

# Folds – dog ears – creases – pleats – kinks – pranks – convolutions

Gill Partington and Adam Smyth

Take a sheet of paper and fold it in half. It's probably the most basic of paper's many affordances, the easiest operation you can perform with it. It's a mechanism, a hinge articulating moving parts. But even here, the fold is no simple thing. It both doubles and conceals, creating an outside and an inside. A few more deft folds and the sheet could become an aeroplane, a hat, a swan, a rose. Its flat surface could be transformed into any number of three-dimensional objects, paper toys or moveable devices, like the 'fortune teller' or 'chatterbox'. To fold something is, literally, to *complicate* it (the Latin verb *complicāre* derives from the prefix *com-* 'together' and *plicare* 'to fold'). The *OED* also gives us 'prank' as an archaic word for fold, as in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* from 1590: 'Some prancke their ruffles; and others trimly dight | Their gay attyre'. The ruff, that most bizarre but characteristic of Elizabethan garments, consisted entirely of elaborate pleats, of prank after prank, and in this issue of *Inscription* Kelly Hoffer manages to both analyse and perform its use. Her poem/ruff 'The Gusseted Lady' is strikingly similar to the ways in which Hester Lees-Jeffries' article 'Shakespeare in Folds' imagines the Renaissance play text. Shakespeare's dramas are much preoccupied with folds, Lees-Jeffries shows, not only in their convoluted intertextuality and the twists of their imagery and wordgames, but also because the play itself is a kind of folded structure, assembled differently with each performance but always containing other, latent potential and 'dark matter'. The fold – much like a prank – can be deceptive. It can trip us up.

For book historians, the fold is axiomatic to the form of the codex: its very operating system. As Justine Provino explains, bibliography deals in the complex mathematics of 'collation', mentally unfolding the book to see how it was constructed. How has the printer folded his or her large sheets of paper to form the book's pages? They might be folded into four, for a quarto volume; eight, for an octavo; twelve, for a duodecimo, but often involved combinations of different patterns. And before this, how exactly did the printed sheet have to be laid out to ensure the resulting pages would appear in the correct order and the right way up – a process known as 'imposition'? Try it with your piece of paper. The more folds there are, the more difficult the calculations become. But also, the more the surfaces are joined together. Folding a sheet three times produces eight leaves, but two are conjoined at the front edge and four at the top edge. And since these folded sheets or 'gatherings' would then be stitched together and bound into book form with their edges still connected in this way, it was common until well into the nineteenth century for readers to purchase books with pages that were printed, but still partially hidden in folded enclosures. They had to be sliced open to be read, but it's possible in archives and second-hand shops to find a book in its original 'unopened' state, still keeping its secrets after all these years. For the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé who, as Craig Dworkin elegantly elaborates in his essay, is one of the most original thinkers of the book, these tightly stacked folds are a 'tomb in miniature for our souls'. But trying to read one of these sealed, unopened books, voyeuristically peering into its crevices, it's hard to avoid the sense that folds can be just a little, well... kinky.

The fold can allow for a frisson of hiddenness and privacy, as Clara Drummond explores in her article on the history of the envelope. It can create a private space of interiority, sealing text on the inside where it is hidden from prying eyes. And, as this issue highlights, prior to the modern invention of the envelope there existed a whole origami technology of 'letter locking', folding structures that could transform a single

sheet into both missive and carrier, ingeniously sealed. In more conventional or straightforward reading experiences, of course, the fold seems altogether less obtrusive, more user friendly. Opened out on a desk, the hinge of the spine is what allows the book to function, making each page accessible. But let's not forget that once it is closed, with facing pages pressed together, its words make contact with one another in ways it's hard to predict. Georgina Wilson's article about the early modern book takes a cue from philosopher Michel Serres to remind us that folding can bring distant points together, so that things seemingly separated in time and space can be pressed into sudden and intimate proximity. Pages might stare innocently up at us as we read, but who knows what they get up to once they are folded shut? (The image on page 47 from Guillermo Deisler's *GRRR* in this issue perhaps gives us an idea).

