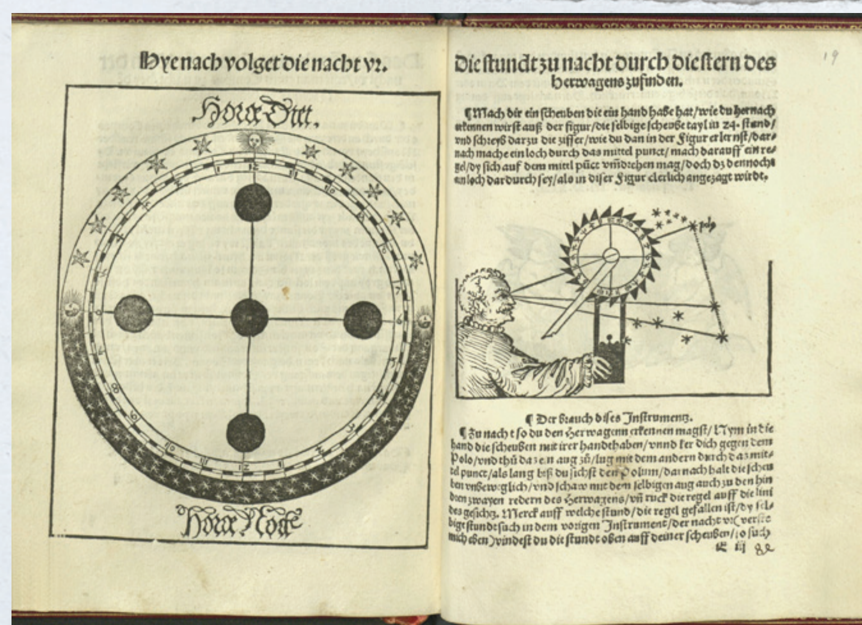
Gill Partington and Adam Smyth

Cut Slash Tear

'I should take the boldness to prune and lop away.'
Abraham Cowley, *Poems* (1656)

'Rip it up and start again', sang a whey-faced Edwin Collins back in 1983. But does the one necessarily lead to the other? Ripping things up, cutting through them, tearing them to pieces: they don't leave you with a blank page and a fresh start. Instead, they just create a confetti of fragments, or a page full of holes. But also possibility: the potential to remake and subvert; to read through the gaps; to reassemble things in new combinations. That's the theme we explore in this issue of *Inscription* – our 6th edition, we're pleased to say – but maybe you're ahead of us. If you've followed the instructions at the start of this journal, you'll already have been busy tearing out the first twelve leaves. In that case, you have produced or co-created 'Wake', according to the specifications of its artist Buzz Spector. Ripping is a technique that Spector has worked with a lot, over many years, to release the potential of unexpected visual conjunctions across the pages of other books (some of those earlier works are included throughout this issue). Ripping does odd things to pages, turning them from sequential objects that we process one after the other into a simultaneous experience. 'What would happen if you could see every page at the same time?' is the question he seems to ask. And yet, with 'Wake', there's a strange twist. Like his earlier well-known bookwork *A Passage* from 1994, every one of its torn pages is identical. The result is that you can read it as a single image, even though it's now distributed across twelve different pages. It is many pages, and one. It creates a visual effect: the torn edges resemble a series of lapping waves which echo the photograph. But more fundamentally, it changes what you do with the page, interfering with its mechanism. It doesn't work conventionally anymore – all those torn stubs are fiddly, making it difficult to turn from one to the next. But then, why would you need to when they are all exactly the same?



Cut-out disc to make a revolving diagram of the stars, complete with instructions for construction and use. Peter Apian, *Ein Kunstlich Instrument* (1524). Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (Taylor 59).

