Locative Narratives and Storied Cities

Creating a City Guide for the Imagination

Rosamund Davies, Cherry Potts and Kam Rehal

ABSTRACT

This article provides three perspectives on the genesis of a book of flash fiction about the city. It is written by the three co-editors, who also contributed flash fiction stories to the book. Their aim for the book was to facilitate reading as a narrative spatial practice. Both the stories and the book itself were designed and edited to encourage readers to take the book into the city and read the stories in situ, facilitating a shared conversation between the reader, the printed page and the environment. Each co-editor, one of whom originally conceived the project, the second of whom is also the book's designer, and the third of whom commissioned and published the book, provides their individual critical reflections on both context and process. They discuss the particular theories of space, narrative and book design on which the project draws, including Bakhtin's notion of the literary chronotope, Seamon's concept of "place-ballets" and Hochuli and Kinross's discussion of the "physical presence of the [book] object." They elaborate on the relationship of these theories to specific writing, design and editing practices employed in the project, which are also discussed in some detail.

INTRODUCTION

This article is organized into three separate sections, each written by one of the three co-editors of the flash fiction anthology *Story Cities: a city guide for the imagination* (Davies et al 2019). The first section, 'Conception' is written by Rosamund Davies, who had the initial idea for the book, the second, 'Design', is written by Kam Rehal who was also the designer of the book, the third, 'Editing', is written by Cherry Potts, who commissioned the book for her publishing house, Arachne Press. The aim is for each section to provide a particular perspective on the genesis of the book, which is grounded in that individual's own history and practice and articulated in their own distinct voice. The collaborative approach taken during the course of this project means that these sections do not, however, confine themselves too narrowly to a discussion of the single activity of idea generation, book design or editing, in each respective case, as we each have had input into each other's sphere. The multi-voiced approach taken in this article reflects that of the book and we hope that it conveys a sense of the layers of understanding and experience that went into this project. These layers include the multiple perspectives on the city provided by the many other co-writers on the project, about which more is written in the text that follows.

Conception
Rosamund Davies

The immediate spur for creating this book was my involvement in a project that used contemporary mobile technologies as a medium for storytelling. Such technologies have created the possibility for location-enabled storytelling – locative narratives – which allow readers not only to read a story in the particular location in which it is set, but also, through their own actions, to participate actively in its telling. As part of the Crystal Palace Festival in London, I wrote a set of interrelated stories for the location-enabled mobile storytelling StoryPlaces platform (Hargood et al 2018). These stories were set in the grounds of the former Crystal Palace during the 19th and early 20th century, when the palace was still standing. The reader needed to move to different areas within the grounds in order to access different story sections. They could also choose which character's story to follow and take a few different paths through each narrative. The play between the space of the story and the space of the reader was a central narrative device within these stories. Physical landmarks that were present in the reader's

locative experience were included in the diegesis of the stories: the sphinx statues positioned on the terrace where the Crystal Palace used to stand, for instance. This provided a tangible spatial connection between the story and the reader. But the stories also made use of the narrative potential of dissonance between the reader's environment and that of the story, featuring landscape and architectural features within the story that were not present in the reader's actual location. The aim was for the story to start to inhabit the reader's real environment, not only through direct mapping of one space onto the other, but also by encouraging the reader to expand the space in which they were standing with their own imagination.

There is certainly great potential in this kind of digital storytelling, but my participation in this project led me to reconsider and evaluate the potential of the traditional book for facilitating the same kind of experience. Navigating the city through fiction is not a new activity, as walking tours of Dickens' London or Joyce's Dublin attest. These walking tours are a kind of narrative spatial practice (de Certeau 1984: 115), layering the fictional space over lived experience in the same way as do digital locative narratives, so that the match and mismatch between the two become part of both the reading of the story and the experience of the city.

I wanted to go one step further and create a book that was intended from the outset to bring together the material experience of reading a story in a book with the material experience of navigating a city, giving the reader a heightened sense of the constant interplay of narrative and space that happens in the city.

Before I say any more about what I hoped that interplay might achieve as a narrative experience, I want to take a bit of a detour, first into the city itself and then into the work of other writers whose writing about the city, narrative, time and space provide a literary and theoretical underpinning to this project.

The city

When you arrive in a new city, for work, for pleasure, or to make a new life, it is likely that, even though you have never been there before, you have certain expectations about what you will find. You expect that there will be streets and shops and markets, places to eat, places to drink, somewhere

you can stay the night. You might hope for there to be a bus or a train to take you around, and, if you are lucky, a park or a square in which you can sit for a minute and look about you.

You arrive and, more likely than not, you are indeed confronted with this expected syntax and it provokes in you, perhaps, a sense of both familiarity and alienation, because, although you know these places – you know streets and shops and hotels and cafes and stations – you do not know *these* places. You know cities, but you don't yet know this city. If you have time, you consult your guidebook for information, you learn about the city's history, its geography, its landmarks and recommended attractions, its population, its industry, and you start to read this knowledge into the city. Meanwhile, you walk around the streets, you get to know some of them. There is one street in particular, where you seem to repeatedly end up, it always seems to be the way to where you are going. It starts to feel familiar. You talk to people, you find a bar you like. After a few days of immersing yourself in cultural narratives about the city, of walking in the city, living in the city, the city starts to live within you. You put together your own particular narrative, you have a personal story of the city, you and the city have history.

Here is another scenario: you have lived in the same city for several years, maybe all your life. You travel to work, go to the shops, see friends, go out to eat, or to the cinema, or whatever else makes up your life and these trajectories are familiar, embedded, routine. You do not think of your life in the city as a narrative, as a story among others. Then you meet somebody whose life in the city is very different from yours, or you find yourself in a part of the city where you haven't been before, or which has changed, or to which you have not returned since you were a child, and the city loses its familiarity. It becomes storied with new experience, new possibilities, reanimated memories and, as it moves from background to foreground, it opens up and splinters into many different cities, many different stories.

Italo Calvino wrote about the phenomenon of the city as multiple in his book *Invisible Cities* (Calvino 1979). In this book all the cities are the same city: Venice. But equally each city is also every city. These cities, like all cities, are structured through human exchanges, through the movements of memory, desire, signs and trade. In *Invisible Cities*, however,

these invisible, structuring movements can also take material form as the actual architecture of the city, as with the city of Zoe, "the place of indivisible existence" (Calvino 1979: 29), in which there is no separation between "prince's palaces… high priests' temples, the tavern, the prison, the slum," and all of the city's buildings can be used for any purpose; or the spider web city of Octavia, which is held in a net across the abyss between two mountains, a fact which means that "the life of Octavia's inhabitants is less uncertain than in other cities. They know the net will only last so long" (Calvino 1979: 61).

The Literary Chronotope
Bakhtin's concept of the "literary and artistic chronotope" (Bakhtin 1981: 84) is also concerned with the way that physical space becomes charged with meaning through human cultural activities and, in particular, how this meaning is represented and produced through fictional narratives. He defines the chronotope as a fusion of temporal and spatial indicators, through which "time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (Bakhtin 1981: 84). In Bakhtin's model, the particular configuration of time and space crystallized within a chronotope provides an organizing structure for the narrative, facilitating certain kinds of characterization, story structure, theme, and narrative devices. It may both provide the framework for an entire novel or genre and/or be represented through one or more motifs within the narrative. He points, for example, to the particular characteristics of adventure-time, as found in the "adventure novel of everyday life" (Bakhtin 1981: 111), from ancient Greek and Roman literature through to the picaresque novel of more recent centuries, and to the way that the motif of the road is used within such novels to fuse the course of the protagonist's life with its "actual spatial course" (Bakhtin 1981: 120).

