
Unoriginal Genius: An Introduction

We are in the midst of a mighty recasting of literary forms, a melting down in which many of the opposites in which we have been used to think may lose their force.

Walter Benjamin

I love originality so much I keep copying it.

*Charles Bernstein*¹

Réécriture

The publication in 1922 of *The Waste Land*—surely the most famous poem in English of the twentieth century—met with a largely negative reception, even on the part of admirers of T. S. Eliot's earlier poetry like Edgell Rickword, who reviewed *The Waste Land* for the *Times Literary Supplement*.² A World War I poet, student of French poetry (he published one of the first critical studies in English of Rimbaud), and founding editor of the *Calendar of Modern Letters* (1925–27), which took a strong stand against the Edwardians in the name of Modernism,³ Rickword expressed admiration for Eliot's "sophistication" but could not condone *The Waste Land*'s extensive use of citation:

[Mr. Eliot's] emotions hardly ever reach us without traversing a zig-zag of allusion. In the course of his four hundred lines he quotes from a score of authors and in three foreign languages, though his artistry has reached that point at which it knows the wisdom of sometimes concealing itself. There is in general in his work a disinclination to awake in us a direct emotional response. . . . He conducts a *magic-lantern show*; but being too reserved to expose in public the impressions

stamped on his own soul by the journey through the Waste Land, he employs the slides made by others, indicating with a touch the difference between his re-action and theirs.⁴

As for the vegetation myths that Eliot cites as his key source in the infamous notes, this "cultural or middle layer" of the poem "is of no poetic value in itself. We desire to touch the inspiration itself, and the apparatus of reserve is too strongly constructed." True, there are a few direct expressions of feeling, like the "concluding confession 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins,'" but on the whole, the poet's method is "reticence itself":

Here is a writer to whom originality is almost an inspiration borrowing the greater number of his best lines, creating hardly any himself. It seems to us as if "The Waste Land" exists in the greater part in the state of notes. This quotation is a particularly obvious instance:

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down

Poi s'ascese nel foco che gli affina

Quando fiam uti chelidon — O swallow swallow

*Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie*⁵

This collage of nursery rhyme, Dante's *Purgatorio*, the *Pervigilium Veneris*, and Gerard de Nerval prompts the following assessment:

Perhaps if the reader were sufficiently sophisticated he would find these echoes suggestive hints, as rich in significance as the sonorous amplifications of the romantic poets. None the less, we do not derive from this poem as a whole the satisfaction we ask from poetry. Numerous passages are finely written; there is an amusing monologue in the vernacular [the Lil passage in "The Game of Chess"] and the fifth part is nearly wholly admirable. The section beginning "What is that sound high in the air . . ." has a nervous strength which perfectly suits the theme; but he declines to a mere notation, the result of an indolence of imagination.

Mr. Eliot, always evasive in the grand manner, has reached a stage at which he can no longer refuse to recognize the limitations of his medium; he is sometimes walking very near the limits of coherency.

And Rickword concludes with the hope that the poet will soon "recover" from this "ambitious experiment."

This *TLS* review is an important document for anyone who wants to understand the poetry emerging in the twenty-first century. Rickword's basic charge is quite clear: *citation*, especially citation that draws on other languages, undermines and destroys the very essence of poetry, which is (or should be) the expression of personal emotion — emotion conveyed, of

course, in the poet's *own words*, invented for this express purpose. The "zigzag of allusion" thus bodes ill; one's "magic-lantern show" — a term Rickword no doubt derived from Proust⁶ — should not consist of "slides made by others." A poem as a "set of notes," most of them "borrowed" from other texts: such "mere notation" can only be "the result of an indolence of the imagination."

It is one of the nice ironies of literary history that Eliot himself, having produced his "ambitious experiment," never used its citational mode again. Was he listening to his critics? *The Waste Land* was, after all, partly the product of Ezra Pound's extensive cuts: did Eliot come to think better of Pound's collagist method? Whatever the reason, his most important later poems, "Ash Wednesday" and the *Four Quartets*, are lyric meditations, oblique and dense in their communication of emotion but certainly reliant almost wholly on *the poet's own words*. "We do sometimes wish to hear the poet's full voice," says Rickword, and in *Ash Wednesday* and the *Quartets* we hear it, however carefully Eliot avoids the particulars of his actual life.

It is *The Waste Land*, however, that, almost a century after it was written, remains Eliot's most celebrated poem — the poem that has given most readers "the satisfaction we ask from poetry." The immediacy of the pub scene, for example, with its "borrowed" lines —

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight —

where the refrain, a crossing of the barman's nightly last call with the warning of Isaiah ("A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation; I the LORD will hurry it in its time," 61:22), modulates into the routine words of the pub crawlers (which will in turn modulate into the "mad" Ophelia's "Goodnight sweet ladies"), has itself become an appropriated text, cited by many later writers for its suggestibility and ironic potential.