Buzz Spector has many historical precursors: there have always been readers ready to tear, snip, cut, excise and rearrange the contents of their books. The modern phenomenon of scrapbooking is anticipated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when fans of extra-illustration would 'Grangerise' their books – following the catalyst of clergyman and print collector James Granger (1723–76), author of *A Biographical History of England* (1769) – slicing open bindings, cutting out images from other sources, tipping additions in to augment the book, rebinding the book, turning one volume into many due to the number of inclusions. A book had become a thing to cut up, as much as an object to preserve or read – an act of codex-vandalism that was also an act of biblio-reverence. The cut produces these paradoxes of love and destruction.
In London in 1962, the playwright Joe Orton and his partner Kenneth Halliwell were infamously sent to prison for cutting out and reusing images from library books to often filthy and hilarious effect, creating bathetic and subversive cut-and-paste collage covers and dust-jacket blurbs: a gibbon's face adorns the *Collins Guide to Roses* ('a quite lovely book', the prosecution lamented); *The Collected Plays of Emlyn Williams* contains new titles ('Knickers Must Fall'; 'Fucked By Monty'); and the dust-jacket photo of Richard G. Stern ('Assistant Professor of English at the University of Chicago') has been replaced with an image of American gossip columnist and actress Hedda Hopper in a feathered bonnet. Orton and Halliwell's work is now celebrated, often by the same libraries from which they pilfered. It's part of the rich and varied practice of collage, found not just in the Dadaist experimentation of Hannah Höch, for example, but in more unexpected places, like the Gospel harmonies of the Ferrar family at Little Gidding, made in the 1630s and 1640s, where the female members of the extended family community cut out and rearranged printed biblical text and images to produce new, 'harmonised' versions of the four Gospel accounts of Christ's life. There are parallels with Orton and Halliwell: was this book vandalism or a kind of devotional reading? The destruction of meaning or the creation of something new?

Earlier too, medieval scribes and manuscript-makers cut out and glued in pieces snipped from other manuscripts, such as historiated initials; the knife a crucial tool of text-making. Some books even asked to be cut up. The sixteenth-century astronomer and mathematician Peter Apian invited his readers to cut out and assemble paper instruments, and John White's *Briefe and easie almanack for this yeare* (1650) instructed readers to snip out 'the whole kalender' for 1650 for use elsewhere: 'which being cut out, is fit to be placed into any book of accompts, table book, or other.' These are printed books prescribing their own slicing up. Children's books from the eighteenth century onwards encouraged child readers to snip out letters of the alphabet or animal drawings, and to cut out models, scenes, figures; to take the page to pieces for the purpose of play. Books for children today (much more than books for adults) sustain this inventive, remake-it-all-materiality: the book in a child's hands is always a radical object. And in more mundane ways, the print world of newspapers and magazines has always been full of prompts to tear out coupons or to cut-out-and-keep posters. Today, even in the age of screen reading, we still encounter daily instructions ('tear along dotted line'; 'cut here to open'), as we deal with the parcels that land with a thud as a result of our digital clicking. As long as there is paper and text, there is always the possibility to cut, rip, tear, excise, and fragment.

THE COMPOSITION

THE beginning of the Gospe. of Jesus Christ the sonne of God,
Now In those dayes in the fifteenth yeare of the reigne of Tiberius Cesar, Pontius Pilate being governour of Judea, and Herod being Tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip Tetrarch of Iturea, and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the Tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, As it is written

Gospel Harmony (1635). © British Library Board (BL C.23.e.4, column 38).

Our articles approach this topic from multiple angles. In 'Birth, Accident and Death: A Narratological Probing of Die-Cut Holes', Sally O'Reilly begins with a book whose cut-out holes are a teaching aid – a guide to the birthing process for midwifery students. Through its interplay of aperture and image, the booklet describes the opening up of a body and emergence of a baby's head. It's a meditation on birth, death, time, determinacy, and how we move through holes in the page. It ends, movingly, at the hospital bedside, which is where YuHao Chen's 'Table of Phonetic Wounds' begins.

Moving between semiotics and surgery, Chen's article thinks about the cut in multiple senses. It explores literacy programmes in Chinese hospitals in the twentieth century, which simultaneously opened up bodies to western medicine and the Chinese language to western reformers. Just as patients went under the knife, a new system of phonetic signs was created through the suturing of words.

Fraser Muggeridge examines the relationship between 'torn' and 'cut' typography: the first results in a ragged right-hand margin, whereas in the second the spacing between words or letters is adjusted to create a uniform straight right-hand edge. Muggeridge explores an experimental hybrid of the two, developed in the work of typographer Herbert Bayer. Yet the distinctive and unconventional typographic textures Bayer created can only be achieved through manual intervention, and cannot be replicated today through automated processes.

Also concerned with typography, cuts and tears is 'The End of the Line, the Beginning of the Novel' by the Rosetta collective (Eva Moulaert, Anneleen Masschelein, and Willem Styfhals). Imagined as a fragment torn from a novel, it responds to another text – *This Little Art* by Kate Briggs – reflecting on cuts and tears in the text, more specifically hyphens, widows and orphans, both in form and in content.