According to Bakhtin, this type of novel is characterized by a narrative trajectory of metamorphosis, in which the hero, through a series of encounters and events, becomes in some way a better, wiser, or perhaps richer or more powerful person. He defines the time through which this trajectory unfolds as adventure-time, because the life of the hero as represented in the narrative is governed mainly by chance and consists only of exceptional moments of crisis and conversion. This time is very different to the duration and fullness

of biographical time. It is also very different to historical time, because the change undergone by the protagonist is individual and private. The hero is not represented as part of a social world and a collective experience of time as movement and change, but as a traveller, an adventurer, moving through this world, but separate from it. While this world remains as and where it is, the hero moves on down the road, which represents "the path of life" (Bakhtin 1981: 120).

The road as "the path of life," travelled by the protagonist as adventurer, on a journey of personal transformation, is a chronotope that recurs in contemporary fiction and drama – most obviously in the road movie – but also within many other cinematic and literary genres.

Although not specifically mentioned by Bakhtin, the city is another recurring literary chronotope, through which writers have organized the meaning structures of their narrative. These narratives have also constructed cultural experience of the city itself. As Lehan says in his book on the city in literature:

> the city and its literature share textuality… ways of reading literary texts are analogous to the ways urban historians read the city. Shared are constructs built on assumptions about the mechanistic, the organic, the historical, the indeterminate, and the discontinuous. From Defoe to Pynchon, reading the text has been a form of reading the city
> (Lehan 1998: 8).

Not only the city, but the spaces within the city, which provide its recurrent and elemental syntax – the street, the square, the market, the café, the crossroads – are all themselves chronotopes. Each of these particular configurations of time and space suggests and facilitates particular narrative possibilities.

The Book

The ideas discussed above had been percolating for some time, decades even, before the locative storytelling project gave a potential shape to how I might bring them into my own practice. The idea was to create a book of narratives about the city that a reader could take into the physical space of any city and every city, whether it was one they knew

well or one they were visiting for the first time. It would function like a city guide for the imagination, facilitating a dialogue between the reader, the page and the city in which they found themselves at that particular moment, through which the reader could explore the specificity and multiplicity of every city, both the features that all cities share, as well as those that distinguish them one from another.

Crucial to achieving this aim was the decision to employ the narrative form of flash fiction. This particular term for the very short story has been in use since the 1990s, in the title of the anthology edited by James Thomas, *Flash Fiction: seventy two very short stories* (Thomas 1992). For Thomas, the defining characteristic of flash fiction was that it was "a story that would fit on two facing pages of a literary magazine" (Arnold 2018). This initial definition is illuminating, since it gets at the heart of what I would point to as flash fiction's most distinctive quality, which is that, while it unfolds word by word in linear sequence, once read, a flash fiction is short enough to be held complete in the mind, like a single flash of insight, just as it appears in its entirety on the page before us. In this respect, it is quite unlike a novel or even a longer short story.

Flash fiction's brevity also means that it relies on implication and allusion (Blair 2020, Stohlman 2020, Arnold 2018, Shapard 2012). As Joyce Carol Oates puts it, "in the smallest tightest spaces, experience can only be suggested." (Oates cited in Shapard 2012: 47). Literary scholar William Nelles points to the fact that one of the ways that very short fiction (which he defines as 700 words or under) does this is to depart from the intimate and detailed exploration of character and setting that have often been considered the particular terrain of the short story. Instead, very short fiction often features characters who are "literally and figuratively anonymous" (Nelles 2012: 92), while setting tends to be minimally described (Nelles 2012).

This approach requires the reader to "jump the gaps, fill in the blanks, follow the breadcrumbs" (Stohlman 2020: 25), an active process which, while demanding, has the potential, Stohlman suggests, to allow the reader to "inhabit the purposeful spaces left by the writer … cultivating a new symbiosis between writers and readers on and off the page" (Stohlman 2020: 25). When and if the reader experiences a flash of insight on reading a flash fiction, it results as much from what they are reading into the page as

from what is already there.

While very short fiction has a long history and has been compared to forms such as the fable (Blair 2020, Arnold 2018, Shapard 2012), the rise in popularity of flash fiction with both writers and readers over the last few decades has been linked to its ability to communicate the fragmented and ephemeral nature of contemporary experience (Shapard 2012). Its success in doing so, suggests writer Russell Banks, lies in the way that it "leaves the reader anxious in a particularly satisfying way" (Banks cited in Shapard 2012: 47).

These characteristics of flash fiction were particularly suited to our aim of facilitating reading as a spatial practice within the contemporary city, engaging with it as a site of flux and multiplicity. In its form, the book would resemble a guidebook – short passages of text dedicated to different aspects of the city – but, rather than providing a guide to the streets and sights of any actual city, it would engage the reader's own imagination. Each opening of the book could present the reader with a story that was at once complete and yet ephemeral and open to interpretation, inviting them to read the city into the story and the story into the city.

My co-editors and I agreed that we wanted the stories to offer multiple cultural, geographical, thematic and stylistic perspectives on the city and that the book should therefore be a multi-authored anthology, speaking in diverse voices and through different genres. Our aim was for the anthology to provide a sense of the fragmentedness and ephemerality of life in the city, but also plenitude, both through the variety of perspectives that the different stories provided and through being read as part of a multimodal practice.

Some discussions of flash fiction are concerned to make a clear and unbreachable distinction between flash fiction and the prose poem, in which the latter is "driven by imagery and emotion" (Stohlman 2020: 9), while the former "bends with tension like a fish caught at the end of a pole" (Stohlman 2020: 9), driving the narrative forward with a "desperate need to *tell a story before it's too late*." (italics in original text) (Stohlman 2020: 10). However, we tend towards the view that "the line between the prose poem and the short-short is invisible, if not nonexistent" (Barenblat n.d). As Barenblat points out, Lydia Davis, one of the most well-known practitioners

of the very short story, has had the same work included in both an anthology of poetry and an anthology of fiction. While many of the stories we included do indeed fit Stohlman's definition, what was most important for us in selecting work for inclusion in this particular anthology was to find pieces that offered an original perspective on the city, a particular sense of time and place, and which would lend themselves to being read as part of an interaction with the spaces of the city itself.

Starting from these initial principles, we developed a set of more detailed writing guidelines through which to achieve our narrative aims.

