

Mature Poets Steal:
a novel, *Notes to Self*, and an extended essay on that work

By James Horrocks
School of English, Faculty of the Arts, Drama and Media
Birmingham City University

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Abstract

This thesis consists of a novel, *Notes to Self*, and an extended essay examining the composition of that work, its processes and contexts. *Notes to Self* is the fictional autobiography of my pseudonym, Ted Bonham. It has been assembled from textual fragments of differing lengths, including many that derive from found texts from both literary and non-literary sources. These fragments are written in a diverse range of styles and set in a variety of geographical locations and historical periods, from Neanderthal tribe story to contemporary lab report and from nineteenth century novel to amateur internet polemic. Taken together, these disparate textual fragments reveal Ted's life story. The narrative tells this story approximately chronologically, but within this broad structure fragments are also organised by associative and thematic principles more often discussed in relation to poetry or visual collage.

The essay examines the assemblage composition of *Notes to Self* and its use of the fragment as a unit of composition. It uses analogies to collage and montage to extend critical discourse around the assemblage-text, helping to provide both a vocabulary for practitioners to discuss their work and the theoretical basis to defend it. It also examines how *Notes to Self*, as the notional autobiography of my pseudonym Ted Bonham, addresses themes of identity and self-narrative and how its fragmentary structure creatively explores and represents our experiences of consciousness and how we construct our narratives of selfhood. In doing so, it seeks to examine how we can make use of assemblage compositions to create new prose work, what these prose works might look like and how these methods can be contextualised and articulated.

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Finally, my thanks to all those whose words I have appropriated. No one ever said it better.

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Notes to Self

By Ted Bonham

[Please note, most of the novel text has been redacted in this version, whilst I seek a route to publication for my creative work. I have included the prologue as an example of the compositional techniques used throughout the text and the endnotes are complete.]

Endnotes referencing the source texts for individual fragments can be found in the appendix. These have been included for academic rigour in the context of this thesis and do not reflect my intentions for displaying the novel in other contexts.

This is the autobiography of one who never existed — *Fernando Pessoa*¹

We live in the mind, in ideas, in fragments — *Henry Valentine Miller*²

MOTHERFUCKER!

#

I intended to start with something visceral, something human and real—the slime, the red, brown, black, the pain of something to shock—to wake you the fuck up, dear reader, leave nail marks in the back of your hands—

#

But time, scientists tell us, existed even before the twinkle in your father's eye.

#

From Tiny Acorns is the first caper Guildmaster Darren Lightfinger will assign to a player who has completed the Buyers and Cellars quest. Capers are the cooked and pickled flower bud of a bramble-like southern European shrub, used to flavour food.³

#

I should also mention Tristram somewhere near the start—only I was never any good at sex. Writing it. I could never delay things in such stern fashion.

#

Motherfucker.

#

Remember the exercises we did in class. At the start of each contraction take a long, deep breath. This will help to relax you, sharpen your focus and provide more oxygen for your baby, your muscles and your uterus.⁴

#

At five o'clock the noise of an opening door wakened him. He squinted into the ghosts of the room; my dear mother was not in bed next to him. But the bathroom light buzzed with a low hum, and he heard her steps.

“What's the matter?” asked he, still only half awake. “Mother of my kittens, what is it?”

“Nothing,” answered she, as is, my father would say, a woman’s wont, reappearing at the bathroom door, flickeringly lit in that pale way peculiar to bathrooms, and smiling at him with flushed cheeks and a significant smile—

a look that flashes him back to the moment of conception. Or a possible one at any rate. Her part open mouth as she peered over her shoulder, wide eyes full of pupils, those same flushed cheeks.⁵

#

Mathematical descriptions of birth-death-movement processes—the rhythmicity of brass pendulums that always appear so perfect under laboratory conditions—are often calibrated to measurements from cell biology experiments, tiny half-mades which consist only of the first introduction of chaos to reality (when not lost to a quantity of tissue). Here we describe and describe and describe, as if in such descriptions can be found some essence of the thing, of the life lived, of the imagined human existing. Here we analyse an indiscreet model of a birth–death–movement process applied to a typical two-dimensional cell biology experiment. We present a failed infinity of different descriptions of the system: (i) a standard meaningless description which neglects just about everything; (ii) a moment by moment description which affects a poor approximation; and (iii) averaged data from repeated discrete simulations which stimulates directly but incorporates no real feeling; (iv, v & vi) variations on the above; (vii and upwards) impossible to enumerate. Comparing these descriptions indicates that the meaninglessness and the moments missed are valid only for tiny boxes, and that all descriptions fail to make accurate predictions of the system for high velocity living where the effects of spatial distortions and hallucinogenic outbursts are sufficiently strong. Without any method to distinguish between realities where these

descriptions are valid—which is really none—it is possible that either the meaningless or moments passing model could be calibrated to experimental data under inappropriate conditions, leading to—well to a complete nonsense, basically. In this work we demonstrate that a simple collage of texts, based on uncoordinated grammatic data, provides an indirect measure of an approximation to what could be considered a life just arriving and can therefore be used to make a distinction between the validity of the different descriptions of the birth-death-movement process.⁶

#

Traffic jams, headaches, constipation, household chores, children's parties, belly laughs, cigar smoking and deep sea diving all provide excellent opportunities to practice different breathing techniques whether you're pregnant or not. To simulate labour, some child birth educators suggest passing a melon through your vaginal canal whilst exhaling.⁷

#

She has been practically cave-bound for one full swell and eat of moon—

Man good but man not know. Man not know back ache and sick come morning and ankles—why ankles big too? Baby not in ankles. Man not know. Man not know woman want eat black from fire, secret. Man go. Find food. Man leave alone. Good. Man go, peace. Always hungry. Eat for one and more one, women say. Small person live in belly. Woman not eat person. Women laugh but woman scared. Old women say pain. Maybe much pain. Evolution, say women. Monkey baby easy because monkey no think, small head. Woman baby big head, much make pain but much bring joy. Now this new. Women say. Women say cramps, pain. Woman like Cramps, band with good political message. But no pain, woman no like pain. Man eyes wide. Man good hunter, never scared. Now man scared. But women come. Women know. Better man go make fire. Go make smoke with men. Men no good fear. Man no good pain.

#

The caterpillar digests itself within the chrysalis, enzymes dissolve all its tissues to a soup—we are reminded of the nutritious nature of the placenta—however, the imaginal discs

survive the process, a childhood memory grown, one for each adult body part—*discs for its eyes, for its wings, its legs and so on*. In some species you can see the adult begin to take form in the child's eyes before the chrysalis is made. Some of us walk around with tiny wings tucked inside our bodies, though you'd never know to look at us.

And so, these few childhood dreams use the protein-rich soup all around them to fuel the rapid cell division required to form the wings, antennae, legs, eyes, genitals of us adults. A thousand cells multiplying up to over ten million. And certain muscles, certain sections of the nervous system remain in the adult butterfly. Some even remember what they learnt in the later stages of our caterpillar lives.⁸

#

We find him first in a small room—imagine a speech impediment—an office, perhaps, with little more than a desk to write on and a bookcase to choose from. He is warm, comfortably too warm, drifting slightly—a steam room mind. And words, and words forming, and a conscientious little man, stooped over a small volume of minute text—an imperfect glass magnifier—a hand written indulgence or a fragment of some long dead language on age-worn parchment. The smell of the paraffin—lightheaded—he needs the dim lamp so close for light that he can feel its heat on his face. Small beads of sweat beading on his forehead. Concentrate. Time seems slow here, or separate perhaps—perhaps there is only this little room and this little man and a past to have written and a present to read and dreams yet to be dreamt. It is the dreams, of course—the ones that occur in sleeps such as the one he's fighting now—that ferment all his best ideas.

#

I think my cultural education began in utero. My father would insist on playing Mozart concertos and reading Tolstoy to my mother's belly. My mother played me Frank Zappa and read Bukowski.

#

After all those months, all the classes, the practising of breathing exercises, the choosing of the perfect, neutral, nursery colour scheme and after carrying that ever-increasing weight around with her, the back ache and swelling ankles, morning sickness and having to pee

every three minutes. After not drinking booze for the entire third trimester whilst he sneaks out to the pub again because he doesn't want to drink in front of you, which is sweet of him, maybe, but it pisses you off because you only want him here, to rub your feet or to hear about your day, your long, tiring, nothing of a day, and you wouldn't mind if he wanted a beer whilst he did so, or you would, you're too warm and have been really craving that first cooling beer of the summer, but you wouldn't say so. And after planning and planning and mothers and mother-in-laws and reading all the books and eating the correct things and then fuck it and just eating olives, olives and olives and chocolate ice-cream. After excitement and nervousness and anticipation and terror and boredom and preoccupation—After complete obsession. After all of it, somehow. Somehow the first contraction still takes you by surprise. Your brain shorts and you think it's period pain. Then panic and something must be wrong. Then a breath. And another breath. And the wave passes down through your uterus and you know and you don't know what to feel. But you know.

#

We discussed the benefits of *slow breathing* during the first stages of labour. This technique, if you recall, involves breathing in slowly. And then breathing out slowly. It should be used when the contractions become intense enough that you can no longer continue normal activities such as walking and talking and smoking and tap dancing and making light of very serious matters and roller derby and pausing a moment without pausing. The aim of slow breathing is to keep you relaxed during your contraction, you should switch to a different breathing pattern when it is no longer having this effect.⁹

#

"Fuck! Are we go? Fuck—my keys?" exclaimed he in alarm, and he fell over dragging on his socks.

"No, no," said she, smiling at his naked penis; "I'm fine; I'm fine; I'm fine."

"You're confident for a fat lass," said he, and heaved himself up off the floor with that smile he always has when he's told a joke. Studiously ignoring him in an indulgently amused way, she got back into bed, put out the light, and lay down again, keeping perfectly still, but with a conscious stillness, a holding of breath, a near-stiffness mirrored in his appreciation of

her milk-swollen breasts—the intense tenderness he felt towards her and her growing belly having manifested itself in a peculiar eroticism—still, he was so overcome by drowsiness that he immediately went to sleep again.¹⁰

#

And dreamt such things.

#

Diaphragm, liver, stomach, pancreas, transverse colon, small intestine, fundus of uterus, uterus, umbilical cord, placenta, cervical (mucus) plug in cervical canal, external os, urinary bladder, pubic symphysis, rectum, urethra, vagina, & everything else.¹¹

#

When you no longer feel that slow breathing is having the intended effect you may want to switch to *light breathing*. You should make the decision to switch to this breathing technique based on the intensity of your contractions. During *light breathing* you are technically photosynthesising.¹²

#

Afterwards, perhaps he would marvel at the serenity of her surface, and make reparations for all that was passing in her doe-gentle heart as she lay thus, eyes-wide and motionless near him, counting, awaiting the most violent moment of a woman's life.

As the digits flashed to 07:00 he was awakened by her hand touching his shoulder and her soft

“Master of my loins, darling, I think.... perhaps you better find your car keys now.”

He leaned over and clicked on the bedside light. She was sitting on the bed, holding the tiny misshapen jumper which they had taken turns at knitting over the last few weeks.

“Don’t panic my love, they’re still minutes apart,” said she, seeing the panic in my dear father’s eyes; and she pressed his hand to her breast, then to her lips.

Dad leapt from their bed, and, only semi-conscious of his naked self, without taking his eyes off my radiant mother for a moment, hurried on his dressing-gown. As much as he would pay for the love of her face, well as he knew her expression, her eyes, her every blemish and tic, yet never before had he seen her look as she did at that very moment. How

ignoble did his own self now seem as he saw her flushed face, blood to the surface, with the night's moisture plastering stray strands of her fringe to her forehead, her self radiant with an inner something and resolution.¹³

#

I hadn't the vocabulary at the time to understand what was going on, to articulate to myself the comparisons I didn't know to make. My font of similes would anyway have been very limited. I imagine it must have been traumatic, but I am not certain—the new-born requires a smack on its little bottom to begin crying—it would certainly have been strange, all this new movement. Did I feel an urge to change the direction I faced, to enter the world head first? Was it a part of the organic chemical synergy I shared with my dear mother? Did I realise that never again would the world be so simple?

#

If you become overwhelmed or are unable to relax you should move to the *variable breathing* variation on light breathing. You will remember this technique from the “hee-hee-haw” breathing exercises we practised. Simply close your eyes and imagine you are an asthmatic Eeyore after a long run.¹⁴

#

Natural and simple as my mother's character never was, father was amazed by the unfolding origami swan before him now when suddenly the possibilities of an empty page were drawn and the very substance of her eyes shone in her eyes. And in this complex of lens and iris, pupil and other technical parts he didn't know the terms for, a revelation, she, her very selves, whom he loved and loved, was more apparent than ever. She looked at him in a way she sometimes did, and smiled. But suddenly the muscles in her face stiffened, a distance passed over her eyes, she reached out for his hand, her grip preternaturally strong, and he could see the physical pain somewhere behind those eyes. He wanted to take that pain from her, to take it inside himself, and yet she seemed to accept it and pity him for his wish. At first it seemed to him that he was to blame for it. But as it passed the tenderness of her look, the very fragility almost, let him know that she did not blame him, it seemed in fact that she had never looked as if she loved him more.

Still his instinct was to assign blame, “if not I, who then?” he asked himself. She seemed to take pride in her pain, and to rejoice in it. Pain, which to him had always been a thing to suppress, to defeat, now seemed the source of some wondrous transformation; he remembered the scars on my mother’s arms, he could not understand. It was beyond his comprehension.

“I’ll call my mum, you get the things together,” said she, dragging him back from himself.¹⁵

#

With this being your first batch please follow this step by step guide carefully.¹⁶

#

There will be times throughout your labour when you will want to push or bear down before the right time. Many women will feel they want to hold their breath during these moments. Remember bears are not welcome and oxygen is necessary. We practised avoiding this urge by raising our chins and blowing and panting and gasping and puffing and wheezing and gulping and heaving repeatedly.¹⁷

#

Be sure to clean all equipment thoroughly with warm water and washing up liquid, and rinse well with clean water. It is important that everything is clean.¹⁸

#

It seemed to my father that he had been in a state of stasis ever since discovering the twinkle in his eye had detached to grow a whole new life. He had, at that time, made up his mind not to indulge in anxious thought, or forebodings, suppressing all his anxieties and troubled feelings, firmly, presenting only a capable and happy face to his wife, at all times supporting and calming her and sustaining her courage. The bags beneath his eyes belied that such exertions had taken their toll on him, but he had survived so far and was now not allowing himself to even think of what was coming or how it might end. These last few hours though, seemed to stretch out into an eternity. He steeled himself to have patience and hold his heart in his hands for the few hours he adjudged, by answers to his questions, it generally lasted, and this seemed to him at the very limit of possibility. But when he returned after his

third un-needed visit to the facilities, and found my dear mother still suffering, his facade cracked slightly and he was heard to mutter more and more frequently, like a repentant peasant stealing to feed his family, “Lord, forgive us, and be merciful!” and he was afraid that he could not endure it, and it seemed to him more to endure even than my mother, and perhaps it really was, so terrible was it to him to see her suffer—thus half an hour went by.¹⁹

#

What do contractions feel like to the foetus, the near new-born? How socially manufactured is fear, is there fear in utero? I can see no evolutionary benefit to being afraid of birth, but fear of the new, of the different, is well documented. What level, what complexity or refinement of consciousness is required to experience such a fear? Rather, does the baby perhaps thrill at this new sensation, this new world opening to its still-developing senses?

#

And after this another hour. And another. He tried to break them up into just about manageable, ten minute ordeals. Tried not to count the ordeals. But the hours were spun out to the very limit of his endurance; and the situation was still the same, each minute resembling the last. And still he was enduring the suspense. And sometimes his brain was empty except for that. Sometimes there was only the suspense and he no longer remembered the world, or the child, he only had the waiting whilst his brain caught up, and there was nothing else to do except endure, thinking every moment that he had reached the last limit and that his heart or his head or something would give. But still the minutes slowly strung themselves out into hours and his feelings of agony and fear seemed unendurable because fuck, anything could happen, fuck, why had she not asked for him again? The feelings of dread growing worse until it feels as if his thoughts might bring the dreaded about, but everything will be okay because everything must be okay.²⁰

#

During the second stage of labour it is time to start focusing on getting this damn baby out of me already! The *expulsion breathing* technique should only be employed once your cervix is fully dilated. It helps to hold a positive image in mind, for instance, try focusing on the anti-electron. When you can no longer withstand the urge to push take a big breath, lean

forwards and bear down whilst holding or slowly releasing air. Remember the pelvic floor exercises we practised, it is important to relax your pelvic floor now. You may find grunting, moaning or extended verbalisations such as FUUUUUUCK will help you at this point.²¹

#

In a sense, galaxy formation is like star formation (which we don't understand either).²²

#

MOTHER-THE-FUCKER!—At least that's the way my father tells it.

#

"Drugs!" screamed she. "Give me the fucking epidural."

#

"Everything must be OK," he mutters as he paces. Nobody in the waiting room notices the odd socks revealed with each knee rise as he strides from left to right to left to right. He has no idea what to do with his hands. When he looks at them they seem like foreign objects.

#

It is the lamb who decides when it is time to be born.²³

#

MOTHERFUCKER!

#

From earliest historical times a king, queen, or chieftain was inaugurated by some public ceremony; the sovereign might be raised upon a shield, presented with a spear, or invested with a distinctive robe or headdress. When Europe became Christianised in the Middle Ages, some of these older customs were grafted onto a religious service derived from Old Testament descriptions of the anointing and crowning of Saul and other Israelite kings.²⁴

#

"While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son." Luke 2:6-7²⁵

#

These days of course you can see the crowning of a baby on prime-time TV. I can only assume my own birth looked something like that.

#

Eventually the world would become less horrifying for me, but this was far from the last slap I'd ever feel. Indeed, in later life there'd be many occasions where I'd come to enjoy a good bit of slap and tickle.

#

She is handed the small pink, red, purple creature—that's me—still slimy in white vernix. And her face, her face is the most beautiful dad has ever seen her. His heart, his whole chest filling with the same joy that rushes into her, like heroin, soft and golden warm and complete. A single boy chorister sounds a perfect round note.

#

The great cigar makers of the world can be compared to the diligent distillers of malt whiskys, the vintners of fine wines, the snooty olive oil producers of Italy or the makers of delicious cheeses of all sorts. However, the art of cigar-smoking itself has gone somewhat out of vogue of late. The pipe is in the ascendant, which is perhaps no bad thing. There is a certain pleasure to be had in the ritual packing of the bowl and twice lighting of the tobacco—those drawn-out preparations reminiscent of the old ritual of making tea. But there are occasions at which a pipe or, heaven forbid, a cigarette, even a cigarillo, will simply not do. Of all the smoking apparatus available, the cigar seems to me the most celebratory.

As an irregular cigar smoker, you may well have wondered what all the fuss is about. But cigar smoking is a learnt activity at which one can always improve. An expression of refinement, with its own self-sustaining world of connoisseurs, opinions, styles, and products, inaccessible and pretentious to outsiders, repugnant to those overly concerned with hygiene. It is a multi-layered and multi-dimensional world that the amateur observer, no matter how curious or intuitive of mind, simply won't understand.

One must always consider the quality of the cigar. These are more than mere fist-fulls of tobacco wrapped in a brown-coloured leaf. Cigars are crafted with care in a variety of locales and styles, from machine-rolled Coronas to Doble Torros rolled on the expert thighs of Cuban Mamacitas. Cigars command a certain aristocratic respect. A person sees a man, because it is usually a man, smoking a cigar, and the observer will instantly experience a

slight sensation of inferiority. The man with the cigar is proud. He is making a statement: "I am smoking this cigar," he says. "I know its smell is pungent, I know its ash is considerable and requires accommodation, I know I will bear the residue of this cigar long after I have finished smoking it, as will the place I have chosen in which to do so. I know some people find it abhorrent. I know this. But I've decided to smoke it anyway. And you know what? This cigar is already lit. So the rest of you will just have to deal with it."²⁶

<<<<>>>>

[The rest of the novel text has been redacted in this version.]

I saw only too well where, in the best of cases, all this might well lead. To a book? Certainly not. Rather to a kind of painstaking montage made up of composed pieces and borrowed fragments.

