

I went to bed and woke in another century

Zoe Tissandier, UK

ABSTRACT

Zoe Tissandier reflects on her evolving body of work, 'I went to bed and woke in another century', which collects online news headlines and recreates them as letterpress prints. She discusses how this work and process is informed by the notion of the personal 'countertype' collector, defined by Walter Benjamin, and looks at how one can trace narratives through such accumulated content. The author explores how the process of utilizing an outmoded technology such as letterpress allowed her to introduce a new temporality to the inherently transient nature of the headline itself.

Facebook to become 'world's biggest virtual graveyard'
Shipwrecks found with ancient cargo
Carbon dating reveals earliest origins of zero symbol
Hiker's body found after 20 years
Is this the beginning of the end for film?
'I went to bed and woke in another century'
Parched fields reveal ancient marks
Tsunami debris washes up in Canada
Library book is returned - 45 years late
Cavemen preferred to 'stay home'

I work with ephemera to reflect upon the archive and the impact of digital technologies on archiving practices. I went to bed and woke in another century is the title for an evolving body of work in which I collect online news headlines and recreate them as letterpress prints.

By using a time-consuming and outmoded printing process, I attempt to create a permanent document of a newsheadline, which is by its nature fleeting and would ordinarily disappear quickly from collective memory. Recreating the headline in letterpress slows the impact of technology's acceleration. The process also comments on the durational quality of this body of work and how this collection came into existence.

The origins of this collection began almost ten years ago, whilst studying for my Masters in Fine Art, when I had a daily ritual of signing out of my then Yahoo email account and being presented with a news headline. These often focused on the more obscure or bizarre stories. At first there was no particular 'rule' I assigned to my collecting habit – any headline that intrigued me was subsumed into my growing collection. However, I soon realized that I could trace the arc of multiple narratives through my collection, and that certain themes were appearing amongst the mass of



Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure 1: I went to bed and woke in another century (2019) by Zoe Tissandier. Letterpress, 297 x 420mm
 Figure 2: I went to bed and woke in another century (2019) by Zoe Tissandier. Letterpress, 297 x 420mm

content. The collection became a record of a singular journey through the online world.

My process was influenced by the ideas of philosopher and cultural theorist Walter Benjamin, in particular his notion of the 'countertype collector'. This category of 'personal' collector is not occupied with the utilitarian or capital value of the collection, but rather its unofficial and subjective nature, which functions as a way to recall diverse histories and ideas. Benjamin posed his countertype collection in opposition to the idea of the public collection. He believed this type of collection was about a specific and personal engagement with history. Indeed, Benjamin's own project, The Arcades Project (undertaken between 1927-1940), is a substantial collection of notes, quotations, thoughts, commentaries and illustrations regarding his interpretation of the social and cultural history of the nineteenth century. In his essay *This is Not a Museum of Art*, Douglas Crimp suggests the countertype collector is 'able to unravel the secret historical meaning of the things they accumulate'. (Crimp,p.202)

Recently I was awarded the 2018-19 Spike Print Studio (SPS) and University of West of England (UWE) scholarship program, which granted access to facilities and support at UWE. The opportunity allowed me to focus on working with a group of headlines from my collection, experimenting with printing these in various typefaces and considering their placement and meaning on the page. Adopting Benjamin's methodology, I tried to make meaningful connections with this continuing accumulation of online debris. My subjective and idiosyncratic collection speaks of historical objects and events being unearthed to reveal the present, highlighting the impact of changing technologies and questioning the proclaimed headlines' authenticities. With letterpress, the headlines become poetic, their meanings coalesced in a quiet installation, incorporating both the humorous and poignant whilst looking back at the whole of history.

In an exhibition at the end of my scholarship program, I produced both embossed prints which were installed on the table, and inked prints which were installed on the wall. Their display functioned as a mirror to each other, rather like a double or twin: the embossed version a kind of shadow of the inked version. The presence of the 'double' aptly reminds us of the headline's digital twin – lost in the ether, once current, now dormant.

