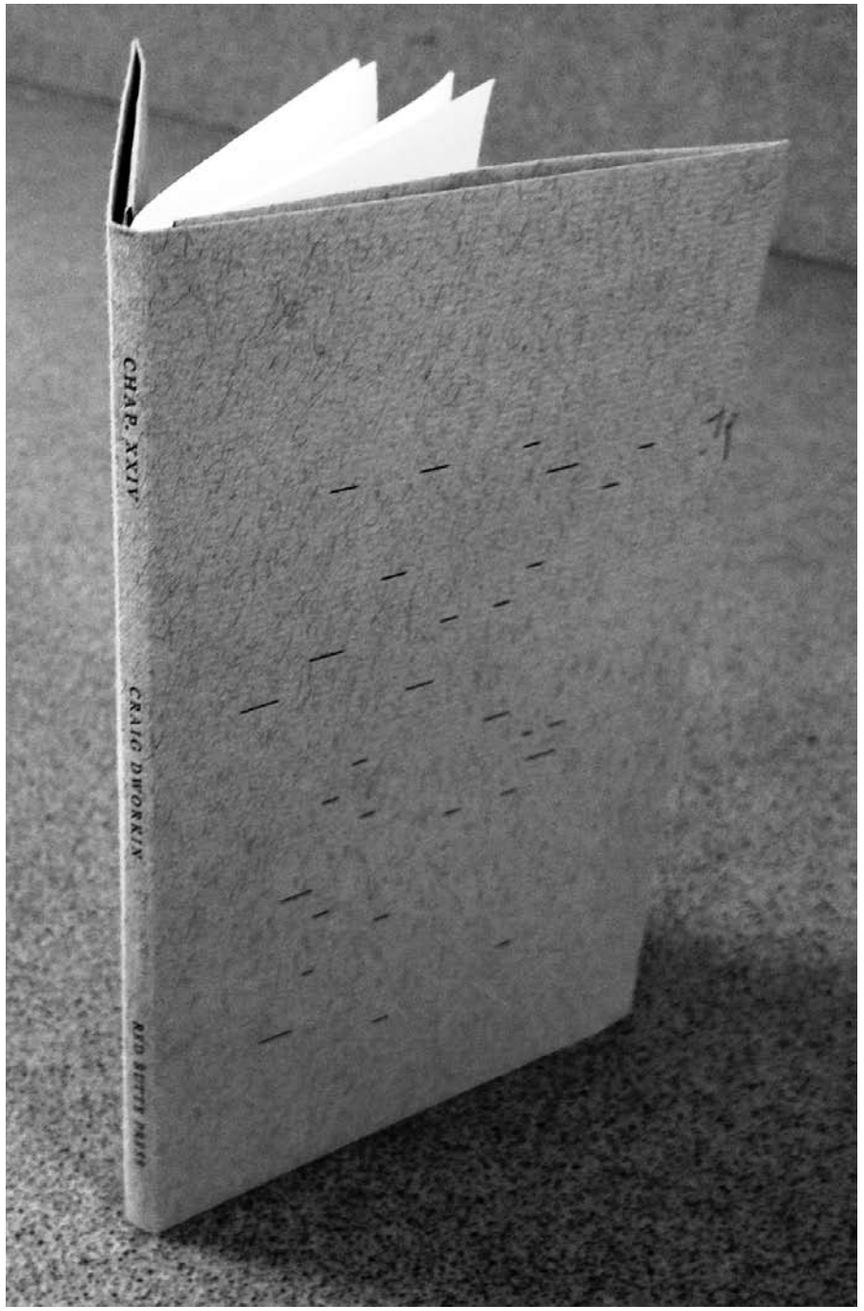
more upmarket printing in which he clarified his prejudice against the long s on both practical and aesthetic terms. In the 'Advertisement' for his 1784 edition of *Macbeth*, the first instalment of his complete *Dramatic Writings of Will. Shakspere*, Bell decided to 'depart from the common mode, by rejecting the long s in favour of the round one' on the grounds that it is 'less liable to error from the occasional imperfections of the letter f'. The result, Bell felt, was 'the effect of being more open'.[17] Disambiguating potentially confusable letters, strange to say, comes to be seen as more literally 'open' – because the round s exists entirely within typographical x-height – even though the possibility of an interesting error becomes closed as the ascender of the long s is lowered.

By the twentieth century, the long s was a distant memory. A poet identifying himself only as V. V. M. B. incorporates what had become an intensified confusion in a poem titled 'Colonial Stuff' published in the 5 July 1919 issue of *The American Printer*. As he reads an 'old-time book' he experiences uncertainty:

> For instance, this is what I read
> On page 294.
> "Affafination so we fee,
> If preffing on uf fore."
>
> As other words are plain enough,
> You'll please explain to me
> The game as played by the printers of
> The 18th century.[18]

Whether the confusion was real or not, an editorial note coyly explains 'It waſn't an f that was uſed, but an ſ.' Today, those of us practiced in the reading of eighteenth-century printed texts often have difficulty seeing the confusion that was there in our first attempts to engage with early print. We train ourselves, and the students who regularly remind us of this oddity, to simply look past this orthography to the point where its form seems unworthy of our attention. Though the confusion may persist, we become accustomed to mentally making corrections by imperceptibly giving final authority to context.

Craig Dworkin's *Chapter XXIV*, published in 2013 by the Red Butte Press at the University of Utah (Fig. 10), attempts to fill in Sterne's missing pages by taking advantage of our frequently ignored, split-second hesitancy during this very process of mental correction. It makes the potential for letterform confusion into a work of *littérature potentielle*, or what in the related



10 Craig Dworking, *Chapter XXIV*, 2013

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tradition of 'pataphysics might be a 'game governing the special occurrence of a sporadic accident'. Taking the confusion over f and long s as a starting point, Dworkin uses misprision as a generative principle, placing it within strict limits. His 'constraint', in the parlance of the *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle* (Oulipo) movement that is the progenitor of much conceptual writing, is to write Sterne's invisible chapter with a predetermined set of words that interestingly hinge on the mistake (though avoiding the most vivid and customary illustrative example of 'fuck').