Folds can conceal as much as reveal. But they can do other things, too. They can change modalities of reading, unfolding narrative content in unexpected ways. The codex, with its sequential, left to right page turnings has never been the only version of the book. There are many other topological configurations, the most common one being perhaps the accordion folded book which has a long history and many uses. It also has another name, 'Leporello', which comes from the servant in Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, whose compendious list of his master's lovers grows materially unmanageable, spilling in zig zags from out of its covers. Unlike the bound book, the pleated strip of the leporello is extendable, providing space for a potentially infinite list of mistresses. It can also be unfolded and laid out in its entirety, as with Pavel Büchler's pull-out print for this issue, which spreads a single sentence across three accordion-folded leaves so that all its individual pages need to be seen at the same time. The format replaces sequence with simultaneity, explaining why it was especially popular in the nineteenth century during the craze for portable panoramas, or 'views of everything'. These were often souvenirs: if you couldn't see the Duke of Wellington's funeral in person, you could still see the procession in its papery entirety. Equally you could enact a journey. The pleated pages of George Cargill Leighton's 1849 *Grand Architectural Panorama of London* can be turned over one by one, or laid out in a nearly seven-metre strip. This is neither a map nor a straightforward illustration. Rather it's an immersive experience, recreating the city streets for viewers in polite Georgian parlours and drawing rooms.

Reading does not have to unfold from side to side, of course. The folding structure of the eighteenth-century 'harlequinade' or turn-up book works instead on a vertical axis. These cheap pamphlets, based on the exploits of the Harlequin figure from popular pantomime, combined rhymes and images, and were made from just a couple of engraved sheets. The top-most sheet, sliced into moveable flaps, instructed readers to 'turn up' and 'turn down' to reveal a surprise, so that these books provided their readers not primarily with sequential narrative, but with visual novelty and entertainment. In *Queen Mab, or the Tricks of Harlequin* (1771), turning back the folded flaps means the trickster figure of the Harlequin emerges unexpectedly, confounding his adversaries by putting them into the stocks, which then transform into a Maypole so that merriment ensues as he marries his sweetheart Columbine. These are folds that

function to enact subversive twists and turns, undercutting what went before. Like Erica Baum's *Dog Ears*, they exploit folding's potential to create unexpected and surreal conjunctions. Turning over the corner of a page can be a helpful bookmark, but as Baum's photographs show, it can also create a found poetry, making new meanings out of existing texts. Riccardo Bogleione, too, uses the fold to remake and reorder, using the well-worn creases in Alberto Hidalgo's oversize poster-poem to dictate a new sequel.

The fold can also work to complicate the workings of the page in other, dramatic ways. Two French books, centuries apart, and operating within very different traditions, can illustrate the capacity of the fold to unlock new protocols of reading, and to generate a vast number of new meanings.

The first book is Christophe Leutbreyer's *Nouvelle methode pour se disposer aisément à vne bonne & entiere confession de plusieurs années* (Paris, 1658). This is a Catholic confession book, or a confession coupée, designed to aid the user in remembering their trans-gressions as they prepare for confession. Not only does each page list dozens of potential sins from which the user is to pick out their own, like being impatient ('Avoir esté trop impatient'), or delaying doing good deeds ('Avoir differé de bien faire'); but each of the sins is printed on a horizontal strip, separated from its neighbours above and below (but joined at the gutter). With a stylus or needle, the reader can unpick their particular sins from the margin and fold them back to serve as paper



reminders. Here, in the following image, are some sins from the devotional life of an owner of the copy now in the Bodleian Library in Oxford – the page represents a spiritual condition recorded in folds, a devotional life locked in the last moment of book use.



Christophe Leutbreuer's *Nouvelle methode* (Paris, 1658).  
Bodleian Library Vet E3 f.506.

The brilliance of the design means that after confession, the user can return each strip to its original, unfolded position, ready for the next cycle of sin/folding/confession. The page tracks the moral life of the reader: the page is permutational, following us, and shaping us; and the fold is the mechanism of both spiritual remembering, and, after confession, when the page is restored, of spiritual forgiveness. In Leutbreuer's *Nouvelle methode*, the page becomes a way of holding folds.

The French novelist and poet Raymond Queneau (1903–1976) may well have known nothing of the confession coupée, but he achieved a similar relationship with the page in his *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (*A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*), published in 1961. Opening the Gallimard edition from 1961, we are faced with a sonnet, but each of the 14 lines is printed on a horizontal slip, rather like Leutbreuer's sins, and can be folded back to reveal further lines beneath. Since each line is 10 strips deep, and there are 14 lines, the strips can (in theory) be arranged to produce  $10^{14}$  different sonnets. Folding becomes a means of sonnet production, a way of writing, if we understand writing as the arrangement of text. We can get a sense of this material and literary depth – of the lines beneath the lines – here:



Where Leutbreuer's text was, we might say, a disciplinary technology, Queneau's page is a machine for producing an almost infinite number of poems. And the method of sonnet creation is the horizontal fold.