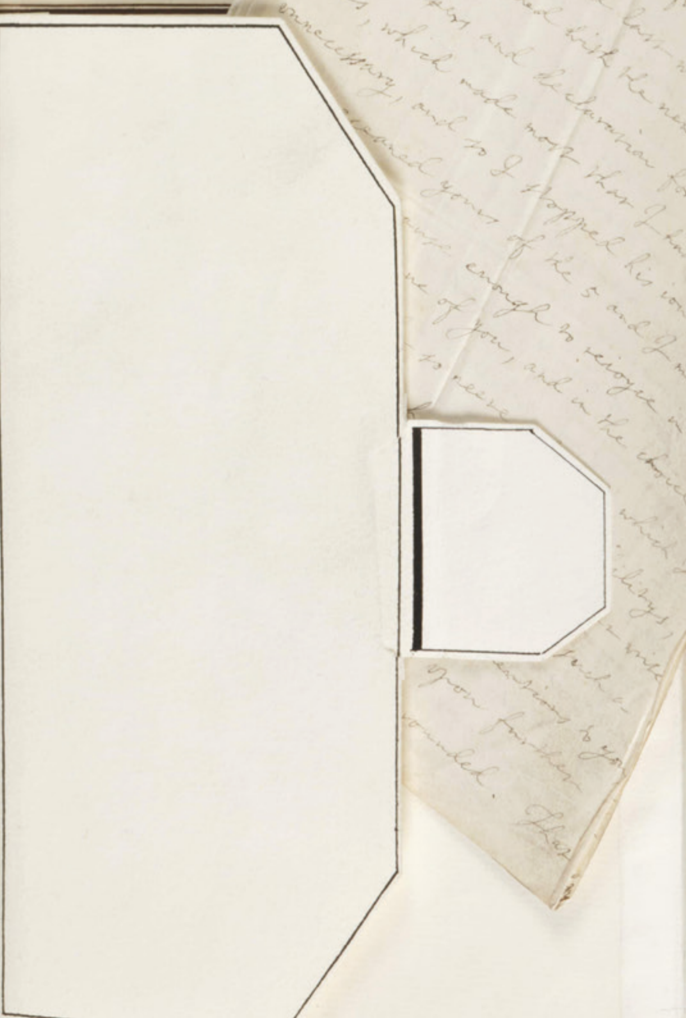
Eleanor Barker focuses on J.L Carr's *Chaucer Pocketbook*, a work which does not involve cutting in the literal sense, but instead generates a 'collagistic' sense of Chaucer and his world. It reflects the already fragmentary nature of Chaucer's 'The Reeve's Tale', and explores late medieval English culture by drawing attention to Chaucer's kaleidoscopic range of visual and textual references.

Meanwhile, Eric Robertson's 'Tearing Up: Artists' Radical Uses of Paper' draws together a tradition of avant-garde tear-erists, comparing the 'rip drawings' of Sol LeWitt, the aleatory *papiers déchirés* of Jean Arp, and the torn-poster works of Jacques Villeglé. These various approaches preserve the tension between the destructive, counter-cultural gesture of tearing something up and the urge to recycle and re-use.

That tension is also alive in Reanna Brooks' exploration of Virginia Woolf's bookcraft techniques – Woolf made copious use of scissors, knives and tearing. Trained in the craft of binding, she nevertheless adopted unconventional approaches which mingled insides and outsides, merged the bodies of books together, and subverted the ideals of aesthetic beauty and precision. This maverick bookbinding, Brooks argues, has less in common with tradition and the conventions of the time, and more with contemporary book arts.

Dennis Duncan interviews the artist Kabe Wilson, whose work involves a kind of writing by collage, cutting and rearranging existing works, entering into a dialogue with their authors. He talks about his latest 'literary installation', *Copywrong*, a project which involves cutting out every tenth word from a Graham Greene novel, and switching another in to replace it, without disrupting the plot.

'The Extinctions Bureau' by Angela Szczepaniak also cuts out and edits existing texts – this time comic books. Szczepaniak's pieces in this issue are extracted from a longer series of detective comics-collages that follow an upstart clothing moth-turned-detective as she tracks the elusive Nylon Killer whose weapon of choice is poisonous synthetic fibres. The cubes are flattened out but scaled to be functional (you can cut each one out and fold the tabs to make a 3D cube).



Anthony, Count Hamilton, *Mémoires du comte de Grammont* (London, 1794). 'Grangerized' by Richard Bull. Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens (284000).