Viewers were encouraged to move around the space in order to read the printed headlines from two perspectives, somewhat like a 'set up' and 'reveal'. This divide considered the interchangeable aspect of the headline and the speed of transformation: old news is inevitably replaced with new news. I also displayed a stack of printed newsprint on the gallery floor, which, like a deck of cards, reminded the viewer that the 'set up' and 'reveal' could be shuffled about, and highlights the role of chance in how such collections come into existence. For example, 'Parched fields reveal...' could have a variety of endings. The content was malleable in this sense, replicating something of the



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

Figure 3: I went to bed and woke in another century (2019) by Zoe Tissandier. Letterpress, installation view

Figure 4: I went to bed and woke in another century (2019) by Zoe Tissandier. Letterpress, installation view

Figure 5: I went to bed and woke in another century (2019) by Zoe Tissandier. Letterpress, installation view

printing process itself, prone to inadvertent accidents. In fact, one such accident whilst I was positioning the lines of type onto the press bed resulted in a flipped line of text, and this became a central part of the conceptualization of the arrangement of the work.

The challenges of displaying paper became apparent during this project, as the newsprint paper fell victim to the decaying processes inherent in showing in such a space: sunlight, dust, handprints. It was intentional not to frame the work, yet, eventually, this decay demonstrated the ephemeral and fragile nature of the work itself.

The phrase ‘what goes around, comes around’ comes to mind when thinking about the tension that is created between the various temporalities in the work. I am reminded of the term ‘archive thinkers’ in Uriel Orlow’s essay *Latent Archives, Roving Lens* in which he discusses contemporary arts practices concerned with memory. This obscure mode of working, he says, is engaged in deconstructing the notion of the archive itself.

They reflect on the archive as something which is never fixed in meaning or material, but is nevertheless here, largely invisible yet at the same time monumental, constantly about to appear and disappear; latent’.

(Orlow, p.35)

Ultimately, the amassing of news headlines is an accretion of words which speak about the weight of history and how past eras are replaced by new ones. Momentous events such as tsunamis and shipwrecks continue to repeat over the centuries, revealing their subsequent destructive forces. In turn, the history of our online news consumption will become part of the infinite ‘virtual graveyard’. The spectral quality of the material in this collection activates the transhistorical. In order to make sense of this and consider the vastness of the archive that exists online, I was drawn to paper and older forms of technology and a direct relationship with the processes and tools of production. My title (borrowed from one of the newsheadlines), I went to bed and woke in another century is a nod to both how the collection began – recording the before heading to bed – and Benjamin’s endeavour to interpret historical phenomena as a way to understand the century from which he originated.

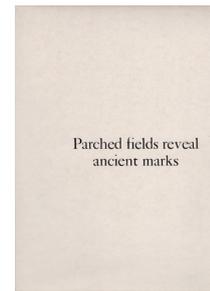


Figure 6:

