

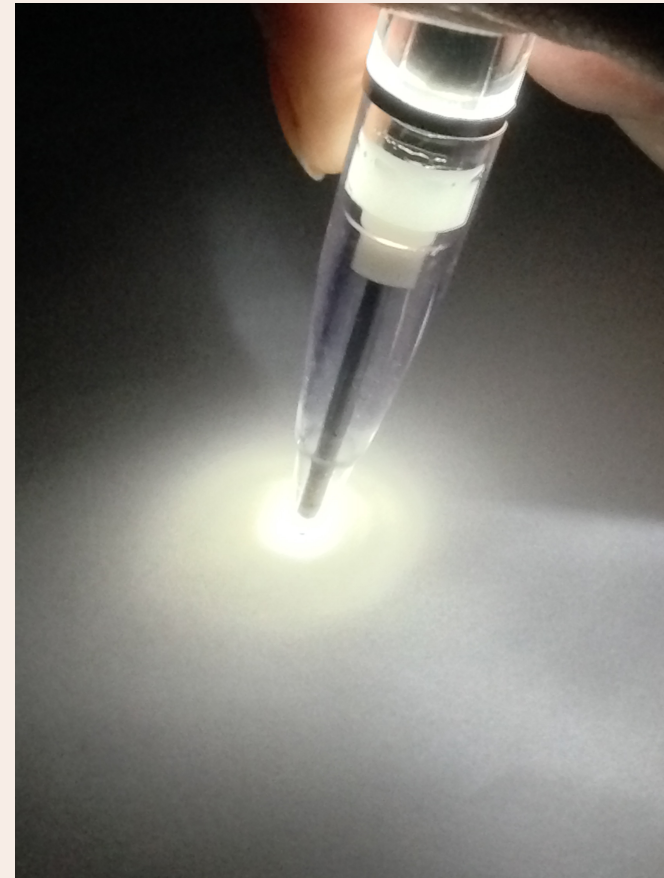
The Self-Illuminating Pen

Dr Sarah Tripp



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Sarah Tripp, production shot from
The Self-Illuminating Pen, MAP Magazine, 2020.
Made in collaboration with Alice Bain and Isobel Lutz-Smith.

The Self-Illuminating Pen

A series of five 'letters to the editor' of *MAP Magazine* relating habits of writing, improvised on the journey to parenthood.

The letters reveal the process of writing *Guitar!* (London: Book Works, 2020), a solo-authored book, which narrates how mother and infant learn to speak and listen to each other.

The letters are presented: online as both texts and videos; and in print in the form of a notebook, published by MAP Editions, which also includes bespoke writing exercises.



Dr Sarah Tripp, production shot from 'Guitar and Balloon',
The Self-Illuminating Pen, MAP Magazine, 2020.
Made in collaboration with Alice Bain and Isobel Lutz-Smith.

Project Details:

This research project developed over three years through two concurrent processes: 1) writing the solo authored book *Guitar!* (2020); 2) using a 'self-illuminated pen' to reflect upon how the conditions of parenting an infant shaped the form and content of *Guitar!* This body of work comprises two interrelated outputs:

Output One:

The Self-Illuminating Pen

Published online by MAP

Magazine (Glasgow), 2020

- 5 x 10 minute HD videos
- 5 x online letters
- A notebook by MAP Editions, 2020, 160 pages (including the 5 letters; 5 writing exercises; and approx. 100 blank pages)

Edited by Alice Bain

Output Two:

Guitar!

Published by Book Works,
(London), 2020, 160 pages

Edited by Lizzie Homersham

Supported by:

Creative Scotland Open Project Fund

Book Works (London)

The Glasgow School of Art

MAP Magazine and MAP Editions

Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop (ESW)

Arts Council England

TOTAL FUNDING: **£22,027**

Collaborators:

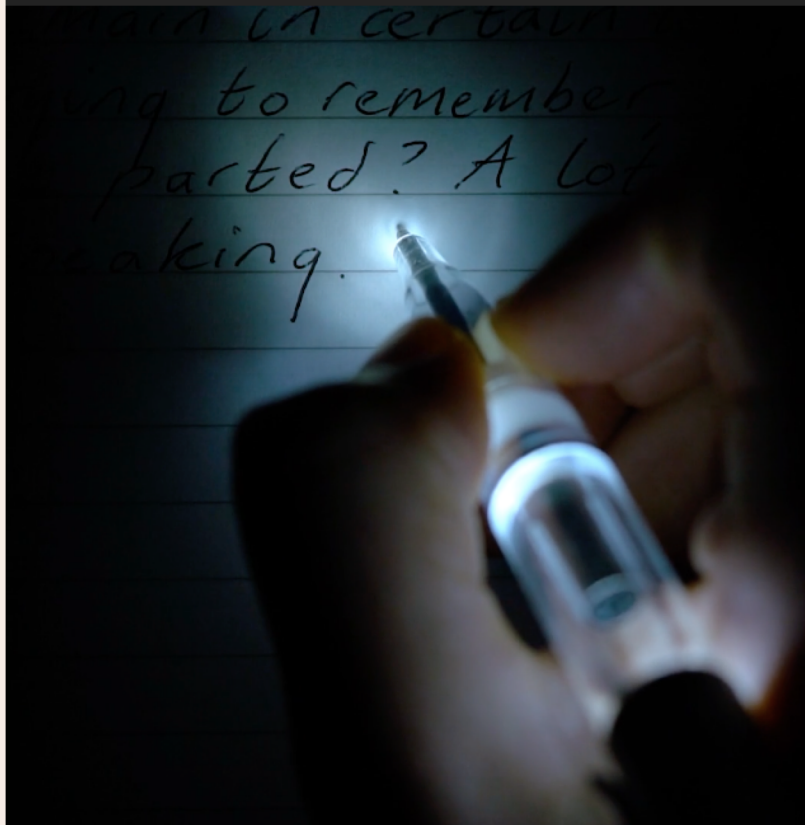
Alice Bain

Lizzie Homersham

Isobel Lutz-Smith

Francis McKee

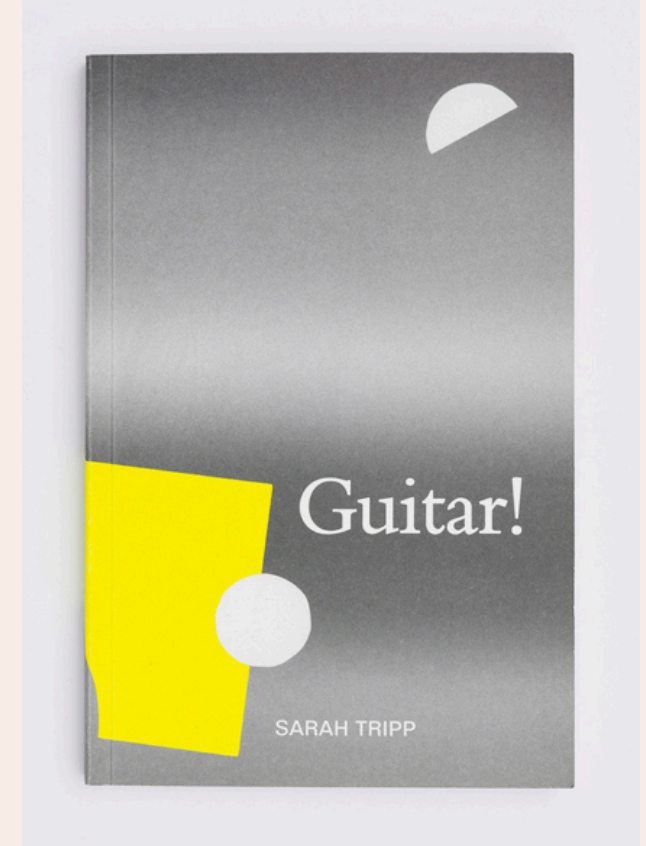
Ciara Phillips



Sarah Tripp, video still from 'Dear Alice,' *The Self-Illuminating Pen*, Published by MAP Magazine, 2020. Made in collaboration with Alice Bain and Isobel Lutz-Smith.



Sarah Tripp, *The Self-Illuminating Pen* (notebook), Published by MAP Editions (Glasgow), 2020. Made in collaboration with Alice Bain and Ciara Phillips.



Sarah Tripp, *Guitar!* Published by Book Works (London), 2020. Made in collaboration with Lizzie Homersham, Ciara Phillips and Francis McKee.

Research Questions:

How can the personal relationships which sustain us be celebrated publicly by revealing the relational conditions in which we practice?

- How can habits of living and the habits of practice be stated in a shared and confluent vocabulary?
- How can 'the personal' be stated in terms which are not autobiographical?
- How is speaking dependent on listening?



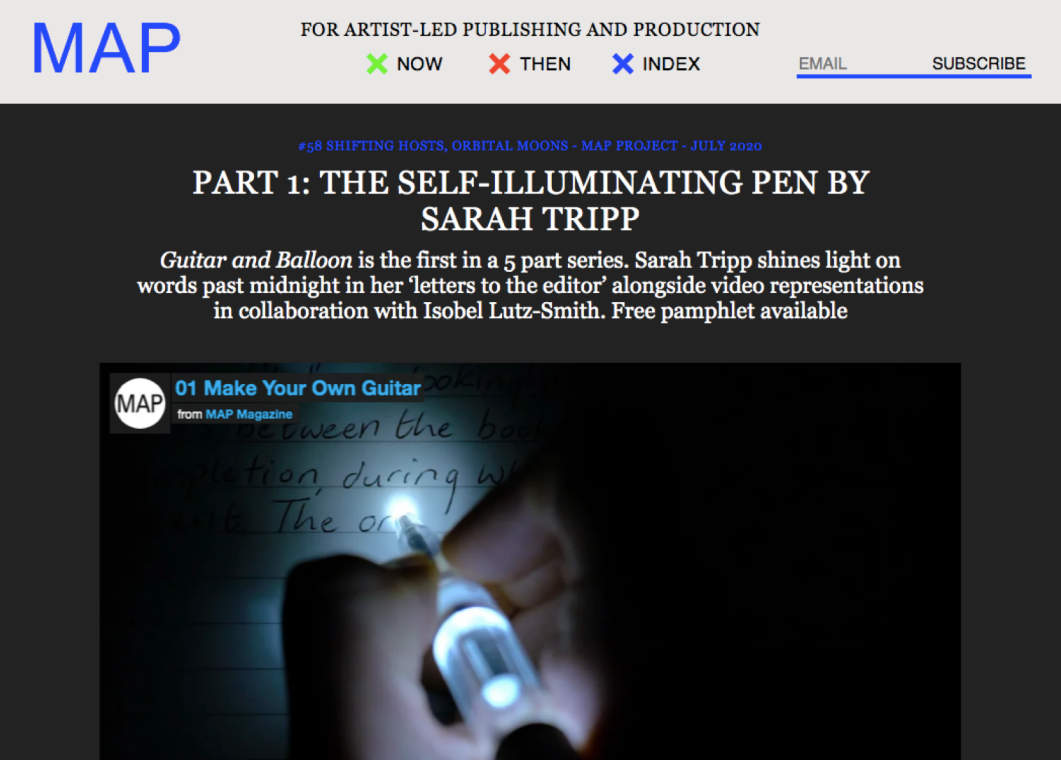
Sarah Tripp, production shot, 'The Glue Ear',
The Self-Illuminating Pen, MAP Magazine, 2020.
Made in collaboration with Alice Bain and Isobel Lutz-Smith

Research Output:

The Self-Illuminating Pen is a series of five 'letters to the editor' of *MAP Magazine* describing how *Guitar!* was written.

The letters are available to the public in three forms: a series of texts published online; a series of ten-minute videos; and a notebook in which each letter is paired with a bespoke writing exercise and over 100 empty pages to be filled in the small hours with a self-illuminating pen. In this way the notebook is also a writing tool.

The five letters were published online weekly on Saturday nights / Sunday mornings at 3:00 am between the 11th of July and 8th August 2020.