In making his chapter Sternean, Dworkin constrains himself further by following printing conventions established by Sterne's mise-en-page, which makes 'ten pages' equate to a text of 1421 words. He must measure the gap and cast off, as it were, to determine the amount of text that might fill it. He makes sure, too, that the resulting chapter utilizes all the possible typographical ligatures found in Sterne's text (ff, fi, fl, and ffi; ff, fh, fi, fk, fl, ft, and ffi, as well as italic double forms *ff*, ff). Dworkin submits those words to *OED* verification to assure they are words Sterne theoretically would have had available to him; then he disposes them into a chapter that must both obey the narrative exigencies of the surrounding chapters and retain a Shandean voice. The accomplishment of this undertaking is impressive within these many constraints, and Dworkin performs it with a level of grammatical complexity and panache that is equally on par with Sterne's (a lexical density test of Dworkin's piece with Sterne's two surrounding chapters reveals an almost precise match; the panache is beyond precise reckoning). Dworkin even expands Sterne's *usus loquendi* to include unused eighteenth-century words like 'fuds' 'faugh' 'fauces' 'sanable' and 'hagbut'.

The result is a text that even in its physical appearance gives the impression of being something of a forgery, related, perhaps, to the tradition of Sternean counterfeits by William Combe and others after Sterne's death until the 1780s.[19] Even the paper of *Chapter XXIV*, made by Robert Buchert at Tryst Press (Provo, UT), painstakingly aims to approximate the eighteenth-century original. As does the type. The work was hand-pressed from photopolymer plates of the text as it was digitally set in *Tristram Shandy*'s characteristic Caslon pica. The printed pages thus have the appearance of the original – format, hand-made paper, typeface – though the paper's watermark of the Red Butte Press's logo reveals these features to be a recreation of the material aspects of an original text along the lines of Information as Material's texts. Such material features are recreated, it would seem, as occasions for thought about the ways that eighteenth-century book design elicits a distinctly different mode of experience, of reading and information processing, than that to

which twenty-first-century readers of Sterne in modernized editions are generally accustomed.

Dworkin's conceptual writings often proceed from concepts latent in the works they reframe. In works such as *Parse* (2008), a 284-page parsing of Edwin A. Abbot's 1874 manual on grammatical parsing into its own odd system of notation, Dworkin enacts concept with a machine-like focus, producing a result that challenges our notion of reading as linear progress. In this way his conceptual works display a kinship with those of Kenneth Goldsmith, who feels his readers need only engage with his book's wrapper. However, Dworkin as a conceptual poet often retains an interest in the minute processes of reading, making traditional *explication de texte* still a worthwhile mode of apprehending his work.[20] As a result, Dworkin's productions, emphasizing as they do both the conceptual and experiential, seem less resistant to the label of poetry. If the most usefully capacious definition of poetry can be that it extends an invitation to move beyond the mere communicative function of language by emphasizing language's potential within traditionally nonsubstantive features (etymology, sound, appearance on the page) and, in the most formal of poems, makes patterns of those features (rhyme, meter, lineation), then Dworkin's works are indeed poetry.

Looking at his less directly 'conceptual' poetry from his 2011 collection *Motes*, we can see how Dworkin's ear attends to what ghosts emerge when syllabic division takes place. In 'CHATEAU DE VERSAILLES', for example, the word *château* precipitates out unrelated etymological energy that Dworkin works to make related. *Chat* (cat) and *eau* (water) give the ensuing distich an extra sense of coherence: 'shadow of a cat over water lithe / -ly padding sanding feeling fine'.[21] His ear for aural similarity even gives 'feeling fine' enough context to seem an expansion of 'feline'. So too with the poem 'AN EGG', wherein a 'flash of white ab / -ove bikini domed' finds new coherence once words are severed by lineation. The line break makes 'above' feel especially Latinate (*ab*, from + *ovum*, egg) in one direction, as well as anatomical in another (ab + domed), a single abdominal muscle framed by the ovoid dome of a bikini. Dworkin's minimalist texts are still interested in what might be considered traditional poetic coherence even as their communicative status as apophthegms proves hard to divine.

In Dworkin's attempt to confront the ten truant pages of Sterne's novel, the page becomes a circuit board, with every f functioning as a diode regulating reading now in one direction, now in the other (Fig. 11). While there are no clear predecessors to Dworkin's exploitation of orthographical similarity, we can find a related poetic technique in Marcel Benabou's

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CHAP. XXIV.

THE regimentals well cured by the fire—and the party riſen betimes and reſted from the hearth—my father began a walk to the fiſh-pond, by way of the *Ox-moor*. My uncle *Toby*, reaſoning there was no ſin in it, trailed behind, whilſt *Obadiah* order'd the hitching of the coach, which my father had determined upon as the moſt orderly tranſport of the gueſts to *Didius*.

My father had not got but a few yards when he ſpied ſeveral ſtones together in a flag heap by the ſide of the track, flipped one againſt the other, and ſtill clouded and ſoggy from the damp of the morning ground where they had ſo lately lain. They now, among the ruffet of the leaves and graff which bordered the

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the path, flatted the lawn, cloſe by the fawn wood viſible in the unleafed portion of the field, which had been ſerried by the mill, and readied for ſelling.

This finding of the ſtones ſtopp'd my father ſhort — Such diſorder, he cried, could be the reſult of no ſane creature! Imps, ſay, or elſe—my good brother —interjected *Toby*, who had obſerved this, together with the violent knitting of my father's brows, and the tinting of his countenance, and had haſtened to his ſide—Marauding Ruſſians! —completed my father—do not be very much exerciſed about the paving—continued *Toby*—but his prudent counſel came too late—for my father was now having a fit down by the path.