IMAGE GALLERY

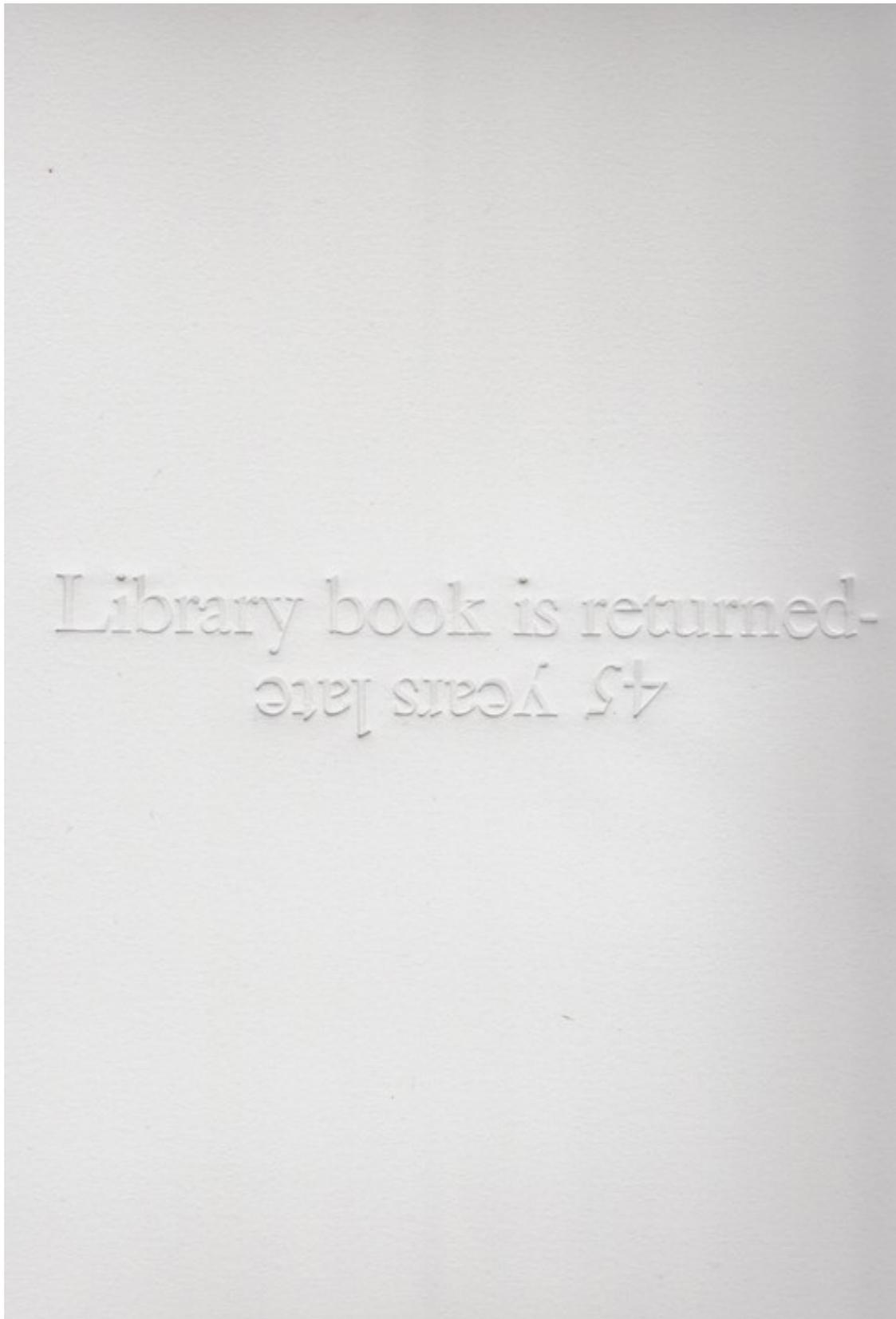


Figure 1. I went to bed and woke in another century (2019) by Zoe Tissandier. Letterpress, 297 x 420mm

