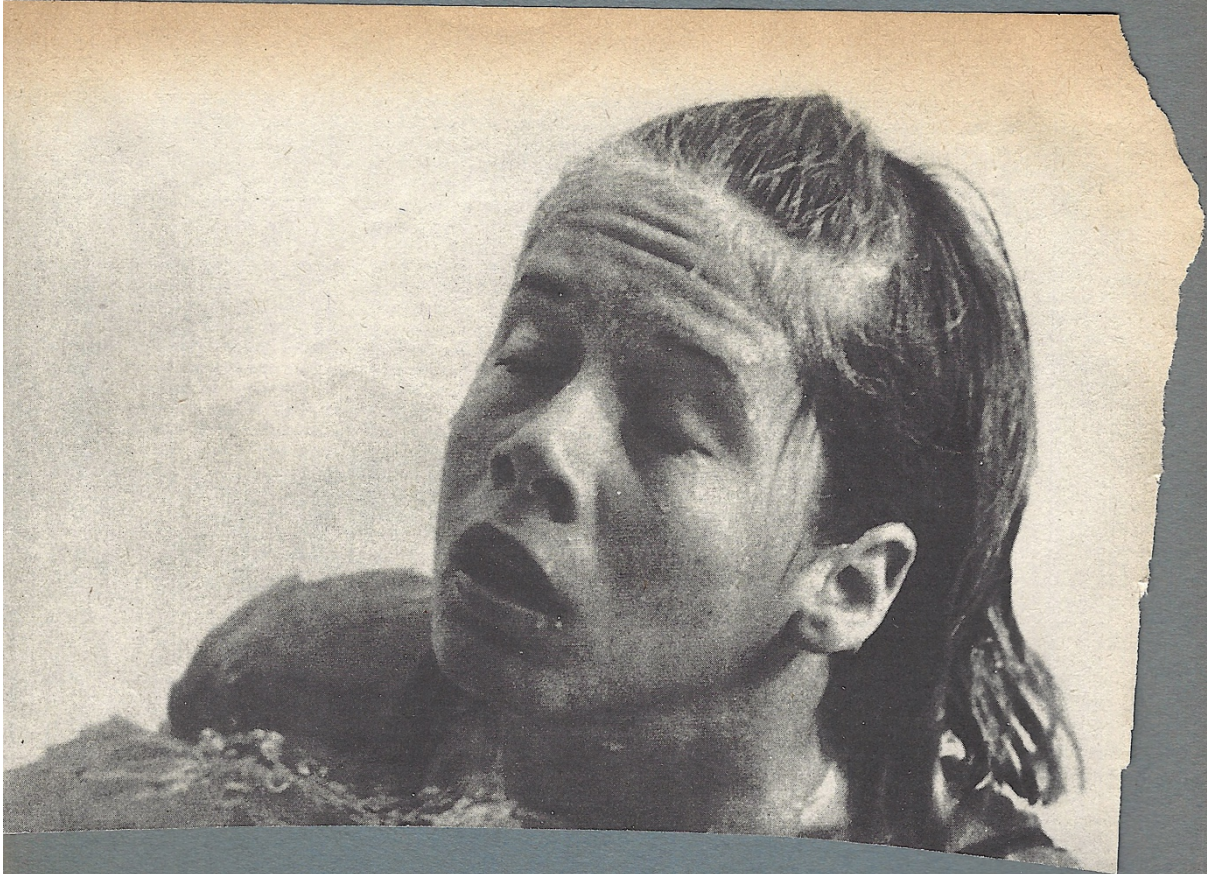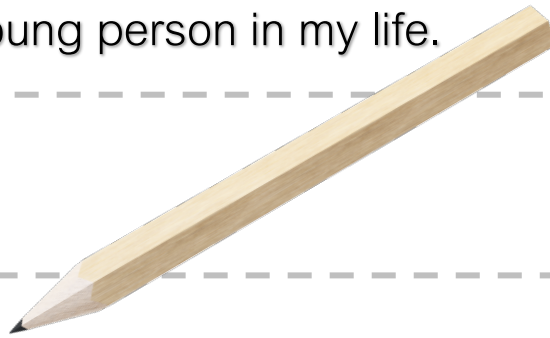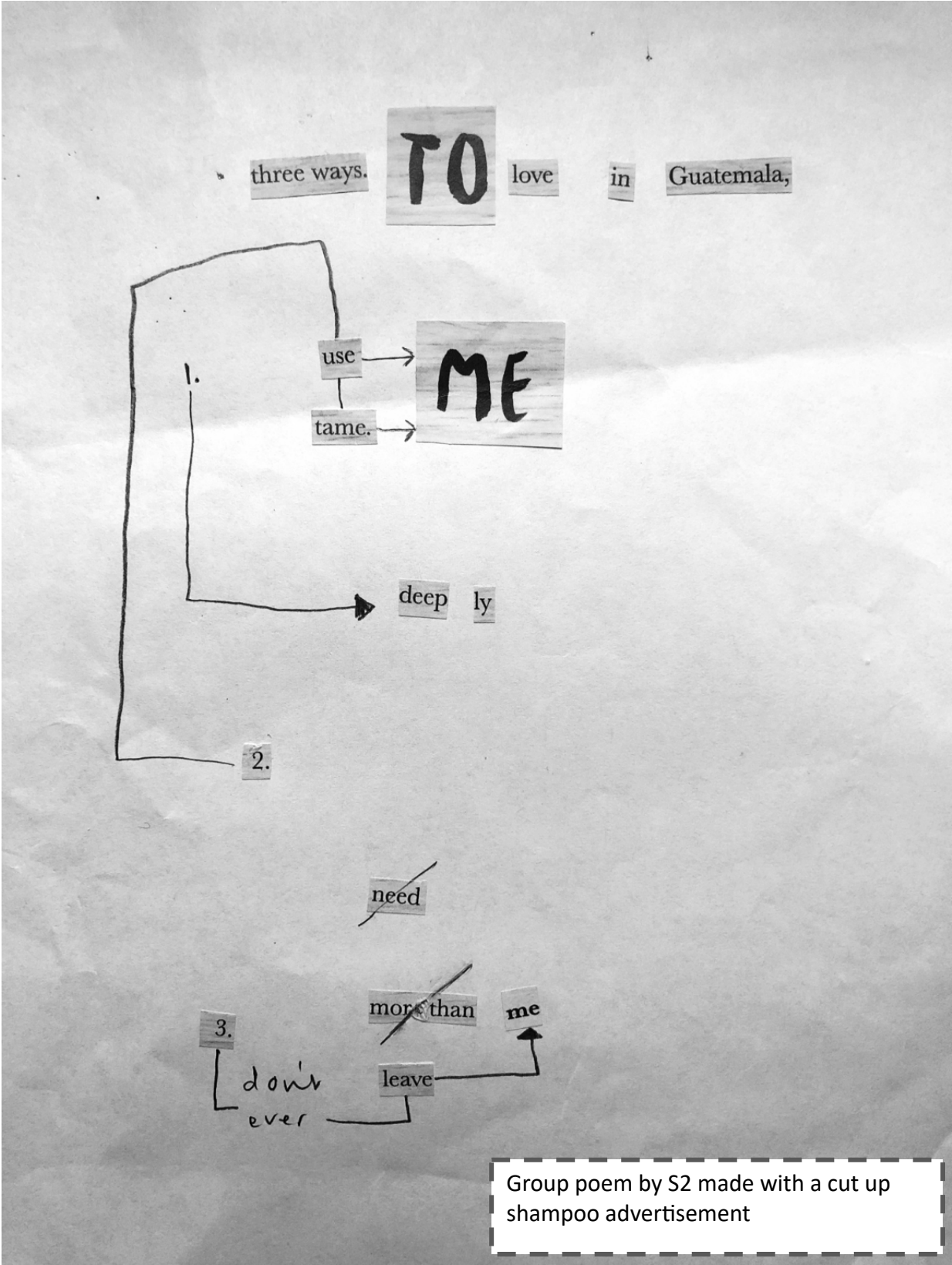# New Ways TO