In his important study *La seconde main ou le travail de la citation* (*The Second Hand or the Work of Citation*), Antoine Compagnon writes:

Blessed citation! Among all the words in our vocabulary, it has the privilege of simultaneously representing two operations, one of removal, the other of graft, as well as the object of these operations — the object removed and the object grafted on, as if the word remained the same in these two different states. Is there known elsewhere, in whatever other field of human activity, a similar reconciliation, in one and the same word, of the incompatible fundamentals which are disjunction and conjunction, mutilation and wholeness, the less and the more, ex-

port and import, decoupage and collage? The dialectic of citation is all-powerful: one of the vigorous mechanisms of displacement, it is even stronger than surgery.⁷

The “doubling” function of citation is characterized even more dramatically by Walter Benjamin, himself a great citational writer, in this instance talking about a fellow appropriationist, Karl Kraus:

In the quotation that both saves and punishes, language proves the matrix of justice. It summons the word by its name, wrenches it destructively from its context, but precisely calls it back to its origin. It appears, now with rhyme and reason, sonorously, congruously, in the structure of a new text. As rhyme, it gathers the similar into its aura; as name, it stands alone and expressionless. In citation the two realms — of origin and destruction — justify themselves before language. And conversely, only where they interpenetrate — in citation — is language condensed.⁸

The language of citation — Compagnon appropriately calls it *écriture* — has found a new lease on life in our own information age. It is a commonplace that in the world of digital discourse, of the Internet, e-mail, cell phone, and Facebook, communication has been radically transformed both temporally and spatially. The speed whereby the sender’s message reaches its destination has obviously created a new sense of simultaneity even as space has become increasingly indeterminate. Neither telephone area codes nor e-mail addresses tell us where caller and recipient are actually located at the moment of communication, nor do most e-mail addresses (e.g., AOL or Gmail) provide vital statistics about their possessors: they reveal neither nationality nor ethnicity, race nor religion, age nor even gender. And even when, as on Facebook, such information is given, how do we know it is accurate? Then, too, forwarded e-mails can be altered without the recipient’s knowledge so that the sender’s identity actually merges with that of the writer whose text is being forwarded. And poets’ blogs, heavily dependent as most are on recycled material, are further framed by viewer responses, producing a curious amalgam of voices that begins to take on a life of its own.

Under these circumstances, communication is likely to shift from a specific geographic location (for example, the New York of Frank O’Hara) or one’s particular local circle (e.g., the Beats) to those, wherever and whoever they are, who share a particular set of interests and allegiances. The word *community* thus takes on an entirely new meaning: the community now exists on particular websites or in the blogosphere — a situation whose far-reaching implications we have not even begun to understand.

Consider the following message sent to me on Facebook (June 6, 2009):

Dear MP,

My name is Ina Serdarevic and I’m a poet, artist and student at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

I just finished reading *Soliloquy* by Kenny G (the whole thing, well, sort of). I’m working on an article about Contemporary Literature and Conceptual Poetry in USA, and it hit me that *Soliloquy* is even funnier and more groundbreaking today than it was in the 90’s when it was first published. Because of the new technology: I mean, yes there was internet back then but things — such as myspace, blogspot, twitter, flickr, youtube and most importantly FACEBOOK are casting a new kind of light on Goldsmith’s book that reveal new layers of importance and new possibilities. Like for instance, look at this very message I’m sending you: you are one among many CHARACTERS in the book, I call you characters because Kenny G earlier described *Soliloquy* as POETRY, and a lot of these characters that I’m reading about in my book are directly available and accessible to me on Facebook. I type your name and Voilà! — a second later I’ve established contact. How many writers can actually take credit for building up a secret network between his readers and book characters?? I mean, this is truly amazing, and by taking advantage of the various search engines on the net, along with Facebook contacting, it’s in fact possible to create a map of the world within *Soliloquy*. I can look up people and talk to them about their personal experience beyond the frame that Goldsmith is creating, I can disprove and invalidate certain situations in the book and get multiple angles on them by addressing the different characters. People like John Post Lee, Karin Bravin, Carter Kustera, Alix Pearlstein, Steve Clay, Charles Bernstein and yourself, are all presented in the book and connected to their own proper equivalents of flesh and blood, they are all to be found on Facebook by anyone who wishes to find them. This awareness gives an odd feeling while reading the book but is also creating a cool and interesting fuzz about it. It’s almost like reading *Finnegans Wake* and having access to all its characters and a key to all the allusions and covert indications.