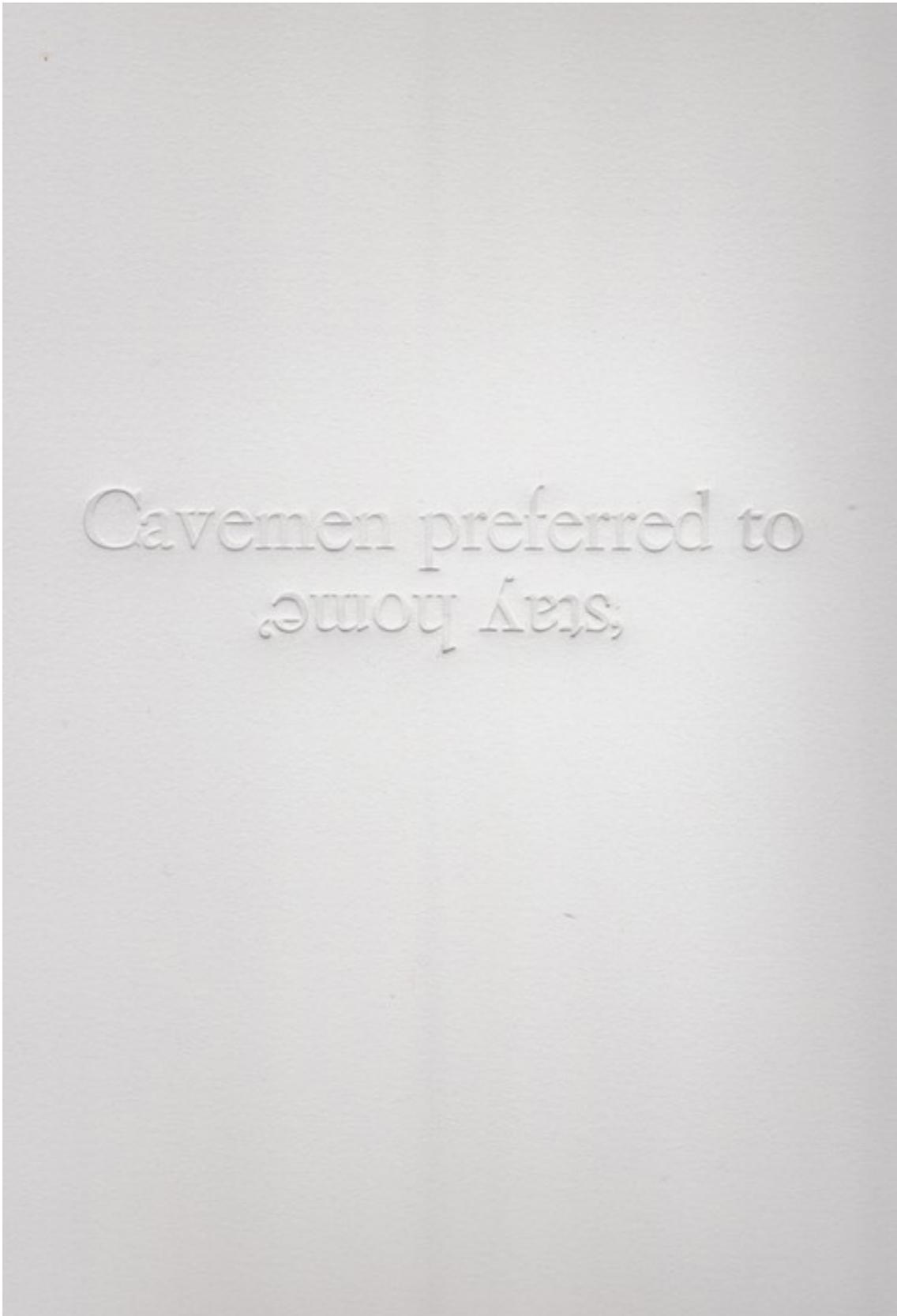


Figure 2. I went to bed and woke in another century (2019) by Zoe Tissandier. Letterpress, 297 x 420mm