Marcel Bénabou

1. Introduction

a. Addressing the Research Problem

Haseman contends that creative practice research differs from traditional problem-led research in that it is motivated not by a problem but by ‘an enthusiasm of practice’.¹ As practitioners, we place an emphasis on the art that we create — the ‘novelist asserts the primacy of the novel’.² I propose to align myself with Haseman, prioritising my practice and the production of an aesthetically interesting artefact as a research outcome.

Such priorities have implications for the researcher when framing her research questions. Barrett acknowledges that the approaches of practitioner-researchers ‘often contradict what is generally expected of research’: she believes that ‘studio-based’ researchers shouldn’t attempt to ‘contort aims, objectives and outcomes to satisfy criteria set for more established models of research’ because ‘innovation [in this context] is derived from methods that cannot always be pre-determined, and “outcomes” of artistic research are necessarily unpredictable’.³ This unpredictability means that it is difficult for the practitioner-researcher to fully define her problem, in terms of the outcomes she is seeking, until she engages with the practice itself.

Accepting this limitation, articulating a research problem nevertheless helps the researcher to initially direct and focus her research or, in Nelson’s words, to ‘mark the

1 Bradley C. Haseman, ‘A Manifesto for Performative Research’, *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy: Quarterly Journal of Media Research and Resources*, no. 118 (2006), 98 - 106: 100.

2 Ibid., 4.

3 Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 3.

proposed line of flight at the research liftoff'.⁴ Having a research problem to return to can also help refocus research as the project develops. Finally, framing the completed thesis as a response to a research problem helps the researcher clarify the results of their research both to themselves and to reader of their work.

When asked about my doctoral project soon after beginning my research, I described it as 'an investigation into the literary fragment and its possible uses in order to answer the question: How can the literary fragment be used to investigate the modern world and authentically reflect/ originate new perspectives on our experience of it?'⁵ This research question dictated the main focus of my early reading, which was largely around the theory of the literary fragment, and provided a basis for the experimental ethos with which I approached the composition of the novel. However, it is not quite the question that this thesis ultimately answers.

Nelson recognises that 'as the research progresses, the direction might shift and perhaps become more focused in the process'. He points out that 'this holds for research conducted by all methodologies in all disciplines', although it is perhaps most prevalent in creative practice.⁶ It is my contention that in practice-led research, or at least for this specific research project, the original research problem ought to be considered as a tool by the practitioner-researcher — there to be drawn on when it is useful but altered or discarded if it unnecessarily restricts or adversely effects the artefact being created. Practitioners should be open to new avenues and directions that arise in their practice and not too tightly confined by the research problem as first formulated. It is therefore possible, even probable, that the problem articulated at the beginning of the process will not still be accurate in defining the research at the point of final submission.

The focus of my research has shifted over the course of producing *NS* to centre more explicitly on the fragmentary composition of the novel rather than primarily on the fragment

4 Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 30.

5 James Horrocks, 'PhD Proposal - Completed as Part of Postgraduate Certificate in Research', 23 January 2014 (unpublished).

6 Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*, 30.

itself. Ultimately then, this thesis is an investigation into composing a novel using assemblage techniques that explores the following research questions: How can we make use of assemblage compositions to create new prose works; what might these prose works look like; and how can these methods be contextualised and articulated? *NS* is itself an example of one such composition, whilst the new insights resulting from its development have enabled me to discuss the capabilities of assemblage texts. Additionally, this essay offers a defence of the assemblage and appropriation practices employed in *NS*, primarily through analogy with curation, collage and montage, and examines how the themes of identity and self-narrative are addressed by the novel.

b. Context

The word ‘novel’ can refer both to a long fictional prose narrative and to something new — a novelty. Novelty and newness are at the heart of novel-writing and I see my own work as part of a long experimental tradition. A key early text for this tradition, and for my personal engagement with the form, is Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*.⁷ Written in the mid-eighteenth century, *Tristram Shandy* is considered one of the first modern novels in the English language, yet it is also often cited as an early example of postmodernism thanks to its multiple digressions, playful appropriations of earlier texts, and refusal to get to the plot. In the centuries since *Tristram Shandy*, the novel has morphed to become a form that is defined as much by its diversity as through its shared features. Over time it has expanded to encompass picaresques, epistolary Gothic, bildungsroman, romances, genre fiction of all sorts, and even its own antithesis, the anti-novel. Key to my own creative development have been several writers from the modernist and postmodern traditions of the twentieth century. Particular influences include the linguistic innovations of James Joyce; the meta-literary play of Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino; the constraint-based experimentation of the Oulipo group of writers (in particular Georges Perec); and the

⁷ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–1767; London: Penguin English Library, 2012).

appropriative practices of Kathy Acker.⁸ Today's broad literary market can still reward authors with a penchant for experimentation and I am also inspired by the success of major contemporary figures such as Ben Lerner, Tom McCarthy and Will Self.

My own identification with the experimental tradition stems from the motivations behind my writing. Many writers primarily identify as storytellers working within a written medium, but for me the medium and the act of writing itself are amongst the most engaging aspects of the craft. I am more interested in experimenting with techniques and creating new effects than telling a story *per se*. According to Bray *et al.*, the common thread that runs through experimental literature is a willingness to ask 'fundamental questions about the very nature and being of verbal art itself. What *is* literature, and what could it be? What are its functions, its limitations, its possibilities?'⁹ I believe it is essential for creative writing practitioner-researchers to pursue these sorts of questions and I aim to do so through my use of assemblage principles in the composition of *NS*.

*

I decided to apply for a doctorate whilst I was completing an earlier novel, *Drawing Hands*, begun for my Writing MA at Birmingham City University. *Drawing Hands* alternates between two narrators, each writing about the other. The narrative begins to fragment as their mutually dependent story-worlds become increasingly entangled. The broken up nature of *Drawing Hands* allowed me to experiment with different ideas and techniques, but to restrict these experiments to short sections of text. This helped me to prevent what was an occasionally challenging reading experience from becoming too overwhelming, both for the reader and for me as the writer.

My experience working on *Drawing Hands* influenced my decision to make use of the fragment within my doctoral project. Whilst *Drawing Hands* had made use of fragmentation within a traditional chapter structure, my new novel would take the fragment as its basic unit and do away with chapters altogether. Such a project would allow me to investigate more

⁸ The Oulipo (*Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*) are a group of writers and mathematicians interested in developing new methods for creating texts based on mathematical practices.

⁹ Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, and Brian McHale, *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature* (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 1.

thoroughly how the fragmentary mode could be employed by prose writers without the safeguard of a more traditional chapter framework. *NS* also represents a conscious decision to set a work over a longer timescale. *Drawing Hands* was set over the course of a single week and several of my earlier prose works were also set over restricted time periods, ranging from between the length of an advertising break to several weeks in length. *NS*, by contrast, covers the entire life-span of its protagonist and many of its fragments are ostensibly set at different points in history spanning thousands of years. This was a creative decision taken with the intention of pushing myself out of my comfort zone. The nature of doctoral study made taking such a risk seem like it could prove fruitful.

I began to clarify and articulate the concept of this fragmentary novel for my initial research proposal in early 2013.¹⁰ Its working title, *Show You/r/e Working*, alluded to a dictum that was often used by my maths teachers at school in response to a habit I had of skipping steps when writing down my calculations. My use of it reflected an interest I have in revealing elements of the construction of texts within the texts themselves and letting the reader see some of the work that goes into them. At the time of my initial proposal the fragmentary nature of the novel was closely connected to my intention to present an apparent novel-in-progress as a complete work. I planned on including fragments of the sorts of text that are created when writing a novel, including fragments from the writer's source materials, writing journal and notes on the developing novel. Similar meta-narrative elements remain in the novel as it is today. These include multiple versions of the same chapter presented one after the other; fragments that appear to be placeholders for as yet unwritten text; repeated fragments or fragments repeated in slightly altered states; and fragments referring implicitly or explicitly to other fragments or discussing the progress of the novel. The cumulative effect of such elements is to draw the reader's attention to the construction of the novel, and in reflecting on its own construction the text asks the reader to consider the construction of our self-narratives more generally.

10 James Horrocks, 'Initial PhD Research Proposal to Birmingham City University', February 2013 (unpublished).

The subject of *NS* was influenced early on by Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*.¹¹ Woolf's eponymous protagonist lives a life that spans some 300 years, from Elizabethan times into the twentieth century. I decided that my protagonist would also exist across more than a single lifetime but, unlike Orlando, he would not have a preternaturally long life-span. Instead, the novel I was beginning work on would tell 'the life story of a single divided/repeated protagonist' with fragments 'set in various historical periods'.¹² Whilst the biography of the protagonist is presented in an approximately linear fashion, the fragments making up this biography jump back and forth between multiple historic eras and across geographical locations.

There is often no attempt made to rationalise these moves; they do not occur in a historically linear fashion, as in *Orlando*, and many of the geographical leaps are not linked by explicit journeys, unlike, for instance, Anaïs Nin's wide ranging protagonist Renate in *Collages*.¹³ There are several ways to interpret the text that results. The fragments can be read as coming from the many lives that the protagonist has actually lived, for example, or as having been brought together as representative of a single life. Such ambiguities are intended to engage the reader further with the novel, increasing their responsibility for interpretation of the material.

As work on the novel continued, the notion of 'divided/ repeated protagonist' was formalised into the concept of a 'polytagonist'. The term 'polytagonist' is my own neologism combining the traditional 'protagonist' with the prefix 'poly' meaning many. It is intended to capture something of the plurality of a subject who is broken up amongst the fragments of the novel. I unpick the concept of the polytagonist and its connection to ideas from psychology regarding the plurality of self in section 4b below.

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The fragmentary composition of *NS* places it in a long history of the literary fragment, from the reconstituted remains of ancient epics to the multiple perspectives prevalent in

11 Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, ed. Rachel Bowlby (1928; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

12 Horrocks, 'Initial PhD Research Proposal to Birmingham City University'.

13 Anaïs Nin, *Collages* (1964; London: Virago, 1993).

postmodern thought. The Romantics have become known as the modern originators of the fragment as a form, or mode, deployed by writers and of interest to theorists. From the mid-eighteenth century onward, writers have made use of the fragmentary mode for a variety of reasons, from depicting the romantic ruin to lending authenticity to their forgeries, and from opening the novel to a plurality of voices to representing the many voices of a single human consciousness. David Shields' recent *Reality Hunger* provides a manifesto for a new kind of writing drawing on collage and remix culture.¹⁴ It articulates a set of methodological and conceptual ideas that drive a new literary movement making use of the fragmentary mode to find ways of representing and exploring contemporary life. This provided a key starting point for theorising about my own work.

NS has been particularly influenced by the fragmentary writing of the last few decades. I had an interest in the work of William Burroughs, for example, long before beginning work on this current project. Burroughs developed his 'cut-up' technique in novels such as *Naked Lunch* and *The Nova Trilogy*, believing that such fragmentary works necessitated a more active collaboration with the reader.¹⁵ Rona Cran describes such compositions 'as both an assault on the reader or viewer and an invitation to participate in the artwork or text's plastic or conceptual processes. Either way, it is an invitation to engage, rather than to look or to read in passivity'.¹⁶ This capacity of the fragmentary work to engage and provoke the reader into further thought is something I took from Burroughs' work and which I seek to develop in my own.

14 David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2011).

15 William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, ed. James Grauerholz, Barry Miles, and J. G. Ballard (1959; London: Fourth Estate, 2010); William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*, ed. Oliver Harris (1961; London: Penguin books, 2014); William S Burroughs, *Nova Express*, ed. Oliver Harris (1964; London: Penguin books, 2014); William S Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded*, ed. Oliver Harris (1967; London: Penguin books, 2014).

16 Rona Cran, *Collage in Twentieth-Century Art, Literature and Culture: Joseph Cornell, William Burroughs, Frank O'Hara, and Bob Dylan* (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 224.

Drawing on the work of Burroughs, Kathy Acker developed the cut-up technique into what Edwin Robinson describes as a 'cut-and-paste' technique.¹⁷ Acker incorporated a wide range of found material into her collage-like novels *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula* by *The Black Tarantula*, *The Adult Life of Toulouse Lautrec* by *Henri Toulouse Lautrec* and *Blood and Guts in Highschool*.¹⁸ The arrangement of texts from various sources in these novels bears a strong compositional similarity with the use of fragments in *NS*.

Recent examples of fragmented novels have used the form to explore the difficulty of creating a novel. David Markson's later novels *Reader's Block* and *This is Not a Novel* also combine a collage-like composition with a significant amount of appropriation.¹⁹ *Reader's Block*, we are told, comes 'avec exactly 333 interspersed unattributed quotations awaiting annotation'.²⁰ These appropriations sit alongside fragments from an author-narrator who questions the very novel he is attempting to create. There are similarities here with the novel I initially intended to create, a novel of notes and thoughts about what it might be. In Markson's case this is taken to an extreme, with a very limited narrative only revealed through a series of alternative plot suggestions that the author poses to himself. The failure to decide about where the novel should be set results in two parallel stories unfolding, with the same protagonist in each: a predecessor to Ted Bonham's multiple existence across many fragments.

Similarly to Markson, poet Bhanu Kapil's *Ban en Banlieue* uses the fragmentary mode to explore her failure to write a novel.²¹ In her case the struggle arose from attempting to encompass difficult themes of protest, racism and both sexual and state-sanctioned violence. The fragment can offer a way of approaching subjects that cannot be articulated directly

17 Edward S. Robinson, 'Kathy Acker: Plagiarism and Adaptation – From Cut-Up to Cut-and-Paste', in *Shift Linguals: Cut-Up Narratives from William S. Burroughs to the Present* (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2011), 151 – 197: 151.

18 Kathy Acker, *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula* (New York: TVRT Press, 1978); Kathy Acker, *The Adult Life of Toulouse Lautrec* (New York: TVRT Press, 1978); Kathy Acker, *Blood and Guts in High School, Plus Two*, Picador (London: Pan Books, 1987).

19 David Markson, *Reader's Block* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1996); David Markson, *This Is Not a Novel* (London: CB editions, 2001).

20 Markson, *Reader's Block*, 166.

21 Bhanu Kapil, *Ban En Banlieue*, (New York: Nightboat Books, 2015).

and, in this sense, Kapil's prose poem is in the same tradition as Maurice Blanchot's meditation on the impossibility of writing about the horrors of the Holocaust, *The Writing of the Disaster*.²² Ideas about the self explored in *NS* are perhaps difficult in a less visceral way, but the fragmentary form is essential to my approach towards exploring the subject. It is also a useful frame in which to approach the depiction of Ted's death at the end of the novel.

Markson, Acker and Blanchot are all amongst the writers I have appropriated in the creation of *NS*. Initially, it was my intention to imitate various source texts, or draw on certain themes or stories, but as writing progressed I made the decision to more directly appropriate some of the texts from my research, adapting them to suit the growing novel.

Having returned to Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* as part of my early research, I realised that the tradition of literary appropriation can trace its origins back to the very beginnings of the modern English novel. Sterne's novel has become notorious for its borrowings from other texts, which even include a lightly paraphrased passage on the evils of plagiarism taken from Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.²³ This passage also formed the starting point for my poem, 'An Anatomical Portrait of the Artist Formerly Drunk on Shandy', an example of appropriation practice in my wider creative work.²⁴

This interest in textual appropriation can be traced further back in my practice than I realised. Whilst rereading my teenage notebooks looking for passages that could be cannibalised into *NS*, I came across this description of my writing at the time: 'I am a scavenger. I just have to hope that I'm a good one and find the right or spectacularly wrong new uses for stuff'. More recently my practice has drawn on the translation and transposition techniques of the Oulipo and the collage techniques of 'treated' found

22 Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

23 Wolfgang Iser is amongst the writers who have highlighted the paraphrase in question: Wolfgang Iser, *Laurence Sterne: Tristram Shandy* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 55.

24 James Horrocks, 'An Anatomical portrait of the Artist Formally Drunk on Shandy', *Alone Together: An Anthology*, ed. Vanessa Courtney *et al.* (Birmingham: Birmingham City University, 2015), 39.

poetry.²⁵ Whilst 'untreated' found poetry is created by changing the context a single piece of prose text, writers of treated found poetry draw on the Roman cento tradition, often gathering lines from multiple sources, rearranging and adapting them to create new work. A broad definition of found poetry can also include the likes of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, with its many borrowings and allusions to other texts collaged with Eliot's own words.²⁶ This long poem, with its characteristic switches of register, has been a significant influence on my thinking about *NS*, which can be seen as an attempt to use a compositional strategy similar to Eliot's transposed to a novel-length prose-work. In an oft quoted dictum used in the title of this thesis, Eliot famously claimed that '[i]mmature poets imitate; mature poets steal'. This quotation comes from Eliot's essay on poet Philip Massinger and continues:

bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different than that from which it is torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion. A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest.²⁷

Drawing on this tradition, the appropriative practices employed in *NS* seek to bring together a diverse range of textual fragments to create an entirely new and unique work.

c. Method

The nomenclature around creative-practice research is still being worked out. Within the critical discourse terms such as 'practice-based research', 'practice-led research', 'performative research', 'artistic research', 'practice as research', 'studio-based research',

25 The Oulipo (*Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*) are a group of writers and mathematicians interested in developing new methods for creating texts and potential texts based on mathematical processes and constraints.

26 T. S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land' (1922) in *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002)

27 T. S. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1957), 125.

and ‘research through practice’ are all used with varying degrees of interchangeability. I will follow the AHRC in describing my own work as practice-led research, a term that has gained significant prominence within the UK. Such research, Nelson remarks, ‘involves a research project in which practice is a key method of inquiry’.²⁸ The creative outcome, according to this definition, is a research output, and can therefore be considered part of an original contribution to knowledge. I examine this more closely in subsection 1d, below.

Brown and Sorenson warn the practitioner that she should not assume her practice ‘is in some way equivalent to being a researcher’, but they also advise against the researcher attempting to manufacture practice primarily as support for her research position.²⁹ This they suggest ‘often leads to unconvincing creative outputs where it is difficult to differentiate between a failure of conception or expression’.³⁰ Instead they emphasise the nature of practice-led research as two separate and interrelated tasks. The practice-led researcher

requires capability in both domains. If the researcher is a poor practitioner then any findings of the outcomes may be of questionable cultural value. If the practitioner is a poor researcher then there is unlikely to be any significant elaboration of existing theory.³¹

In prioritising my practice, I am not contending that the creation of an artefact in itself is sufficient to constitute doctoral level research. Rather, I follow Nelson in believing that, at least in my own case, what separates practice-led research from other artistic practice is an engagement with ‘praxis’. Such praxis involves ‘thought within both “theory”

28 Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*, 85.

29 Andrew R. Brown and Andrew Sorenson, ‘Integrating Creative Practice and Research in the Digital Media Arts’, in *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts*, ed. Hazel Smith and R. T. Dean (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 153 – 165: 156.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

and “practice” in an iterative process of “doing-reflecting-reading-articulating-doing”.³²

Theory and practice should feed into and off one another throughout the research process, in what Bolt describes as a ‘double articulation between theory and practice, whereby theory emerges from a reflexive practice at the same time as practice is informed by theory’.³³

The opportunity to engage with theory, reading extensively around the topics broached by my creative practice, was part of the appeal for me of creating a novel as part of a doctoral thesis. Both Smith and Dean and Nelson offer models for practitioner-researchers that attempt to encompass the complexities of research arising from practice and practice arising from research.³⁴ Such models aim to be descriptive rather than prescriptive of a process that needs to allow for and support an ongoing dialogue between research and creative practice. This is a balance that each individual researcher must find for herself, requiring the ability to shift focus as necessary in order to concentrate variously on practice, theoretical research and other academic research or outputs.

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Stephen Spender divided writers into two groups: Beethovians, for whom writing is a process of discovery, and Mozartians, who write to record what they already know they want to say.³⁵ A similar division has sometimes been made between the types of text these two groups tend to produce. Sharon Spencer uses a differentiation between closed and open-structured texts in her discussion of the architectonic novel. She labels closed-structured those novels that provide a single perspective through which the reader views the story world. Such works, she claims, are more likely to be produced by a writer who has a clear idea about what they want to say. Open-structured novels, by contrast, ‘embody multiple perspectives, some of which are actually contradictory, whose purpose is to expose the

32 Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*, 32.