MAP FOR ARTIST-LED PUBLISHING AND PRODUCTION

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#58 SHIFTING HOSTS, ORBITAL MOONS - MAP PROJECT - JULY 2020

PART 1: THE SELF-ILLUMINATING PEN BY SARAH TRIPP

Guitar and Balloon is the first in a 5 part series. Sarah Tripp shines light on words past midnight in her 'letters to the editor' alongside video representations in collaboration with Isobel Lutz-Smith. Free pamphlet available

MAP 01 Make Your Own Guitar
from MAP Magazine

Sarah Tripp, production shot, 'The Here-and-Now Word',
The Self-Illuminating Pen, MAP Magazine, 2020.
Made in collaboration with Alice Bain and Isobel Lutz-Smith

Research Output:

MAP Magazine

Please read/view *The Self-Illuminating Pen* online letters and videos now:

Guitar and Balloon

<https://mapmagazine.co.uk/the-self-illuminating-pen-part-1-make-your-own-guitar>

The Here-and-Now Word

<https://mapmagazine.co.uk/the-self-illuminating-pen-by-sarah-tripp>

The Glue Ear

<https://mapmagazine.co.uk/part-3-of-the-self-illuminating-pen>

With

<https://mapmagazine.co.uk/part-4-the-self-illuminating-pen>

Dear Alice

<https://mapmagazine.co.uk/part-5-the-self-illuminating-pen>

Guitar!

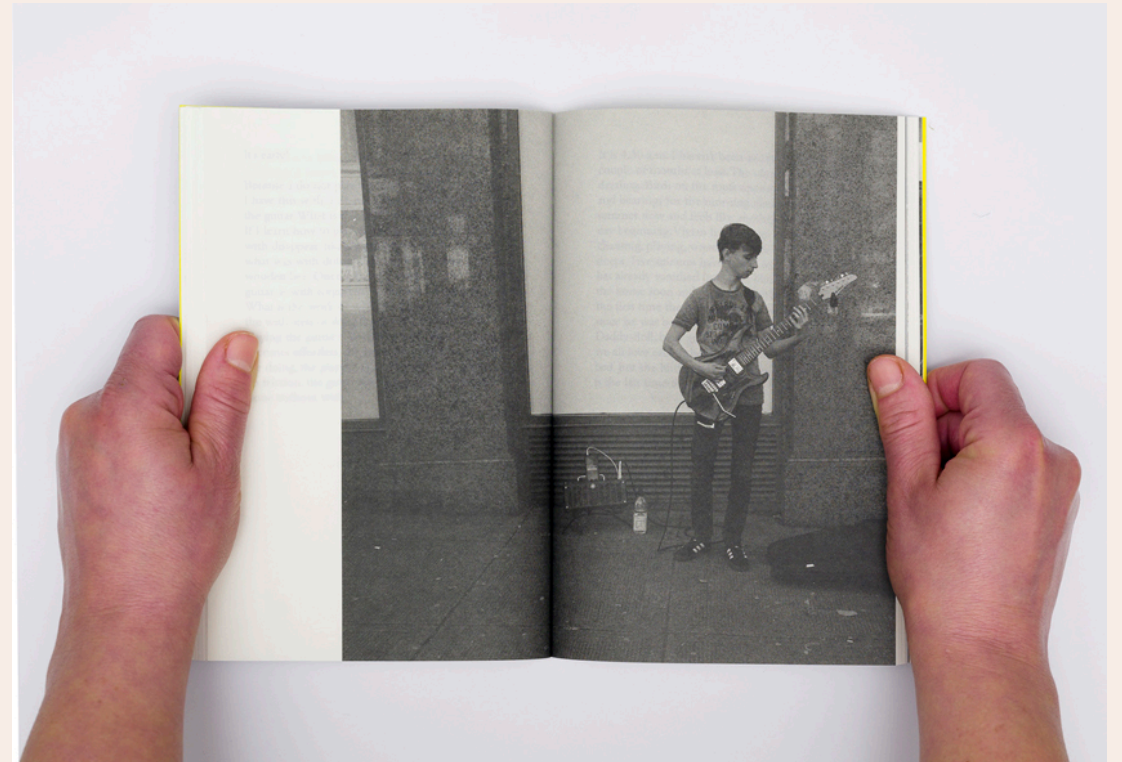
The Self-Illuminating Pen reflects upon the writing of *Guitar!* (London: Book Works, 2020)

Guitar! describes the contours and conditions of writing - interrupted, in flashes, or in restless moments through the night. A narrator listens; as a child learns to speak there is a re-acquaintance with the strangeness of putting a feeling into words. There is a yearning for meeting and an idea of love or companionship as a sense of being met. Reading is punctuated by a series of black and white images of buskers, photographed by Francis McKee in Glasgow. Cover artwork by Ciara Phillips.

Guitar! narrates the process of learning to speak and proposes that the capacity to speak depends on the kinds of listening inherent in our environment. The characters of mother and infant acquire a common language as they learn to listen to each other.

Vivian's first word is 'Guitar!' His mother (the narrator) learns his nascent glossary, re-learning to speak as his language develops. The narrative integrates five modes of listening and multiple ways of using the word, 'guitar.'

Please read '[Tripp_7535_Self_Illuminating_Pen_Guitar.pdf](#)' on the USB stick now.



Sarah Tripp, *Guitar!*, 2021. Published by Book Works (London). Made in collaboration with Lizzie Homersham, Ciara Phillips and Francis McKee.

Research Output:

The Self-Illuminating Pen Notebook (MAP Editions)

Please see information on the Notebook here:

<https://mapmagazine.co.uk/the-self-illuminating-pen-by-sarah-tripp-1>

Please read 'Tripp_7535_Self_Illuminating_Pen_Notebook.pdf' on the USB stick now.

The Self-Illuminating Pen Notebook contains 5 writing exercises, developed from the experimental writing methods, outlined in the 'Letters to the Editor' (also included in the notebook):

Exercise 1 / Two Words

How to speak with two words.

Exercise 2 / Illuminating Pencil

How to write at night.

Exercise 3 / The Summit of the Fridge

How to take and extend notes.

Exercise 4 / With

How to accept accidents and errors.

Exercise 5 / Find Someone

How to work with an absent other.

Aims:

The aims of this project are: to publicly realise the private conditions in which writing is practised; to explain how these conditions shape what is written; and to actively reflect on *when, where* and *how* I write. Further, this research aims to:

- relate the habits of writing sessions and understand how such routines shape the narrative events described.
- celebrate adaptations and improvisations made when writing as innovative methods, which are easily taken up by anyone.
- give careful consideration to the interconnections between listening and writing; listening and speaking; words and sounds.

Ultimately, in aiming for a public understanding of writing as a relational practice to others and to the self, the project foregrounds subjective experience as critical to the process of writing without foregrounding autobiography.