The unifying factor, besides the city itself, was that the book would be organised around a set of chronotopes, common to most cities, to which we would ask all writers to respond. The book would then consist of multiple stories relating to each of these chronotopes. The original chronotopes we began with were *ports, stations, main streets, side streets, crossroads, markets, squares, parks, cafes, hotels, buses, trains*. Our hope was that each chronotope would both facilitate multiple narrative possibilities and lend itself to particular characters, plots and themes, thus developing an ongoing dialogue between specificity and multiplicity, similarity and difference, across the pages of the book and the spaces of the city. Structuring the book around these chronotopes would create thematic connections between stories, while also giving writers sufficient creative freedom. At the same time, it would also help to guide readers' narrative spatial practice, as they could take the book to a specific location in the city and read one or more stories connected to it, creating a combination of resonance and dissonance between the story space and their own space, which we hoped would be creatively productive.

Since the idea was not for the stories to relate to a particular city but rather for them all to be universalized enough to be read in any city, we also made the stipulation to writers that each story needed to avoid proper nouns that would set it too obviously in a particular place and time.

Writers' responses to these guidelines resulted in a collection of stories that both worked as we had envisaged and gave us perspectives on the city that made us imagine it differently. A few of the ways in which writers responded to these chronotopes within

the book are discussed below:

The liminal spaces of transport – the train, the bus – spaces in which one moves from one place to another, seem to exist slightly outside everyday time. In the space of these stories, another kind of time "thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible" (Bakhtin 1981: 84). In Jasmin Kirkbride's *Not Every Train*, the protagonist experiences the "anonymous commuter hour" (Kirkbride 2019: 31) she spends in the train carriage as a precious limbo between home and work, in which, free from the demands of both, she can "dream about my worries and desires" (Kirkbride 2019: 31). In Annabel Banks's *Other Signals*, on the other hand, a journey by bus is the occasion not for reverie but for the nightmare of intense and horrifying intimacy with strangers. Each second of the protagonist's time on the bus seems to stretch endlessly, from one interminable, anxiety ridden moment to another, as she frets about how close the man next to her might get, what the woman who sits down beside her might say, what she has in her bag … (Banks 2019: 37)

Crossroads, meanwhile, seem to be particularly resonant with history, lending themselves to stories that embody a strong sense of historical time. In *Foundation Myth* (Potts 2019), for example, the reader is invited to imagine the first woman who settled at the place where they are standing now "and thought – *this is my place*" (italics in original) (Potts 2019: 72). The space of the crossroads stretches between past and present to link the time of this first woman to the reader's own time, to their own decision to settle, to think "*our place*" (italics in original) (Potts 2019: 73). Within the timespace of the story, both times exist simultaneously.

The hotel, meanwhile, is a location charged with a sense of dislocation, where time and space become fluid, unfamiliar and indeed somewhat unreliable. In the story *The Right Place* (Davies 2019), the hapless tourist protagonists suspect that their hotel has "got bored in our absence and swapped names with the hotel in the next street" (Davies 2019: 20). The dislocation of the stranger in the city is articulated in a different way in *Starlight* (Limina 2019), in which a man stands looking out of the window of his skyscraper hotel at a lone star in the sky. Distanced from the "smog and corruption and noise" (Limina 2019: 26) of the city below he feels at once protected and alienated by the "sterile pod" (Limina 2019: 26) of the hotel room, which, high above the city, brings him "the closest he'll ever be to a star" (Limina 2019: 27). In this moment, it seems as if he and the star share the same astral timespace, as they both stare down at the city below as on another world, another existence.

These examples are by no means exhaustive of the ways in which the stories in this anthology explore time and space, but I hope they give some idea of the way that the book attempts to narrate and activate a chronotopic experience of the city, as a space that is "charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (Bakhtin 1981: 84).

Design
Kam Rehal
"The city is his possession, he struts through it, arrogant,
his head raised high, trampling its citizens, like a wild bull"
– from *Gilgamesh* (Mitchell, 2005: 72)

Fiction writing and the city share a long history. The Sumerian epic of *Gilgamesh* first appears as five separate poems around 2100BC from ancient Mesopotamia (now Iraq and the surrounding region). These stories are later brought together as a single epic in versions dated from the 18th century BC and survive as inscriptions in stone/clay tablets. The system of characters and forms inscribed in the tablets – known as Cuneiform (distinguishable as wedge-shaped marks) – presents one of the earliest records of literary writing. In the 4000-year-old story of Gilgamesh, we find not only the earliest evidence of a collected work of fiction – dealing with themes

of love, friendship, loss and journeys – but also evidence of a particular conceptual representation of the city.

When we first encounter Gilgamesh, he is presented as a mighty metropolitan king. The city of Gilgamesh stands separate from himself and is a place for him to command. In contrast, the mirror reflection of Gilgamesh, Enkido, is depicted as an elemental being, situated outside of the man-made structures and objects of ownership. "He roamed all over the wilderness, naked, far from the cities of men, ate grass with gazelles, and when he was thirsty, he drank clear water from the water holes" (Mitchell 2005: 75). This framing of the city as a space which fuels power, in direct opposition to the forest or natural places, where strength, time and experience exist in harmony, are somewhat echoed in an Heideggerian perspective of "dwelling." Those who dwell in the ideal rural places, away from the "rootless and inauthentic existences" (Creswell 2008: 3) of urban centres of competition and moral decay, perform a balancing act between spiritual goodness and everyday bodily needs. Cities, and by association those who dwell within them, are presented as corruptible or corrupted, where individuals struggle for knowledge and mastery of the built environment. But what is it to feel connected to a city, not as a possessor, but as one who experiences it and perhaps also seeks connection to other cities? How might we further explore and imagine the rhythmic, sensory, spatial and textural configurations which coalesce to assemble the city? (Wunderlich 2008)

When we first began to gather our disparate research explorations within space, place, design and writing, and worked towards developing a collection of short stories, our intention was to establish conversations with the city. We sought to celebrate the limitless constructions, speculate upon alternative arrangements, and invite others to join us in play with flash fiction renditions of the city. *Story Cities* was intended as a collection of flash fictions that allowed readers to embrace the city, not as something to possess, but to provide different approaches or points of entry – to move within it and enhance one's experience of it.

Reflecting upon the project now in 2020, I could not have envisaged the current context in which the city would be experienced – or not. The global pandemic of Covid-19 and its ensuing restrictions to mobility of goods, communication and people, has

challenged the conception of contemporary humans as global citizens, able to freely and easily traverse vast distances and networks of connected cities and places. The humanist geographer Deborah Massey speaks of a "time-space-compression" (Massey 1991: 24) as the result of increasing globalisation, which seemingly shrinks geographic distance, so that for some, the freedom to move between cities and countries is as simple as the decision to cross from one side of the street to the other. We presently find ourselves directed to exist at a more local level with less agency to physically explore places in other locations. As we anticipate what long-term effects the global pandemic will have upon the ways in which we encounter the city – how we move, feel and interact within it – our collection of city stories perhaps takes on a historic context, speaking from a specific moment in the interstitial space of the city. I recently re-entered the city of London for the first time in almost nine months. As expected, the majority of high street businesses were closed to the public and there were visibly fewer people moving through the ordinarily busy streets – altering the sounds, experiences and mood of the place. Moving within the urban environment, travelling on public transport, walking through familiar streets now in the grip of a pandemic felt almost hyper real, exaggerating the sensorial experiences of previously everyday movements and actions, challenging the familiar. Acknowledging that our collection has been produced in the reality before Covid-19, we are presented with the opportunity to compare these two points in the life of the city, potentially heightening the qualities of fiction and imagination.