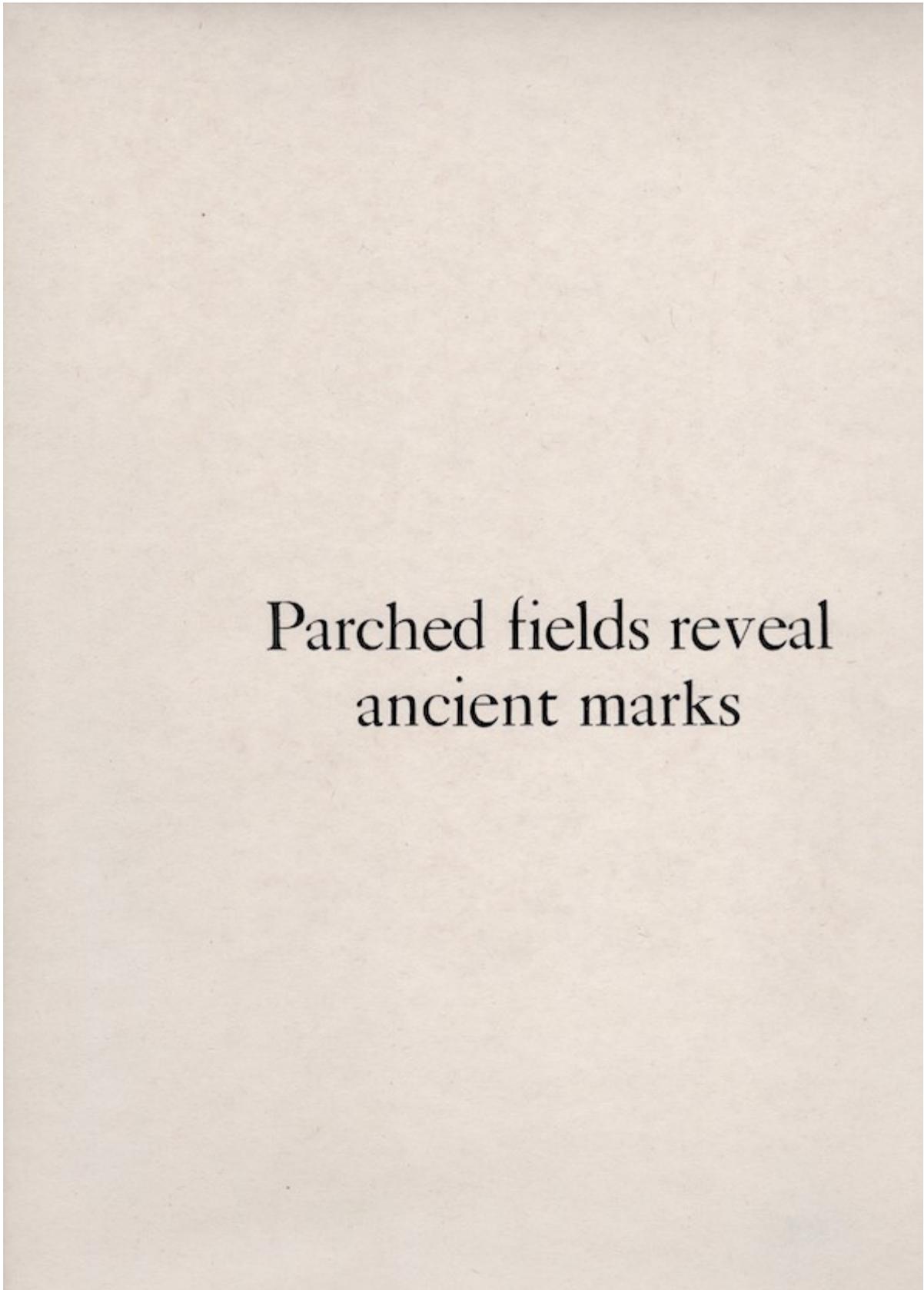


Figure 3. I went to bed and woke in another century (2019) by Zoe Tissandier. Letterpress, 297 x 420mm



Figure 4. I went to bed and woke in another century (2019) by Zoe Tissandier. Letterpress, installation view



Figure 5. I went to bed and woke in another century (2019) by Zoe Tissandier. Letterpress, installation view



Figure 6. I went to bed and woke in another century (2019) by Zoe Tissandier. Letterpress, installation view

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Crimp, D. (1993) This is Not a Museum of Art. In: Crimp, D., ed., (1993) On the Museum's Ruins. Cambridge: The MIT Press, pp.202.

Orlow, U. (2006) Latent Archives, Roving Lens. Bristol: Picture This Moving Image.

CONTACT

Zoe Tissandier
Zoe.tissandier@gmail.com
www.zoetissandier.co.uk < <http://www.zoetissandier.co.uk> >