33 Barrett and Bolt, *Practice as Research*, 29.

34 Hazel Smith and R. T. Dean, eds., *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts*, Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*.

35 Stephen Spender, *The Making of a Poem* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955), 48.

subject from as many angles as possible'.³⁶ Such works, Spencer claims, often 'constitute an intellectual exploration undertaken by a novelist who actually is not certain what he believes about the nature of reality'.³⁷ Whilst this stereotyping of the tendencies of open or closed-structured works is perhaps questionable, and it is certainly possible to find a great deal of counter examples to each, I believe it is true that, in the case of *NS* at least, an open-structured work can provide a useful format for a writer to present the working through of her ideas about a subject.

Most writers are likely to exist somewhere in between Spender's Beethovenian and Mozartian extremes. In creating *NS*, my Mozartian tendencies helped me initially with planning several aspects of the novel, including an approximate plot overview, and developing my ideas about the use of fragments. On the other hand, the story was not fully worked out before the writing began. Nor was the pre-existing plot held sacrosanct; rather it was altered as I wrote, either as the text suggested it or when new ideas usurped existing ones. The creation of *NS* was a process of discovery, but it was an expedition that was begun with a map of sorts, a basic plan from which to explore what could be created. The result is an open-structured work, combining multiple voices and perspectives through the gathering together of hundreds of disparate textual fragments.

This process of discovery can also be understood as a series of experiments. In the case of *NS*, as with most creative projects, some of these failed, some were successful, and over time I was able to gradually discover what the novel would be. Such experimentation suggests a possible parallel between creative and practical scientific research. Both research processes involve experimentation as a route to making new discoveries. It is this spirit of experimentation that is likely to uncover the new knowledge required of doctoral research in creative practice. Borgdorff maintains that research design in this context must incorporate 'both experimentation and participation in practice and the interpretation of that practice'.³⁸

36 Sharon Spencer, *Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 52.

37 Ibid.

38 Henk Borgdorff, 'The Debate on Research in the Arts', *Dutch Journal of Music Theory* [Online] 12, no. 11 (2007): 13, Available:

This interest in how a text is produced, not just its final form, is part of what distinguishes creative writing research from literary theory.

The experimental focus of *NS* is around its composition. Working with assemblage texts brings with it a different set of compositional activities from other prose writing methods. Analogies to other artforms, such as collage, are both salient and useful.

Much as in collage-making, the assemblage writer must begin to gather the material she is going to work with before assembly of the work can begin. The material for *NS* was found or created through a combination of serendipity, and directed effort. I came across useful material whilst surfing the web or listening to the radio (I often have BBC Radio 4 on in the background as I write). Fragments of my notebooks and journals were cannibalised into the text. But writing a novel of this length, in this manner, also required a significant amount of directed research, searching out usable texts, and, as is the case for approximately half of the fragments that make up *NS*, creating new texts for a specific purpose.

As material is found or created it must be fitted into the developing wider schema. The assemblage text writer must find a way of getting an overview of her work, just as the pictorial collage artist might start to lay out her source images on a board. Where in the past a writer may have done this physically, perhaps with the aid of index cards, I was able to turn to writing software for assistance. *Scrivener* is a writing program specifically designed to aid writers working on longer and more complicated texts.³⁹ It enabled me to represent and manipulate the individual fragments that compose *NS* quickly and easily, and to begin to assemble the work in a way analogous to the collage artists board. I discuss my use of *Scrivener* and the processes involved in assembling *NS* in section 3c.

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The practice-led researcher's approach to theoretical research is different from that of a non-practising researcher. Nelson suggests that it is more likely to be 'interdisciplinary and to

http://upers.kuleuven.be/sites/upers.kuleuven.be/files/page/files/2007_1_2.pdf [Accessed 20 May 2016]

³⁹ Keith Blount, *Scrivener*, version 1.9.0.0 (Literature and Latte, 2015), <http://www.literatureandlatte.com>.

draw upon a range of sources in several fields'.⁴⁰ For this reason it is not possible for the practice-led researcher 'to equal the specialist in all disciplines drawn upon, [but] the shortfall does not amount to a lack of thoroughness': rigour in this context is found in 'syncretism, not in depth-mining'.⁴¹

My own research has roamed over topics as diverse as the literary fragment, psychological conceptions of the self, postmodern reading strategies, assemblage compositions, reading and writing technologies, autobiografiction, and the nature of practice-led research itself.⁴² Any one of these represents a broad area of research study and to cover all of them in depth is clearly outside of the scope of any single thesis. I therefore needed to devise strategies for processing and making use of all this information. My prioritising of the creative artefact as a research output gave me the basis for doing so. The material I covered was only of interest to the thesis in as much as it was either of use for creating my novel or in illuminating and questioning it as part of this essay.

d. Outcomes

The Birmingham City University *Research Degrees Handbook* states that doctoral research must make a 'significant contribution to knowledge'.⁴³ This subsection explains how I believe this thesis makes a new and significant contribution to knowledge, primarily for practitioners working with assemblage texts.

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Bolt contends that as creative practitioners 'we cannot consciously seek the new, since by definition the new cannot be known in advance'.⁴⁴ Whilst I agree that we cannot seek a specific piece of new knowledge, I don't believe that this prevents us from consciously

40 Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*, 34.

41 Ibid.

42 The term 'autobiografiction' was coined by Stephen Reynolds in 'Autobiografiction', *Speaker*, New Series, 15, no. 366 (6 October 1906), 28-39.

43 Birmingham City University, 'Research Degrees Handbook' (Birmingham City University, 2015), Available: <http://www.bcu.ac.uk/Download/Asset/b94ce13a-3bec-e511-80c7-0050568319fd> [Accessed 25 April 2016].

44 Barrett and Bolt, *Practice as Research*, 31.

seeking new knowledge altogether. By pushing our creative practice beyond what is the established norm, we give ourselves the opportunity of discovering something new. Whilst we cannot entirely predict the results of our creative experiments — if we could it would seem disingenuous to call them experiments — such experiments and their results can provide new information for future practitioners. Indeed, in the case of creative practice, the development of the experiments themselves can provide interesting new knowledge for practitioners attempting similar projects in the future.

It has been suggested that the production of an artefact alone (perhaps accompanied by a short explanatory text) ought to be capable of receiving doctoral accreditation.⁴⁵ As discussed below, I believe that artefacts can demonstrate a contribution to knowledge, but I remain unconvinced that a standalone artefact can itself represent research worthy of doctoral accreditation. Candy provides a useful differentiation between research undertaken as part of normal creative practice and that of the practitioner-researcher.⁴⁶ In the former case research is solely directed towards the creation of an artefact or the development of the individual's practice. The latter aims to generate what Stephen Scrivener calls 'novel apprehensions', which are not just novel for the individual practitioner or observers of the art work.⁴⁷ Such apprehensions ought to be generalisable beyond the artefact created for a specific project.

The AHRC's position on practice-led research states that a '[c]reative output can be produced, or practice undertaken, as an integral part of a research process' but requires the product of creative practice to be 'accompanied by some form of documentation of the

45 See for instance Delter Lesage, 'PaR in Continental Europe: A Site of Many Contests', in *Practice as Research in the Arts Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances*, ed. Robin Nelson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 142–51.

46 Linda Candy, 'Practice Based Research: A Guide', *Creativity and Cognition Studios Report* [Online] (Sydney: University of Technology, November 2006), Available: <http://www.creativityandcognition.com/resources/PBR%20Guide-1.1-2006.pdf> [Accessed 3 May 2016].

47 Stephen Scrivener, 'The Art Object Does Not Embody a Form of Knowledge', *Working Papers in Art and Design* [Online] 2 (2002), Available: https://www.herts.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/12311/WPIAAD_vol2_scrivener.pdf [Accessed 15 June 2016].

research process, as well as some form of textual analysis or explanation to support its position and as a record of your critical reflection'.⁴⁸ Brown and Sorensen remind us that 'knowledge embedded in practice is often personal and ineffable'.⁴⁹ A process of reflection and contextualisation is required to transform such personal knowledge into communal knowledge. It is this work that goes into the production of the critical component of the practice-led research thesis and it is here that the practitioner-researcher can articulate their 'novel apprehensions' so that they can be integrated into the corpus of academic and/or praxical knowledge. Candy tells us '[t]hat new knowledge [produced through doctoral research] is expected to have two characteristics: it is shared and it can be verified or challenged'.⁵⁰ The praxical knowledge articulated within this essay is of this sort.

It is important, however, to remember that this new praxical knowledge is still reliant on the artist's practice. As Brown and Sorensen point out, 'the artefact provides evidence of the knowledge discovered. It stands as a demonstration of the theory and is available as a reference for further investigation and verification. The artefact helps to make the ideas explicit'.⁵¹ It is the artefact that provides the 'stimulus for engagement with the knowledge gained' and which 'is integral in communicating the ideas of the research in all its richness'.⁵² Beyond this, the artefact is capable of making some, if not all, of the knowledge produced through the research process available to a wider audience, one which may not be interested in the academic thesis in its entirety.

Nelson imagines a case in which the artefact submitted as part of a doctoral thesis need not necessarily itself be original, so long as it provides the basis for original insights elsewhere in the thesis.⁵³ Whilst I am happy to accept this possibility, it does not accord with

48 Arts and Humanities Research Council, 'Definition of Research - Arts and Humanities Research Council' [Online] Available: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/funding/research/researchfundingguide/definitionofresearch/> [Accessed 5 May 2016].

49 Brown and Sorensen, 'Integrating Creative Practice and Research in the Digital Media Arts', 162–63.

50 Candy, 'Practice Based Research: A Guide', 5.

51 Brown and Sorensen, 'Integrating Creative Practice and Research in the Digital Media Arts', 163.

52 Ibid.

53 Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*, 80.

my own approach to this thesis. Rather, I set out to create, and believe I have achieved, an original creative artefact — one that should be considered when evaluating this thesis's contribution to knowledge. This was achieved through a process of creative experimentation, as outlined above and substantiated below, which led to the unusual assemblage composition of *NS*. The final novel embodies implicit or tacit knowledge about the capabilities of assemblage texts and the ways in which they can be composed gained through and from my practice. It provides an example of what can be done with the assemblage form, one that can be replicated and adapted to other purposes by future practitioners.

The novel also embodies another kind of knowledge, one that is available to and varies for each reader and reading of it. Stephen Scrivener suggests that '[a]lthough we may be able to talk of knowledge being conveyed by art this tends to be of a superficial nature that doesn't approach the deep insights that art is usually thought to endow into emotions, human nature and relationships, and our place in the World, *inter alia*'.⁵⁴ In this sense art isn't primarily communicative, but provocative. Reader-response criticism contends that meaning is not created solely by me as writer, but in a relationship between writer, reader and text. As such, it must be qualitatively different with each reading.⁵⁵ For this reason, Scrivener argues that art works do not usually engender knowledge, but rather provide new perspectives on the world, claiming that they should therefore not be considered 'knowledge artefacts'.⁵⁶ Here, Scrivener seems to be equating knowledge with imparting information, but I disagree — in offering the reader a new perspective on the world the artefact also provokes knowledge of that perspective in the reader. This provocation should also be acknowledged as part of the novel's contribution to knowledge.

As demonstrated above, *NS* does itself represent a contribution to knowledge, but this contribution is that of a novel, which may not in itself be equivalent to the new

54 Scrivener, 'The Art Object Does Not Embody a Form of Knowledge', 8.

55 See for example Jane P. Tompkins, ed., *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980) *passim*.

56 Scrivener, 'The Art Object Does Not Embody a Form of Knowledge', *passim*.

knowledge demonstrated by a doctoral thesis. For this reason, I reiterate my belief that the present essay is essential to the thesis's claim to doctoral accreditation. It is this essay that makes explicit some of the new knowledge gained from the production of *NS*. It highlights aspects of knowledge implicit in the novel itself as well as articulating generalisable praxical knowledge gained from both the process of producing the work and in examining the result. Above I have outlined my methodology toward producing this thesis. A significant portion of the rest of this essay, in particular section 3, is dedicated to examining in more detail the methods involved in creating the novel itself.

2. The Fragment and the Fragmentary

In this section I situate this thesis within the theory and literature of the fragment and the fragmentary mode. I begin by outlining what I mean by my use of the term 'fragment' before exploring how use of this term has changed over time. I then examine several fragmentary texts that have either been key to the development of my novel or which bear illuminating correspondences with it.

a. Defining the Fragment

In his discussion of 'New Poetries', Aaron Kunin highlights how collage has become central to the work of many writers who, rather than taking the word as their basic unit of composition, make use of 'a larger prefabricated language piece often called a fragment'.¹ He explains that such a unit could be 'grammatically incomplete or miniature in scale, but this is not necessarily the case; the fragment can be a phrase, a line, a sentence, a paragraph, etc.'² Kunin's fragment is further defined by two conditions: it has 'another context outside of the poem' (whether this be a real world or imagined context) and 'the edges of the fragment are not coextensive with those of the poem'.³ Thought of as a compositional unit, it can be understood as being analogous to the individual shot in a film, an idea I return to in my discussion of the novel as montage in section 3d.

Understanding the fragment as a compositional unit is useful when considering the composition of *NS*, but this description does not fully engage with the rich theoretical

1 Aaron Kunin, 'New Poetries', in *The Handbook of Creative Writing*, ed. Steven Earnshaw (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 216.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

discourse around the term. Historically, the fragment has proved a difficult concept to define. Indeed, Elias suggests that ‘much of the appeal of the fragment relies on the fact that we can never be sure of what exactly constitutes a fragment’.⁴ Examining the etymology of the word, she notes that it derives from the Latin root ‘frangere’ which means ‘to break into fragments’. This, she remarks, points to ‘the necessary plurality of fragments, since it is logically impossible to break a whole into one fragment’.⁵ However, another ‘consequence of defining the fragment by its part/whole relation’, Elias claims, ‘is that the fragment is always seen as derived from and subordinate to an original text’.⁶ Sandro Jung challenges this contention, telling us that, for eighteenth-century proponents of the form at least, ‘the fragmentary is not seen as inferior to “complete” structures but as complementing other modes’.⁷ Whilst fragments from this era might purportedly be from a longer work, they were read on their own terms, as works in their own right. Jung is amongst the theorists who construe the fragmentary in terms of a ‘mode’, employed and developed by writers as an aesthetic choice for their work. One advantage of conceptualising the fragmentary in this way is that modes have the ‘potential to mutate, transform themselves, and enter into relationships of generic collaboration with other modes and forms’.⁸ Writers working with a variety of forms and genres are all able to utilise the fragmentary mode in their compositions.

The tension between the fragment as an object of interest in itself and in relation to its place in an imagined whole is at the heart of Strathman’s conceptualisation of a fragmentary ‘imperative’ or ‘exigency’. Strathman suggests ‘one can think of the exigency of the fragmentary work as a claim the work exerts on us which calls us outside the simple opposition between poetry and philosophy, art and criticism, seriousness and playfulness,

4 Camelia Elias, *The Fragment: Towards a History and Poetics of a Performative Genre* (Germany: Peter Lang, 2004), 2.

5 Ibid., 1.

6 Ibid.

7 Sandro Jung, *The Fragmentary Poetic: Eighteenth-Century Uses of an Experimental Mode* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2009), 15.

8 Ibid., 14–15.

and on to what remains of thinking'.⁹ He contends that the fragment creates an obligation on the reader to move continuously between such dichotomies as wit and irony, lyric and narrative, the Dionysian and the Apollonian, the experiencing self and the remembering self. This exigency can be used to more actively engage the reader with the text, involving them further in the creation of meaning. It has often been used by philosophers and thinkers – such as Schlegel, Nietzsche and Blanchot – interested in provoking new insights.

The definition and understanding of the fragment has changed over time. Elias reminds us that for philologists 'the fragment began to be a fragment with the finding of old texts and artifacts'.¹⁰ Initially, defining the fragment in this sense seems simple; any incomplete piece can be designated a fragment. However, such definitions are soon complicated by ideas of intention. Elias uses the example of Heraclitus to illustrate this. It is a matter of some contention whether Heraclitus wrote a single work of which only fragments remain, or whether his collected aphorisms are just that — a collection of his sayings put together either by the author himself or by somebody else. In the first case, there is no complication to our simple philological understanding of the fragment. The text that exists now is an incomplete version of Heraclitus' original work, the parts of which constitute fragments. However, in the second case Heraclitus' work is complete. It exists currently in the form intended by its author or compiler and it is its participation in the fragmentary *mode*, rather than its incompleteness, that allows us to define its parts as fragments.

In considering the fragment in these terms, I have found it useful to define two classes of fragment. The first I will call *natural* fragments. These include both fragments of once complete texts, many ancient fragments are of this sort, and texts which are fragments because left (unintentionally) unfinished by the author, such as Dickens' *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. The former case is closest to the etymology of the word, in that fragments of this class owe their status as fragments to being the result of the breaking up of a pre-

9 Christopher A. Strathman, *Romantic Poetry and the Fragmentary Imperative: Schlegel, Byron, Joyce, Blanchot* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 22.

10 Elias, *The Fragment*, 6.

existing whole. Fragments in the latter case we can understand as being fragments of a never accomplished whole. Both are unintended fragments defined by their incompleteness.

The fragments used in *NS* are of another class that I will call *intentional* fragments. This group consists of texts deliberately constructed as fragmentary pieces or deliberately fragmented from longer pieces. Writers creating intentional fragments are often seeking to make use of the of the form's ability to allude to a larger whole. Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, for example, gains an enigmatic power from its nominal incompleteness, whilst critics often make use of quotation to draw on the authority of another text in defence of their own.¹¹ The creators of intentional fragments are seeking to make purposeful use of the fragmentary mode.

Elias observes that the intentionality or otherwise of the fragment does not seem to have been a matter of interest to ancient Greek thinkers. Neither Socrates nor Aristotle, for example, address the origins of the Heraclitus fragments. But this is not to say that there weren't writers making use of the fragmentary mode during this period, only that the intentionality behind such use remained largely unexamined. Ancient writers such as the pre-Socratics, Heraclitus amongst them, used the fragmentary mode to articulate a dialogic form of reasoning. They presented works that did not always offer clear resolutions, preferring to provoke questions in the reader rather than presenting a fully resolved idea. Like many modern writers, they were making use of the fragmentary mode because of its capacity to go beyond simply informing and to engage the reader in new thought.

During the Medieval and Renaissance periods, the fragment was viewed, as Elias remarks, as 'an allegorical expression of divine power', the surviving pieces of earlier texts suggesting something broken off from the divine whole.¹² This was an idea that played into the early stages of my thinking about this project. For several months the title of the novel-in-progress was *The Face of God*, and the fragmented structure was in part an allusion to the impossibility of a person understanding God or her own existence. This title also played on

11 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Kubla Khan', published 1816, in *Selected Poems*, ed. Richard Holmes (London: Penguin, 1996).

12 Elias, *The Fragment*, 7.

the notion of the writer as creator-figure and of Ted trying to piece together his own identity from the fragments that compose the text, ideas that are still important to *NS* today.

Much of the surviving literary record from Late Middle Ages and Early Modern period is itself now fragmentary and many of the manuscripts that remain consist of compilations of different texts by single or multiple, often anonymous, authors. In his study of four such manuscripts from fourteenth century London, Bahr notes that there are several reasons for the fragmentary state in which these texts now exist. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, for example, was left unfinished by its author, whereas the corpus of manuscripts compiled by Andrew Horn were deliberately disassembled and then chaotically reassembled in the sixteenth century. Sections and leaves from the Auchenlick and Trentham manuscripts have either gone missing or been deliberately excised at some point in their history.¹³ Whilst the reasons vary for the fragmentary forms these manuscripts now take, Bahr's thesis is that there is value to be found by readers approaching these assembled texts as 'compilations', suggesting that

the selection and arrangement of texts in manuscripts, like that of words in poetry, can produce [...] 'metaphorical potentialities,' discontinuities and excesses, multiple and shifting meanings, resistance to paraphrase, and openness to rereading that deservedly become resurgent objects of critical value.¹⁴

My use of the assemblage form for *NS* seeks to develop similar literary qualities in the text to those Bahr finds in compilations.