The ſubject of the eſtate's compoſition had always been moſt vexing to my father, who found the want of loam the foreſt defect of the land. He held the

11 Craig Dworking, *Chapter XXIV*, pp. 147-148

'Table of Elementary Linguistic and Literary Operations', which offers an Oulipean elaboration of the 'paragram' as a 'printer's error consisting of the substitution of one letter for another'.[22] Locating the confusion in the mind of the typesetter, however, misses the point of how readers experience an uncertainty that is often the result of no such printing error. And an emphasis on the substitution of just one letter occludes the ways that context governs the process of deciding which of several possible readings – the typographically manifest or the mentally corrected – we might follow. Dworkin's long s confusions, by contrast, occur in a nest of context that often facilitates reading errors that would not occur in other contexts. A new character Dworkin includes in his chapter, a stable master named Ephraim Ezra, reveals the problem when Obadiah hopes to contain some gossip: 'But you cannot tell Ephraim Ez'; you cannot tell f from s. Such figures of misprision may be more accurately termed 'sphalmograms' (σφάλλειν error + γράφειν to write), or, in the particular case of Dworkin's f/long s instability, 'ſfalmograms'. Error defines them, destabilizes the words in which they appear, but, as we will see, the error comes from several possible sources.

Within these constraints, Dworkin produces a supremely accomplished narrative insert. The chapter begins with the regimentals, and we only read without event for a single sentence before encountering Toby looking on a 'fiſh-pond' and 'reasoning that there was no ſin in it'. Our mental auto-correct function, on the grounds that 'fin' as poetic diction for fish produces more sense than 'sin', makes a correction. And we move on. Alliteration in the second paragraph ('he ſpied ſeveral ſtones') heightens our awareness of the long s, gives us enough momentum to make the same correction with 'flag heap', which we reason might possibly be 'slag heap'. Then Walter either 'flipped' one of the stones against another, or he 'slipped' it. The specificity, we feel, does not matter. So we go on – until we become stuck in the mud with Walter, Toby, and Obadiah. The immediate context offered by the word 'clouded' makes 'ſoggy' seem an untrustworthy rendering of 'foggy'. Sometimes several duplicitous phrases force certain alignments and resist others. For instance, the group notices 'fawn wood' near a Mill, but we find later that it had been 'readied for ſelling', which means that it was either 'sawn' and ready for purchase or it was 'fawn' coloured wood that had been prepared to be felled. We are caught between different stages of the same process of selecting wood, cutting it, and selling it. But the selling might not, in any event, have to do with the wood. The 'graſſ' they stand on is an 'unleafed portion of the field', and so its potential to have been hitherto 'unleased' is there in the confusable letter. And as Walter continues pawing through the stones, he notes that 'such disorder' can be 'the reſult of no fane creature!' Toby responds by imagining the kind of supernatural creature who might have made such a mess: 'Imps, ſay, or elſe'. The logic of the list makes us see three kinds of creatures (imps, fairies, or elves), though this contradicts the actual typography that nominates the 'Imps' as the only specifically conjectured culprit, and 'say' or 'else' as markers of uncertainty. If there is a lesson to be taken from this kind of reading, it is that we will follow the path of least contextual resistance – even if this means mentally changing a letter. The possibility of human error is easier for us to accept than the prospect of our misunderstanding the work's intention.

Context and typography are at odds in these sphalmograms, though not always with the same intensity. Even before being inserted into a new context, the pairs of words, which are identical but for a tiny crossbar, have

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meanings that reveal different levels of attraction or repulsion from one another. Sometimes the difference can even constitute a pair of opposites – 'slowing' versus 'flowing' – that are intensified in context, as when Walter has a 'fit down by the path', not a more placid 'sit'. Other times the difference seems nugatory, as when Toby grabs a fallen hat either 'on the sly' or 'on the fly'. And sometimes we may, in perceiving a difference as nugatory, find the conflation of two things to be humorous, as when we encounter 'Marauding Ruffians' who seem like 'Ruffians'. Sometimes we perceive that a mistake has been made, as when we encounter 'hafting to report' that surely must be 'hasting to report'. The same applies to a description of a non-Newtonian 'thick liquid' that must be a 'slurry' not a 'flurry'. Likewise with the 'fine grift' that must be 'soil' not 'foil', insofar as it might be 'grift' and not 'grift' at all. An 'Irish setter', when it clamps onto Toby's leg, seems to be some kind of Hibernian method of restraint, an 'Irish fetter'. And so on.

The quagmire of sand, which might serve as something of a metaphor for the constantly shifting ground of meaning beneath the sphalmogram, gives Dworkin a lot to work with. Sand can be 'sifted' and 'refifted', as well as 'refifted' by the application of pressure; it is both 'fallow' and 'fallow'; and one can be 'foiled' and 'fopped' with it after it is 'ftirred' or clumped in one's 'fift'. Other times the mistake is ours, based on the path of least resistance given by a circuit of short-distance context, as when we find that Obadiah was 'also roughly uſed at the hand of his ſiſter' and allow the 'hand' of sororal abuse to make us see a 'fist' in 'fifter', and later to ponder deeper meanings as Obadiah confirms the story by shuddering and proclaiming that he 'can still feel the flick' – or 'flick' –'of her wriſt'. At one point 'foot' hovers between contexts, but 'blackened' makes it seem like 'soot'; at another, the 'foul leaving the body' is refigured as a flatus by the proximity of 'fuds'. What is especially revealing is the distance at which context can continue to force us to make corrections to what is on the page.