Sarah Tripp, production shot, 'With',
The Self-Illuminating Pen, MAP Magazine, 2020.
Made in collaboration with Alice Bain and Isobel Lutz-Smith

Objectives:

One objective of this project is the completion of a solo authored book, *Guitar!* in tandem with *The Self-Illuminating Pen* which were both developed concurrently over a three-year time period, during which time I became a parent. Further objectives are:

- To share methods of writing which are easily adopted, in a non-technical vocabulary, using forms which are easily accessed.
- To acknowledge how becoming a parent produced new habits of writing.
- To represent the rapidly changing situation of the new mother through the lens of writing.
- To demonstrate the infant's acquisition of language and how this developed in parallel with the mother's acquisition of new methods of writing.



Sarah Tripp, video still from 'The Here-and-Now Word', *The Self-Illuminating Pen*, MAP Magazine, 2020. Made in collaboration with Alice Bain and Isobel Lutz-Smith.

Methodology:

The Self-Illuminating Pen is a series of assertively intimate letters to the editor of *MAP Magazine* answering the question: How was *Guitar!* written? The letters reflect on three years between 2017 and 2020 when the book was being composed. It is the changing conditions of my writing practice during this time which are addressed. Each letter takes a condition and then reflects upon how a habit of practice emerged in relation to that condition.

Each letter is concerned with how speech is sponsored by listening, and how writing is a form of listening. As the infant learns to speak the mother relearns language as a value system belonging to her infant. Thus the emergence of language within the mother/infant dyad runs in parallel to an improvisation of new writing habits around the primary care of an infant.

This reflective process uses what the feminist author Monique Wittig describes as a 'double critical movement': to take the critic's point of view (the point of view of afterwards) and the point of view of before (the point of view of the writer facing the unknown, within a process) weaving these perspectives together to evince method. (Some *Remarks on Les guérillères*, 2005, p. 37).



Methods:

This research uses the intimate act of letter writing, from one woman (writer/mother) to another as a principal research method. In turn, the letters simultaneously enact and describe five experimental writing methods developed as a new parent attempting to identify: 1) how the conditions of parenting shape what is written; and 2) how to create the conditions for writing in early parenthood. Here are the five titles and their scope:

- **Guitar and Balloon** focuses on writing as habit, conversation as writing sustenance and working in conditions of noise and exhaustion. It explores the relationship between rapid change and improvisation. The desire to write is related to the infant's growing desire to speak.
- **The Here-and-Now Word** introduces the illuminated pen as a tool to silently put down thoughts at night. A new 'present tense' writing method emerges because the pen will only illuminate one-word-at-a-time. Inscribing a letter becomes a micro-performance, the page is a stage lit by a pen.
- **The Glue Ear** describes transcription as a practice of listening, both as a means of recording dialogue and as a means of care, then relates this to developing the 'ear of an narrator.'
- **With** considers the imaginative and immersive power of play; of writing without rules. This letter posits play as learning, through improvisation and experimentation as opposed to expertise.
- **Dear Alice** considers the form of the letter as a means of communication with the distant community beyond the reach of the mother-infant dyad.

Each letter tests a method and prompts a writing exercise to share these methods with others:

Exercise 1 / Two Words

How to speak with two words.

Exercise 2 / Illuminating Pencil

How to write at night.

Exercise 3 / The Summit of the Fridge

How to take and extend notes.

Exercise 4 / With

How to accept accidents and errors.

Exercise 5 / Find Someone

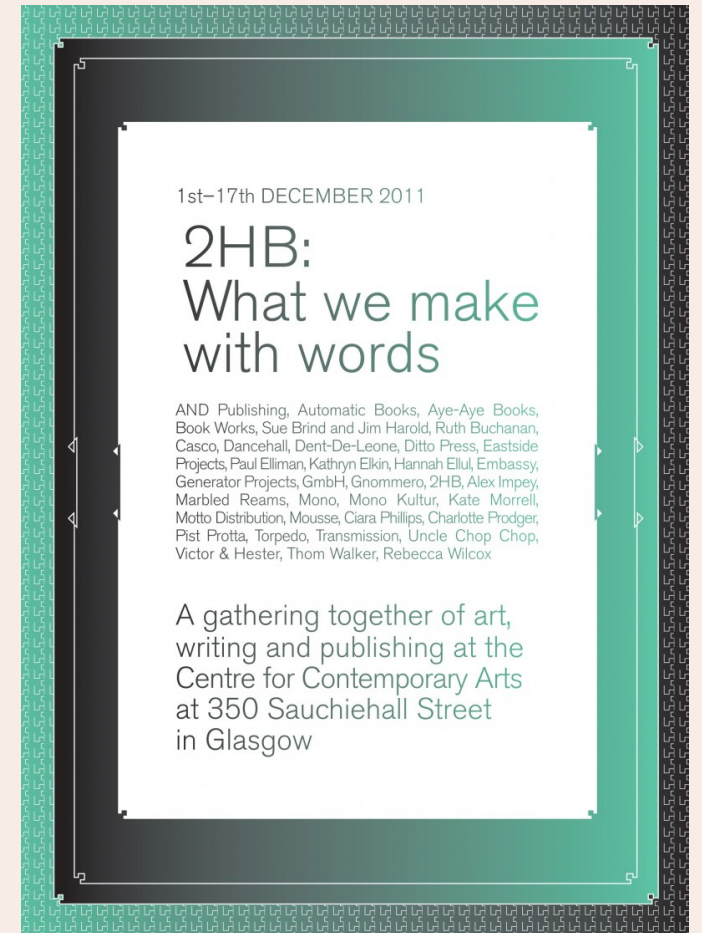
How to work with an absent other.

Context:

I am working within a tradition of artist-led practice that emerged within many post-industrial cities, including Glasgow in the 1990s. This context places emphasis on the autonomy of the artist from commercial interests, interdisciplinary practice and social engagement. The earliest example of this approach is, perhaps, the exhibition *Windfall* (Glasgow, 1991) initiated by founding members of the longstanding artist-led Transmission Gallery, where I served as a committee member from 1994 to 1996.

Artist-led independent publishing in Glasgow is one of the most recent expressions of this tradition which I celebrated in *What We Make With Words* (CCA, Glasgow, 2011). This festival profiled the proliferation of art, writing and journal publishing in Glasgow. The festival celebrated hybrids of art and writing practice. Artists and journals celebrated included: *2HB*, *Victor & Hester*, *Gnommero* and work by the Turner Prize winning artist Charlotte Prodger.