The bringing together of a range of stories, each with a different voice or tone, provided an exciting design challenge from the outset. A guiding principle for considering the diverse nature of the narratives was to place oneself "in the position of the reader" (Birdsall 2004: viii) in order to create a book with a cohesive structure that accommodated the variety of texts.

From early on, our discussions on writing the city had frequently mused upon the exploration and movement of bodies in a city space, considering notions of wandering, drifting and the embodied experiences of individuals as they performed "place-ballets" (Seamon 1980). Within our approach we had sought to address the physical, material, tactile potential of reading and to produce a book object that grounded the reader in a bodily experience of

place, time and narrative. Through this we were interested in activating what Hochuli and Kinross refer to as "the physical presence of the [book] object" (Hochuli and Kinross 2008: 14). Our research investigations of books, maps, printed materials, ephemera and flash fictions helped to formulate a connection to small, compact, print objects, through which we developed the concept of our collection as a portable guidebook – a passport for the global citizen to set forth with. *Story Cities* encourages reading as a situated, embodied act whereby the material nature of the relationship between reader and book object (Boom 2015; Littau 2006; Drucker 2004) engages multi-sensorial experiences. The stories are not passively read as printed text on a page. The visual and physical properties of typography, paper, scale, size, weight enter into negotiation with unique environmental and bodily characteristics. These contingent relationships determine, amongst other things, the angle and distance at which the book is held or positioned for reading, the pace and rhythm with which pages are viewed and turned, the location or container that the book is transported or housed in – contributing not only to the immediate connection between reader and book object, but also to how this may potentially shift or develop over time. As Adema and Hall (2013: 143) state, "in certain respects the page can be

thought of as being finite (e.g. physically, materially), but it can also be understood to be infinite, not least as a result of being potentially different on each respective viewing/reading." Whether used to "hide your face on the subway [. . .] decorate your coffee table" (Perloff-Giles 2011) or as a "carrier bag" (Le Guin 1997) for narrative texts, the physical book allows bodies to come into contact with stories.

For us, the printed book was felt to be the "favoured vessel" (Blumenthal 1977: 157) with which to collect and communicate our city stories. The sense of portability and access to multiple narratives could also of course have been achieved through a digital or online collection. Certainly, this could offer interesting opportunities for story selection, and inclusion of further additions and contributions, as well as enhancing the reading experience. However, the tangible connection to the physical printed book promotes a specific set of characteristics (Gruning 2018), allowing a unique appreciation of narrative. In-page distractions such as pop-up messages, battery life, and scrolling functions are eliminated. Each story is presented on a single page or spread, not backlit from behind the reflective glass surface, but illuminated in the context and situated environment of a physical setting. As Kuusela (2016: 3) states, "books and printed texts react to their

TODAY'S ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES
Rosamund Davies

Those who have just arrived
Those who are going home
Those who have left home
Those who are on leave
Those who have left it all behind
Those who are on holiday
Those who are here on business
Those who work here
Those who need work
Those who need money
Those who are here for the season
Those who are lost
Those who have something to lose
Those who are fleeing a war
Those who are carrying a passport
Those who have a ticket
Those who have something to sell
Those who have something to give
Those who are homeless
Those who are travelling light
Those who packed the night before
Those who are thirsty

Those who are hungry
Those who have missed their train
Those who will not be missed
Those who are waiting for someone
Those who are waiting for a connection
Those who do not mind waiting
Those who check their watch repeatedly
Those who are in a hurry
Those who look straight ahead
Those who look around
Those who look down
Those whose feet hurt
Those who are looking for somewhere to sit
Those who are looking for somewhere to sleep
Those who have just woken up
Those who remember what it used to be like
Those who want to make a new start
Those who are returning
Those who are going to war
Those who come and go
Those who will never leave
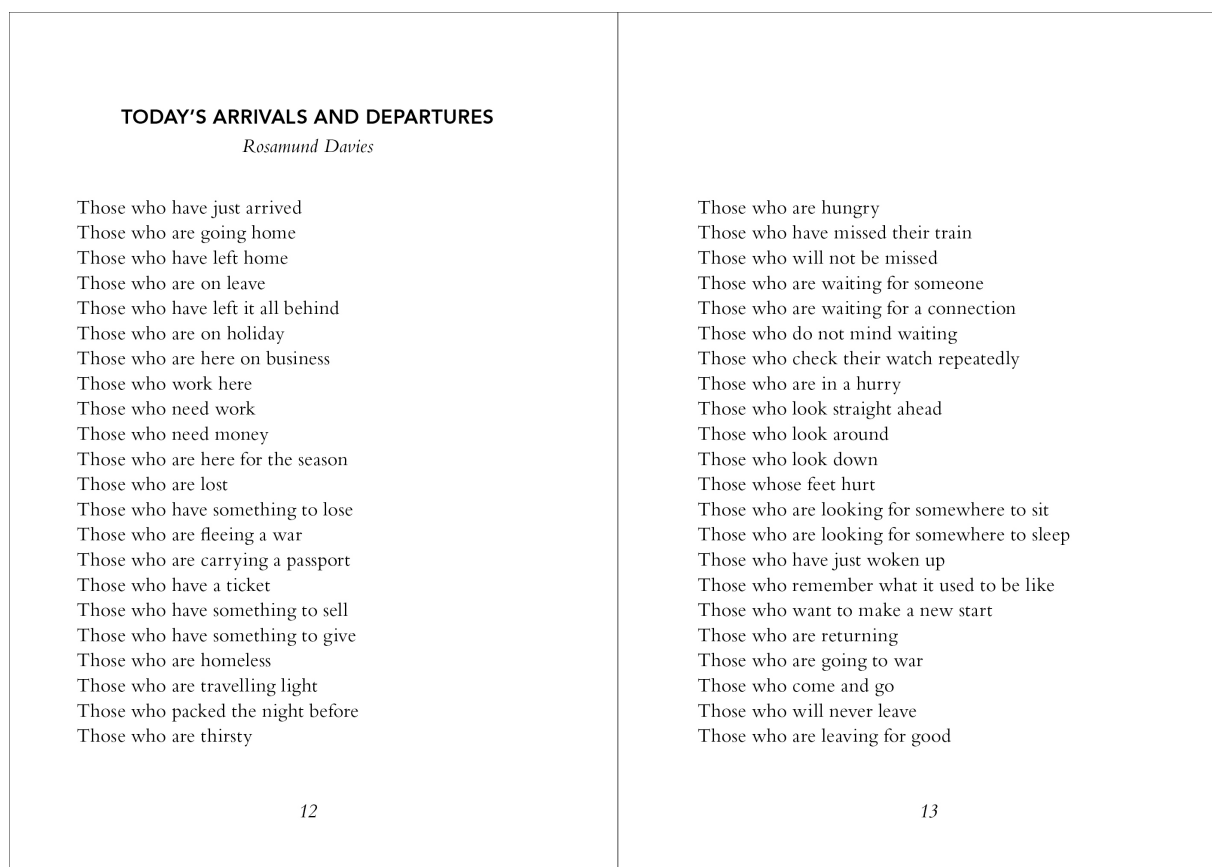Those who are leaving for good

12

13

Figure 1: Today's arrivals and departures

environments; they are interpreted, appropriated, modified and used in different ways. In a word: they change." The book object is susceptible to many of the same spatio-temporal and sensory conditions as the human reader – pages evidence age and use over time; cold, warmth, moisture and other atmospheric phenomena impact and continuously change the book object; at a material level the physical book is indelibly marked by the conditions of a particular place and may indeed deposit a trace of itself. In this way perhaps both reader and book object experience a shared sense of place (Tuan 1975).