In narrative terms, writing the missing chapter needs to accomplish very little. We know from Sterne's synopsis in chapter 25 that the group must get up and on its way to the 'visitations at ****', which Dworkin quickly fills in as an ecclesiastical dinner at the home of Didius, the 'great civilian' and pedant. In one of the few instances where Dworkin's following his concept opens the door to working with existing characterization, we find that Toby becomes 'always more timid whenever he was out of ſorts', though the same might be said for his demeanour when out of 'forts'. Dworkin does not stop at plundering the novel itself for material. He manages even to place Johnson's famous reproach on *Tristram Shandy* into Walter Shandy's

mouth: 'We have only even a few more familiar links to cover, for nothing odd – my father quoth – will do long'. And the overreaching ending of *Sentimental Journey* returns as a feature of a vivid set piece in which 'ten ſtableboys' take liberties with a 'broodmare':

> They used to ſaddle her a great deal – buffing her both fore and aft whether her parts be puffy or not – 'till her ſurcoat was thoroughly muſl'd. The rude gathering, having chaſed her beyond the point of all ſober pleasure, and caught her in the end, bound her by a tack 'till ſhe was fully chap'd and ſought to hide her ſore-edge entirely.

Here, in what is later called a 'filly affair', we can see the functional and expected 'ſaddle' straining to reveal the caress of 'faddle', especially once the misplaced affection of 'bussing' fails to manifest the more expected equine maintenance of 'buffing'. But the context of friction, of rubbing the mare's 'surcoat' until it becomes a 'muſl'd' version of a 'furcoat', begins to evaporate when the word 'chafed' proves merely a figment of 'chased', which initiates a pursuit that leads to the stable hands having 'caught her in the end'. If a pun is an instance of a single word becoming duplicitous when another context manifests, Dworkin's sphalmograms appear to be something like phrasal puns. They cause us to back up and notice the distance at which syntax can act.

Dworkin ends with a self-referentiality that seems willing to imply the chapter's deceit. These ten stableboys are 'pages' and they go missing just when their account must be taken. When Walter tells Toby 'I ſuſpect some ſubbing here', ironically echoing our own thoughts in an 'uncommonly ſtern voice', he also could have in mind any number of substitutions or variations on 'fubbing', including meanings that still pick up on the context of the horse violation. Toby replies – 'diffidently' or perhaps 'dissidently' – that there are 'some chapters on which, I fear, we ſhall not yet agree'. The final words of the chapter are Tristram's customary apostrophic mode: 'If, learned reader, you ſuppoſe to find a mare's neſt in theſe fugitive pages, you muſt fend for it yourſelf, and I cannot tell you if it is'. The notions of difficulty and deceit that converge in the expression 'mare's neſt' constitute the most direct expression of the affect Dworkin has created.-

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Nick Thurston's approach to the 'chasm' takes as its starting point the fact that the marbled page, the missing chapter, as well as the book's 896

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asterisks perform what in terms of narrative may be seen as deferrals – sometimes, in the case of 32 of those 'stars', the deferral lasts only until we reach the footnote at the bottom of the page. Thurston in effect layers these deferrals one on top of the other in a series of 25 distinct and uncut imposition spreads titled 'The Visitations at ****', which were produced in a limited edition that was curated by Johanna Melvin at the Whitechapel Gallery (London) in 2013. These prints in a way expand the problem of the chasm to the point where the specific terms of Sterne's original concept force us to choose one form of material understanding of the gap. The missing chapter is marked by four different signifiers that refuse to align: first, there is the skip in the page count; second, the fact that this skip changes the odd-even order of the recto-versos; third, the span of blank paper after chapter 23; and, fourth, the fact that Tristram says 'ten pages' are missing.

To understand Thurston's approach to the problem, we might note how his conceptual writings have often uniquely involved very little readable text or expressive content. In fact, his most famous book, *Reading the Remove of Literature* (2006), has been categorized by conceptualists Robert Fitterman and Vanessa Place as an example of what, in the conceptualist repertoire, is known as erasure – conceptualism 'without appropriation'.[23] Yet what it spares from appropriation is text, not the physical elements of the book with which it conceptually engages. It imitates precisely the physical attributes of the 1989 University of Nebraska Press English translation of Maurice Blanchot's *L'Espace littéraire*, except that every one of Blanchot's words has been removed, leaving only the annotations – the metadata of glosses, scholia, and underlining – that have accreted in the margins during readings of the text by Thurston. The marginalia, however, is set in the typeface of Blanchot's original, and overlaid so as to let glosses mutate into glossolalia, and to allow the process of trimming the book to create on the top and fore-edge a speckled pattern unique to each copy. The result, in Dworkin's words, is Thurston's 'actively enacting Blanchot's text, rather than merely picturing it'.[24] This drive toward active enactment, however, can for Thurston identify moments of conceptual realization from within the production flow of printing and bookmaking.

Perhaps the most relevant of Thurston's earlier experiments to his work with Sterne is a small leaflet titled *THE DIE IS CAST*. Launched at 'Miss Read' book fair at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin in September, 2009, *THE DIE IS CAST* is a collaboration between the poet Carolyn Bergvall and Thurston in which the artistic concept follows the linguistic concept of the cliché back to the point when its origins become bound with the mechanics of printing.[25] Its bifolium pages present

clichés that possess integrity when printed; but when cut and nested, in an aleatory arrangement, into a stapled leaflet, they produce, in all but the center opening, new clichés made of two halves of different clichés, such as 'Everything in its / end of the stick'. This division allows us to observe a kind of caesura already within the cliché, the kind of turn it takes to redouble and meet the length of its proposition. Making a kind of syntactical caesura coincide with the material divisions of bound pages asserts what we might say is the bifolium nature of the clichés themselves. The richly ambiguous phrase 'die is cast' – also, of course, a cliché – offers a 'die' that reminds us of what seems an emblem of randomness, one that is thrown in in order to introduce an aleatory effect, as when sheets are thrown to the wind. Yet, in stereotype printing the moulded die is also a fixative, taking print in, and putting it out, one page at a time. Randomness and reproductive fidelity in one book, all rendered in a steel grey Didot typeface – now so evocative of the glossy world of fashion magazines, with its equipoise between boldness and the thin fragility of its serifs. A typeface for machines that leaves the handwritten word and its uniqueness behind.