I am working within the field of 'art writing' as coined by David Carrier in 1987. This term took pedagogical form in 2009 when Professor Maria Fusco established the MA Art Writing Programme (Goldsmiths, London), where I was a Visiting Lecturer from 2009 to 2011. 'Art writing' has come to refer to practice-led interdisciplinary research using writing as a generative force.



Sarah Tripp, cover of the festival guide for
What we make with words, with *2HB* at the CCA, 2011

My research explores artistic and life practice through the use of narratives and characters. Particularly, how audiences experience characters when they are adapted into multiple forms, for example, on a page, on a screen or in a live performance.

Audiences change their proximity to characters when they are apprehended in different media, for example, the intimacy of reading a character is distinct from meeting this same character on screen. This multidisciplinary approach is typified within the field of art writing by Professor Katrina Palmer's *End Matter* (2015). This work used characters and contrasting media (publication, audio guide, radio broadcast) to depict intimate encounters between characters inhabiting the Isle of Portland (Art Angel).

My research project also seeks the meeting point between creative living and the specific habits, patterns and methods of artistic practice within the context of cultural production. This central concern draws from the history of psychoanalysis, specifically the writings of the psychoanalyst Marion Milner (*A Life of One's Own*, 1934) and the child psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott (*Playing and Reality*, 1971).

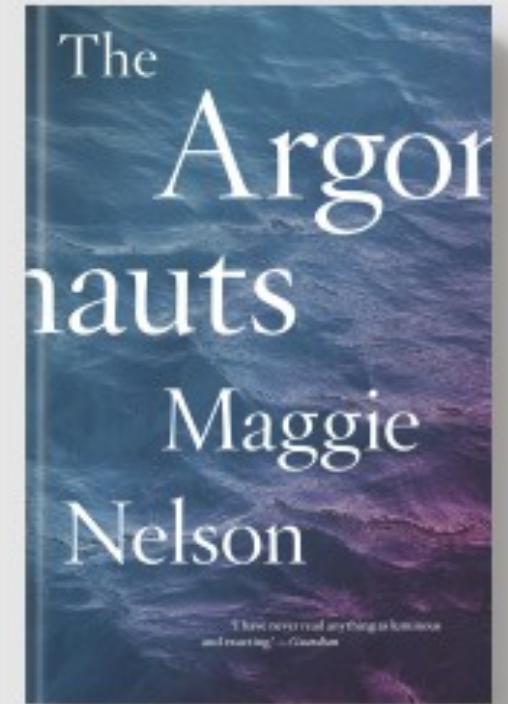


Professor Katrina Palmer, *End Matter*, 2015, Art Angel Commission

In 2015, the writer, art critic and academic Dr Maggie Nelson published *The Argonauts*. This ground-breaking book is built from autobiographical, theoretical and critical writing on pregnancy, the queer family, mothering and creativity. Nelson provides two departure points for my research: she cites D. W. Winnicott to invoke the experience of the new mother, and presents her experience of motherhood as confluent with her writing practice. She describes the perception she encounters in academia of mothering as a departure from research (46–47) and counters this with the form and structure of *The Argonauts*.

The Argonauts builds upon recent women's writings as mothers. Rachel Cusk, Deborah Levy, Annie Ernaux and Rebecca Solnit also rejected formal fiction to write from the subjective experience of their own lives. Despite not writing specifically from a psychoanalytical perspective, they are all following a similar style to Milner who used her psychoanalytic training to establish a highly reflective, reflexive and analytical voice.

The Self-Illuminated Pen uses the form of the letter to reflect upon writing process. The antecedent is Ali Smith's *Artful* (2012) and its precedent, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (1988) by Italo Calvino. *Six Memos* is a series of five memos outlining qualities of literature worth preserving. The missing memo is accounted for in a preface written by Calvino's widow Ester Singer: Calvino died in 1985 prior to the memos' completion, which were to be delivered as a lecture series at Harvard.

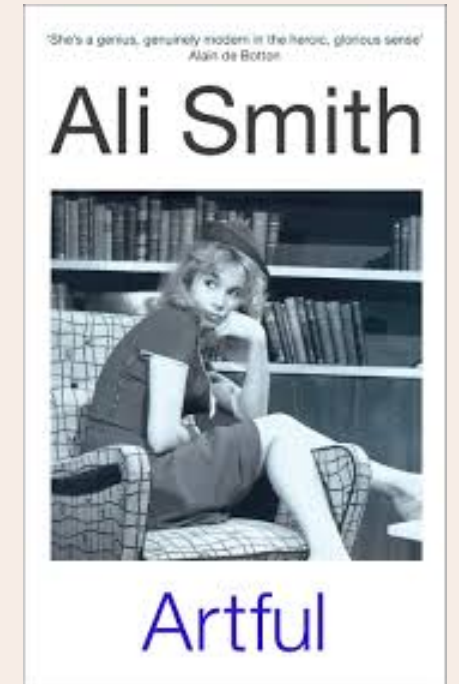
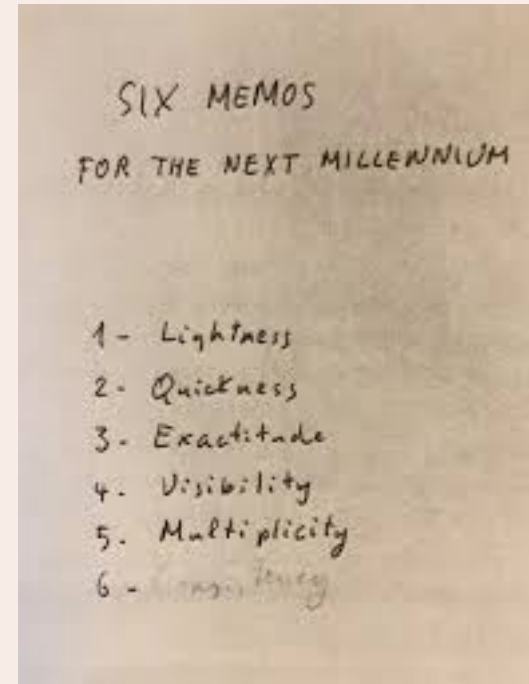


Ali Smith adopts this scenario: a lover reading the unfinished notes on art left by her deceased partner (an academic and researcher) to reflect on perennial forms in art and literature.