In the wake of the Renaissance came 'the French moralists, writers of maxims, and essayists' for whom, according to Elias, 'the fragment as an incomplete text is replaced with the form of the aphorism which exhibits a "complete" constitution'.¹⁵ Elias' understanding of the fragment as a 'performative concept, rather than as a genre' leads her to exclude

13 Arthur Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages: Forming Compilations of Medieval London* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 4.

14 Ibid., 10.

15 Elias, *The Fragment*, 8.

aphorism from her taxonomy because its completeness means ‘it does not possess the same potential as the fragment to be performative’.¹⁶ Whilst such an exclusion is consistent with Elias’ own thesis, as a practitioner working with fragments (and to a lesser extent aphorism) I find it useful to follow the historical norm and include the aphorism within my classification of the fragment. Indeed, although the aphorism might exhibit a complete constitution, it is a form that depends on tension in the same way as the fragmentary mode. Aphorisms rely on suggestion and implication in generating their meaning. They direct the reader’s thoughts outside of themselves towards the possibility of a larger system of knowledge and philosophy. In this sense the aphorism behaves as we would expect according to Strathman’s fragmentary exigency — asking the reader to think beyond simple oppositions to what is as yet unthought.

Jung associates the fragment with the experimentation and increasing hybridization of genre in the eighteenth century, where the fragmentary mode’s mutability gave it a prominent position in the new literature. This era saw such a proliferation of the fragmentary that Jung claims it is

impossible to outline a consistent typology of the mode; rather, the multivalence of the incomplete form with associations of open-endedness, a greater whole, or remnants of the past enables the fragment to become meaningful in more ways than a clearly generically defined kind can be.¹⁷

The intentional fragment was so prevalent by the end of the eighteenth century that Schlegel, a key proponent of the form, remarked that whilst ‘[m]any works of the ancients have become fragments. Many modern works are fragments as soon as they are written’.¹⁸

The arrival of the Jena Romantics at the end of the eighteenth century saw the emergence of the fragment as a topic of interest to theory. During this period writers and

¹⁶ Ibid., 9.

¹⁷ Jung, *The Fragmentary Poetic: Eighteenth-Century Uses of an Experimental Mode*, 14.

¹⁸ Friedrich von Schlegel, ‘Athenaeum Fragments’, in *Friedrich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments* (1798–1800; University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 164.

theorists, often one and the same person, brought a new focus to the interpretation and development of the fragmentary form. This thesis also seeks to bring together the practice and theory of the fragment. It does so by incorporating both a novel that makes explorative use of the fragment as a unit of composition and this essay, which seeks to examine the fragmentary mode in that context.

Hamrick connects the flourishing of the fragmentary mode in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the political and economic upheavals of that period.¹⁹ 'In past eras, such as the Middle Ages or the Renaissance,' she suggests, 'faith had served as a unifying force permeating all aspects of the life and expression of the people'.²⁰ There was an increasing suspicion of institutional power during this period and in particular the moral authority of the Church. Long established hierarchies no longer seemed as secure as they once had and some began to look for more fractured and discontinuous models through which to understand their world.

Hamrick identifies a key difference in perspective between two French writers of the mid nineteenth century. Gautier, she tell us, believed the artist 'should strive to transform perceived discontinuity by imposing unity from *without*', whereas Baudelaire, ten years Gautier's junior, maintained that it was not the artist's job to impose continuity, rather 'continuity emerges from *within* what is *apparent* discontinuity'.²¹ This notion of the unified artwork being an emergent feature of its constituent parts, rather than a result of the artist imposing a unity on those parts, is one that feels true to my own process as a practitioner. When assembling the fragments into their final composition, I relied on the kind of creative intuition explored in the rest of this paragraph to draw out the similarities and find the juxtapositions that would work, rather than working from a more formalised plan. Such intuitions remained largely unexamined by my conscious mind whilst the work was in

19 Lois Cassandra Hamrick, 'Artists, Artisans and Artistic Discontinuity; Baudelaire and Gautier Speak Out', in *Discontinuity and Fragmentation: [Expanded Versions of Presentations Made at the French Literature Conference Held in Columbia in March 1993]*, ed. Freeman G. Henry and French Literature Conference (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 67–80.

20 Ibid., 73.

21 Ibid., 76.

progress, but they need not necessarily be considered as non-rational thought. Indeed, if probed, I am often able to explain such decisions *post hoc* in a manner that suggests a substantial amount of rational decision making has occurred without my having been consciously aware. This experience chimes with John Gray's contention that '[s]elf-awareness is as much a disability as a power': Gray observes that '[t]he most accomplished pianist is not the one who is most aware of her movements when she plays. The best craftsman may not know how he works. Very often we are at our most skillful when we are least self-aware'.²² Such features link to the idea of a 'flow' state from positive psychology, a kind of optimal mental state often entered into by people performing certain creative activities.²³ Whilst in a flow state, the conscious mind is entirely engaged in the activity itself rather than being distracted or inhibited by self-awareness about being engaged in that activity.

The turn of the twentieth century saw another flourishing of the fragmentary, this time amongst the modernists. David Lodge connects the modernist reaction against classical realist fiction with a new interest in psychology and consciousness influenced by the recent work of psychoanalysts such as Freud and Jung.²⁴ Virginia Woolf articulates this turn in her essay, 'Modern Fiction', in which she accuses the realist tradition of not being true to the experience of life and calls for writers to 'look within' in their efforts to represent their experiences.²⁵ One of the results of this turn inwards was an increased use of the fragmentary mode to represent the inner consciousness. A key example of this turn is Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, in which, as Lodge describes, Joyce came 'closer than any writer had before to representing the extraordinary complexity of brain activity'. However, as Lodge also

22 John Gray, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (London: Granta Books, 2003), 61.

23 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, 1st ed (New York: Harper & Row, 1990).

24 David Lodge, *Consciousness & the Novel: Connected Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 57.

25 Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', in *The Common Reader, First Series* [Online] (1959; Australia: Project Gutenberg of Australia, 2003), Available: <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0300031h.html#C12> [Accessed 8 November 2016] *passim*.

highlights, 'the price of this was to sacrifice the narrative cohesion which makes stories intelligible to us'.²⁶ A challenge for any writer working to represent these sorts of processes is finding a balance between fidelity and clarity in their work.

Discussing Kvale's themes of postmodernity, Anderson highlights the importance of a 'willingness to accept things as they are on the surface rather than search (à la Freud or Marx) for Deeper Meanings'.²⁷ Kvale points to a clear trend amongst postmodern writers who, distrusting of their modernist predecessors' attempts to depict psychological depth, focus instead on writing about the surface of the world. *NS* seeks to inhabit a space somewhere between these stereotypical realms of the modernist, with her interest in representing deep psychology, and the postmodernist, playing with the varying surfaces of the world. It makes use of its fragmentary structure to represent the multiple perspectives that can be contained within an individual and the porous borders between ourselves and the world around us. I return to this topic in section 4.

b. Fragmentary Influences

William Burroughs is perhaps the most famous recent proponent of the fragmentary mode thanks to the success of his novels *Naked Lunch* and *The Nova Trilogy*.²⁸ Burroughs' cut-up technique was first developed by his friend, the surrealist artist Brion Gysin.²⁹ It involved cutting up existing texts and rearranging the fragments in an attempt 'to form new combinations of word and image'.³⁰ Burroughs' novels cannibalise his letters and themselves (repetitions occur across the three books of *The Nova Trilogy*) to create radically non-linear narratives that heavily implicate the reader in the creation of meaning in the text.

26 Lodge, *Consciousness & the Novel*, 63.

27 Steiner Kvale, 'Themes of Postmodernity', in *The Truth about the Truth: De-Confusing and Re-Constructing the Postmodern World*, ed. Walt Anderson (New York: Putnam, 1995), 18.

28 Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*; Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*; Burroughs, *Nova Express*; Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded*.

29 William S. Burroughs, 'The Cut-Up Method of Brion Gysin', *UbuWeb Papers* [Online] (no date) Available: http://www.ubu.com/papers/burroughs_gysin.html [Accessed 1 August 2016].

30 Ibid.

Influenced by Burroughs, Kathy Acker took his technique one step further and begun interpolating large sections of both literary and non-literary found texts into her work. *Blood and Guts in Highschool*, for example, draws heavily on texts as varied as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and theoretical works on poststructuralism, as well as incorporating Acker's own drawings.³¹ As with several of her other novels, the resultant text juxtaposes several thematically linked narratives in differing registers, asking the reader to draw links between them in order to form their own understanding of the text.

Acker was brazen about her use of found texts, self-describing as a plagiarist. I too have spoken about my appropriations as a form of 'creative plagiarism' and their use within *NS* stems partly from my wider creative practice. In my shorter prose and poetry, I often draw on Oulipian methods of translating and transposing existing texts. Amongst their constraint-based techniques for producing literature is the concept of the 'Canada Dry'.³² A Canada Dry is a work that appears to have been produced under some kind of Oulipian constraint without the writer having actually used one. Many of my poems are produced by a kind of Canada Dry translation. This involves taking a poem or other text, usually already in English, and rewriting it with a large degree of license to change its meaning and content. This method of creating new poetry has influenced my approach to adapting many of the found text sources used in *NS*.

Georges Perec's *A Man Asleep* exemplifies what can be achieved with the use of extensive amounts of found material within a novel.³³ It appropriates a range of literary sources including *Moby Dick*, "Bartleby", *The Trial*, *The Inferno* and *Ulysses*, but, like Acker, Perec also makes use of non-literary sources.³⁴ The opening of *A Man Asleep*, for example, is a translation into the second person of a lab report on electrocortical activity, one which Perec had come across as part of his work as an archivist at the Neurophysiological Research

31 Katie R. Muth, 'Postmodern Fiction as Poststructuralist Theory: Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*', *Narrative* 19, no. 1 (2011), 86–110.

32 Harry Mathews and Alastair Brotchie, eds., *Oulipo Compendium* (London: Atlas Press, 2005), 118.

33 Georges Perec, *Things: A Story of the Sixties with A Man Asleep*, trans. David Bellos and Andrew Leak (London: Vintage Books, 2011).

34 David Bellos, *Georges Perec: A Life in Words* (London: Harvill, 1993), 362.

Laboratory at the Hôpital Saint-Antoine in Paris.³⁵ My own use of a scientific abstract as a part of the prologue to *NS* is a covert acknowledgement of Perec's influence on my work.

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Cran suggests that autobiographical content is an inherent component of the collage form. She argues that the collage-text is 'always at least partly about what was going on around the collagist, enabling the autobiographical impulse or desire to act as the archivist of one's own life'.³⁶

Pessoa's *The Book of Disquietude* is an example of the fragmentary form being used in this way. This career-long project became the ostensible autobiography of Bernardo Soares.³⁷ It is fragmentary in part because it was left incomplete at his death and compiled from his folders of drafts and notes. Pessoa's 'factless autobiography' has clear parallels with and was influential on the creation of *NS*.³⁸ A quotation from the novel describing it as 'the autobiography of one who never existed' serves as an epigraph to *NS* and a neat summation of its subject, Ted Bonham being in part a fictional representation of myself.³⁹ Zenith asks us to interpret his translated version of *The Book of Disquietude* by imagining 'that Bernardo Soares is looking back over his life, reading what he wrote long ago ("I am the selfsame prose I write") and mentally or literally collating the pieces from his past'.⁴⁰ Whilst there is no single correct interpretation of *NS*'s fragmentary composition, one possible reading that has influenced its creation has been the idea that Ted himself — who is after all its ostensible author — has gathered and altered these fragments to represent his life story. This reading is ultimately brought into question by an epilogue set after Ted's death.

Zenith also describes how, in order to solve the problem of structuring Pessoa's disordered notes, he 'placed the dated fragments from the last phase (1929-34) in

35 Ibid., 258.

36 Cran, *Collage in Twentieth-Century Art, Literature and Culture*, 28.

37 Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquietude: By Bernardo Soares, Assistant Bookkeeper in the City of Lisbon*, trans. Richard Zenith (Manchester: Carcanet in association with the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1996).

38 Cited in *ibid.*, ix.

39 *Ibid.*, 305.

40 *Ibid.*, xv. (The quote in parentheses is taken from the novel itself.)

chronological order, interspersed with the other fragments, usually on the basis of a common theme or image'.⁴¹ A similar methodology has been followed in constructing Ted's narrative, which loosely follows the time-line of the story but is interspersed with fragments that thematically or associatively link with those around them.

Kurt Vonnegut's *Palm Sunday* is more straightforwardly autobiographical than Pessoa's work. Vonnegut approaches autobiography through collecting material from his writing life.⁴² In an introduction that I have appropriated for several fragments from the early parts of *NS*, he refers to *Palm Sunday* as a 'collage', telling us that '[i]t began with my wish to collect in one volume most of the reviews and speeches and essays [...] But as I arranged those fragments in this order and then that one, I saw that they formed a sort of autobiography'.⁴³ The resultant compilation of anecdotes, speeches, essays and letters gives us an insight into Vonnegut's life and thinking. This idea of building up the biography of a person through fragments of their thought and writing is a key idea behind the conception of *NS* as Ted's autobiography. Vonnegut even tells us that he felt free to include some fragments not written by himself, although these are rather less prevalent in *Palm Sunday* than they are in *NS*.⁴⁴

The use of the fragmentary mode to present autobiographical material relates to the way that fragments can be organised. If we read individual fragments as representing individual memories or ideas, the collation of them can be read as a series of associated memories and parenthetical thoughts. This certainly seems to be the principle behind Markson's *Reader's Block*, in which, as the back cover describes, 'an ageing author who is identified only as Reader contemplates the writing of a novel. As he does, other matters insistently crowd his mind—literary and cultural anecdotes, endless quotations attributed and not, scholarly curiosities'.⁴⁵ The similarity with the author's own life is difficult to ignore,

41 Ibid.

42 Kurt Vonnegut, *Welcome to the Monkey House and Palm Sunday: An Autobiographical Collage* (London: Vintage, 1994).

43 Ibid., 309.

44 Ibid.

45 Markson, *Reader's Block*.

and indeed the authorial voice is soon forced to question whether he is ‘in some peculiar way thinking of an autobiography after all?’⁴⁶ This, too, is an idea explored within *NS*, which self-consciously operates in the borderlands between fiction and autobiography.

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The works in this subsection are all examples of texts that make intentional use of the fragmentary mode (although, in the case of *The Book of Disquietude* such use is as much due to its compiler and translator, Richard Zenith, as Pessoa himself).⁴⁷ Their creators are employing the fragmentary mode for similar reasons to those Bahr gives for reading assembled medieval manuscripts as compilations: the interplay between their various parts create meaningful and interesting associations and juxtapositions that create a richer literary experience. The value of such texts relies, as Bahr suggests, in part ‘on the perspective of readers, who must ultimately determine whether to interpret its given assemblage of texts in compilational terms, that is, whether to see in the sum of its parts some larger meaning, effect, or perspective’.⁴⁸ My use of the fragmentary mode within *NS* seeks to explore some of the ways in which these effects can be used in an extended prose work. Specifically, I am aiming to combine the use of a sophisticated fragmentary mode with linear narrative — thereby serving both a traditional story impulse and an emphasis on play and experimentation with texts.

46 Ibid., 137.

47 There are multiple editions of Pessoa’s novel compiled and translated by different editors and translators, but all of them share a characteristic participation in the fragmentary mode.

48 Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages*, 11.

3. Assembling *Notes to Self*

In this section I look at the composition of *NS*. I begin by discussing the concept of the assemblage text. I then address the question of plagiarism and issues that might arise because of my use of found texts. Finally, I use comparisons to artistic practice in collage and montage to further explicate the composition of *NS*.¹

a. The Assemblage Text

Giraudoux remarks that '[p]lagiarism is the basis of all literatures except the first, which happens to be unknown to us'.² All literary texts are to some degree palimpsestuous, in that they are all at least partly reliant on the canon that precedes them, and this can understandably give rise to an anxiety amongst writers about the originality of their work. This is Bloom's famous 'anxiety of influence'.³ Bloom's discussion is about poets but it is also applicable to prose-writing. Although widely critiqued today, he provides an interesting frame from which to understand my own practice.

Bloom contends that poets are inspired to write by their predecessors, but that because of this they are liable to be too strongly influenced by those that have gone before. This results in the production of derivative work. According to Bloom, the 'strong' poet is right to be anxious about producing such 'weak' poetry. He needs to find strategies to free

1 This discussion expands on my conference paper 'Working with Fragments: The Novel as Collage', delivered at The Great Writing Conference, Imperial College London, 19 June 2016.

2 Cited in Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 381.

3 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

himself from his anxiety and to produce work that is his own.⁴ One such strategy (Bloom sets out six but it is the first of them that is most relevant to this discussion of my own methodology) is ‘the *clinamen* or poetic misprision’.⁵ This involves the poet’s misinterpretation of a predecessor’s work in order to free a new space to work in himself. Bloom tells us that ‘[p]oets, by the time they have grown strong, do not read the poetry of X, for really strong poets can only read themselves’.⁶ This is not to say that strong poets don’t read widely and deeply, but that, rather than reading as a critic or a lay reader, they must read as a poet, with an eye to repurposing ideas from what they read for use in their own work. In the case of *NS*, my appropriations are often direct. Many fragments literally contain the words of earlier writers, giving them new meaning through adaptation and by placing them in new contexts. This is an act of deliberate overinterpretation. A side effect of such a practice is that it provides a solution to Bloom’s problem of the anxiety of influence by finding interesting and often unintended ideas and meanings in texts that can be extracted and re-contextualised into new roles.

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Genette discusses the palimpsestuous nature of literary texts in terms of their ‘hypertextuality’. This he defines as ‘any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted’.⁷ In his foreword for Genette’s *Palimpsests*, Gerald Prince reflects that ‘[a]ny text is a hypertext, grafting itself onto a hypotext, an earlier text that it imitates or transforms; any writing is rewriting; and literature is always in the second degree’.⁸ This is not to say, however, that some texts are not more palimpsestuous than others. *NS*, for example, draws

4 I have chosen to use the masculine pronoun here as Bloom’s conception of the poetic tradition is an archetypically masculine one.

5 Ibid., 19. Of the other five strategies the etymology of Bloom’s ‘tessera’ might especially suggest a connection to my fragmentary approach. However, its emphasis on working within a precursor’s frame of reference seems less relevant to my practice than the swerve away from a predecessor suggested by *clinamen*.

6 Ibid.

7 Genette, *Palimpsests*, 5.

8 Gerald Prince, ‘Foreword’, in Genette, *Palimpsests*, ix.

on more hypotexts than most. Genette follows Le Lionnais in describing hypertexts that combine elements from multiple hypotexts as *chimeric*.⁹ *NS* is chimeric in that it is composed of many fragments with different and sometimes multiple hypotextual sources.

I have found it useful to conceptualise such chimeric composite hypertexts as ‘assemblages’. This term is taken from the work of Selber and Johnson-Eilola who call for a distinctive approach to the creation of productive texts, specifically, in their case, student essays.¹⁰ They define assemblages as texts that are ‘not concerned with original words or images on a page or screen but concerned primarily with assemblages of parts’.¹¹ In assembling *NS* from hundreds of individual parts or fragments, including original material alongside found and adapted found texts, a focus is placed on the organisation of these fragments rather than the privileging of ‘original words’.

The concept of the assemblage can also be found in contemporary art where, as Brendan Taylor tells us, the English word ‘assemblage’ has come to ‘replace and extend the French words assemblage and collage as designations for a whole gamut of avant-garde mannerisms and techniques centred on composite material juxtaposition’.¹² Such juxtapositions are central to the composition of *NS*, which places together disparate textual fragments that draw on both literary and nonliterary sources, in order to create provocative changes of tone or register. My use of the word ‘assemblage’ captures something of this nature, in part because of its application in other arts fields that use analogous methods.

The assemblage bears a family resemblance to the remix. Robertson *et al.*, in their discussion of the assemblage and the remix in the context of college essays, offer a useful differentiation between the two practices. They suggest that ‘[w]hile a remix is a synthesis or incorporation of elements’ — think, for example, of the running together of samples used in a Hip Hop track — ‘an assemblage is a combination in which there are recognizable

9 Genette, *Palimpsests*, 47.

10 Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart A. Selber, ‘Plagiarism, Originality, Assemblage’, *Computers and Composition* 24 (2007): 375–403.