From this nexus in which the material aspects of printed language set in motion a metaphor for a phrase's unchecked reproduction, concept manifests at the stage of the printer's imposition. The stapled leaflet in this way conjures up not only the wholeness of the A4 sheet of which it consists, but the wholeness of the entire print run of 1000 identical copies enabled by the cast die of stereotyping. Cliché, cliché, cliché. Even disyllabic word suggests, in its trochaic burst and soft scrape of afterevent, not only its etymological birth in the dip and sizzle of a print matrix being dropped onto molten metal, but also the two-part back-and-forth of machine operation to which it became integral. All to describe the similarly mechanical deployment of tired and un-retested language. If terming a common expression a 'cliché' itself evinces the 'loss of evocative power' and reversion to the 'ordinary' that George Orwell associates with moribund metaphors, *THE DIE IS CAST* resuscitates them with new evocations by refreshing our approach to them through a Mallarméan *coup de dés*.[26] Here the withholding of the word 'cliché' allows the mind to reconfigure the open space surrounding the semantic core of the word through its connotations and etymology, making them literal, material.

As with the *THE DIE IS CAST*, the page for Thurston seems to be the wrong unit of analysis through which to properly view Tristram's 'chasm'. As he moves from page to imposition – from 170 mm × 108 mm to 454 mm × 967 mm – Thurston expands the concept of these pages beyond the intimate scale of the printed book and, therefore, beyond

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the scale in which marbling is designed to make its appearance. Perhaps not surprisingly, the distance of the marbling brush above the bath that receives its drops reproduces a readerly distance. As can be seen in the engravings of a marbling atelier in Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encylopédie* of 1765, the marbler stands over a trough tapping a paint-loaded brush against a firm object at a height of between one to two feet in order to diffuse colour onto the ground. The reader, like the marbler, performs his work at, at most, an arm's length from the page. As a process that was most often used to decorate a book's endpapers, marbling develops a vocabulary of pattern suited to this scale.[27] When Thurston expands the issue of the 'chasm' from the page to the larger scale of imposition and book production, the designs of marbling retain the same internal scale, though they are viewed in a larger expanse. The stages of making become aesthetic opportunities, sites of decision, and therefore become susceptible to a kind of rearrangement and reordering. In the new *non-finito* that Thurston brings about, the marbling interposes itself before the printing in a way that dramatizes the impossibility of a 9-page imposition.

The book aims to conceal the evidence of its making, but here the material book's resistance to this gap becomes conceptually assimilable only under the conditions of defect. An imposition sheet cannot make sense of nine pages going missing in a way that gives us the page count we have. Modeled in part after the imposition diagrams found in Shandy Hall's copy of John Smith's *Printer's Grammar* (1754), Thurston's impositions arrange the missing pages in a way that displays, while effacing, their impossibility. Confronting the chasm in this case involves stepping away – away from the authentic print plan as well as from the scale of the page – in order to work beyond the limits imposed by the chasm in its codex form. Backing up, as in so much conceptual work, enables one to see new relationship between parts and wholes. Tristram's 'ten pages wanting' defer to the description of their content, succinctly rendered as 'The visitations at ****'. Thurston takes this nest of deferrals one step further, deferring the meaning of the asterisks to another Sternean method of deferral, marbling. The asterisks contain – they hold – the entirety of the physical chapter as its empty limits are transferred to a marbled imposition sheet. These asterisks, like all Sterne's asterisks, are everything and nothing. Driven back through the process by Thurston, Tristram's asterisks now point us to marbling. The 'emblem' of Sterne's 'work' or practice thus becomes a kind of camouflage over the echoing space of this 'chasm'.

In Sterne's England marbling was a relative novelty and, as such, presented restrictions. As the marblings in *Tristram Shandy* attest, available colours were mostly primary: lake red (most likely a mixture of Mexican

cochineal carmine and alum), yellow ochre (mineral limonite levigated into a paste), and indigo blue (vegetable colour extended with chalk). White was often applied first as a base and last as a kind of antiquing and likely made with kaolinite or pipe clay.[28] Other frequently appearing colours in the first edition were composits. The olive drab colour that appears and one of only six distinct colours in *Tristram Shandy*'s first-edition marblings was produced by mixing ochre with indigo. Black was made by a combination of lampblack and indigo. (Before they become paint applied to a viscous size that assures the integrity of their drops, the pigments are properly miscible). The bath of gum tragacanth and flea-seed size on which colours were dispersed likewise presented limits. The typical wooden marbling trough, roughly 40.6cm × 53.4cm, was designed large enough to contain a sheet of demy or even slightly larger 'montfaucon' paper, though not large enough to contain an imposition sheet that could be folded down to foolscap octavo.[29]

An entire marbled quire is thus an impossibility in Sterne's time. Whatever level of control Sterne had over the marblings, the palette was predetermined and the proportions limited, thus enfeebling the sense of 'anarchy and unbridled fancy' that some readers feel the pages symbolize.[30] In fact, the marbling in *Tristram Shandy* is itself entropic, a pocket of visceral, imaginatively enterable space, seemingly punched into a page. Apart from moments of bleed-through, it has definite bounds distinct from the page, like any 'emblem'.[31] Peter de Voogd describes how the process required first 'cutting foolscap sheets into the proper duodecimo (pre-binding) size ... and folding each piece along all four sides to get the oblong type-area ... and to ensure clean margins'.[32] Margins were consciously, painstakingly constructed, assuring a frame of material blankness like the one Thurston conceptually redefines in *Reading the Remove of Literature*. Such margins become 'sufficiently luxurious and aestheticized', reminding us that margins are, as Dworkin asserts in reference to *Nudisme*, a book within Jean Cocteau's film *Orphée* (1950), 'reserved for the activities of the reader's body' and thus a 'fundamental part of the reader's physical reaction with the book'.[33]