My research has also explored Calvino's *Memos* in the independent publishing project *Gnommero* (2008–2015). *Gnommero* is a series of five thematic pamphlets that provided space for artists and writers to respond to the qualities of literature advocated by Calvino in the *Memos*.

One of the many challenges raised by both books is: how to relay the interwoven histories of art and literature in an accessible vocabulary. Smith's narrator has the vocabulary of a tree surgeon who interprets the refracted handwritten notes of her deceased lover. Another is how to show the urgency to create whilst being frank about the way the situation the writer finds themselves in shapes writing methods, habits and to some extent what is written.

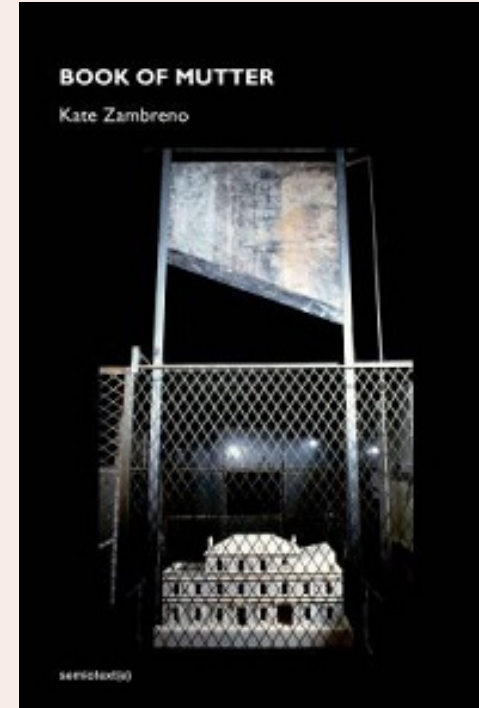
The Self-Illuminating Pen attempts to foreground the time, place and situation of writing, the 'moment' of writing.



In 2014, *MAP Magazine* hosted a reading group devised by the artist/writer/educators Emma Balkind and Laura Edbrook. The title was *Sick Sick Sick: The Books of Ornerly Women | A reading group examining a radical or 'bludgeoned' subjectivity of female writers. The Self-Illuminating Pen* builds upon many of the materials presented, including the work of Kate Zambreno.

In 2017, Zambreno published a meditation on mourning her mother, *The Book of Mutter* (2017). This book was followed by an addendum titled *Appendix Project* (2019). *Appendix Project* reflects upon and extends the *Book of Mutter* in the form of a collection of talks and notes. *The Self-Illuminating Pen* notebook also takes the role of companion work in relation to *Guitar!* because many of its insights were folded back into *Guitar!* *The Self-Illuminating Pen* adopts the same cover artwork (by the artist Ciara Phillips), the same page number and proportions, as a means of signalling the books' reciprocal relationship with each other.

The Self-Illuminating Pen has foundations in psychoanalytic writing, the interdisciplinary practice of art writing and the subjectivity of the mother/infant dyad, to see adaptations as methods, to present improvisations as the form creativity takes in life and in art.



Appendix Project

Talks and Essays

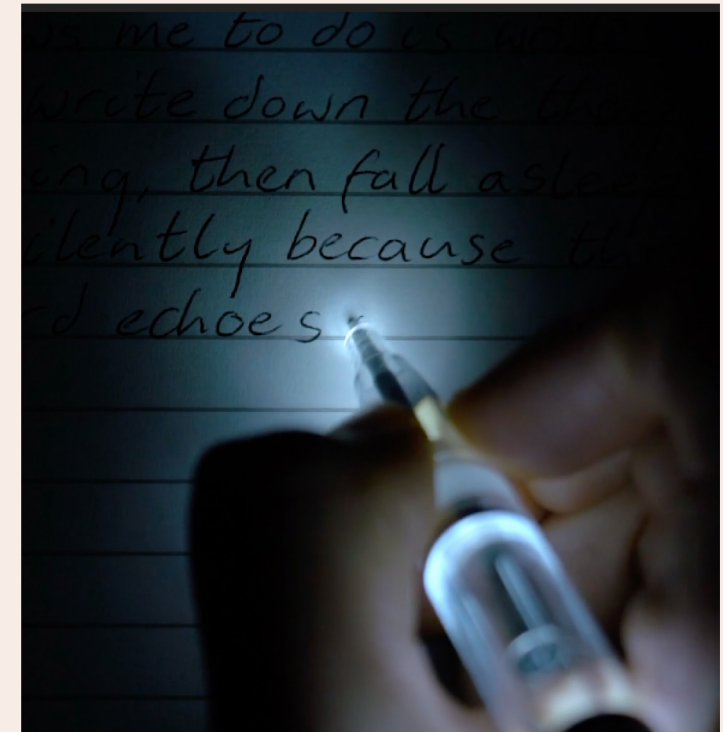
Kate Zambreno



Contributions to the field:

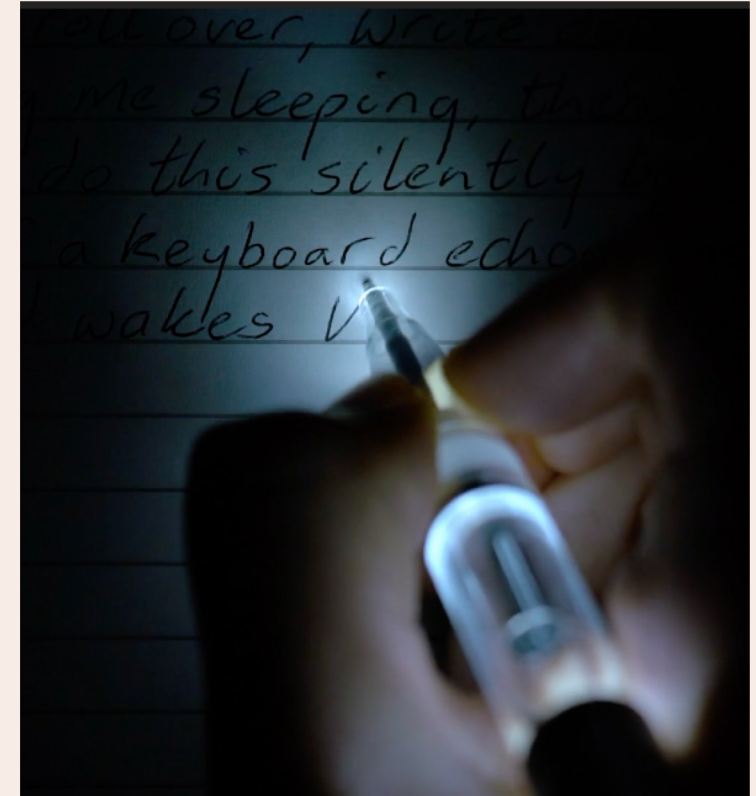
The Self-Illuminating Pen realises a public demonstration of the affective conditions of motherhood that are usually private, and how these conditions have determined the solo authored book *Guitar!* These conditions are: **evoked** through a series of moving image works, **analysed** through a series of letters and **extruded** into the pedagogical form of writing exercises.