Alongside the practical concerns of designing a printed book, which require negotiation of time, resources and finances, conceptual and aesthetic approaches also require careful consideration and negotiation – particularly within a shared research-writing-design publication. A guiding principle for development of the typo/graphic language of the book was to not "inflict" the design on the context, but ensure that it was "derived from it" (Birdsall 2004: viii). It was essential for us to create a visual reading experience that did not work in opposition to the writing or misrepresent the intentions of each author's work through a misaligned visual tone. As is common practice in collections or anthologies, a

unifying typographic hierarchy and compositional page design were created so that all titles, author names and story texts shared the same features of scale, point size, colour and measure – each of the 51 stories from 42 individual writers presented within an overall visual context designed to balance the diversity of voices. The parameters of these design specifications were explored visually and structurally in some instances where writers allowed the compositional and typo/graphic arrangement of elements to direct the reading experience. In these cases, the design treatments were developed to enhance the narratives, offering novel or alternative ways to read and construct meaning from the texts.

Today's Arrivals and Departures (Davies 2019: 12-13 – see Figure 1) presents the text as a stacked sequence of lines, suggesting the repeating, rhythmic qualities of an information board familiar to stations, airports or travel interchanges. *In the Park, Man with the Guitar* (Rehal 2019: 106-107 – see Figure 2) introduces a series of graphic forms that indicate the visual representation of the words and music emanating from a musician. This device resolves not only the potential issue of obtaining licensing rights for the lyrics featured, but allows space for the reader to interject their own auditory
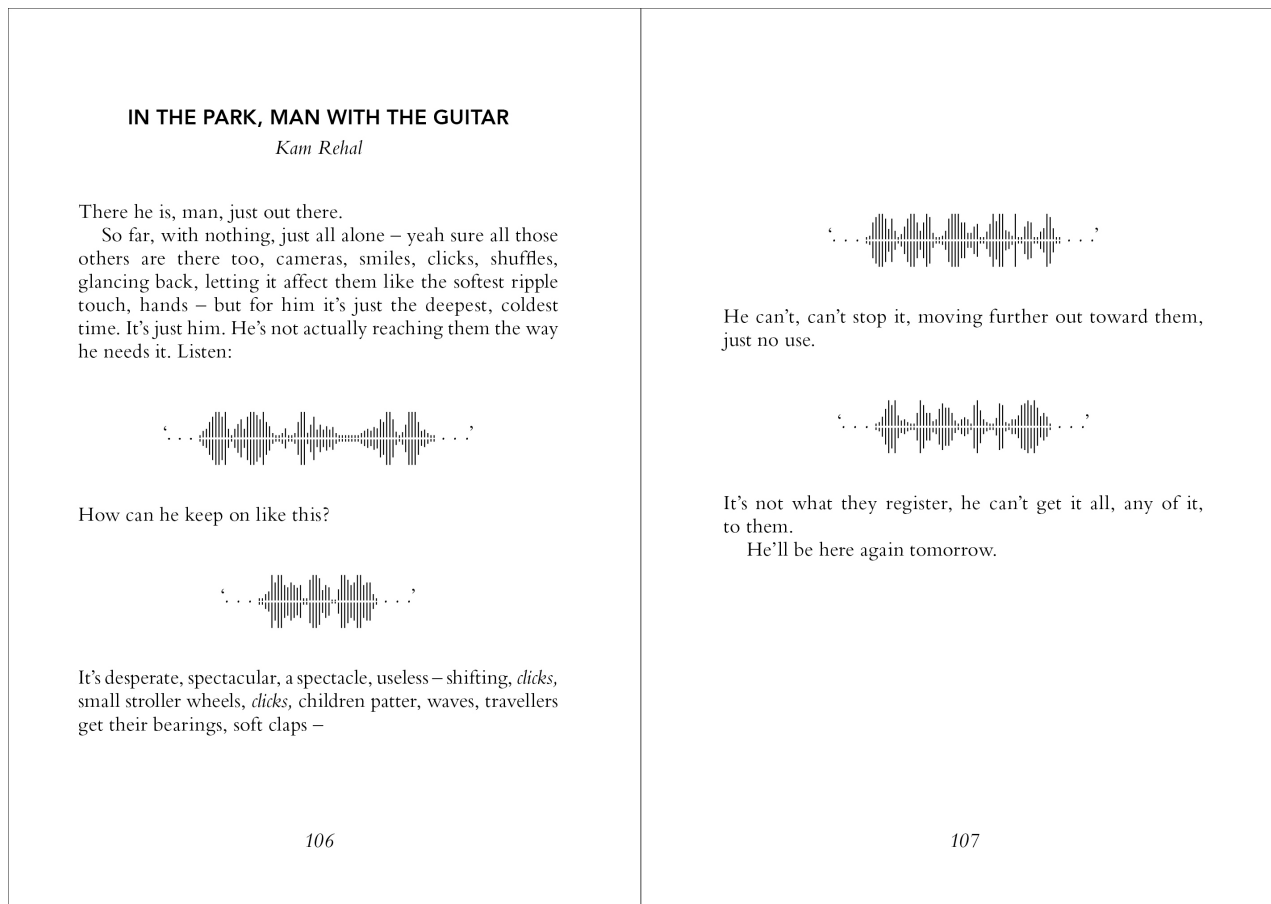

Figure 2: In the Park, Man with the Gitar

THE ALLEYWAY I
Miriam Sorrentino

My shoes make no
sound on the man-
hole cover under
which water races.
Three bright yellow
dandelions stand to attention along the wall. A mother
in jogging bottoms followed by two little girls with hair
in bunches rounds the corner. The youngest stops and
points to a single abandoned trainer lying on gravel
behind a fence. 'Why is that there?' she asks. Her mother
              ignores her and carries on
              walking with the eldest.
              'It has a name written
              inside it, I can see it.'
              A man with a dog passes
              me, the lead held tight
       towards his body. Getting no response the
child runs after her mum. Directly ahead
a procession of ants carries the corpse of a
long dead fly. 'But why was it there?' I walk
on into the dip in
the tarmac that on
rainy days makes the
perfect puddle.