In Thurston's series of prints, however, edge and limit coincide. There is no frame except the wall that holds it upright. What it suggests is the expansiveness of the unfinished. It can be viewed, but at a decidedly non-intimate distance. This identifies Thurston's most important reversal of Sterne's practice that allows the new concept to extend to its limit. He places the process of marbling, usually tipped in at the last moment or inserted as a page cancellation, at an earlier stage of book production. The marbling of Thurston's sheets, performed by Kate Brett of Payhembury Marbled

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Papers in Cambridge, derives new styles from eighteenth-century patterns. The marbled page is a revolt against transparency and all it might stand for. As such, it proves to be a clear statement of faith in the uncontrollable complexity of life, but one that still can be controlled insofar as it is set in motion as a process. Thus it can be seen as an emblem for conceptual writing. Preceding the actual imposition in this way, in Thurston's prints the decorative becomes integral. It functions as deferral, just as it does for Sterne, but at a different point, not at a stage of the diegesis but at a stage of production. It defers us away from the impossibility of the imposition. The colours, especially in the Stormont effect where the inks are degraded by a tincture of turpentine, may reveal different densities and intensities. But the surface of the sheet, however packed full of incident, refuses to take on any real thickness. They show flatness frozen at the precise moment of its occurring. A drip that expands under the pressures of gravity, determining its own dimensions on the slick flatness of the ground. Opaque deposits without impasto or dimensionality, everything sealed to paper.

Yet, there is an established hierarchy among a marbling's drops. The final, aggressive applications drive their predecessors into veins, though the appearance is often opposite, as in print no. 13 (the marbling on the cover of this *Shandean*). Here the different densities of paint produce an antagonism that feels like dimensionality. The pullulating energy – the slow push of spreading blue against a thinner, quickly surging red – takes place beneath what seems an overlaid green sputtered across a surface that separates it from the unstable depths. The stagnant green, paradoxically, has action to it, as if the dropping of paint had been aided by wind, causing it to appear more physical in the suspension of gravity's work. The even, rich green colour proves similar to one of the five colours that appear in *Tristram Shandy*'s first-edition marblings, but possesses solidity while retaining its liquidity in large, downward splashes that sit calmly atop the chaos. Such effects of layering are caused by thinning or enriching the main colours. Large Turkish spots of pure lily pad green form against a ghostly blue made by a shell technique (of adding oil to cause shadowy deposits of uneven internal density) and spidery filaments of a rust red made by the Stormont technique (of adding turpentine to break the paint into lines). The continuously curving lines congeal into pure atmosphere. A fragile calm. The slow churn of things in a frog pond.

Marbling, of course, is pressing – the dropping of wet paper onto the prepared ground impacts everything into the surface. The drips do not interfuse, nor do they become consubstantial. The sheet holds these elements to a plane of their own so that they no longer press mercilessly against one another. In some prints, the plane itself becomes the site of

drama, particularly in the more Italian patterns of marbling in which one colour takes over almost entirely. No. 21 (which will be the marbling on the cover of next year's Volume 25 of *The Shandean*) possesses a chromic neutrality just on this side of warm: a flat sheepswool beige with the slick, fatty opacity of a slice of foie gras. The subtle chromatic variations of drops in its dominant colour, reticulated by darkly lustrous veins, render it aggressively flat. Colour deviation refuses to correspond to dimensionality. Instead the beige-on-beige deposits seem to reveal different densities of a mass that has been sliced apart, cross sectioned. We seem to have moved up several orders of magnitude from the usual marbling. Instead of giving the impression of a colloidal drama of expanding and contracting biological cells, platelets, and vacuoles stained for viewing, as most marblings do, we feel here as if we are witnessing the drama of flatness enacted on a substance. It resembles a specimen of dissected brain pressed against a layer of glass.

Of course, there is also writing. The self-effacing white text of the imposed page numbers help to make marbling's similarity to camouflage no longer mere similarity. The text is legible, but only just. The eye has to strain. The text of page numbers and crop marks, though screen-printed at the final stage by Joshua Robertson of White Duck Studio (Bath) is in most of the prints effaced – lost – the moment it reaches the picture plane, almost entirely subsumed into the page's organic paisley. The Stormont technique of adding turpentine to the inks allows the fibrous paper to scratch its way through the paint to become part of the surface, revealing what appear as abrasions down to the crisp white of unstained punky white satin rag paper that in many prints further enfeebles reading the white text. When we can make them out, Sterne's original brackets surrounding the page numbers now function, according to our present bibliographical conventions, to indicate their status as unprinted, missing. The crop marks remind us that what we are viewing is not finished – folded, cut, and sewn into its destined form as a quire in a printed book. Rather it is stuck at a stage that ultimately gives it a new destiny on the wall of the collector. The impossible arrangement of pages in this configuration (one-sided, with 9 pages arranged without corresponding cognates or outer forme impositions) reminds us that, in any printing house, such an imposition never could make the cut. The prints emblematize the error in the concept, though they run aground at a different point during the production flow than the first edition. They freeze Sterne's idea at the point beyond which it cannot sustain its material form.

The moment at which the concept is frozen becomes emblematized by the freezing displayed in the fluid dynamics of marbling. In our minds

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Thurston's marblings still retain the impression of being seen from above, at the moment of their birth in the marbler's bath. In this way they often appear to our minds as landscape viewed from thousands of feet above.[34] Take print no. 18, for instance. The craquelure of fine veins of red and yellow, evidently applied in a second dip, may be the only thing reminding us that we are not viewing a desert landscape variegated with chaparral. In print no. 2 a shade of Martian tawny gives the impression of an aerial view of a burnt desert with estuaries of Indian sapphire. The distance at which Thurston's marblings offer themselves to be viewed can feel very great indeed. The materiality of the pigment is rendered sheerly visual, and the result is a new kind of space – if it still makes sense to call it space – in which conditions of reading prevail rather than one in which objects exist. On their new scale, these marblings prepare us for a more direct confrontation with the nature of marbling, not unlike what we find in the artist Bill Sampson's use of the traditional techniques of marbling to remove intention from the process of abstraction, particularly in his 2013 'Chance upon Nothing' series at the Mars Gallery in Melbourne. Sampson and Thurston take up the same question: How far, and for how long, can marbling be intentional for the maker?