11 *Ibid.*, 380.

12 Brandon Taylor, *Collage: The Making of Modern Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 171.

boundaries between elements' — more similar to a collage, where the distinct elements can still be easily discerned.¹³ *NS* falls into the latter of these two categories utilising clear section breaks between fragments. But the two practices can be very similar. It is easy to imagine, for example, removing the section breaks from *NS* and presenting the text with the fragments run together. Whilst I believe this would be detrimental to the novel, it demonstrates the possibility that, at the limit case, the assemblage and the remix can differ only in the choice of formatting.

Shields suggests that it is 'the artist's job to mix (edit) the fragments together and, if needed, generate original fragments to fill the gap'.¹⁴ In defining the artist as (re)mixer, Shields inverts the typical hierarchy of original work over quotation, reducing new material to mere gap filling. This inversion goes beyond the strategies employed in *NS*, which, conforming with Selber and Johnson-Eilola's conception of an assemblage, '[does] not distinguish primarily between which parts are supposed to be original and which have been found and gathered from someplace else; assemblages are interested in what works'.¹⁵ Within *NS*, the hierarchy between original texts and transformed texts is flattened rather than inverted. The treatment and placement of fragments in the final composition reflects primarily aesthetic rather than genealogical considerations (although, in some cases the origin of the hypotext may affect its treatment). Essentially, any text placed in the novel document, whether found or newly created, is treated as a first draft of that fragment within the final novel. Genette maintains that

every successive state of a written text functions like a hypertext in relation to the state that precedes it and like a hypotext in relation to the one that follows. From the

13 Liane Robertson, Kara Taczak, and Kathleen Blake Yancey, 'Notes toward A Theory of Prior Knowledge and Its Role in College Composers' Transfer of Knowledge and Practice', *Composition Forum* [Online] 26 (Fall 2012), Available: <http://compositionforum.com/issue/26/prior-knowledge-transfer.php> [Accessed 11 May 2015].

14 Shields, *Reality Hunger*, # 281.

15 Johnson-Eilola and Selber, 'Plagiarism, Originality, Assemblage', 380.

very first sketch to the final emendation, the genesis of a text remains a matter of auto-hypertextuality.¹⁶

In this sense, each version of a fragment in the working document, whatever its source, is in a hypotextual relationship with its final draft.

To understand the remix and the assemblage as creative acts it is useful to consider creativity as inherently combinatorial. Rather than seeking to re-invent the wheel, Johnson-Eilola and Selber choose to shift the notion of creativity

to the assemblage: Take what already exists and make something else, something that works to solve problems in new, local contexts. Creativity, in this rearticulation, involves extensive research, filtering, recombining, remixing, the making of assemblages that solve problems.¹⁷

Such an understanding of creativity has roots back to Coleridge's notion of the primary and secondary imagination. Coleridge describes the primary imagination as 'the living power and the prime agent of all human perception'.¹⁸ It is the unconscious creative act by which a person's sensory experience of the world is constituted. The secondary imagination involves the further processing of this information to create something new. The conscious mind is involved in a process that 'dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate'.¹⁹ It is this breaking down and recombination of our experiences that allows the artist to produce their work.

This kind of creative work can be seen as partly curatorial in nature. There has been a shift in the perception of the role of the curator over recent decades. Paul O'Neill describes this shift as from 'the curator as carer to a curator who has a more creative and active part to

16 Genette, *Palimpsests*, 395.

17 Johnson-Eilola and Selber, 'Plagiarism, Originality, Assemblage', 400.

18 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, (1817; New York; Harper and Brothers, 1834), 363.

19 Ibid.

play within the production of art itself'.²⁰ The emergence of the verb 'to curate' meaning 'to select, organize, and present' as much as 'to look after and preserve' is indicative of this change, which, though not uncontroversial, has seen the emergence of the curator as a creative practitioner in her own right. The dual definitions of this verb capture something of my own use of found textual fragments in *NS*. These fragments are selected, organised and presented within the larger text so as to both be displayed effectively themselves, but more importantly to play a role in the wider novel. I also feel an onus on myself to take care of these fragments — to treat them sensitively and make sure that they are put to good use. Whilst there is still a debate about whether the work of the curator should be considered artistic creativity, such work does at least have a value in finding, displaying and providing access to art. By viewing part of the work behind the assemblage text as an act of curation, it can be seen that some of its value is in presenting pre-existing material in a new context and/or to a new audience.

b. Plagiarism

The assemblage writer, like any artist working with appropriated material, must, as Kunin says, '[be] concerned with the problem of the fragment's original context, a problem sometimes identified as appropriation, and sometimes, more bluntly, as plagiarism'.²¹

Plagiarism is a much and often rightly maligned activity in academia, education and many other contexts today. However, the definition of what constitutes plagiarism and the morality of its perpetration are controversial issues. Perhaps too often, and often with the best of intentions, the discourse around plagiarism has been over-simplistic. Students are drilled about the immorality — even the illegality — of plagiarism whilst the very plagiarism statements setting out these rules are lifted unattributed from elsewhere.²² Johnson-Eilola and Selber contend that the unexamined hierarchy of originality over quotation taught in

20 Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Turn: From Discourse to Practice', in *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, ed. Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick (Bristol, Intellect, 2008), 15.

21 Kunin, 'New Poetries', 216.

22 Richard A. Posner, *The Little Book of Plagiarism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 8.

schools has led to students spending many hours engaged in learning the art of unnecessary paraphrase.²³ There is a call for a new, more nuanced and constructive approach to plagiarism through the use of assemblage texts.

The creative world finds itself as something of a crucible for the plagiarism debate. Examples abound of 'plagiarisms' in other art mediums that have become increasingly acceptable to the public at large. Issues of attribution, fair usage and fair compensation have always been controversial in the world of Hip Hop, for example, but lovers of the music have long considered the use of samples to be a creative act. Indeed, the borrowings of Hip Hop can be seen as a natural extension of practices from folk and classical traditions which often reuse and rework passages or melodies from earlier pieces. John Cage uses similar techniques in a very different genre, introducing found sounds into his classical compositions, and, in the visual arts, the likes of Rauschenberg have brought collage techniques and the use of found objects to the attention of a fine art audience. 'The found scraps of material in these sculptures,' Foster remarks, 'aim less to disrupt the work of art than to render it porous to the world'.²⁴ Art created in this way opens conversations with the world outside the gallery.

There is also a sometimes hidden tradition of creative plagiarism in literature. Richard Posner notes that our concept of plagiarism is often said to have emerged from 'the Romantic cult of originality', with the modern market's obsession with novelty serving to further exacerbate the issue.²⁵ Historically though, originality did not have as important a place in writers', or the public's minds. Although the Romans had a concept of plagiarism, it seems, according to Posner, 'to have been limited to word-for-word copying'. Roman writers subscribed to the idea of *imitatio*, believing their role was to emulate and rework earlier masterpieces. The popular cento form, which originated with the Greeks, sought to reuse lines from other poems to create something entirely new. It is the ancestor of the found poetry of today.

23 Johnson-Eilola and Selber, 'Plagiarism, Originality, Assemblage', *passim*.

24 Hal Foster, 'At The Tate Modern', *London Review of Books* 38, no. 23 (December 2016): 27.

25 Posner, *The Little Book of Plagiarism*, 49.

Through the Middle Ages and up until the Elizabethan period, creativity was still largely understood in terms of 'improvement rather than originality'.²⁶ The plots for many of Shakespeare's historical plays, for example, owe a large debt to the work of Raphael Holinshead and Plutarch amongst others. Posner cites a passage from *Anthony and Cleopatra* as a particularly 'splendid' example of a Shakespearean plagiarism. Shakespeare's description of Cleopatra on her barge is, as Posner remarks, 'a blank-verse paraphrase, without acknowledgement, of the description in Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's life of Marc Anthony'.²⁷ However, Shakespeare's version is also usually considered a significant improvement on the original. We should, Posner suggests, see such an exercise as one of 'creative imitation', rather than plagiarism. Shakespeare himself is probably the most appropriated writer in history and the barge passage emerges again as one of the many appropriations in Eliot's *The Waste Land*.²⁸

This idea of creative imitation, both in literature and in other artistic mediums, is important to my understanding of my own appropriation practices. Posner suggests that we sometimes need to re-examine our prioritising of originality. If the writer's aim is to produce the best possible work, it may well require a significant amount of appropriation of successful elements from other sources. He suggests that readers 'are no more interested in originality than eaters are'.²⁹ Rather, they 'are interested in the quality of the reading experience that a work gives them'.³⁰ I'm not sure Posner is correct here (many eaters and readers do value originality alongside and as part of the experience), but I also believe that it is possible to make use of pre-existing elements in an original way. My own appropriations are employed in the interest of creating a new reading experience; radically reworking the source material into something different. Whether such work should be labelled plagiarism or not is less important to me than whether it results in a worthwhile artefact. Again, this speaks to the combinatorial nature of creativity, and so 'I don't feel any of the guilt normally

26 Ibid., 54.

27 Ibid., 51.

28 Ibid., 55.

29 Ibid., 72.

30 Ibid.

attached to “plagiarism,” which seems to me organically connected to creativity itself’, as David Shields remarks using the words of Harvey Blume.³¹

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Another of Shields’s ventriloquisms, this time of William Gibson, contends that ‘[t]he citation of sources belongs to the realms of journalism and scholarship, not art. Reality can’t be copyrighted’.³² It is interesting to note, however, that, against his professed preference, the sources used within *Reality Hunger* are given attribution at the end of the published book. As Shields’s publisher perhaps emphasised to him, any author seeking to publish assemblage works must consider the legal ramifications of their appropriations. Indeed, the issue of attribution is often key to whether a work is considered plagiarised. Correct use of quotation marks and citations are usually enough to prevent accusations of plagiarism (although a work can still fall foul of copyright law if it is published without the correct permissions). However, there are also cases, for instance when a work makes extensive use of parody or allusion, where borrowed texts may not be cited and yet the new work is not considered an act of plagiarism. This might be the case, for example, if the hypotext(s) from which the work derives are known to the intended readership. On other occasions, Posner uses the example of book titles that are drawn from an earlier work, the ‘awkwardness of acknowledgement’ makes it impractical to acknowledge appropriations directly.³³ When this occurs, Posner suggests, ‘[t]he vagueness of the concept of plagiarism should be acknowledged and thus a gray area recognized in which creative imitation produces value that should undercut a judgement of plagiarism’.³⁴

An appendix to this thesis gives a list of the hypotextual sources for the individual fragments in *NS*. However, there is a difference between the novel presented as part of a thesis and its presentation as a stand-alone art object. When it comes to attribution within the novel itself, my preference is to follow the example of Perec’s *A Man Asleep*, which does not acknowledge its many borrowings either within the text itself or in the paratext

31 Shields, *Reality Hunger*, # 102.

32 Ibid., # 74.

33 Posner, *The Little Book of Plagiarism*, 64.

34 Ibid., 108.

surrounding the novel.³⁵ In the Vintage edition, even translator David Bellos' introduction makes no reference to Perec's many appropriations (Bellos can be assumed to be aware of these appropriations as he draws attention to them himself in his biography of Perec *A Life in Words*).³⁶ I believe that the composition of *NS* and its diversity of styles and registers are enough to suggest that it is substantively assembled from fragments of other texts, many of which may be known to the reader, but as an aesthetic object I would prefer that this was not made explicit in the text.

Whether this approach is possible may depend on a potential publisher's interpretation of copyright law. Posner suggests that that copyright law may be 'limiting the scope for free creative imitation'.³⁷ It was for this reason that I made the decision, in line with my prioritising of the artefact as a research output, not to allow the legal ramifications of my use of appropriated material to unduly affect the creative process. However, I am willing to make decisions about attribution based on legal as well as aesthetic necessities and I am keen to avoid a situation like the one Acker found herself in, being threatened with a law suit because of some of her unattributed borrowings.³⁸

An understanding of the legal situation can be garnered from the UK Government's own guidance on copyright.³⁹ Copyright law in the UK applies only until 70 years after the author's death, and a considerable amount of the material appropriated in *NS* falls outside of this. The guidance suggests that '[t]here is an exception to copyright that permits people to use limited amounts of copyright material without the owner's permission for the purpose of parody, caricature or pastiche'.⁴⁰ This is, I believe, an accurate description of my own use of the majority of appropriated texts within *NS*, which seek in some way to *play off* their

35 Perec, *A Man Asleep*.

36 Bellos, *Georges Perec*, 259, 361–62.

37 Posner, *The Little Book of Plagiarism*, 73.

38 Malcolm Gladwell, 'Something Borrowed', *The New Yorker* [Online] November 22, 2004, Available: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/11/22/something-borrowed> [Accessed 23 March 2017]

39 Intellectual Property Office, 'Exceptions to Copyright - Detailed Guidance', www.gov.uk [Online] 12 June 2014, Available: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/exceptions-to-copyright> [Accessed 7 September 2016].

40 Ibid.

hypotextual sources and not to represent themselves as original material. The guidance goes on to suggest that '[i]n relation to certain exceptions, if you are making use of that exception to copy someone else's work it is necessary for you to sufficiently acknowledge their work [...] However such acknowledgement is not required where it is impossible for reasons of practicality'.⁴¹ I believe that it would be impractical to make all such acknowledgements within *NS* where they number in the hundreds and so would add substantially to the length of the text as well as undermining the novel as an art object. However, should a potential publisher (or the lawyer of a potential publisher) recommend clear attribution of my hypotexts, I hope to follow the example of David Shields' *Reality Hunger* in presenting my sources away from the main body of the text. Shields does this by listing all his citations at the end of the book in a section that he explicitly requests the reader not to read. Conceivably, the many source texts used in *NS* could be listed away from the text of the novel entirely, perhaps online. This would also serve to sate the interest of curious readers who wish to follow up on the ideas in particular fragments.

The government guidance also refers to 'fair dealing', which, although it has no statutory definition, is considered in copyright cases. The guidance states that

Factors that have been identified by the courts as relevant in determining whether a particular dealing with a work is fair include:

does using the work affect the market for the original work? If a use of a work acts as a substitute for it, causing the owner to lose revenue, then it is not likely to be fair.

is the amount of the work taken reasonable and appropriate? Was it necessary to use the amount that was taken? Usually only part of a work may be used.⁴²

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

It is my belief that such an understanding of 'fair dealing' would cover the appropriations within *NS*. Its fragments rely on a change of context for their meaning within the novel and as such *NS* is never intended as a replacement for the original work. Indeed, it seems likely that where a reader is particularly intrigued by an individual fragment they are likely to seek out its source text creating, if anything, a small increase in the market for the works it appropriates. Most of the fragments consist of only a very small proportion of the text from which they are extracted, or else they have been radically altered from their initial state. The amount taken is based on the requirements of the novel and I would therefore also consider it in all instances 'appropriate'.

c. The Novel as Collage

I have made the analogy above between assemblage texts and pictorial collage. Indeed, Rona Cran suggests an expansion of the definition of collage to include not only the 'technique and practical act of making [plastic] collage', but also the 'less easily defined *concept* of collage' (my emphasis).⁴³ Under her expanded definition, the basic principle of collage becomes its 'experimentation with the linking of disparate phenomena: democratically, arbitrarily, and even unintentionally'.⁴⁴ Such a definition is broadly consistent with Johnson Eilola and Selber's concept of an assemblage as being a democratic assemblage of parts, and both apply to the composition of *NS*. Read according to Cran's model, texts such as *NS* are not simply analogous with collage, they actually are collage. Such a classification is borne out by the presence of collage-like novels such as Acker's literary 'cut-and-pastes' or artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* in art libraries such as the Tate Library and Birmingham City University's own School of Art.⁴⁵

Collage is sometimes thought of as more accessible to practitioners because it does not require a traditional artist's skill in, for instance, painting or sculpting. However, it is far

43 Cran, *Collage in Twentieth-Century Art, Literature and Culture*, 4.

44 Ibid., 4–5.

45 Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictee* (1982; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

from being a short-cut for creating art and requires its own unique set of art-making skills. The process of creating a collage work on the scale of *NS* is a long one of ‘collecting, searching, or perhaps only finding’; adapting, editing and creating; iterating, re-planning and revising.⁴⁶ As Busch *et al.* explain, ‘what might seem coherent or deliberately confusing to the viewer is, in many cases, the result of a long process and not of a supposedly quick copy and paste’.⁴⁷

Similarly, Genette suggests the concept of hypertextuality (in the French, ‘bricolage’, which might translate as ‘D.I.Y.’) ‘generally carries derogatory connotations’ by those who consider it closer to ‘tinkering’ than ‘real’ art-making.⁴⁸ He defends such methods on the basis that

the art of ‘making new things out of old’ has the merit, at least, of generating more complex and more savory objects than those that are ‘made on purpose’; a new function is superimposed upon and interwoven with an older structure, and the dissonance between these two concurrent elements imparts its flavor to the resulting whole.⁴⁹

The meaning of a work produced by collage techniques is dependent on the interaction between its component parts, their original contexts and the new form that they create.

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The process of collage making (as with novel writing and other art-making) usually begins with some kind of idea, theme, or story to tell. Even the most Beethovian of practitioners will have an initial concept to build the work around. In the case of *NS*, the idea I began with was to tell the life-story of my alter-ego Ted Bonham.

46 Dennis Busch *et al.*, eds., *The Age of Collage: Contemporary Collage in Modern Art* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2013), 4.

47 Ibid.

48 Genette, *Palimpsests*, 398. Genette’s use of the word also nods towards Levi Strauss’s framing of mythic thought as a form of bricolage, and Derrida’s extension of this to the construction of all discourses.

49 Ibid.

Once the concept has emerged, the artist starts looking for material to be incorporated into the work. Busch *et al.* remark that '[a]rtists have various strategies for getting the right images for their collages; some allow themselves to be inspired spontaneously; others seek specific motifs, colors, or forms that are regularly found at antique dealers, flea markets, and on the internet'.⁵⁰ This description encapsulates the kinds of processes involved in gathering textual materials for *NS*. I discovered much of the material by chance, finding myself spontaneously jotting down quotations whilst reading novels, browsing the internet, or listening to the radio. Odd ideas or pieces of description from my writing journal also made their way into the text. But writing a novel of this length, in this manner, also requires a good deal of directed research, of reading with the specific intention of finding usable hypotexts, or indeed of creating new texts for a specific purpose. Literary texts, texts of theory from various fields, autobiographical material and the internet all provided multiple hypotexts for the fragments that compose *NS*.

Similarities can be drawn between my approach to sourcing and employing hypotextual sources for *NS* and the sorts of strategies being employed by readers of on-screen texts. These strategies are often grouped under the category 'hyperreading' and are employed in the reading of 'hypertexts'. To avoid confusion between these digital hypertexts and Genette's palimpsestuous hypertexts, I will continue to use 'hypertext' in Genette's sense of the term and use the hyphenated version 'hyper-text' when referring to digital texts.

Sosnoski's skimming and Hayles' scanning hyperreading strategies are essentially speed reading techniques that involve reading rapidly through a text, or even only glancing over it, at a speed that is too fast to form a good understanding of the content.⁵¹ In the case of skimming this is done by paying attention to the structure of the text, perhaps making use

50 Busch *et al.*, *The Age of Collage*, 4.

51 James Sosnoski, 'Hyper-Readers and Their Reading Engines', in *Passions, Pedagogies, and 21st Century Technologies*, ed. Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe (Logan: Urbana, Ill: Utah State University Press; National Council of Teachers of English, 1999), 161–77, *passim*; Katherine Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 55–80.

of a contents list or subheadings as a guide. When scanning, people seek out key words, phrases, or images in a text that flag sections that might be worth closer investigation. The digitisation of texts also allows readers to outsource some of the work of finding material to the computer itself by using what Sosnoski calls a 'filtering' strategy. When filtering, the reader deploys 'selection criteria' to search through the text and decide which parts to read. They effectively create a new text from just those parts.