80

THE ALLEYWAY II
Miriam Sorrentino

A man, hood up,
enters the alleyway
behind me. My
office heels click,
click on the tarmac,
echoing along the walls. His trainers are almost silent. He
picks up his pace. Alone, except for the man, there is no
choice but to speed up, click, click, click. He picks up his
pace again. I pick up my pace. I reach the lampost at the
dead centre of the alleyway. I look up. A spider hangs
                    on a single thread under
                    the bright light. I shake
                    an imaginary stone from
                    my shoe. Looking down
                    I see his old Pumas as
                    he passes. I start to walk
– click, click, click – I increase my pace. He
picks up his pace slightly. So do I. We can both
hear the click of my heels. He picks up his
pace. Now I am only two feet behind him. He
steps out onto the
dark road and looks
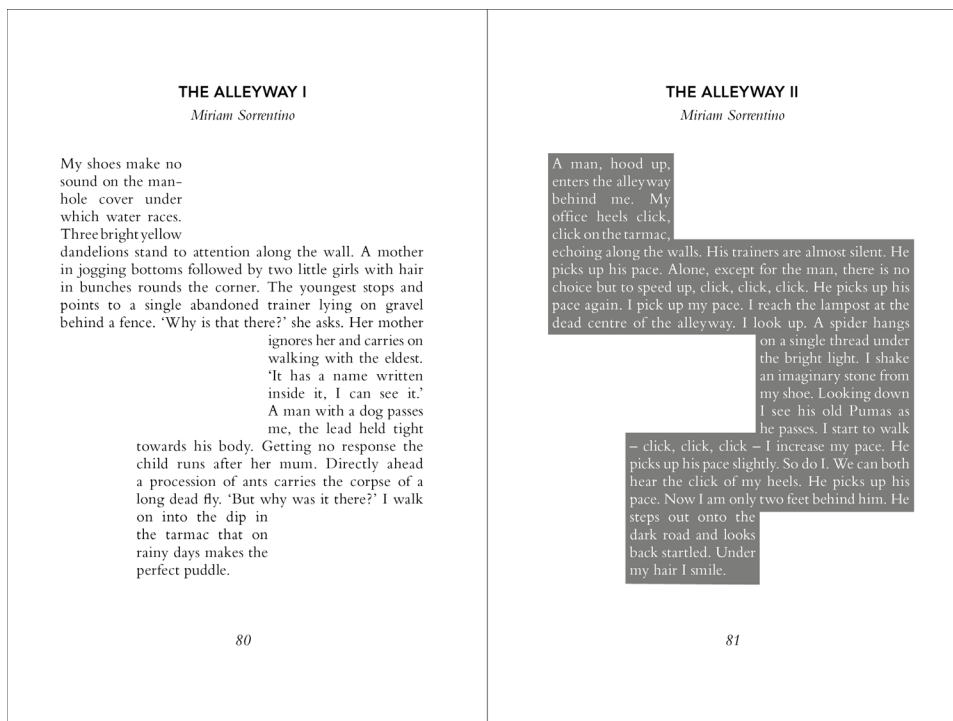back startled. Under
my hair I smile.

81

Figure 3: The Alleyway I and II

elements, or construct aspects of the narrative. The story becomes a collaboration between author, text and reader. *The Alleyway I & II* (Sorrentino 2019: 80-81 – see Figure 3) distributes the text as an arrangement within the confines of a geometric form, echoing the space of an alleyway. The contracting-expanding line-lengths, justified to the "walls" of the alleyway increase the sense of movement within the physical setting, whilst the contrast of light and dark opposite pages further enforces the context of day and night. *Switching On* (Rehal 2019: 54 – see Figure 4) is set to the full width and height of the page text area, with each line presented as a repetition of forms at varying opacities. The text sequence is presented as a temporal occurrence, the switch / exchange in a single word invites the reader to question what they first perceived or read. The writer's words are not a complete, fixed narrative experience, but one constructed through the reader's interaction and engagement with the text, their interpretation of what is presented to them, and how they choose to establish a sense of meaning.

The area of a single page or spread that each story occupies offers a whole encounter with a narrative – much as an individual city encounter at a given time or place – however, the order in which one experiences these encounters and their proximity and contextual relation to one another, echoes both the fragmentary and inter-connected qualities of the city experience. The situated, physical context within which a reading takes place may also play a part in shaping the experience, so that a story read in one city may lead to a different perspective if/when it is read in another.

SWITCHING ON
Kam Rehal

THIS   PLACE   IS   OPEN   COME   ON   IN

THIS   SPACE   IS   OPEN   COME   ON   IN

THIS   PLACE   IS   OPEN   COME   ON   IN

THIS   PLACE   IS   OPEN   COME   ON   IN

THIS   PLACE   IS   OPEN   COME   ON   IN

THIS   SPACE   IS   OPEN   COME   ON   IN

THIS   PLACE   IS   OPEN   COME   ON   IN

THIS   PLACE   IS   OPEN   COME   ON   IN
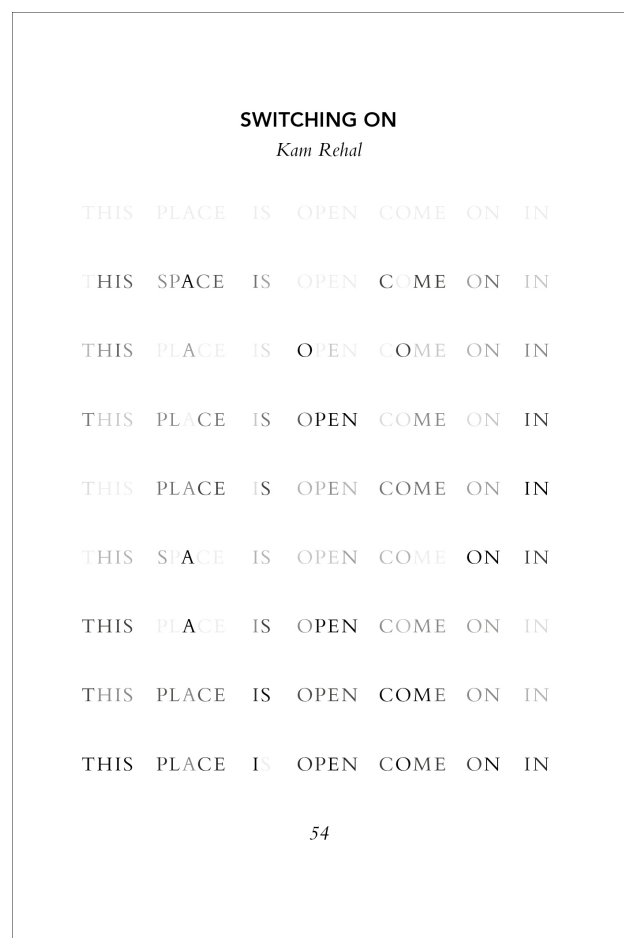
THIS   PLACE   IS   OPEN   COME   ON   IN
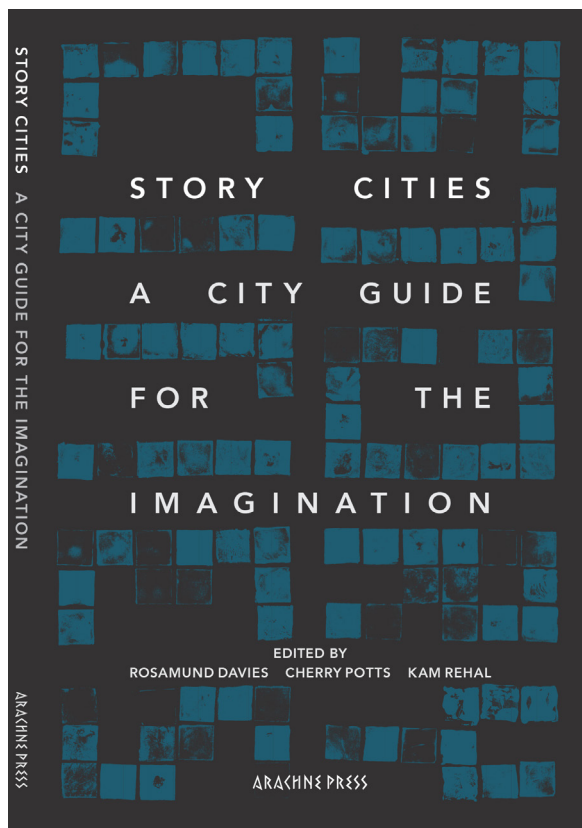
54