- In *The Argonauts*, Maggie Nelson shares an autobiographical narrative and reflects upon the ethics of how this sharing may impact upon her partner and son. She wonders at the limitations of language to express her experience but does not consider the mundane conditions of her writing process. By foregrounding the conditions/habits/methods of the new mother writing, I have presented the personal and relational aspects of writing practice without autobiographical detail.
- In *Artful* by Ali Smith, the narrator (a tree surgeon) uses her professional experience to reflect on the research of her deceased lover. *The Self-Illuminating Pen* builds on this approach by using the listening expertise of the new mother (and a writer of transcriptions) to reflect on writing process.
- *The Self-Illuminating Pen* personalises the polemic/discursive space of 'letters to the editor.'



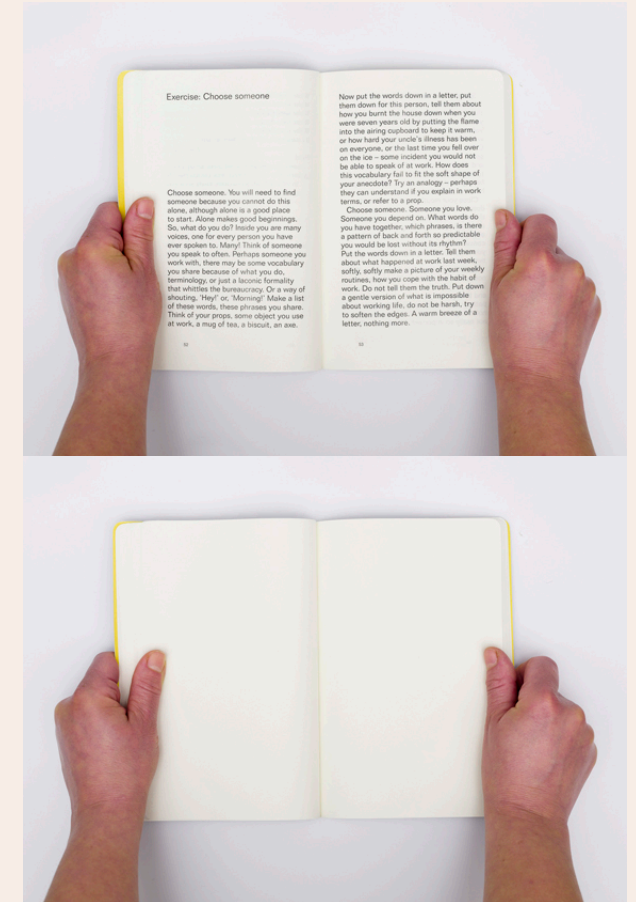
Dr Sarah Tripp, video still from 'With',
The Self-Illuminating Pen, MAP Magazine, 2020.
Made in collaboration with Isobel Lutz-Smith.

- *The Self-Illuminating Pen* is a celebration of the formation of the mother-infant dyad, whereas Kate Zambreno's *Appendix Project* is a mourning of its fracture. By writing *The Self-Illuminating Pen* in tandem with *Guitar!* I was able to develop a reciprocal notion of the 'companion work': to not only reflect on the writing process, but to fold this reflective writing back into *Guitar!*
- *The Self-Illuminating Pen* is written using the 'double critical movement' described by Wittig. The writer/artist/mother reflects upon how *Guitar!* is being written whilst writing in the same conditions of urgent improvisation. This reflecting on a book which is being written whilst demonstrating the shifting conditions of the writing itself brings an additional level of reflexivity to the field of writing as the mother/infant dyad.
- In the collaboration with the moving image artist Isobel Lutz-Smith we devised a process of filming the letters being handwritten. Each inscription unwinds smoothly across the page creating an immersive experience of writing. Working with the close-up macro lens of the camera preserved the intimacy of writing late at night in the video versions of the letters.



Dr Sarah Tripp, video still from 'Glue Ear',
The Self-Illuminating Pen, MAP Magazine, 2020.
Made in collaboration with Isobel Lutz-Smith.

- Editing the letters for different media, online 'letters to the editor,' texts to be filmed, texts to be printed, created significant problems. Judging the tone and length of the letters for different media and viewing/reading situations was challenging because the requirements of length and tone conflicted. For example, the original letters written at night were lengthy and elliptical but the demands of viewing a video for longer than ten minutes meant the letters must be no more than 190 words.
- *The Self-Illuminating Pen* identifies the moments when the habits of life shape the habits of creative practice. Where creative structures are improvised *around, through* and *with* the demands of infant nurture in the domestic setting where 24 hour care is essential. By describing these moments of overlap between life practice/creative practice/artistic practice the relational conditions of writing itself can be evinced.
- *The Self-Illuminating Pen* videos bring the action of writing at night around the care of an infant into the realm of artistic discussion. These silent videos are the first representations of this kind and immerse the viewer in a space/habit/method of writing which shifts assumptions about optimum and ideal conditions for an art writing practice.



Dissemination:

This project was initially developed with Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop (ESW) during a residency in 2017. *MAP Magazine* was in residence at the same time, represented by the curator/artist/writer team Clare Walsh (National Galleries) and Suzanne Van Der Lingen.

ESW employees, studio holders and residents formed a reading group with Walsh and Van Der Lingen to workshop drafts of *Guitar!* This group continued to provide feedback as *Guitar!* developed to include *The Self-Illuminating Pen*. The ESW studio holders and reading group participated in ongoing discussions sharing methods and processes of habitual practice they developed as parents and carers.