As much as these prints follow Sterne's idea of marbling as an act of uncontrollable creation in which intention and likeness prove impossible, we still search for likeness in their frozen chemical combat. As Dworkin's own take on the marbled page in Shandy Hall's 2011 'Emblem of My Work' exhibit suggests, the marbling evokes the fluids of life, cells expanding and undergoing gradual chemical change. We read them in the manner of a Rorschach test, and we may produce responses like those that conceptual poet Dan Farrell draws from published interpretations of the Rorschach plates and combines into a 109-page pastiche titled *The Inkblot Record* (2000): 'Lake in white part, eroded down, just edge'.[35] In Thurston's print no. 4, for example, we can see a washed, dusky cerulean galaxy webbed with orange nebulae. The shell technique of adding oil to the paint creates, in no. 6, drops of blue spruce colour against a darker Gloster that suggests the propagation of lichen over tree bark. Nos. 9 and 25 feature vortices of curl pattern that draw in – and stretch to thinness – drops of flinty grey, parchment beige, and carmine red in a milieu of rich glaucous blue; they cannot help but appear French. Nos. 10 and 23, with their clash of red against yellow, suggests the jester's motley that Sterne's own mind made of marbling, enhanced in this case with six rows of curls that, at the scale of imposition, call to mind Sterne's arrangement of printed asterisks. A Stormont technique in no. 12 creates compacted webs of grave, dour, steely black within skeins of warm oranges and reds that, with their high

level of contrast, take on a cutout clarity, as if they too were imposed with the text. No. 14, a ghostly shell pattern finished by tightly sprinkled droplets inky grey, gives the sense of paint bubbling up from below, still in the process of forming. No. 17 has the colour and texture of bloodshot crocodile skin, as if a yellow eye might suddenly open in its middle. Though our readings may be symptomatic, they are unavoidable. Each marbling lets us perceive differently.

If this is the case, then what does it mean to enact the process 25 times? What we see at the level of production now is the unreproducible nature of marbling as it is engaged in a process of reproduction. 25 instances of 9 pages failing to come fully into being as a foldable, cutable quire gives us an entire expanded book of gap, only slightly longer than the longest of Sterne's volumes (which incidentally is volume 4). Seen across their print run, those marblings possessing a similar palette and technique (such as the French duo of nos. 10 and 23) especially demonstrate the impossibility of precise reproduction. We are reminded of all of the things that would have to go right in order to reproduce the marbling exactly. We are reminded that uniqueness itself is the inevitable process of both making and reading. As suspicious as Sterne was in his Scriblerian prejudice against 'systems' – and their wished-for realization in such projects as Walter Shandy's loving but absurd *Tristrapaedia* – he expects that his readers 'may raise a system to account for' certain 'points left yet unravelled' in the narrative (*TS*, 2. 19. 180). Erected systems in this way seem to involve not only points that are unraveled in the text, but the mistakes, mismatches, and misprisions in them. Dworkin's misprisions in the key of ſ demonstrate how we build unique systems of explanation at the smallest scale; Thurston's impossible impositions show how the text fails at a point when deferral becomes a necessary component of our 'system'. *Tristram Shandy*'s gap cannot be understood simply through an examination of its material existence, as its material properties have no stable value independent of conditions of reception. The missing chapter, as Dworkin might say, demonstrates that a work, whatever its assertions of nonexistence, is always subject to material conditions, and those conditions, as Thurston demonstrates, have a conceptual flow predating their manifestation as material – they are the result of process, and in that process a writer can reframe (or unframe) a work in a way that exposes a glitch, an error. The book aims to conceal the evidence of its making. But conceptual reframing can make it show its work.

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NOTES

1 Peter de Voogd, *'Tristram Shandy* as Aesthetic Object', *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*, 4:1 (1988), 385.
2 *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1886).
3 Martin Rowson, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1996), [135].
4 See Melvyn New, 'The Arion Press Edition of *Tristram Shandy*', *The Shandean*, 1 (1989), 135-36.
5 Craig Dworkin, Simon Morris, and Nick Thurston, *DO or DIY* (York: Information as Material, 2012).
6 Simon Morris, *Getting Inside Jack Kerouac's Head* (York: Information as Material, 2010).
7 Sol LeWitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', *Artforum*, 5:10 (1967), 80.
8 In his first critical monograph, Dworkin offers a 'synopsis' of his argument by enacting it and coyly placing it *sous-rédaction*: 'In short, the basic thesis of this book is ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬'; *Reading the Illegible* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2003), xviii.
9 'Zero Kerning', *Open Letter*, Twelfth Series, no. 7 (Fall 2005), 10.
10 Brewer, *The Afterlife of Character, 1726–1825* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 155–62.
11 Thomas Keymer, *Sterne, the Moderns, and the Novel* (OUP, 2002), 78.
12 Kenneth Goldsmith, *Fidget* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2000), 8.
13 *Tristram Shandy* itself may offer just this kind of engagement outside of the process of reading it. The Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk seems to recognize the same productive affect of boredom in *Tristram Shandy*'s digressions, going so far as to provide a synopsis of the chapters of the first volume, as a way of demonstrating his view that the novel's conceptual 'point' is the 'impossibility of getting to the point'; 'Foreword to *Tristram Shandy*', in *Other Colours: An Essay and a Story* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 127. Another novelist, John Updike, seems to get this much of the 'point' and yet counts himself among those too impatient to finish *Tristram Shandy* for precisely this reason: 'even the boredom of utter solitude was no match for the boredom that poured in waves off the chirping pages of this particular great book'; *Odd Jobs: Essays and Criticism* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 848.
14 Goldsmith, *Day* (Great Barrington: The Figures, 2003).
15 'A Week of Blogs for the Poetry Foundation', in: *The Consequence of Innovation: 21st-Century Poetics*, ed. Craig Dworkin (New York: Roof Books, 2008), 138.