Many of the texts appropriated into *NS* come from works that were of little other interest to me as a reader. By employing techniques such as skimming, scanning and filtering, I could more efficiently seek out material that might be suitable for appropriation. Indeed, considering that all the online content and most of the books used in *NS* were the result of online or library catalogue searches (both of which can be considered filtering tools), almost all the appropriated material in *NS* was the result of employing a version of the filtering strategy.

Hyperreading strategies offer readers the freedom to engage with texts in nontraditional ways, giving them more control over the reading experience. 'In constructive hyper-reading', Sosnoski remarks,

there is no doubt that the reader is in charge and that the text is subservient to the reader's wish [...] By framing texts, readers assimilate them to their interests and hence render them significant in the context of their concerns. The significance of the text, in this sense, is more important than its 'meaning'.⁵²

There is a parallel here with Bloom's notion of poetic misprision. By imposing my own intentions on a text, I can extract what is useful from it to create my own work. My re-use of found material within *NS* is itself similar to two further hyperreading strategies that Sosnoski calls 'trespassing' and 'fragmenting'. Sosnoski discusses the concept of trespassing in relation to the coding behind web pages as opposed to their content. He describes hyperreaders as 'textual burglars. They break into electronic texts and once they have found the source codes

52 Sosnoski, 'Hyper-Readers and Their Reading Engines', 163.

hidden from sight, steal them away with their cut&paste tools and reassemble them'.⁵³ Such trespassing might equally apply to the content of webpages, which is easily copied and reused elsewhere making it ideal material for the assemblage writer to use. As McMullen suggests, '[w]hether it's YouTube or Twitter, the contemporary writer can pull on disparate information, absorb it and paste it in their text'.⁵⁴ Sosnoski describes such hyperreading trespassers as 'ardent plagiarists', but this is an active and creative form of plagiarism by readers who also impose their own understanding on the texts they appropriate from.⁵⁵

Similarly, according to Sosnoski, '[f]ragmenting involves breaking texts into notes rather than regarding them as essays, articles, or books'.⁵⁶ These fragmented texts can then be arranged to suit the reader who feels 'that they are now free to organize textual features in patterns relevant to their own concerns whether logical, topological, or associative'.⁵⁷ This is a kind of reauthoring of the text to suit the reader's own concerns and understanding. It is highly analogous to the way in which *NS* has been created, bringing together fragments from multiple sources to create its own logical (in this case narrative) structure.

Ferris remarks that whilst '[t]raditional writing delivers a coherent narrative in large chunks of text; large chunks of text defeat the purpose of hyper[-]text', which allow 'writers to organize information loosely, rather than in a well-developed thesis'.⁵⁸ Like the assemblage-text, the hyper-text can be understood as participating in the fragmentary mode. However, despite the fragmentary nature of both forms, the reading experience enacted by the assemblage prose text is likely to differ significantly from that of a typical hyper-text. This is because assemblage texts like *NS* are presented in a linear order, encouraging readers to approach them as they would a non-assemblage novel. The text is

53 Ibid., 170.

54 Thomas McMullan, 'How Technology Rewrites Literature', *The Guardian* [Online] 23 June 2014, Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jun/23/technology-rewrites-literature-tom-mccarthy-internet> [Accessed 20 May 2015].

55 Sosnoski, 'Hyper-Readers and Their Reading Engines', 170.

56 Ibid., 163.

57 Ibid., 172.

58 Sharmila Pixy Ferris, 'Writing Electronically: The Effects of Computers on Traditional Writing', *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 8, no. 1 (August 2002).

produced with the assumption that it will be read from beginning to end and as such there are no obvious markers that allow readers to swiftly navigate or skip to those sections that they perceive as most relevant. In encouraging this linear reading of the whole text, the format of *NS* offers the opportunity for a deeper engagement with the work as a whole, despite its fragmentary composition. Indeed, this fragmentary composition, within the novel form, may well serve to increase reader engagement with the material by creating a natural focal point upon each individual fragment.

I have worked hard to ensure that readers who engage closely with the text will be rewarded for doing so. Discussions with my supervisor on this point have resulted in two key phrases useful in my editing process. The first, to be ‘careful of the arbitrary interpolation of extraneous matter’, relates to the need for any material included in the text to have some reason for being there; each fragment must be performing a role. The second, ‘clarity in mind-foxing’, reminds me that my more ambitious experiments with texts need to also be understandable, on some level, by the conscientious reader. By following these rules, I believe I have produced a text that, although reminiscent of hyper-texts, encourages a very different, and hopefully rewarding, kind of reading.

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The fragments that compose *NS* are the result of a variety of more or less radical adaptations of their original hypotexts. Genette provides a useful classification for the various kinds of hypertext, dividing them into two sorts; those derived from their hypotext by simple *transformation*, which are created by manipulating an already existing text, and those that derive from indirect transformation or *imitation*, which set out to imitate the style of another text or kind of text. Genette further categorises hypertexts by intention, such that they can be *ludic*, aiming ‘at a sort of pure amusement or pleasing exercise with no aggressive or mocking intention’;⁵⁹ *satirical*, aiming at ‘satirical or caricatural effect’;⁶⁰ or *serious*, which category includes most literary hypertexts and forgeries. These hypertextual forms are not mutually exclusive and many hypertexts engage in more than one kind of hypertextuality to

59 Genette, *Palimpsests*, 27.

60 *Ibid.*, 23.

varying degrees. Genette echoes Jung's discussion of the fragment when he talks about hypertextuality as a playful mode, telling us that

One could even go so far as to say that every form of hypertextuality entails some kind of game, inherent in the very practice of reusing existing structures; at bottom, whatever its urgency, tinkering is always a game, at least to the extent that it processes and uses an object in an unforeseen, unprogrammed, thus 'unlawful' manner—true play always entails some degree of perversion. Using and processing a (hypo)text for purposes foreign to its initial program is likewise a way of playing with it, of having fun with it and making fun of it.⁶¹

Such an understanding of the hypertextual demonstrates the appeal of the mode to me. It places an emphasis on play and experimentation with texts, over and above traditional storytelling. Importantly, I find it fun to adapt and alter texts, to make subtle changes to a found fragment, bringing it into a new context to perform a role. Huizinga sees this kind of playful spirit as fundamental to poetry and creative writing. For him the essence of the 'play-spirit' is '[t]o dare, to take risks, to bear uncertainty, to endure tension'.⁶² It is this tension that is at the heart of the creative act and which gives potency to the work of art. The aim of Huizinga's poet-player, and central to my own creative methodology, is 'to create a tension that will "enchant" the reader and hold him spellbound'.⁶³

Such tensions, as they are found in assemblage texts, relate to ambiguities created by the form. Genette remarks that

Every hypertext, even a pastiche, can be read for itself without becoming perceptibly 'agrammatical'; it is invested with a meaning that is autonomous and thus in some manner sufficient. But sufficient does not mean exhaustive. In every hypertext there

61 Ibid., 399.

62 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1949; London: Maurice Temple Smith Ltd, 1970), 72.

63 Ibid., 155.

is an ambiguity that [... is] caused by the fact that a hypertext can be read both for itself and in its relation to its hypotext.⁶⁴

Whilst knowledge of the hypotextual sources of a hypertext is not essential to understanding its surface meaning, those original contexts lend a depth of allusion and layers of meaning to its use. In a similar way, tension can be created between the individual fragment and its new context: the fragment as part of a new complete work. This capacity for allusion and suggestion, rather than elucidation, allows the fragment to create meaning beyond authorial intention.

Blake, in his correspondence with Dr Trusler, spoke in defence of writing in such a way:

You say that I want somebody to Elucidate my Ideas, But you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the Ancients considered what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction, because it rouzes the faculties to act.⁶⁵

Those Ancients of which he speaks no doubt included the likes of Heraclitus and the Pre-Socratics who are at the beginning of a long line of thinkers, which would later include Schlegel and Nietzsche, Joyce and Blanchot, who subscribed to a provocative form of theorising, not in opposition to the narrative of rational argument but certainly in addition to it. This tradition of thinkers and writers is very important to both how I think about the world and the work I aim to create.

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The fragments that make up *NS* vary considerably in both their degree of their hypertextuality, from fragments that have no specific hypotext (except their own earlier

64 Genette, *Palimpsests*, 397.

65 William Blake, 'Letter from William Blake to Rev. Dr. Trusler', in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman and Harold Bloom (1799; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 702.

drafts) to fragments of verbatim quotation, and in the sorts of hypotexts they draw on, from Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* to scientific paper abstracts. The proportion of fragments that derive from particular hypotexts and the types of hypotext that these fragments derive from vary throughout the novel and help to define a sense of progression through the text. The section from Ted's teenage years, for example, contains a significant amount of original material, much of it based on my memories of those years. This sits alongside fragments derived from my teenage notebooks, Kurt Cobain's notebooks (an edition of which I have had since my teens), fragments derived from the background material for a bizarre ebook by Ron O. Cook, and others discussing the history of making alcohol, again based on an internet source.⁶⁶ The section discussing Ted's midlife crisis, by comparison, has perhaps the highest proportion of fragments derived from particular individual hypotexts. Many of these are from academic sources and they include several exploring the idea of information overload and others concerned with identity from a psychological point of view. Those fragments that don't derive from specific hypotextual sources tend to refer to Ted's family and play an important role grounding the abstract theoretical texts in the real world of Ted's life. These increase in frequency as Ted gets to grips with his issues and during the fallout from his father's death, creating a more intimate reading experience that suits the move to more personal, less abstract themes.

The process of selecting, filtering, adapting and writing these fragments was ongoing throughout the drafting and redrafting process. As fragments were produced, they had to be fitted into the developing wider schema. Some interesting fragments didn't initially have an obvious place in the text and needed to be put to one side for possible later use. Other fragments were put in and then moved or removed because they were too similar to those around them, or too dissimilar. The placement of fragments within the novel was based in

66 Kurt Cobain, *Journals* (London: Penguin, 2003); Ron O. Cook, 'A Secret, Closely Held', *Enigmni.com* [Online] (no date) Available: <http://www.enigmni.com/roc-secclosheldpg.htm> [Accessed 27 October 2016]; David J. Hanson, 'History of Alcohol and Drinking Around the World', *Alcohol Problems & Solutions* [Online] 29 April 2005, Available: <http://www.alcoholproblemsandsolutions.org/Controversies/1114796842.html> [Accessed 12 September 2016].

part on the evolving plan of the novel, but also on an iterative process of trial and error. These fragments could also be adapted, repeated, and even newly created. If a fragment was the wrong length it could be shortened or lengthened. Texts could swap genders, subjects, or points of view. They could be deleted and replaced with something new. Throughout this process I was seeking, in Cran's words, 'meaningful encounters and juxtapositions' between and even within fragments, with the aim of 'bringing ideas into conversation with one another'.⁶⁷ James Gallagher's description captures something of what this experience is like for the practitioner. He describes himself as being '[i]n a constant state of layering paper, moving shapes, adding and subtracting colors' – as I might layer stories, move fragments, add and subtract words – 'waiting for figures to form and something exciting to happen. And when it does, when I have spotted that brief moment in time that feels so natural, or unnatural, that's when I leave it up to the viewer to decide what it all means'.⁶⁸

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Whilst the collage artist may begin to search for such relationships between her fragments by laying out her source images on a board and starting to play with their placement, it is difficult for the assemblage writer to get a similar overview of her work. My use of technology had a profound effect on how I went about doing this. As McMullen explains:

Writing with word processors has given a new organisation to shaping sentences but it has also given flexibility; paragraphs can be switched, flipped and thrown out with an ease that would've been impossible when working with a typewriter. As we become increasingly inundated with little black screens this fluidity is becoming ever more central to how writers shape their work.⁶⁹

Scrivener is a writing program specifically designed to aid writers working on longer and more complicated texts.⁷⁰ I began using *Scrivener* whilst also working on the early concepts

67 Cran, *Collage in Twentieth-Century Art, Literature and Culture*, 4.

68 Quoted in Busch *et al.*, *The Age of Collage*, 196.

69 McMullan, 'How Technology Rewrites Literature'.

70 Blount, *Scrivener*.

for *NS* and its design has helped create the process by which the novel was made. *Scrivener* breaks each project into documents that can be organised into separate folders and subfolders. Text documents as well as folders can have sub-documents beneath them, allowing the hierarchy to become as complicated as necessary for the project undertaken. These can be used flexibly by the writer to break down her work however she sees fit. For example, documents can be used to represent scenes and folders used to define chapters (*Scrivener* aids such usage by offering compilation formats that, for example, can delineate between folders and add in chapter names). For *NS* I could create a separate document for each individual fragment and use a series of folders and subfolders to organise the text for easier navigation and editing (these folders are largely not indicated in the final text, except for the separation of the prologue and the epilogue from the main body of the novel). The folders and text documents all sit within a 'binder' which is a removable navigation bar on the left-hand side of the screen. As standard, this binder presents all the folders and documents in the order that they will appear once the work is compiled into another format. Documents and folders can be moved around within the binder using a simple drag and drop method that means one can easily manipulate their order. In the case of *NS* this makes it possible to move fragments around and try different orders and combinations with a similar ease to that of a collage artist moving images around on a board.

This feature also helped with the process of revising and redrafting *NS*. At one point the novel text stood at close to 110,000 words, well beyond the maximum word count for the thesis (even before this essay component was considered) and placing it outside of industry norms for first time novels, particularly given its unusual composition. The folder structure of *Scrivener's* binder made it easy to remove whole fragments and groups of fragments from the draft text and to reorder those that remained. The much leaner version of the novel produced by this process included in this thesis will now form the basis for the version sent to agents and publishers.

The binder also provides access to project research notes that are not included in the main text document. This provides a place within the program for key research documents (it is possible to import files in various formats, not just text documents) allowing access to

them without leaving the project window. In my case, it allowed me to store hypotexts that I had yet to edit or find a place for as well as fragments removed from the text, which I kept in a separate folder easily accessible should I wish to reinstate them into the novel.

Another key feature of *Scrivener* is that each document and folder is assigned a virtual index card and can be labelled with various user-defined pieces of meta-data. These index cards allowed me to keep track of the draft status of each fragment and to keep a record of the source texts for individual fragments. A space for document notes allowed me to give myself reminders about possible changes or other thoughts about texts. Index cards and document notes are amongst the details viewable on a pane on the right-hand side of the screen and the index cards can also be viewed on a separate virtual cork board. The project text is viewable either as individual documents, as a selection of multiple documents (including multiple sections from different parts of the text on the same screen), or as a single ongoing text (similar to most other word processors). A full screen text mode presents the text uncluttered by the distractions of *Scrivener's* additional functionality.

Finally, *Scrivener's* 'snapshot' function allows drafts of documents to be captured and saved easily. This enabled me to keep a record of original hypotexts, so they could be revisited if needed, and to save drafts of fragments before experimenting with them further in case it was later necessary to return to an earlier version.

It is possible that a similar work-process could be attempted using physical materials, perhaps making use of a filing system and actual index cards. Certainly, the likes of Burroughs, Acker and Cha achieved their collage-like compositions without the benefit of this kind of software. But given the amount of time and organisational effort that would be required to imitate such work off screen, it seems unlikely that I would have achieved a similar composition thirty years ago. In digitising the process *Scrivener* can significantly assist in the organisation of texts of this sort.

Every technology does however have its limitations and *Scrivener* began to struggle with the sheer number of documents I required for each of the hundreds of fragments contained within *NS*. This resulted in the program freezing if I tried to view the whole text as a single view, as well as a noticeable slowing of speed in both searches and viewing larger

groups of fragments. These inconveniences were just that, and although they were frustrating at times, they were far outweighed by the flexibility of *Scrivener* in other respects.

d. The Novel as Montage

I have been discussing *NS* as an assemblage-text in relation to collage, but there is a sense in which it can also be seen as montage. These two terms are often used interchangeably, but montage is also sometimes used in opposition to collage. Definitions vary, but the key distinction in respect to the current discussion is suggested by Kunin who explains that collage often 'designates spatial arrangement of fragments' whilst 'montage designates the arrangement of fragments in chronological sequence'.⁷¹

Novels are essentially temporal works in that they are normally read page by page. As suggested above, the textual fragments in *NS* can be seen, especially in this sense, as analogous with shots in a film. Each fragment is a viewpoint on a particular scene or idea and so the transitions between fragments bear similarities to transitions between shots in a film. Film montage theory, which is interested in shots and the transitions between them, can then offer a way of explicating the elements of assemblages that relate to their temporal nature as texts.

There are two schools of thought that relate to the way montage is used in film. Spencer concisely captures 'the essential disagreement about the nature of montage', which, she tells us,

concerns the question of whether the participating elements are to be relatively similar to one another, so their ensemble provides an impression of harmony, or whether they are to be relatively varied, so that their combination results in contrast, conflict, tension, and explosion.⁷²

⁷¹ Kunin, 'New Poetries', 218.

⁷² Spencer, *Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel*, 116.

Whilst most novels resemble the first kind of montage, assemblage texts tend to more closely resemble the latter.

In his discussion of what he calls 'literary mosaic', Shields contends that momentum 'derives not from narrative but from the subtle, progressive buildup of thematic resonances'.⁷³ Similarly, Hermans and Kempen suggest that montage is more concerned with 'the rhythmic patterns of the combined fragments than in the narrative coherence of events'.⁷⁴ Yet readers still seek a narrative from the montage text. Eisenstein discusses the tension this creates in films in terms of 'depiction' (i.e. the content being communicated) and 'rhythm' (the momentum of the film or text) telling us that these two elements 'are inevitably in conflict in montage'.⁷⁵ Individual fragments need to be long enough to fulfil a depictive function in the text but it is essential that they do not interrupt the momentum or rhythm of and between fragments.

The narrative of *NS* follows the life-story of its protagonist, but within this broad structure fragments are organised along more thematic or associative lines. There is a danger that, in following such associative trails, a fragment or series of fragments could draw the reader away from the narrative itself – that we might be drawn too much along with the rhythm or momentum of the text and lose track of the story underpinning it. Equally, part of the reason for composing a novel in this manner is to make use of the capability of the assemblage composition to follow flights of fancy rather than being entirely constrained by plot. The success of the novel depends on finding the right balance between these two elements.

Eisenstein further warns that if the individual shot (or fragment) is poorly constructed then we place additional difficulties in the way of the reader understanding the work.⁷⁶ A badly formed fragment distracts from its content. The solution, for *NS*, isn't simply a case of

⁷³ Shields, *Reality Hunger*, # 334.

⁷⁴ H. J. M. Hermans and Harry J. G. Kempen, *The Dialogical Self: Meaning as Movement* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1993), 53.

⁷⁵ Sergei M. Eisenstein, *Selected Works 2: Towards a Theory of Montage*, ed. Richard K. S. Taylor (London: BFI Publ, 1994), 229.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

creating fragments that are ‘good enough’. By presenting a visually broken up text, *NS* places an increased focus on each individual fragment, which must, therefore, offer enough to the reader to be worthy of this additional attention. This is achieved in part by the very nature of the fragment as a form that can allude to a context beyond itself. Eisenstein describes this in terms of the law of *pars pro toto*. Montage, he tells us, is

not merely the sum of the constituent elements, not a static summary of the whole, but something significantly greater. It will not be the sum of, say, five details that form one whole; it will be five wholes, each taken from a different angle of vision and in a different aspect, all of which are interconnected.⁷⁷

The montage artist works with fragments that still have the capacity to refer to an imagined whole, but for this to be effective the author is reliant on the imaginative capacity of the reader to reconstruct the whole from the part.

To misappropriate Rona Cran’s discussion of Frank O’Hara’s *Second Avenue*:

The danger with [*Notes to Self*] is that it can seem inaccessible, and that the sum of its component parts is ultimately available only to its author...[T]he reader is required to be quick, and if one can be quick enough, and intuitive enough about the [novel]’s collage processes, its elusive or seemingly inaccessible qualities will prove rewarding rather than merely frustrating.⁷⁸

New forms are often initially rejected as difficult. Sam Rohdie discusses the public reaction to Eadweard Muybridge’s still photographic series of motion (an early precursor to motion pictures). At first, he notes, these images of, for instance, a horse galloping, with the unconventional view they gave of the horse’s gait, were rejected as unpleasant. However, with a little exposure to this new form, viewers were soon able to understand and accept

⁷⁷ Ibid., 203.