MAP Magazine has made space for the creation and dissemination of this project from 2014 onwards. Initially, through the reading group *Sick Sick Sick*; then while I was in

residence at ESW, and finally through the dissemination of the letters online, as videos and texts, and by publishing the letters and exercises in an edition of 100 notebooks.

Working with the Editorial Director of *MAP*, Alice Bain, we framed my reflective writing in *The Self-Illuminating Pen* as assertively intimate 'letters to the editor,' thus subverting this sub-genre of public writing.

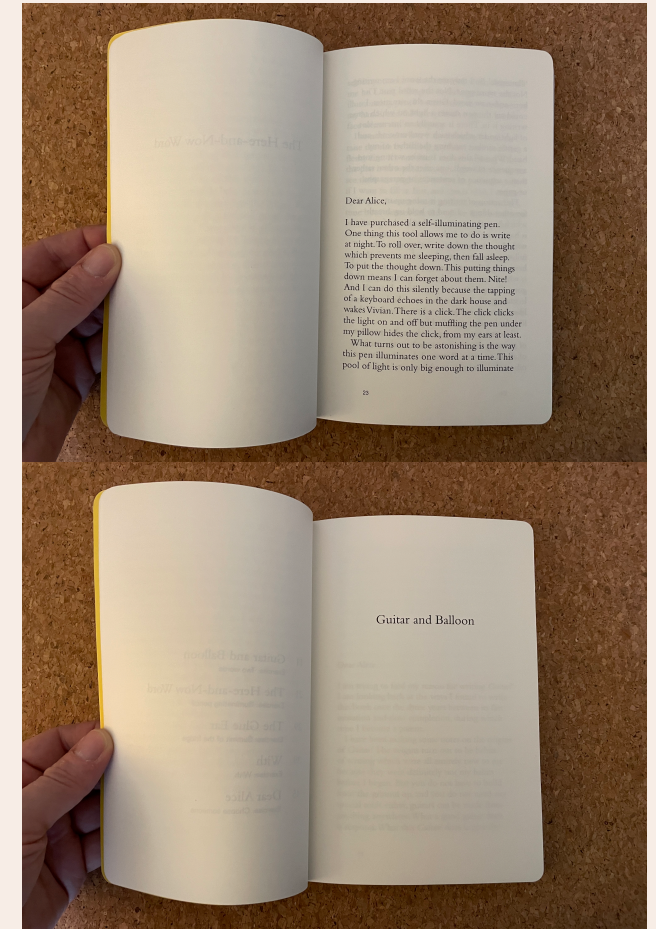
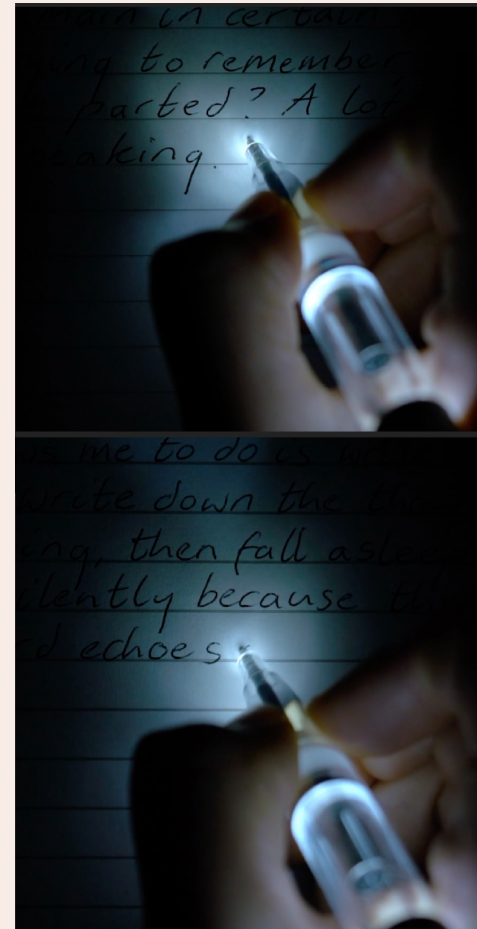
The longer forms of the letters published online are more analytical, the videos are atmospheric and use heavily abridged versions of the letters and the printed notebook is instructional, containing the long form letters beside writing exercises, followed by empty pages to be filled by the exercises. Thus, there is a tiered system of dissemination by which audiences may engage with additional analysis or be immersed by the intimacy of the video footage or put the exercises to use within their practice using the notebook.

THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART

Through MAP's publishing *The Self-Illuminating Pen* reaches five distinct but overlapping audiences: writers and artists reflecting on their habits of practice; art writers concerned with the specific lineage of feminist writing practice; educators concerned with innovative methods or practice; parents of young children with a creative practice; and researchers interested in creativity and the mother/infant dyad.

The online letters and films were published at 3 am on Saturday nights / Sunday mornings for five weeks reflecting the nocturnal working habits described in the letters with the series title, *The Self-Illuminating Pen*. The notebooks, published by MAP Editions, were distributed with no costs by post on request. This free model of dissemination ensured that this pedagogical version of the letters could be accessed for free.

By December 2020, all the notebooks had been distributed and a second edition of *The Self-Illuminated Pen* was commissioned by MAP editions.



Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop for their ongoing support, especially their reading group for their critical feedback during the development of *The Self Illuminating Pen* and *Guitar!*

Thank you to Creative Scotland for making an award from the Open Project Fund and The Glasgow School of Art for their research funding.

Thank you to *MAP Magazine* and MAP Editions for publishing *The Self-Illuminating Pen* online and in two editions.

Thank you to Alice Bain (Editor, *MAP Magazine*) for her editing of *The Self-Illuminated Pen*.

Thank you to Isobel Lutz-Smith with whom I collaborated on *The Self-Illuminating Pen* videos for providing conceptual focus technical expertise and aesthetic judgement.

Thank you to Book Works (London) for publishing *Guitar!*

Thank you to Lizzie Homersham (Editor, Book Works) for her editing of *Guitar!* and feedback on *The Self-Illuminating Pen*.

Thank you to the writer, curator and photographer Francis McKee for taking the photographs in *Guitar!*

Thank you to the artist Ciara Phillips for producing the artwork for the covers of *The Self-Illuminating Pen* and *Guitar!*