16 For the deattribution, see Melvyn New, '"The Unknown World": The Poem Sterne Did Not Write', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 74:1 (2011), 85–98.
17 The entire history of the long s is given in Paul W. Nash, 'The Abandoning of the Long s in Britain in 1800', *Journal of the Printing Historical Society*, 3 (2001), 3–19.
18 *The American Printer*, 69:1 (5 July 1919), 22.
19 Rhona Brown, 'Forging Yorick: Constructions and Counterfeits of Laurence Sterne in the Scottish Periodical Press', *The Shandean*, 17 (2006), 93–106.
20 Consider Dworkin's most direct statement of how language coheres in what I call non-substantive ways: 'In precisely these moments of this text where even the screen of chance cannot prevent two adjacent words from unexpectedly making sense, or suggesting a common unwritten third term, where themes emerge like shared secrets between certain words, where the very materiality meant to obviate reference only allows language to point back to itself in a series of differences and repetitions, in the rubbing of one word against the next, we catch language in its ceaseless symptomatic acts and assignations: dangerous idiomatic liaisons, anxious avoidances, teasing connotations, flirtations with syntax, illicit frictions, incestuous mirrorings, and all the perverse and unnatural combinations of aberrant ungrammatical coupling we cannot, as readers, resist seeing as such'; 'Editor's Introduction' to Simon Morris's *Re-Writing Freud* (York: Information as Material, 2005), 17.
21 Craig Dworkin, *Motes* (New York: Roof Books, 2011).
22 Warren Motte, *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).
23 *Notes on Conceptualisms* (New York: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2009), 74.
24 Dworkin, *No Medium* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013), 47.
25 Caroline Bergvall and Nick Thurston, *THE DIE IS CAST* (York: Information as Material, 2009).
26 Orwell, 'Politics and the English Language', *Horizon*, 13:76 (1946), 252–65.
27 Some controversy has attended the idea that marbling was used for endpapers before the time of Sterne's novel; see Peter de Voogd's 'Laurence Sterne, the Marbled Page, and the "Use of Accidents"', *Word & Image*, 1:3 (1985), 285. However, according to Joseph W. Zachensdorf's *The Art of Bookbinding* (London, 1880) marbled papers came to England in the seventeenth century as wrappers for toys from Nuremberg, after which they were promptly incorporated into

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the practice of bookbinders. Richard J. Wolfe, who identifies English marbling's birth in Samuel Pope's 1731 patent for a proprietary form of marbling as a defense against forgery on bond notes, shows that marbled paper was used decoratively during Sterne's time as wrapping for 'Dr. James's fever powders'; *Marbled Paper: Its History, Techniques, and Patterns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 16–19.

28 Wolfe, *Marbled Paper,* 226 n. 26.

29 *Ibid*., 142.

30 T. John Jamieson, 'A Note on the Marbled Page in Tristram Shandy', *American Notes & Queries*, 16:4 (1977), 56.

31 The issue of just how distinct print boundaries might actually be has been taken up by Glasgow-based artist Scott Myles. The concept of 'bleed' constitutes the drama of 'Full Stop (The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman)', in which Myles takes the final full stop from the final volume of the novel and enlarges it with a Carl Zeiss photomicroscope to the point where the paper's fleck and fiber are visible, in order to create a 126.50 x 126.50 cm Lambda photograph detailing how the 'oil and lamp black' of ink are not crisply absorbed by the page. The final mark of closure in the novel seems, at this level, a hesitant, resistant, uncertain end. 'Full Stop' is illustrated in *The Shandean*, 20 (2009), Fig. 36.

32 Peter de Voogd, 'The compleat Marbler', *The Shandean*, 20 (2009), 69.

33 Dworkin, *No Medium*, 39

34 One emblem from the exhibit in which Dworkin and Thurston took part, no. 92, offers just this vantage. The emblem is a photograph of a layer of marbled-looking cloudsputter viewed from the window of an airplane.

35 *The Inkblot Record* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2000), 43.

Visual Textuality in Tristram Shandy, Print Technologies, and the Future of the Novel

When considering the eighteenth century in light of modern technology, most observers automatically assume that there can be no comparison between our modern age and the historical past. However, one technology that continues to undergo a transformation in both centuries is the novel, and, with critics daily sounding its death knell, it is fruitful to take a look at a novel that was a technical innovation at the beginning of the novel's prominence: *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Placing new emphasis on Sterne's novel as an example of the type of formal experimentation occurring in the eighteenth century, as well as looking for similar connections in our own time, creates a framework that will allow a conversation to occur intra-genre, diachronically, and between the text and reader. In our increasingly technological age, both *Tristram Shandy* and the novel form itself are undergoing renovations that attempt to fit them into the landscape of a digital future.

I have chosen Sterne's great work as the example text because I have so frequently heard it described as a post-modern novel pre-post-modernism. I am not so sure that is the best way to view it, especially as it seems to fall in line with Ian Watt's assertion that *Tristram Shandy* is somehow an 'out-of-time' anomaly produced *sui generis* from the mind of genius. Looking at the function of the unusual printed features of the novel will, I believe, allow for the better understanding of Sterne's visuals as an experiment fully in line with his textual experiments. This examination of the text's unique aspects will also create a dialogue between the print innovations of Sterne in the eighteenth century and the early twenty-first century's experimentation with new kinds of interactive reading. Seen through our modern eyes, it is also possible to put pressure on older notions of Sterne's text and, I believe, come to a better understanding of *Tristram Shandy* as a textual object within its own time.

Roger Moss, in his 1982 article 'Sterne's Punctuation', reads the punctuation and visual interruptions of the 'conventions of narrative *space*' in *Tristram Shandy* as 'essentially devices *against* that momentum, against reading.'[1] In this paper, I am going to argue against this hypothesis

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