Figure 4: Switching On

Figure 5: The book's cover

Developing a visual language to communicate these concepts and set the tone from the outset so that it could carry through the book required attention to a number of design elements. The cover design (Rehal 2019 – see Figure 5) followed a range of experiments with maps, geographic symbols and features, city grids and plans, and testing of illustrative and typo/graphic approaches. The design of the cover moved in step with the design of the internal pages to observe a holistic approach that utilised a common architecture or plan – the typefaces, images and grid systems encountered on the cover move through the body of the book.

The illustrative components featured on the cover and through the chapter title spreads (Rehal 2019: 18-19 – see Figure 6), employ a modular approach of multiple units constructing a whole – suggestive of the bricks in a building or structure, steps in a journey through the city, or the words within a story – each individual, but forming part of a collective effort, organised within a system. The square printed block elements on the cover come together to form the title *Story Cities* and can be read when the book is rotated at 90 degrees. The modularity of this system allowed the possibility to scale elements up or down for sharing across other print or digital contexts for purposes of promotion and communication. At the launch event for our publication, where authors performed their stories aloud to the invited audience, the design language of
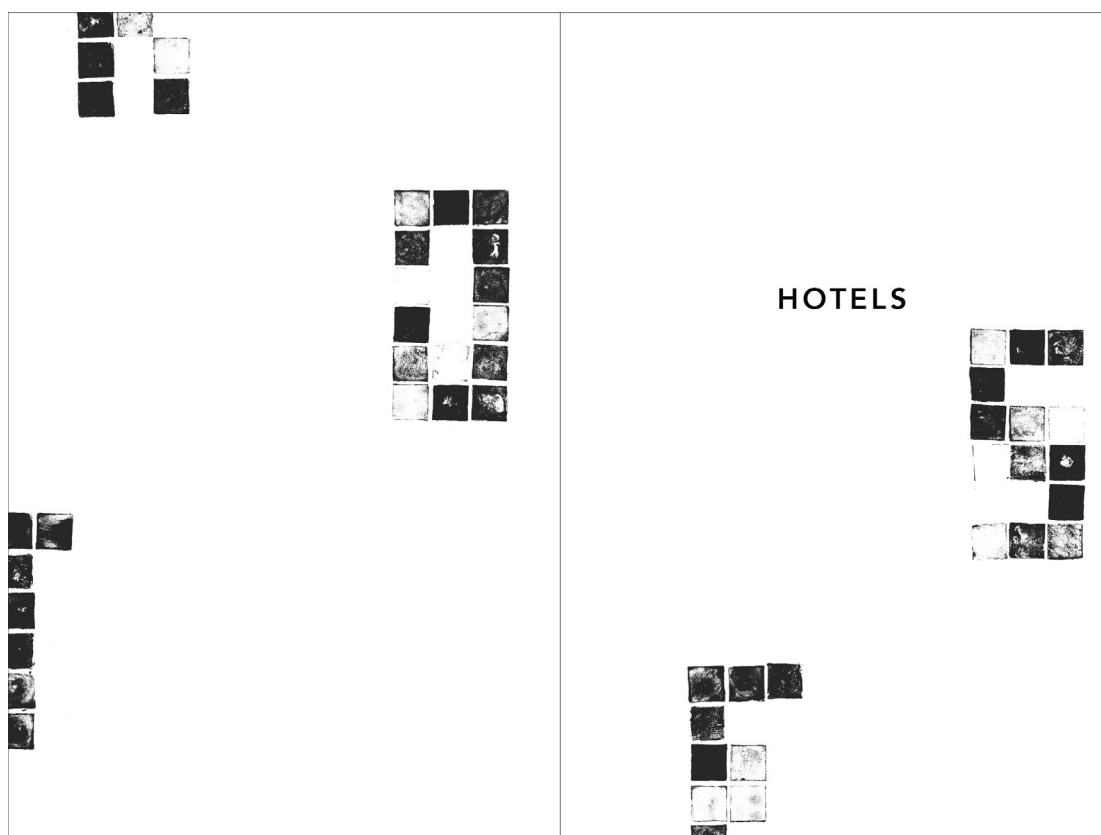

HOTELS

Figure 6: Hotels

Figure 7: Stephen Lawrence Gallery UoG

the printed book took on a further reconfiguration. The process of physically printing the block forms of the titles on paper was scaled up for the painted walls of the Stephen Lawrence Gallery, University of Greenwich. Whilst the relationships between individual blocks, letter forms and corresponding words were retained, the titles were distributed across the walls of the gallery space, inviting bodies to move amongst the visual features of the book (see Figure 7). In this, and other ways, the design intention is to seek the liminal glimpses that Ivan Shcheglov speaks of when he declares,

> We move within a closed landscape whose landmarks constantly draw us toward the past. Certain shifting angles, certain receding perspectives, allow us to glimpse original conceptions of space, but this vision remains fragmentary. It must be sought in the magical locales of fairy tales and surrealist writings (writing as Ivan Chtcheglov 1953).

The abstract, low contrast forms that are signposted on the cover and distributed throughout the book alongside chapter titles, might also be interpreted as a pattern or series of shapes – the topographic arrangement of a street network or neighbourhood; the demarcation of city ruins awaiting excavation and discovery; or perhaps even the labyrinth of the Minotaur.

Editing
Cherry Potts
Editing a themed anthology (in particular) is a mixture of science and subtlety. The science is in the early stages, as laid out below.

One: where does this proposal fit into our catalogue? It fits perfectly. Arachne Press has a history of themed anthologies linked to place. *London Lies* (Potts et al 2012) and *Stations* (Potts 2012), our first two books, are firmly rooted in London and her transport systems, and the idea of a book that does something similar but with the city in question being entirely fluid is entertaining.

Two: we agree the stringent criteria proposed by Davies and Rehal for inclusion of stories. We define our version of "flash" which could be anything from 6 words to 1000 depending on the publisher, and agree on a maximum of 500 words, which will fit across a spread of two pages. The story must be about a city or place within a city, that is unidentifiable. The critical issue turns out to be no proper nouns, which, it turns out, also means: no currency, no historical references.

Three: we agree terms for contracts with writers, which is not quite our standard contract, as there are so many potential authors that we have to be less generous with our free copies, and more generous with the length of the contract.

Four: we agree terminology of call out (sigh). We are aware that we are shaping the response of the writers by doing so. How do we want to shape their responses? Are we being effective?

Five: let others read the first tranche of stories. Only read 300 (300?) A very long long list.