WORK well

with text

WHAT

Here are some examples of different methods to use text creatively, therapeutically, and in a way that can be more widely accessible.

I've heard all sorts of names for these techniques; cut-up, concrete poetry, black-out poetry, found poetry, and collage, to name a few. I can also add meme-maker to the list thanks to a young person in my life.

WHO

People I have worked with include those who are experiencing dementia (or cognitive impairment), or poor mental health; carers and young people at risk of exclusion from education; professionals experiencing burnout, and anyone and everyone with "creativity scars". Some of the examples I share are from my own creative practice, others are from groups sessions I have facilitated over the years.

three ways. **TO** love in Guatemala,

use → **ME**

tame. →

deep ly

1.

2.

need

3. mor~~e~~ than **me**

don't
ever — leave —

Group poem by S2 made with a cut up
shampoo advertisement

One of the challenges in sharing the tools I use, is not having permission to use participant's work as examples. Some do share work within the group, though there's never pressure to do so. I have found asking to photograph the process feels intrusive. Sometimes work is destroyed at the end of the session, and occasionally I'm privileged enough to see it first.

One time, while I was clearing away at the end of a session, a participant pointed at three cut-out words they had arranged behind a notebook, before sweeping the words into the bin I was holding. I hope there was as much power in the work being briefly seen by another as there might have been erasing it.