These articles show how the cut can be a productive thing, a way of making something that was not there before, an act that turns the singular into the plural. Our artists begin with a similar sense of the potential of the cut or tear. To produce *When News Hit Shore*, Dave Beech cut photographs from books found in charity shops and second-hand bookshops, creating a montage that is, as a product of these formerly-owned books, a kind of portrait of a community. Erica Baum's 'Crops as Cuts' – which the artist describes as a 'deadpan foray', and an 'appreciation' – uses slicing and cutting to make a pun: these are crops (as in cuts) of crops (as in harvests). The images come from old seed catalogues, and two of the crops are cut price (the Giant Dahlia Garden is slashed by 26%). David Bellingham has torn 500 pieces of paper – one for each copy of this edition of *Inscription* – an apparent gesture of cancellation that turns one object into two. In the case in Lucio Fontana's *Spatial Concept, Waiting*, the cut is a minimal but decisive statement in itself. We can see that a canvas has been sliced with a single stroke using a sharp blade. It's one of a number of gestural works Fontana made in Milan between 1958 and 1968. As he explained in an interview: 'my discovery was the hole and that's it. I am happy to go to the grave after such a discovery.'

Cuts through paper can be cuts through time. Our cover is the work of Abigail Reynolds, and comes from her *Universal Now* series. Searching through old books for images of the same space, she then splices together the different photographs, blending a sense of constancy of location and a movement through time – Reynolds has described these works as 'three-dimensional time ruffles'. We are in one place, but at different moments, and the meticulous slicing and collaging is a way to create that effect. Cuts can also release meanings that exceed our grasp. Joe Gilmore, Simon Morris, Tom Rodgers and Patrick Wildgust have collaborated to produce a work that explores what it means to read Raymond Queneau's *100 million million poems* (1961). Queneau's book is about the literary richness of slicing up the page. Ten sonnets are printed on card with each line on a separate strip, as if the page has been cut; the lines can be combined to produce 10^{14} sonnets – which means 100,000,000,000,000 different poems – which means a work that can never be read in its entirety.

There's a particular potency to cutting up – or tearing into – the canonical texts that pulse at the centre of our culture, and two of our artists' editions tackle this head on. Jo Hamill's *Gutter Words* was produced by the artist typing out the entirety of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and then cutting away every word except those closest to the gutter. What remains is a radically thinned text: 25,071 words from an original 264,448; a novella, cut out from (and formerly lurking inside) the vast body of Joyce's novel. And, in *The Aleatory Moment*, from his 2003 project *The Royal Road to the Unconscious*, Simon Morris slices up Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*. Morris separated all 223,464 of the words from Freud's bible of psychoanalysis and threw them from the window of a Renault Clio Sport travelling at 90mph, leaving them to rearrange themselves on the road. The photograph taken by Italian photojournalist Maurizio Cogliandro captures the moment of their vehicular defenestration.

With the poet and artist Stephen Emmerson we've cut a record all about textual cuts. *Holes* (7 inch, 45RPM) is a reading of poetry based around the practice of placing templates over pages, and reading the words and word-fragments that remain legible. This is the use of obstruction, or a cutting away, to reveal new texts: a revealing, or lifting out, of latencies. 'Wormholes' uses a template based on the holes found in old books, gnawed away by literal book-worms; 'Cover-ups' uses acetate sheets with black shapes.

There's a pun lurking in one of our key words. Do we mean tears (as in cuts) or tears (as in sadness)? Carolyn Thompson's *Tearjerker* is made from words and phrases, all of which refer to crying, cut from 30 literary works Thompson read since Brexit. In *Agony 1*, Steven Zultanski tells us he has thus far in his life produced 1,373.034 cubic inches of tears. Bas Jan Ader's face is on page 89 of this issue: he is crying, but we don't know why (the piece is called *I'm too sad to tell you*). The image has been excised (or cut) from a now-lost film from 1970. Sometimes a 'tear' can carry two meanings at the same time. It can cut both ways, as Nick Thurston shows. His *Rips and Floods* is an abbreviated quotation from a William Blake poem 'The Grey Monk' ('For a Tear is an intellectual Thing'), the words torn horizontally in two.

So, grab some scissors and enjoy this issue of *Inscri*

Overleaf

Left: Hannah Höch, 'Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschland' (1919–1920). Photomontage and collage with watercolor (114 × 90 cm)

Right: Sheet of cut-out dolls (circa 1932). Edgar Parin and Ingri D'Aulaire Papers.

dada
Komm
Die anti
dada istische
Bewegung
dada siegt!
He, he, Sie junger Mann
Dada ist keine Kunstrichtung
Die große
dada
Tretet dada bei.
DADA i Sten
Siri