With this message, I’m simply trying to establish contact with a prominent figure from the book.

What to make of this ingenious and engaging e-mail from a total stranger? Its address (MP) and reference to Kenneth Goldsmith by his disc jockey name (Kenny G) is nothing if not casual and certainly irreverent. And Serdarevic’s recipients (of whom I am one) could easily take umbrage at the idea that an overseas student is using a poetic text along with Facebook as a way to make contact with the American artists or critics she wants to know. But her letter does argue persuasively that *Soliloquy* (1997) curiously anticipates our own moment. A conceptualist text that transcribes every word its au-

thor spoke during an entire week in New York City (while omitting all the words of those he spoke to). *Soliloquy* blurs the distinction between “real” people—people with Internet profiles and publications—and fictional characters. In doing so, it prompts the reader to investigate more fully to what extent Goldsmith’s portraits, of himself as well as of others, are reliable, the poet’s “actual” speech notwithstanding. On the one hand, *Soliloquy* has the air of a urban documentary; on the other, its submission to a rigid set of constraints—the Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action, as well as its governing rule that only the narrator is to be heard—gives the book an aura of hyperreality. Reading such a text, one must negotiate between inside and outside in ways that are still unfamiliar. As in the case of *Finnegans Wake*, each reading yields new connections. The mirrors, as Sertdarevic understands, keep multiplying.⁹

But how did this student happen to hear about Goldsmith’s work in the first place? Copenhagen, like Stockholm or Helsinki or Oslo—for that matter, like São Paulo, Brazil, and Wuhan, China—has become in recent years a center for avant-garde poetics, hosting festivals at which poets from the United States have joined others from around the world. Partly this shift in literary venues has been brought about by the changing relationship between majority and minority literatures. As recently as the 1980s, US anthologies had titles like *In the American Tree*, Ron Silliman’s important compendium of Language poetry, which divided its contributors into two sections, West and East—eighteen West Coast poets (mostly from San Francisco) and twenty from the East (mostly from New York).¹⁰ *In the American Tree* excluded such leading Language poets as Steve McCaffery (Canadian) and Tom Raworth (British) and made no attempt to bring poets from other regions of the United States into the Language fold. Two decades later, the notion of a “new American poetry” restricted to those who dwell and work in the United States seems increasingly anachronistic. Where poets actually live is much less important than what they do, and mobility—whether of texts, now eminently movable, or of their authors—is the status quo. In the Scandinavian countries, where English is a strong second language and where Modernist avant-gardes have found a receptive audience, Internet sites now have a broadly global reach.

Consider the electronic journal of international contemporary poetry and poetics *nypoesi* (*New Poetry*), which is edited from Norway by Paal Bjelke Andersen.¹¹ *nypoesi* regularly features poetry, both in the original and in translation, from the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Ger-

many, as well as from Scandinavia. It also publishes intriguing theoretical essays like Alexandr Skidan’s “Poetry in the Age of Total Communication” (November 2007), translated from Russian into both Norwegian and English.¹² In the same vein, the Brazilian journal *Sibila*, founded and edited by Régis Bonvicino in São Paulo, carried in issue 11 an exciting roundtable on “poesia em tempo de guerra e banalidade” (poetry in a time of war and banality), in which the Finnish poet-translator Leevi Lehto has an essay, also reproduced on the *Sibila* in English website, called, with a nod to T. S. Eliot, “Plurifying the Languages of the Trite,” with its partly tongue-in-cheek “central claim . . . for an *absolute and global pluralism of forms, contents, and languages*.”¹³ When I was searching for Lehto’s essay on Google, I got the prompt “Did you mean: ‘Purifying the Languages of the Tort?’” Clarifying the language of torts: a poet like Lehto could have a marvelous time making connections between the trite and the tort, the relation of the pure to the plural.

Invention

Reading *nypoesi* or *Sibila* or the French-English website and electronic journal *Double Change*,¹⁴ one is struck by how different the new poetics is, not just from the mainstream poetry of print journals like *The New Yorker* or *American Poetry Review* but also from the first wave of Language poetry in the 1980s. Here are some representative extracts:

- (1) were I idiom and
the portray
what on
idiot you remarking
cessed to only up
opt hope this
was soundly action
more engineer
taut that the

Bruce Andrews, from “White” (1981)

- (2) at the end of delight, one
who or that which revolves
more than chests have
to heave “. . . where gold,

"Tome" and "crayon" can be related metonymically, but why and how would a large, heavy book be equated to a small vessel?