Six: long listing. We immediately reject over half for proper nouns and identifiable cities. At least there's nothing over 500 words – those were weeded out beforehand.

Seven: we reject anything that is just plain bad – and the boring. This is all fairly uncontentious except where I reject several stories by fellow editors. Hey ho.

This is now the official long list. We let the writers know.

Eight: I group stories by which of the published themes they fit into, and discuss with fellow editors which are the best versions of the themes.

We realise there were some themes we should have included and didn't. Has that warped the writers' responses? They seem to have written them anyway – waterways, bridges.

Nine: we identify the unstated tropes that have risen to the surface. Are some of them, in fact, clichés? We argue about the difference between a cliché and an archetype. We agree to not include a cliché no matter how well-written.

Ten: we winnow out the stories that are still recognisably a specific city: those that could be edited to resolve, we put to one side; those that are meaningless without the real city to hold them up, we reject.

This is now the short list.

Eleven: This is where the subtlety comes in, the turning of the ear for the echo, the weighing of the material in the hand, the smile at the unexpected juxtaposition.

We start "mapping" the stories onto the city. Where do we have a glut, where are we short – which stories cross over between, say, cafés and hotels? We discover that we need to group the stations, ports

etc into Termini as there are so few stories, and start shaping the whole book from there – following the flow of the visitor to the city: arrival, a place to stay, places to visit, less well-trodden paths, and so on.

Where do our city natives fit into a "guide" book designed for a visitor? Our transit stories are about workers commuting, but are our café stories *only* about customers?

Multiple stories for multiple city sites begin to create a palimpsest in the best possible way: this is every city, it is any city – yours, mine, a city we know the bones of, a city we have never visited, perhaps a city not yet built.

This is how cities work – layers of personal history laid down day by day. I am reminded of Lyra's cry of "This is a different Oxford" (Pullman 1997: 73): the buildings and streets and interiors are experienced differently by every person who goes there.

Twelve: How do the stories work together? How do the tropes and concerns of *this* story reflect and complement this *other* story? How does that change if we place a third story between them? All the stories are so short, but there begins to be a cornerstone story for each section, the one we all agree on without a second's demur, and the other stories reflect in and onto its surface like older buildings reflected in the sheet glass of an office block, revealing their worth and nuance, their quirkiness, their cleverness, and suddenly the section is complete, unquestionably right; there is a quiet click as it all falls into place.

Thirteen: The gaps. We only have one market story that made the grade (Lee 2019). My fellow editors are concerned. We re-read the market story, and it is about the heart of the city. It is the heart of the book. It doesn't need a supporting cast.

I review my mental three-dimensional map of the city we are building from the stories in the book. I turn it through 360 degrees, and there it is, provincial from one view, a capital from another, ancient from below, vibrantly modern from above. Seedy, expressive, hungry for change, populated, sedate, grand, noisy, charming, frightening, throbbing with energy. For every story I have a different (un)real city in mind.

Although I know it isn't, the market in my mind is

the fish market in Bruges.

Although it isn't, the station in one of the stories is Farringdon (Underground).

Although it isn't, the tourist boat on the river is in Chicago.

This park is in Luxembourg, and this one, just off Borough High Street, but also the park I went to most often as a child, although I know it is not even on the same continent.

This is somewhere I've never been, but this particular corner here, I recognise, that's in Granada. And we know we are each reading our own favourite cities, and our homes, onto the stories.

Fourteen: The author edits.

 –Too many pigeons.

 –How did this name sneak through?

 –This is a little repetitive; can you tighten it up?

 –We are changing "Roman road" to "ancient trackway."

 –Are we ok with all this? Yes? Yes.

Fifteen: Design. The design of the call out for submissions by Kam Rehal is still at the forefront of my mind, when I need a draft cover for catalogues and Nielsen (the reference for all books in print). I mock something up using elements of this – a building block/paving slab look, that is delightfully ambiguous.

We spend ages talking about the size and shape of the book. Pocket sizes, heft in the hand, it all goes into the experience of the reader. The concept of the passport comes up more than once, as does the traditional guidebook entry. I'm thinking about Michelin Guide rather than Rough Guide or Lonely Planet, the small book with a heading and 500 words for each entry. The book ends up a non-standard size for the book industry, smaller than we would normally print, and not a size our overseas printer can accommodate, but with only 500 words to a story, there's no reason to go bigger, and we want the reader to be able to hold it in the palm of their hand. We spend very little time discussing the layout of

the text, we are in immediate agreement. Arachne's house style and Kam Rehal's design concept are entirely in alignment.

Sixteen: The cover. A cover must be something that people can read and understand at first glance. It must make the book be one that readers will pick up, and so a design that works on every level.

We think briefly about maps, but decide that any map, even a made up one, is setting up assumptions about an actual city. We keep the blocks/ buildings from above/ paving slabs/ labyrinth (oh look, it's words).

Before I became a publisher, I didn't know what kerning (Bringhurst 1992: 33) was, nor how important it is to readability. The compromise between readability and the block design is all about the spaces between the letters. I start seeing them as the streets between the buildings. I want alleyways. We are familiar with the design, we chose the title, so we know what the book cover says – but will a stranger? Will it sell the concept, the book?

We solicit cover endorsements, we make space for them on the back, where the blurb is contracted to a single brief paragraph. That seems appropriate.

The colours are darker and moodier than I expected, and we have to play with the contrast to ensure the printer will replicate our subtle charcoal and bluey-grey accurately.

Seventeen: the book arrives from the printers. The cover is indeed subtle, it draws you in to explore what the blocks of colour are. The title can be read. The sales team say "oh, we are excited about this one." We take a moment to admire it, and start organising the launch.

Eighteen: the Launch. Letting the book out into the wild, to be read out loud to a slightly inebriated crowd of friends and family, gives it a whole new dimension. We have to rethink the order, how do the stories work out loud? Who can make it to the launch to read? The voices I had given to the stories are not the voices of the writers, and it is fascinating to hear the words from the authors' mouths. I hear the stories anew; I find new things to think about – despite having read them repeatedly. And, of course, these are not the voices, nor even the stories that the readers will hear, whether they attend a reading,

Figure 8: Reading from Launch 2019

watch a video (see Figure 8) or read from the physical book. As with the city, each reader has their own version of the story.

Conclusion

The flux and polyvalence of the city posed an interesting challenge to attempt to represent within the fixed form of a printed book. Whilst the specific intentions of an individual author are presented in the ordered arrangement of a single story, the gathering of a collection brings multiple voices together, ready to engage in further dialogues across place and time. Much as a city reaches beyond its physical boundaries through reputation, exchange and influence, a book "reaches outside and beyond its covers in the form of a web of texts, discussions, human reactions, uses and practices, which makes it prone to change" (Kuusela 2016: 3). Through our individual approaches within writing, design and publishing, we have edited a city guide that invites writers, readers and citizens to continue in an active exploration of the city. In inviting readers to journey with and within *Story Cities,* we hope to contribute to the ongoing narrative potential of the city; to critically engage the visual and material presence of the book – or what Drucker (2004) describes as a book's "objectness" – and to demonstrate and expand the multimodal potential of flash fiction as a literary form.

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