⁷⁸ Cran, *Collage in Twentieth-Century Art, Literature and Culture*, 148.

what they were seeing: 'The disturbance was quickly standardised, accepted as both real and true'.⁷⁹

Being conscious of the range of possibilities of reader reaction, I have designed *NS* to try to mitigate against initial frustration. By beginning my novel with a prologue depicting the birth of a child, I introduce the fragmentary mode with an experience many readers will know first-hand and of which most, if not all, will have a pre-existing understanding. This presentation of the familiar in an unfamiliar way gives the reader time to orientate themselves. The text, in effect, begins by teaching the reader how to read it.

Part of this process is about familiarising the reader with the way in which meaning in montage can be produced not only within individual shots or fragments, but by the juxtaposition between them. 'The Kuleshov Effect' was first demonstrated by Soviet filmmaker Lev Kuleshov in the early twentieth century. When he intercut an actor's face with a shot of a bowl of soup viewers perceived the actor's blank expression as one of hunger. When intercut with a coffin, viewers saw grief, with a child playing, viewers saw his expression as one of joy. What the viewers perceived was not present in any single shot, but emerged from their combination. In fact, Kuleshov took his images from several *different* sources and relied on the imaginative capacity of the viewer to make a consistent narrative between them. Rohdie explains that Kuleshov's montages create an internal logical connection without there being a real one. Instead, reality is created in the editing.⁸⁰

The narrative in *NS* relies on a similar process. Fragments come from multiple sources, and in isolation each fragment may seem static, but a narrative emerges in the spaces between them. In this way, the imaginative capacity of the reader seeks to fill in the narrative gaps in the story. This process is an extension of something readers are always required to do when reading a novel. Palmer remarks that '[s]toryworlds differ ontologically from the real world because they are incomplete'.⁸¹ The reader must work to fill in the 'ontological gaps' inevitably left by the writer. Palmer's focus is on the minds of fictional

79 Sam Rohdie, *Montage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 4.

80 Ibid., 28.

81 Alan Palmer, *Fictional Minds* (Lincoln, Neb.: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2004), 34.

characters. He suggests that readers are particularly competent at constructing a 'continuing consciousness' for a character because they are used to doing so from their observations of the real world.⁸² Our observations of other people (and, it could be contended, ourselves) are always partial. There is a degree of creative work needed in order to frame real-world people as unified selves. *NS* relies on the reader's capacity to do such work to construct an identity and story for Ted Bonham from the fragments available to them.

A parallel process in film production is defined by Eisenstein as 'the montage principle'. Montage, he says, 'forces the spectator himself to create, and thereby releases that great force of latent creative excitement within the spectator'.⁸³ This increased engagement in the creative process can help shift the viewer or reader away from passive observation and towards active participation in the text.

82 Ibid., 175.

83 Eisenstein, *Selected Works 2*, 311.

4. Reading *Notes to Self*

In this section I examine how both the structure and content of *NS* engage with themes of identity and self-narrative. I begin by examining my relationship with Ted, moving beyond the idea of the pseudonym to explore Pessoa's notion of the 'heteronym'.¹ I go on to explore how the fragmentary composition of *NS* and my development of Ted as a polytagonist relate to models of consciousness and the plural self. I then examine how the intertextuality of *NS* links to ideas about self-narrative and memory before concluding by examining Ted's own grappling with notions of self in the content of the novel.

I make two caveats here before beginning this section: firstly, whilst many of the ideas mentioned below fed into my compositional methodology, the composition of *NS* is not intended to be a scientifically verifiable representation of human psychology. I am also not seeking to outline a single coherent and correct reading of the text here, but probing my own influences and understanding of the material.

a. Heteronyms

NS is ostensibly the autobiography of my pseudonym Ted Bonham who is both the named author and the subject of the novel. I have been writing as Ted (or rather ascribing my writing to Ted) for several years. Examining my use of a pseudonym now, I find two reasons for my having chosen to do so. Both relate to the idea of trying to distance the texts I produce from myself. Firstly, by ascribing my creative efforts to Ted I can distance myself from those that are unsuccessful, either in my own eyes or in the eyes of others. This frees

1 Richard Zenith, 'Pessoa's Heteronyms', *Poetry International* [Online] Portugal, 1 July 2006, Available: http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/cou_article/item/7096/Pessoas-Heteronyms [Accessed 1 February 2017].

me to write badly and therefore to take risks, as well as perhaps mitigating the emotional effect of negative criticism. Secondly, by writing as Ted I also distance myself from the content or argument of what I write. This allows me to fictionalise personal details or make controversial arguments without ascribing them or having them ascribed to me. Ted gives me the freedom to write provocatively, or exploratively to find out what I believe.

The early concepts for *NS* did not have a named protagonist. It was only as the text took on more autobiographical features that I realised, given it was being written under Ted's name, that I was in some sense creating a life-story for him. Ted, as he is represented in *NS*, shares many characteristics and autobiographical details with myself. The 'I' of the narrator and ostensible author often overlap with the 'I' of the physical creator of the text. The relationship between Ted and myself can be understood in terms of Fernando Pessoa's concept of the heteronym. Pessoa, who wrote under over seventy different names during his lifetime, differentiated his heteronyms from pseudonyms by rendering them with their own styles, opinions, beliefs and back stories, which did not always concur with their creator's. Narrators of texts are often like this; in that they are well developed characters that do not share a viewpoint with the author. However, by ascribing these characteristics not just to a narrator but also to the supposed author of a work, I am seeking to further disrupt the border between the text and context. *NS* is partly an attempt to create a heteronymic identity for a pseudonym that has taken on increasing importance to my writing life.

Amongst his many heteronyms, Pessoa created himself an 'orthonym', a writerly persona with his own name, and with a large amount of overlap with his real-world self, who interacted with his other heteronyms. Between the heteronym and the orthonym lies Bernardo Soares, ostensible author of *The Book of Disquietude*, who Pessoa described as 'a semi-heteronym because his personality, although not my own, doesn't differ from my own but is a mere mutilation of it'.² Soares differed from Pessoa's other heteronyms in that he was a persona that was closer to his 'real' identity, thoughts and beliefs, but still distanced by a separate name. The entanglement between author and heteronym suggested by the term semi-heteronym captures something of my own complex relationship with Ted.

² Pessoa, *The Book of Disquietude*, x.

Ted's heteronymic status is dependent on the development of an identity separate from my own. There are obvious limitations to the independence and self-hood that a heteronym can achieve. Ted, for example, has no ongoing physical identity. I feel that I only become Ted Bonham in performance, and then only in the sense that an actor becomes a character. Whilst I attribute much of my work to Ted, I am rarely consciously writing as him. He does not have the capacity to experience himself as a self, or indeed to experience anything except vicariously through me. In other ways, however, I can also live (and die) vicariously through Ted, and I am interested in how far I can go in creating for him a simulacrum of a self. In setting out Ted's life-story, *NS* is seeking to explore questions about the self such as those articulated by Benson — 'How much of me is in the telling? Is there a "me" apart from the telling? Is the story I tell of myself [...] a record of what I am and have been or is it a fabrication or construction?'.³

Benson draws the distinction between the non-conscious proto-self of biology and the autobiographical self of psychology and suggests that the latter is driven by self-narrative. He maintains that '[t]he story or stories of myself that I tell, that I hear others tell of me, that I am unable or unwilling to tell, are not independent of the self that I am: they are constitutive of me'.⁴ This suggestion is supported by evidence from the observation of children. Reporting on observations of a young girl between 18 months and 3 years old, Bruner remarks:

we were struck by the *constitutive* function of her monologic narrative. She was not simply reporting; she was trying to make sense of her everyday life. She seemed in search of an integral structure that could encompass what she had *done* with what she *felt* with what she *believed*.⁵

3 Ciarán Benson, *The Cultural Psychology of Self: Place, Morality, and Art in Human Worlds* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 46.

4 *Ibid.*, 45.

5 Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2000), 89.

Pessoa himself claimed 'I am the selfsame prose I write', and Freeman, similarly, understands the self as a linguistic construct, one predicated on the stories and ideas we tell ourselves about ourselves.⁶ 'We too,' he says, '*as selves*, are artifacts of the narrative imagination'.⁷ For Freeman, though, this selfhood is reliant on a self-awareness. The reality of my self depends on 'my own consciousness of it, from my own narrative imagination, indeed from my own *belief* in its existence'.⁸ Ted's quest for self-hood must then stall at this point. The narrative of *NS*, Ted's struggle with and ultimate failure of self, can be seen as a tautegory for this doomed quest.⁹ The dissolution of self is inevitable when there is no conduit in which the self can be resolved, and, no matter how complete the narrative, Ted will never have a consciousness of his own to acknowledge it.

b. Multiple Perspectives and Plural Selves

The rise of modernism brought with it an increased interest in representing the human consciousness. Psychologist William James first formulated the 'stream of consciousness' in 1890 and over the century that followed it became a well-known concept in both psychology and literary theory (within the broader category of interior monologue).¹⁰ James formulates his stream of consciousness as a continuous series of states of mind. As Humphrey points out, 'the techniques for presenting stream of consciousness [in literature] are greatly different from one novel to the next'.¹¹ What unites them tends to be the written representation of a stream of thoughts, often in a nonstandard grammar and proceeding

6 Pessoa, *The Book of Disquietude*, x.

7 Mark Philip Freeman, *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 223.

8 Ibid., 13.

9 The term 'tautegory' was coined by Coleridge to differentiate it from the notion of 'allegory'. Philip Hamilton explains that the two terms differ by the fact that 'tautegory is the same as what it figures in a way that allegory is not'. Philip Hamilton, *Coleridge and German Philosophy: The Poet in the Land of Logic* (London; New York: Continuum, 2007), 108.

10 William James, 'The Stream of Consciousness', *Classics in the History of Psychology* [Online] 1997, Available: <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/James/jimmy11.htm> [Accessed 2 February 2017] *passim*.

11 Robert Humphrey, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*, Perspectives in Criticism 3 (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1955), 23.

through associative links as opposed to conforming to the requirements of narrative. Ferris suggests that hyper-texts also work in this way, mimicking the way conscious thought appears to proceed through association and connection.¹² These are attributes that *NS* shares with the hyper-text, grouping fragments by associative links so that one fragment seems to instigate those that follow it. If we read individual fragments as representing individual memories or ideas, then sections of *NS* can be read as a series of associated memories and parenthetical thoughts. Similar processes occur in everyday conversation. We begin with a simple narrative but can quickly get side-tracked by parenthetical thoughts or even be interrupted by an interlocutor. *NS* thereby bears some similarity with the convoluted way in which people often relate stories about their lives in conversation.

Contemporary notions of consciousness have begun to diverge from the stream-of-consciousness model. Daniel Dennett demonstrates the stream-of-consciousness' reliance on a 'Cartesian Theatre', through which the flow of thoughts must pass and be observed. He argues that no such centre of consciousness exists, but rather that consciousness is distributed across the different parts or networks within our brain responsible for our phenomenological experience.¹³ According to Dennett, it does not make sense to talk about a single stream of consciousness because different parts of the brain can become conscious of the same event at different times and deal with this information in different ways. In his proposed 'Multiple Drafts' model there is therefore no single moment of becoming conscious, no single time at which we become aware of a particular event or idea, but rather different parts of our brain are stimulated by different aspects of that idea at different times and for different amounts of time. According to Dennett, 'at any point in time there are multiple drafts of narrative fragments at various stages of editing in various places in the brain' and our brain constructs a narrative out of all these fragments as and when it is required to do so.¹⁴ Our reported consciousness (whether that be self-reported or reported to an external observer) is dependent on the point at which we probe our awareness.

12 Ferris, 'Writing Electronically', *passim*.

13 Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, Penguin Science, Philosophy (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 107.

14 *Ibid.*, 135.

Consciousness, in Dennett's terms, seems then to correlate with the aims of the creators of assemblage texts and indeed open-structured works more generally, who often, as Spencer tells us, 'aspire toward the approximation of diffusion; of flux; of constantly forming, dissolving, and re-forming relationships among the elements of the work'.¹⁵ The Multiple Drafts model suggests a diffused consciousness that is in constant flux. The parts of our brain make moment on moment decisions as to whether to retain a particular phenomenological aspect of an event or to abandon it. Our phenomenological experience is dependent on how our brain responds to constantly changing stimulus and how the different parts of our brain interact with one another. The self, according to this model, relates to other psychological theories of the narrative self as a kind of 'center of narrative gravity'.¹⁶ Just as massive bodies can be usefully assigned a centre of gravity for the calculation of gravitational effects, so too it is useful to assign our multiple ongoing self-narratives a central point from which to emanate or to which they seem to be told.

Dennett's belief that there are no strict boundaries between the conscious and the unconscious means that the point at which the unconscious becomes conscious is also an illusion. He contends that there are many ongoing interactions between the various elements of our brain creating ideas and we only rarely become aware that we are conscious of a particular one of these. Writing seems to me an interesting medium in which to probe this indistinct borderland between the conscious and the unconscious. Umberto Eco describes how an understanding of the creative process necessitates an understanding of 'how certain textual solutions come into being by serendipity, or as a result of unconscious mechanisms'.¹⁷ It can often seem that the writing is not the result of a conscious thought process, but that the act of writing is itself a kind of thinking. As David Lodge puts it:

Writers discover what it is they want to say in the process of saying it, and their explanations of why they wrote something in a particular way are therefore always

15 Spencer, *Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel*, 52.

16 Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 430.

17 Umberto Eco et al., *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 85.

retrospective extrapolations, working back from effect to cause—wisdom after the event.¹⁸

This process of writing as discovery is necessarily also influenced by the form that the writing takes. Jarvis emphasises the influence of form, and in particular prosody, on the articulation of thought in this context. He suggests that, for Wordsworth and others, the way in which metre is used is ‘dependent upon the organization of consciousness itself’.¹⁹ Indeed, it may even be that the form is intrinsic to the expression of meaning such that the thought cannot be adequately expressed in another form. Jones suggests that Coleridge’s verse, for example, ‘thinks philosophically in a manner that philosophy proper cannot (or could not for Coleridge)’.²⁰ It is through his poetry that he can formulate ideas that he cannot otherwise articulate to himself. The form and content of these texts interrelate to constitute the meaning of the thought being articulated. The constraints of the form shape the idea that is expressed and *vice versa*. Approaching *NS* in these terms, we can understand its proliferation of registers as a formal expression of its multiple viewpoints. Its participation in the fragmentary mode helps shape the plurality of the ideas being explored.

However, the meaning of a text is not only dependent on the writer and its form, but also on the reader. I have discussed above how various features of *NS*, including its fragmentary composition, draw attention to the process of creating it. Spencer argues that in drawing attention to an artwork’s construction the artist ‘knows, and wishes to express his knowledge, that the appearance of a work of art may give of being “finished” is [...] but an illusion’.²¹ Just as there is no ‘final draft’ in Dennett’s Multiple Drafts model of consciousness, so too there is no final understanding of the meaning of a work. As one historical period follows another, Spencer contends,

18 Lodge, *Consciousness & the Novel*, 110.

19 Simon Jarvis, ‘Thinking in Verse’, in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romantic Poetry*, ed. Maureen N. McLane and James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 95.

20 Ewan James Jones, *Coleridge and the Philosophy of Poetic Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5.

21 Spencer, *Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel*, 58.

it is apparent to all that every art work is but a fragment, an incomplete and forever tentative statement, partly dependent on its audience for its meaning. Since the audience is forever changing as the work passes through various cultural environments, the nature of the work itself must be regarded as forever fluid and vulnerable to alterations.²²

NS does not seek to present an authoritative final narrative, but rather to provide a suggestive text that offers a wealth of interpretive possibilities, engaging individual readers in different ways. The knowledge embodied in the text will continue to alter and expand as it is discovered by new readers into the future.

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The Multiple Drafts model of consciousness has arisen alongside similar notions about the division of our personalities. Pessoa's heteronyms are believed by some to be the result of an abnormal psychological condition, but notions of the plurality of self in healthy individuals have become increasingly prevalent in psychological discourse.²³ Such notions are by no means new and can be seen played out in the contrasting hermeneutics of two key figures amongst the Jena Romantics. Friedrich Schleiermacher believed that texts were misunderstood as a matter of course. He contended that 'the meaning of a text or a collection of texts is always determinable by intuiting the meaning originally intended by the mind that produced them'.²⁴ Friedrich Schlegel, by comparison, believed that 'interpretation as divination of another's mind is overly ambitious, if not foolhardy'.²⁵ The reason for this disagreement was that for Schlegel the (understanding) mind 'contains within itself simultaneously a plurality of mind and a whole system of persons'.²⁶ Very likely influenced by

²² Ibid.

²³ Zbigniew Kotowicz, *Fernando Pessoa: Voices of a Nomadic Soul* (London: Berkeley, CA, USA: Menard; Distribution in N. America, SPD Inc, 1996), 40.

²⁴ Strathman, *Romantic Poetry and the Fragmentary Imperative*, 36.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Friedrich von Schlegel, 'Athenaeum Fragments', 170.

Schlegel amongst others, Coleridge entertained a similar notion in his notebooks, ruminating on '[t]he possibility that a man may be a Hive, a myriad of men in each man, every one of the Myriad holding himself & held by others to be *the man*'.²⁷

One way in which modern psychology represents this idea is through the 'multiple selves metaphor'.²⁸ This metaphor reflects the way we present ourselves differently in different situations, even think differently depending on the context. This has sometimes been explained as a sort of mask wearing, a disguising of the 'true' or 'authentic' self for social convenience. A nod to this view is made in *NS* during Ted's first days at university with fragments discussing the Venetian custom of mask-wearing. Modern psychological models, however, tend not to contain a 'true' self to disguise. Instead, they maintain that the self is composed of the totality of its presentations.

The plural self is represented in *NS* through Ted's presence as a polytagonist. Stockwell describes how 'a character running through a novel might have several different versions or enactors'.²⁹ Each enactor, in this respect, represents the character at a certain point or in a certain setting. Dickens's *David Copperfield*, to use Stockwell's examples, includes younger and older versions of the titular character, whilst Austen's Elizabeth Bennet represents herself entirely differently depending on her audience. Such multiplicity does not stem from a lack of authenticity on the part of the character; rather, it reflects the malleability of personality in different contexts. My polytagonist pushes this possibility further, existing in textual fragments notionally from across literary history. He is, in some sense, a manifestation of Schlegel's 'infinite number of real definitions for every individual'.³⁰ Stockwell describes *David Copperfield* as a 'split-discourse', in that the narrative is divided between the adult and the child David. Extending this notion to *NS*, we might describe it as a

27 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Vol. 4 1819-1826*, ed. Kathleen Coburn and Merton Christensen (London: Routledge, 1989), entry 5177 (fo69v).

28 Benson, *The Cultural Psychology of Self*, 28.

29 Peter Stockwell, 'How to Read a Mind', MOOC, *How to Read a Mind*, [Online] (March 2014) Available: <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/how-to-read-a-mind> [Accessed 29 March 2014]. Part 1.5.

30 Schlegel, 'Athenaeum Fragments', 171.

‘frayed-discourse’, offering a multitude of different perspectives from and on the polytagonist.

Dialogism’s influence on contemporary psychology has seen the likes of Rappaport *et al.* distinguish between the ‘serial pluralism’ of the modern era and what they predict will be a wide acceptance of ‘simultaneous pluralism’ in the postmodern era.³¹ Again, this goes back to Schlegel who, in Strathman’s formulation, believed that ‘the romantic is fully realised when engaged in dialogue [...] not just feeling (empathetically), or knowing (cognitively), but talking out loud, debating, bantering, even arguing’.³² It is Schlegel then who, according to Strathman, ‘leads understanding out of the private, mental sphere and back into the public, social, or rhetorical sphere [...] the realm of the marketplace or streetcorner, the townsquare or the Temple Mount’.³³ Thinking, in this sense, requires a second (or third, or fourth...) questioning voice to break the monologue of old thoughts repeating. My use of the fragmentary mode is designed to allow for such interactions between fragments, giving the opportunity for multiple perspectives to be portrayed and for a conversation to arise between them. However, such an attempt to represent our self-constructs can only ever be an approximation. As Taylor remarks, ‘our identity is deeper and more many-sided than any of our possible articulations of it’.³⁴

c. Intertextuality, Self-Narrative and Memory

Another characteristic of Spencer’s open-structured novels ‘is the deliberate rejection of the novel’s “frame,” of those literary conventions that have traditionally served to distinguish the novel from its surrounding context of reality’.³⁵ Such framing devices include the meta-textual elements surrounding the text — the preface, the author’s biography, the blurb and

31 Leon Rappaport, Steve Baumgardner, and George Boone, ‘Postmodern Culture and the Plural Self’, in *The Plural Self: Multiplicity in Everyday Life*, ed. John Rowan and Mick Cooper (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 1999), 93–106.