The defeat of reader expectation—a kind of cognitive dissonance—is central to these poems. Ward's "At the end of" anticipates a noun phrase like "the day" or "the journey" but not "the delight"; in Inman, the "hole" promises to contain something tangible rather than "effort," and although "morrow" (as in *tomorrow*) and "ago" are related temporally, neither the potato nor the neologism "crayern" fits into its syntactic slot. Reading these lines, one has to make one's way through a maze, with no guidance from a controlling voice or a context. "The family / not personal," as Ward puts it.

At the same time, it is important to note that the words, morphemes, syntactic units, and sound patterns in each of these examples have been *chosen* by the poet in question. Even the jagged free verse (or "new sentence" in the case of much Language-centered prose), designed to obstruct the very possibility of pattern or ordering principle, underscores the primacy of the poet's *inventio* as constructive principle. This is a poetry that conceives of the poem as meaning-making machine and takes its motive from what Adorno termed *resistance*: the resistance of the individual poem to the larger cultural field of capitalist commodification where language has become merely instrumental.

Central to such resistance is the drive to Make It New, to avoid dependence on earlier poetic models. Allusions to Modernist lyric, let alone Romantic ode or Renaissance elegy, give way to a rapprochement with the language of theory, references to Derrida and Deleuze, Foucault and Baudrillard, cropping up in epigraph or wordplay. Form, in this scheme of things, is (in Robert Creeley's phrase, though not in his practice) never more than the extension of content. Thus the look of the poem as well as its sound structure are primarily instrumental, used to emphasize the poem's semantic density and verbal originality.

Verbal originality: it is this criterion that links the "language poems" in question to the lyric of the 1960s and '70s. Now that the much-fabled poetry wars of that era have receded into the distance, we can see that however different, the poems of Elizabeth Bishop and Allen Ginsberg, Sylvia Plath and James Wright, Denise Levertov and A. R. Ammons, all are, to put it most concisely, Originals. Here are the openings of some famous American poems of the period:

This is the time of year
when almost every night
the frail, illegal fire balloons appear,

dirt, and blood flow
together": margins

the family, not personal
fallibility leads

to instrumentality
in self-restraint

Diane Ward, from "Limit" (1989)

- (3) morrow every listen
ago potato who have a paper voice
the hole where the effort went
tome is crayern
a fasten into trance, necklace some awake of notes, floorer
as classed some follow

Peter Inman, from "Colloam" (1986)¹⁵

Different as these three selections are, theirs is a period style that exhibits specific features. First, this is a poetry of programmatic nonreferentiality, words and phrases refusing to "add up" to any sort of coherent, much less transparent, statement. Syntactic distortion is the key: in Andrews's "While," articles modify verbs rather than nouns ("the portray" where we expect "portray"), infinitive slots contains adverbs ("to only"), syllables are elided as in "cessed" (processed? recessed? accessed?), and it is not clear whether "this" in line 6 is the direct object of "hope" or the subject of "was" in the following line. Similarly in Diane Ward's "Limit," the agent ("one / who or that which") is indeterminate, and nouns in apposition ("margins / the family") don't form a sequence. Inman's "Colloam" (the title word is not in the OED; it seems to be a neologism formed of *colophon* and *loam*), the verb "fasten" does not have "necklace" as its object; rather, we are given the phrase "a fasten into trance," where "fasten" and "trance" relate phonemically rather than semantically. All three poems use predominantly abstract language, and the pronouns have no discernible referents. Who is Ward's "one / who . . . revolves"? Or Inman's "who" with the "paper voice"? In each case, linkage is produced by sound rather than signification: in Andrews's poem, "idiom" is related to "idiot" (see line 5), the words "up / opt hope" alliterate, and "taut" (pun on *taught*) in the last line visually echoes "that" and "the." Inman rhymes "ago" and "potato," "floorer" leads to "follow," and "crayern" seems to be a phonetic spelling of "crayon" or a reference to *crayer*, an obsolete word meaning "small vessel."

climbing the mountain height,
rising toward a saint
still honored in these parts,
the paper chambers flush and fill with light
that comes and goes, like hearts.

Elizabeth Bishop, "The Armadillo"

What thoughts I have of you tonight Walt Whitman, for I walked down the
sidestreets under the trees with a headache self-conscious looking at the full
moon.

In my hungry fatigue, and shopping for images, I went into the neon fruit su-
permarket, dreaming of your enumerations.

What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families shopping at night! Aisles
full of husbands! Wives in the avocados, babies in the tomatoes!—and you, Gar-
cía Lorca, what were you doing down by the water-melons?