I hope here, to share a few examples, even if it's just my own work to fill in the gaps.
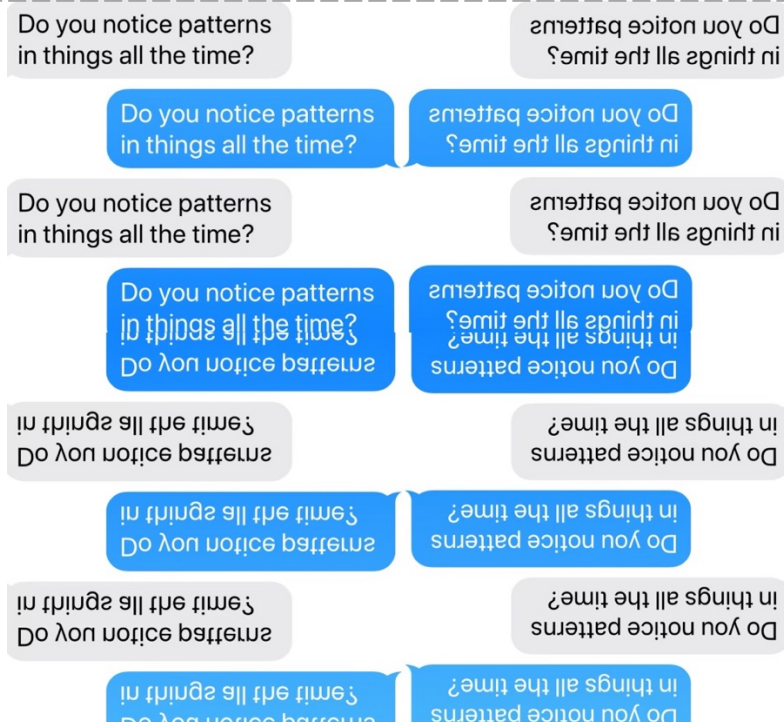
Digital collage
With phone app
(2019) F Bailey

WHERE?

I have used these techniques in person, online, indoors, outdoors, inside community spaces and clinical spaces. The outcome is always unexpected, and powerful. I've found it possible to present all the techniques shared here, even with a new group whose needs are not yet known with little adaption.

What to bring:

Source material might include:

-Magazines (recent & vintage) & newspapers

-Unloved books, books the charity shops can't sell (Dan Brown)

-Bills, benefit letters, junk mail, emails, jokes, lyrics, (any print really)

- All of the above can be photocopied, when it doesn't feel okay to work on a source directly

Also:

-Sturdy A4 coloured paper is useful to stick a cut-up poem onto + pens, scissors and glue. Wallpaper & patterned paper is also useful.

A wide range of source material helps set the tone, and shows there needn't be a hierarchy of types of text. Bonus if participants can bring their own text to the mix.

Paint collage (2017) F Bailey

The following pages show many of the different kinds of ways of working with text. I'm always adding more.

1. Cut out text and reassemble it, make new meaning

💡 Simply allow participants to browse the material and cut out whatever catches their attention. Some might want to work together on this.

Participants can then play with the words (like fridge magnets), maybe never arriving at a final arrangement.

As the session evolves, a task could be to select just one word, or phrase and to use that as a starting line for a piece of creative writing/poem.

It might be enough for some (with/without help) to stick the original text order onto a background they choose, e.g. song lyrics on a patterned background

2. Choose part of the text to remain visible, and cover the rest

💡 Participants may want to use crayons. markers or Tipex, or cut out patterns to stick on – sometimes called found poetry, concrete poetry, or blackout poetry.

Maybe just one word or phrase left visible could be enough, and may (as above) become a starting line for a piece of creative writing/poem

3. Challenge participants to conceal/change just one word to alter the meaning of text

💡 Same goes for adding/removing an image alongside text.

4. Choose two separate sources of text and see what happens they are merged together

💡 E.g. energy bill and a popular song.

6. Starting lines and endings

💡 Choose a book (perfect if you are in a library) or find text on a nearby poster and use that as the starting line for a short story. Or use the last line of a novel as a jumping off point. Can the story be continued (and maybe the ending improved)?. Perhaps the last text message someone has received on their phone or an email title could be used. I recently saw a writing prompt called "Literary Taxidermy" where the starting and ending line were given and you could write whatever you wanted in between.

7. Start with an image as inspiration

💡 Magazines, or a piece or wallpaper might do, or some might want to look around the room for an image. Maybe the last photo someone took on their phone. Write about it, find text to put alongside it.

8. Start out with text cut up, from a familiar source

💡 E.g. chop up a well-known song and present it to the group. Is it easy to guess what the source is? How many times is a word repeated? What happens if everyone picks a word or phrase each as a writing prompt. Can the remaining words still be assembled by the group to make some sense? Is there a familiar script in a workplace or school that could be cut up and read in a different way?

Other useful resources:

Everything is a Remix (2023, Kirby Ferguson)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9RYuvPCQUA

Anything David Bowie or William Burroughs
https://www.oca.ac.uk/weareoca/creative-writing/burroughs-and-bowie-using-the-cut-up-technique-part-2/

To be a Teacher and remain a Student

Mr. Shaynak, who taught phys-

(unknown source)

Old receipt wreath (2017) F Bailey

If you have downloaded these tools, and found them in any way useful, please do email me, Fi at writetobeknown@gmail.com. If you are happy to share a comment, information like this will support my freelance work, such as a testimonial when I apply for funded work in the future. I also work with organisations, to help use writing with wellbeing for confidence and I welcome any ideas for collaboration.