32 Strathman, *Romantic Poetry and the Fragmentary Imperative*, 38.

33 Ibid., 39.

34 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 29.

35 Spencer, *Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel*, 54.

so on — as well as in-text cues such as the kind of narratorial voice used. Readers, she suggests, have become accustomed to certain ‘patterns embodied in the various familiar narrative sequences’, resulting in only a superficial engagement with the text.³⁶ The removal of this frame is ‘a demand for the reader’s acute concentration, and sometimes it is a demand, as well, for his active participation in the re-creation of the book’.³⁷

NS’s most significant break with literary convention is its fragmentary composition, which allows a variety of different voices to be employed including many related to non-literary modes such as theoretical discourses, advertisement copy and web articles. The inclusion of this kind of material is in part intended to represent our modern relationship with and access to these kinds of discourses and how this impacts on our understanding of ourselves. Rappaport *et al.* report that ‘social-emotional adjustment to life in postmodern societies encourages, and all but requires, development of a pluralistic sense of self’: ‘This is a self’, they contend, ‘that owes its pluralism or multiplicity to exposure to the constant barrage of imagery and information produced by postmodern communication technologies’.³⁸ ‘Information overload’ is a common complaint today, but it is a complaint that has been around for hundreds of years.³⁹ The subject is approached directly within the content of *NS* with fragments expressing the fears of thinkers and writers from throughout history about the increasing pace with which new information is created and shared. The fragmentary composition of *NS* can be understood as a representation of our fragmented experience and understanding of this flood of information. Read in this way, the juxtapositions between fragments reflect the disjointed feeling of channel hopping on a television or our distracted attention flicking between different media across multiple screens or windows. My appropriation of real-world fragments forefronts such a reading. It also results in a kind of ‘multiplication of perspectives’, enabling the text to give several

36 Ibid., 57.

37 Ibid.

38 Rappaport, Baumgardner, and Boone, ‘Postmodern Culture and the Plural Self’, 93, 98.

39 Ann Blair, ‘Information Overload’s 2,300-Year-Old History’, *Harvard Business Review* [Online] 14 March 2011, Available: <https://hbr.org/2011/03/information-overloads-2300-yea> [Accessed 11 January 2017].

narrative focal points around a single theme or idea.⁴⁰ In the case of *NS*, these differing perspectives aren't explicitly linked with particular individuals, as is perhaps more typical, but rather are intended to suggest the multiplicity of perspectives that can be in dialogue or conflict internalised within a single individual.

In presenting fragments of texts seemingly from very different discourses next to each other, I am also seeking to disrupt the reading experience. One aim of this is to engage the reader in a novelistic reading of texts that would usually be read in a different way. An early reader of *NS* in draft form commented that he found himself 'coerced into several different reading postures/analytic practices, and that these then begin to bleed into one another, so that we find ourselves reading a candid personal confession as a piece of philosophy, or a historical text as a biographical note'.⁴¹ The reader might well find such a reading experience 'disorienting', but it is my hope that it creates new ways of approaching the text that are also 'rich and rewarding'.⁴²

NS does employ the literary convention of including a prologue and epilogue, which, as Spencer suggests, 'have traditionally served to distinguish the novel from its surrounding context of reality'.⁴³ However, even these are used in such a way as to undermine readers' expectations of what is notionally an autobiographical text. They do this by referring to periods of time outside of the notional autobiographer's experience, both before his birth or after his death. These sections, like the rest of the novel, also include large amounts of appropriated material that has literally come from outside of the frame of the fictional work.

The intertextuality of *NS* also relates to how our engagement with textual material and the external world help shape our concepts of self and our self-narratives in particular. King suggests that '[t]he notion of a composite protagonist draws on the notion of relational identity' and that the self, in this sense, 'is defined by – and lives in terms of – its relations

40 Spencer, *Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel*, 54.

41 Joey Connolly, 'Notes on Notes to Self', 13 October 2016 (unpublished communication with author).

42 Ibid.

43 Spencer, *Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel*, 53.

with others'.⁴⁴ The plurality of self is then necessarily a product of our engagement in the world. We gather meaningful objects and texts around us and define ourselves by our likes and dislikes. In doing so we have to allow concepts from the world into the conceptual space in which we define our selves. Anderson describes this form of self-making as the 'self-concept'. 'Instead of forming our ideas of who and what we are on the basis of the "found" identity fixed by social role or tradition,' he contends, 'we begin to understand ourselves in terms of the "made" identity that is constructed (and frequently reconstructed) out of many cultural sources'.⁴⁵ This is not always a positive experience, especially in the clamour of the (post)modern world. Gergen warns that the postmodern condition 'is marked by a plurality of voices vying for the right to reality'.⁴⁶ The appropriated material within *NS* is in part a representation of the 'multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of self' that compete for our attention in a world where 'we are invited to play such a variety of roles that the very concept of an "authentic self" with knowable characteristics recedes from view'.⁴⁷ The 'multiphrenia' that arises from this condition is evident during Ted's midlife crisis. This part of the text contains the highest proportion of appropriated fragments in the whole novel, and many of these external voices provide contradictory notions of the self.

How we deal with this multiplication of internal and external voices is at the centre of Hermans and Kempen's notion of the 'Self'.⁴⁸ The Self, according to Hermans and Kempen, is the part of the self that reflects on its own nature. They conceive of the self as a crowd of 'characters' each representing a position the 'I' can take. The Self is one amongst the many I-positions within the self, but it is an I-position 'of a special nature. It has the capacity to juxtapose and interrelate the other positions that neither apart nor in their incidental

44 Laura Tanja King, 'Travelling Without Moving: Navigating the Liminal Space between Memoir and Fiction', *New Writing* 12, no. 1 (2 January 2015): 27–34. I would suggest that Ted, as a polytagonist, is such a composite protagonist.

45 Walt Anderson, ed., *The Fontana Post-Modernism Reader* (London: Fontana Press, 1996), 10.

46 Kenneth J Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 7.

47 Ibid., 6–7.

48 Hermans and Kempen, *The Dialogical Self*, *passim*.

relationships can achieve any synthesis of the self as a whole'.⁴⁹ This Self, then, 'represents a metaposition that is actively oriented to synthesize the self as a whole'.⁵⁰ It does not, however, unify the different voices of the characters, who retain their relative autonomy. One or other of these characters can at times become 'so dominant that even the Self is, temporarily or more permanently, under its control', as may happen, for instance, in an outburst of anger.⁵¹ Hermans and Kempen contend that when you apologise for such situations by suggesting 'I was not myself', you mean by this that you were not in the control of your Self.

One reading of *NS* suggests that the novel-text is the result of Ted's Self curating the fragments of ideas and memories and documents, the material of so many different I-positions, to represent Ted's narrative. We get glimpses the Self at work within the text in the italicised fragments of the Scholar character. Perhaps it is he who is gathering and reordering the material from which the novel is made. Ultimately, though, the processes by which we construct our self-narratives remain mysterious — we are unable to effectively probe our subconscious mind — and the elusive habits and activities of the Scholar also reflect this.

In constructing our self-narratives we necessarily draw on the stories we have been told. Helen Keller's autobiography is an extreme example of the influence of external texts on a person's self-narrative. Freeman explores Keller's relationship with the texts she read, explaining that Keller

was ultimately unsure which of the words she uttered and indeed which of the thoughts she thought were her own, if any. Moreover, she was also unsure whether this "self" she believed she was, was anything more than a heterogeneous ensemble of texts.⁵²

49 Ibid., 92.

50 Ibid., 95.

51 Ibid.

52 Freeman, *Rewriting the Self*, 21.

Helen's is something of a unique case. Her lack of sensory experience meant that much of her understanding of the external world came through the texts she read. Her self-doubt was first instigated by an episode of cryptomnesia in her childhood, when she discovered that a story she wrote at eleven years old bore a startling resemblance to a fairytale she had read some four years earlier. We are all capable of such unintended reproductions, and the appropriations within *NS* can also on be read as a representation of this. Indeed, as a fictional character, Ted's phenomenological experiences are not just limited by his sensory deprivations, they are non-existent. It therefore seems appropriate that such unintended appropriations would be exaggerated in his autobiography.

Freeman maintains that 'it is perfectly justified to call what Helen has done an autobiography, even if it is the case that she is inevitably working with "hand-me-downs", so to speak, derivatives of what has come before; in telling your own story, you can only work with what is available', our stories have to be 'constituted as such *inside* language and culture, inside that "world" we keep referring to'.⁵³ He is quick to add, however, that it is how these hand-me-downs are put to use that determines what kind of work is created. Some people, he suggests, are unable to break with the idiom from which they are borrowing. Others, Helen among them, seek to 'find images or words for thoughts or selves that are strictly their own'.⁵⁴ They may find limited success, but they 'must inevitably be thwarted by the fact that they are always already in a world whose contours have been supplied prior to entry'.⁵⁵ It is to the final group of writers that I aim to belong, those who 'try to seize upon what is and, precisely through attempting to rework the old, the established idiom, succeed in creating something — or someone — new and original'.⁵⁶ The assemblage composition of *NS* allows me to radically alter the context, and thereby the meaning, of a diverse range of texts, reworking them to tell a new story, that of Ted Bonham.

Ted's story is ostensibly being told by Ted himself and as such *NS* can be read as a written articulation of Ted's self-narrative. Theorists have compared the construction of self-

53 Ibid., 79.

54 Ibid., 80.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

narratives to the selective processes involved in creating autobiography and even to the creative processes involved in writing fiction.⁵⁷ *NS* uses its fragmentary composition to explore these kinds of links.

Our self-narratives are created from our episodic memories. Quoting Robert Wider, Shields remarks that most of us 'recall only the most intense moments, and even these tend to have been mythologized by repetition into well-wrought chapters in the story of our lives'.⁵⁸ The fragments that compose *NS* can be read as representing these most intense moments. Our memories of such moments are themselves the product of a creative act. Contemporary neuroscience suggests that it is a mistake to think of our memories as storage units.⁵⁹ The recollection of an event as a memory involves the reconstruction of that event. Such a recollection is a (re)creative act that constructs a memory out of the elements of our experience, often with a surprising lack of fidelity to life. The adaptation of found fragments within *NS* creates distortions in the original that mirror those that arise through our (mis)remembering. Somewhat counter-intuitively, memory researchers have shown that such distortions are exaggerated by repeatedly returning to a memory.⁶⁰ The more we remember something, the less true to the original it becomes. Similarly, the process of drafting and redrafting in *NS* has produced what I hope are 'well-wrought' fragments, but fragments that are altered further and further away from their hypotexts.

Shields describes the process of creating a narrative from episodic memories as being reliant on 'complex narrative strategies that closely resemble the strategies writers use to

57 See, for example Freeman, *Rewriting the Self*; Benson, *The Cultural Psychology of Self*; Taylor, *Sources of the Self*; Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*; Michele L. Crossley, *Introducing Narrative Psychology: Self, Trauma, and the Construction of Meaning* (Buckingham; Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2000).

58 Shields, *Reality Hunger*, # 6.

59 Robert Epstein, 'Your Brain Does Not Process Information and It Is Not a Computer', *Aeon* [Online] 18 May 2016, Available: <https://aeon.co/essays/your-brain-does-not-process-information-and-it-is-not-a-computer> [Accessed 5 December 2016].

60 Arthur Dobrin, 'Your Memory Isn't What You Think It Is', *Psychology Today* [Online] 16 July 2013, Available: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/am-i-right/201307/your-memory-isnt-what-you-think-it-is> [Accessed 29 September 2016].

produce realist fiction'.⁶¹ Just as there are ontological gaps in our understanding of others, so too there are significant gaps in our memories of our own lives. Often, it is not necessary for us to fill in these gaps because we can ignore them, but in telling our self-narratives we seek a coherent structure in which to situate our memories. The work of finding the connections and linking fragments within *NS* has not been finished by the author, as if, perhaps, this is his narrative as told to himself, still incomplete and somewhat incoherent, rather than to an audience. The construction of a more-or-less coherent life-story for Ted Bonham is dependent on the reader for completion.

d. Ted's Conception of his Self

Issues of identity are also explicitly addressed in the novel through Ted's changing conception of the self as his understanding of it develops throughout his life. By beginning with a prologue set before and during Ted's birth I acknowledge an idea articulated by Taylor, that 'even what happened before I was born might on one reading be seen as part of the process of my becoming'.⁶² Many of the factors that will influence the people we become are already decided before the moment of our birth.

Fragments from the early part of *NS* tend to deal generally with how children develop into adults and come to understand their place in the world. The development of Ted's individual identity is mostly dealt with through biographical narrative until it is brought into greater focus with his act of apostasy as a teenager. His study of pataphysics at university leads him to a theoretical engagement with the subject of self, one that is also influenced by his travel experiences.⁶³ His decision to settle down can be seen as a result of a desire to create a life for himself, and in doing so create an extended web of significance in which to understand his own reasons for being. Ted's midlife crisis conforms to the cliché of men of that age reacting against their settled life, but it is also a response to his interaction with the wider world. Both the impossibility of integrating all information into a single system of

61 Shields, *Reality Hunger*, # 165.

62 Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 50.

63 Pataphysics is an imaginary, absurdist philosophical discipline first conceived of by Alfred Jarry.

understanding and the difficulty of perceiving his own significance and impact on the world contribute to this, especially in as much as he feels a need to communicate with the world through his writing. He is in part struggling to maintain a unified sense of self in a divided, plural world. The solution Ted arrives at, as indicated by the continued fragmented structure of the novel, is that we have to come to accept a certain amount of disunity within ourselves.

Such an understanding of the self is not unique to the present time and has its roots in Lockean notions of identity. Locke distinguished the person from the biological human, telling us that the former 'can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by consciousness'.⁶⁴ In his discussion of Locke's theory of identity, Fairer highlights the idea that such a consciousness need not be continuous (indeed, it will inevitably be interrupted by sleep, for example, or forgetfulness) but must demonstrate a continuity.⁶⁵ Personal identity, in the Lockean sense, is dependent on the memory, which links together the events of our past with our present selves. As Fairer summarises, 'Lockean identity resides neither in the material body alone nor in an immortal soul, but in successive confirmations of a persisting life'.⁶⁶ It is our memories and the stories that we tell ourselves that define our identity over time. Such a conception of identity resonates with Gray's (and my own) beliefs about the self. He cites both recent cognitive science and ancient Buddhist teachings in defence of his contention that our belief in ourselves 'as unitary, conscious subjects' is illusory, noting that '[b]oth view selfhood in humans as a highly complex and fragmentary thing'.⁶⁷ Again, we can see such an understanding of the self represented in the fragmentary composition of *NS*.

The novel's ending explores the loss of self at the end of life. Ted's deterioration with Alzheimer's is necessarily tinged with sadness, but his acceptance of what is to come and his determination to remain happy into his confusion suggest a way of coming to terms with the

64 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690; Menston: Scolar Press, 1970), § 9.

65 David Fairer, *Organising Poetry: The Coleridge Circle, 1790-1798* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 33-34.

66 *Ibid.*, 34.

67 Gray, *Straw Dogs*, 70.

reality of the mortality of the self. Killing Ted off at the end of the novel is in part a cathartic act, the destruction of the protagonist freeing the author from the work. But the use of my alter-ego Ted also creates a more personal involvement for me as a writer. At some point we must all confront the end, and killing off Ted is a way for me to work out some of my own thinking about death and in particular my own death. My continued use of Ted as a pseudonym, despite his death in *NS*, suggests there is still more work to be done in this regard.

NS is for me about the construction and dissolution of identity. Our identity is tied up with the stories we tell ourselves, the ideas and opinions we have, our likes and dislikes and the cultural signifiers and objects we gather around us. All of these attributes feed into the creation of Ted's self-narrative in *NS*. His ultimate demise can be understood as the inevitable failure of trying to create a real identity for a fiction, but it also represents the inevitability of our own identities unravelling through the loss of these same things. Whether fictional or real, eventually all that remains of a person are the stories that are told about them.

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Appendix – Fragment Sources

This appendix contains the source texts from which fragments in the novel have been derived. The references given are of those texts I consulted, rather than necessarily the best scholarly edition. The full reference is included the first time it is used, after which a shorter reference is used. Where page numbers are available these have been included. Where multiple sources contributed to the same fragment these have been included in the same endnote and separated by a semi-colon. In compiling this list I discovered that some of the online sources used are no longer available; these have been indicated as such. Likewise the couple of instances where I can no longer locate the origins of a fragment. Fragments without direct sources are not endnoted.

¹ Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquietude: By Bernardo Soares, Assistant Bookkeeper in the City of Lisbon*, trans. Richard Zenith, (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), ix.

² Henry Miller, *Black Spring* (Grove/Atlantic, Inc., 2007), 8.

³ Fandom, 'From Tiny Acorns', *The Runescape Wiki*, accessed 15 July 2017, http://runescape.wikia.com/wiki/From_Tiny_Acorns; Angus Stevenson, ed., 'Caper 2', *Oxford Dictionary of English* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴ American Pregnancy Association, 'Patterned Breathing During Labor: Techniques and Benefits', *Americapregnancy.org*, accessed 15 July 2017, <http://americanpregnancy.org/labor-and-birth/patterned-breathing/>.

⁵ Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Constance Garnett (Project Gutenberg, 1998), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1399/1399-h/1399-h.htm>, ch 13. This edition was used because it is searchable, it allowed me to copy and paste the sections of text I was working from, and because this translation uses a slightly antiquated English that was suited to my purposes.

⁶ Matthew J. Simpson, Jesse A. Sharp, and Ruth E. Baker, 'Distinguishing between Mean-Field, Moment Dynamics and Stochastic Descriptions of Birth–death–movement Processes', *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and Its Applications* 395 (February 2014): 236–46.

⁷ American Pregnancy Association, 'Patterned Breathing During Labor'.

⁸ Ferris Jabr, 'How Does a Caterpillar Turn into a Butterfly?' *Scientific American*, 10 August 2012, <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/caterpillar-butterfly-metamorphosis-explainer/>.

⁹ American Pregnancy Association, 'Patterned Breathing During Labor'.

¹⁰ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, ch 13.

¹¹ Pearson Education, Inc., 'Two Sectional Views Comparing the Organ Positions in Nonpregnant and Pregnant Women' (Diagram), 2011, <http://www2.highlands.edu/academics/divisions/scipe/biology/faculty/harnden/2122/images/dev6.jpg>.

¹² American Pregnancy Association, 'Patterned Breathing During Labor'.

¹³ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, ch 13.

¹⁴ American Pregnancy Association, 'Patterned Breathing During Labor'.

¹⁵ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, ch 13.

¹⁶ Instructions from a home brew kit.

¹⁷ American Pregnancy Association, 'Patterned Breathing During Labor'.

¹⁸ Instructions from a home brew kit.

¹⁹ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, ch 14.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ American Pregnancy Association, 'Patterned Breathing During Labor'.

²² William C. Keel, 'Galaxies and the Universe - Galaxy Formation', *Astronomy.ua.edu*, 2009, <http://pages.astronomy.ua.edu/keel/galaxies/galform.html>.

²³ Susan Schoenian, 'Sheep 201: The Lambing Process', *Sheep 101*, 2011, <http://www.sheep101.info/201/lambingprocess.html>.

²⁴ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 'Coronation', *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 2007), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/coronation-ceremony>.

²⁵ 'Luke 2', in *The Bible, New International Version* (Bible Study Tools), accessed 16 July 2017, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/luke/2.html>.

²⁶ Antal Polony, 'The Art of Cigar Smoking', *Antal Polony: Literary Living*, 27 November 2011, <https://antapolony.com/essays/the-art-of-cigar-smoking-excerpt/>.