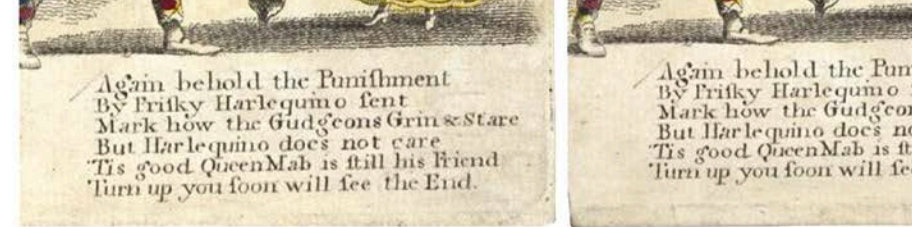
$10^{14}$  sonnets means 100,000,000,000,000 sonnets, which Queneau estimated would take 200 million years to read.

One last kind of fold, before we leave you to explore *Inscription 3*. Each article in this edition is presented as what in origami (from the Japanese *oru*, *-ori*, 'fold,' plus *kami*, 'paper') is known as a Japanese preliminary base fold. Pull on the corner, and the pages open up before you, a sudden expansion into wholeness. The pages fold not up nor across, but outwards, producing depth, so that catching hold of one page multiplies it into four. This is a journal that expands and, like the 'Bottari' of our cover artist Kimsooja, it's a deceptively spacious container, capable of holding all manner of varied things. Our vinyl LP records the sound of an origami rose being folded along with verbal instructions for other folding patterns, with the audio track folded back on itself (by sound artist Nikos Stavropoulos) to create an acoustic layering that tracks its paper subject. Also enclosed within this issue are the artist Abigail Reynold's 3D collage work, which closes in on itself like a four-panelled medieval tetrptych; Marjorie Welsh's gatefold print from her series of images reworking the patterns of police tape; and Eleanor Vonne Brown's hand-folded artwork, based on the precise tucks of a parachute as it waits to be suddenly unfurled in mid-air. Daniel Jackson's AR collaboration with Ian Truelove unravels equally spectacularly from its QR code into virtual space to show impossible, multidimensional shapes performing mind-bending contortions and folds.

This is the third edition of *Inscription*, after previous numbers on 'beginnings' (2020) and 'holes' (2021). Each article presents new research and thinking on the working of folds in different material and intellectual traditions, and at different moments in history. The instantiation of these articles as folded structures brings together meaning and form in productive ways, an entangling that is at the heart of our journal. We hope you enjoy this edition's pranks and pleats and folds.

Folds – dog ears – creases – pleats  
– kinks – pranks – convolutions

Gill Partington and Adam Smyth



Queen Mab, or The tricks of Harlequin (1771). Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library.

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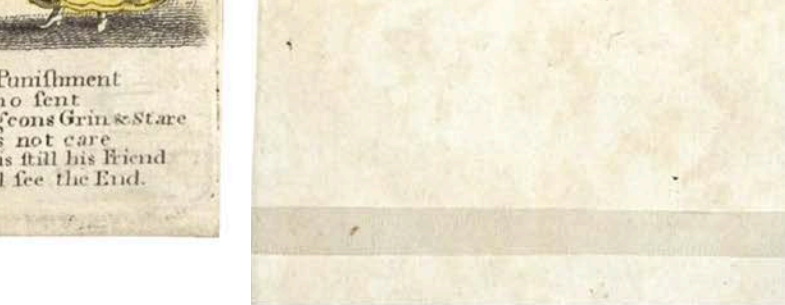
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## About *Inscription*

*Inscription* combines imaginative thinking and critical rigour to take the study of material texts in new directions. *Inscription* is at home equally in the first century and the twenty-first, as well as all points in between, and features work by practitioners – book artists, printmakers and writers – alongside academic discussion. *Inscription*'s focus is not just on the meanings and uses of the codex book, but also the nature of writing surfaces (papery or otherwise), and the processes of mark-marking in the widest possible sense: from hand-press printing to vapour trails in the sky; from engraved stones to digital text. The journal's theoretically aware, trans-historical, and cross-disciplinary remit will break with the conventions of academic ghettoization, creating connections between areas that have much to say to one another – bibliography, media theory, conservation, the history of the book, museum studies, and artist's book studies, for instance – enabling wide-ranging conversation and unexpected juxtapositions. *Inscription* promises not only to add to the field but to set new agendas for the next phase in the study of material texts.

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
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*Grand Architectural Panorama of London: Regent Street to Westminster Abbey* (1849). Yale Center for British Art.