Allen Ginsberg, "A Supermarket in California"

What a thrill—
My thumb instead of an onion.
The top quite gone
Except for a sort of a hinge—

Of skin,
A flap like a hat,
Dead white.
Then that red plush.

Sylvia Plath, "Cut"

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass,
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies
Darken with kindness.
They have come gladly out of the willows
To welcome my friend and me.

James Wright, "A Blessing"

The ache of marriage:

thigh and tongue, beloved,
are heavy with it.

it throbs in the teeth

We look for communion
and are turned away, beloved,
each and each

Denise Levertov, "The Ache of Marriage"

I went for a walk over the dunes again this morning
to the sea,
then turned right along
the surf

rounded a naked headland
and returned
along the inlet shore

A. R. Ammons, "Corson's Inlet"¹⁶

Whether in rhyming stanzas (Bishop, Plath), free verse (Ammons, Levertov, Wright), or rhetorical prose (Ginsberg), whether explicitly first-person (Plath, Ammons, Ginsberg) or more outer-directed (Bishop, Wright, Levertov), whether speech-based (Plath, Ammons), self-consciously literary (Bishop, Wright), or even surreal (Ginsberg, Levertov), these are poems of strong individualistic cast: each has its own voice, its own discourse radius, that connects it to other poems by the same author.

Language poetry had as its explicit aim to oppose such "natural" expressionist speech, such individual voicing and accessible syntax. But for the most part—and this has been insufficiently recognized—the poets represented in, say, Ron Silliman's *In the American Tree* did accept their predecessors' trust in invention, in the poet's power to create a unique *parole* from the language pool of the culture—a *parole* framed to resist what Adorno had defined as the culture industries. In the climate of the new century, however, we seem to be witnessing a poetic turn from the resistance model of the 1980s to dialogue—a dialogue with earlier texts or texts in other media, with "writings through" or *épiphrases* that permit the poet to participate in a larger, more public discourse. *Inventio* is giving way to appropriation, elaborate constraint, visual and sound composition, and reliance on intertextuality. Thus we are witnessing a new poetry, more conceptual than directly expressive—a poetry in which, as Gerald Bruns puts it with reference to Cage's "writings through" *Finnegans Wake*, the shift is "from a Chomskyan linguistic competence, in which the subject is able to produce an infinite number of original sentences from the deep structure of linguistic rules, to the pragmatic dis-

course that appropriates and renews what is given in the discourse that constitutes a social and cultural world.¹⁷

Poetry by Other Means

In this new poetic climate, *The Waste Land*, with its “zig-zag of allusion,” to use Edgell Rickword’s dismissive phrase, its “unoriginal” lines and borrowed “magic lantern slides,” can be seen as a foundational text. Together with Pound’s *Cantos*, with their amalgam of citation and found text, it looks ahead not only to the mosaic of borrowings found in Louis Zukofsky’s “A” but also to the impacted pastiche of John Ashbery’s later poems, where almost every line has an intertextual referent. Both Susan Howe and Steve McCaffery, who began their poetic careers under the sign of Concrete poetry, have always devised complex uses of citation and constraint, intertext and intermedia: Howe’s *The Defenestration of Prague* (1983) is a classic example of “writing through,” in this case, Jonathan Swift’s “Journal to Stella,” while constraint is exemplified in such McCaffery sequences as *Evoeba* or the more recent *Dark Ladies*, a dazzling, rule-generated writing through Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*.

All the same, nothing quite prepared the poetry world for the claim, now being made by conceptual poets from Kenneth Goldsmith to Leevi Lehto, Craig Dworkin to Caroline Bergvall, that it is possible to write “poetry” that is entirely “unoriginal” and nevertheless qualifies as poetry. In fall 2007, for example, Kenneth Goldsmith, in a set of short manifesto statements for the blog of the venerable Poetry Foundation of America, announced his advocacy of conceptual or “uncreative” writing—a form of copying, recycling, or appropriation that “obstinately makes no claim on originality.” Indeed, “at a reading I gave recently,” Goldsmith recalls wryly, “the other reader came up to me and said incredulously, ‘You didn’t write a word of what you read.’”¹⁸

Incredulous as that “other reader” may have been, let’s remember that Edgell Rickword made almost the same complaint about *The Waste Land*: “Here is a writer [Eliot] . . . borrowing the greater number of his best lines, creating hardly any himself.” Indeed, the poetics of “unoriginality,” now hotly debated in journals like *Poetry* and on the blogosphere, can be traced back to a number of movements and paradigms that antedate Language writing by decades. One such was the concretism of the 1950s and ’60s (itself a bridge to the great avant-garde projects of the early twentieth century)—a movement associated with the smaller or marginalized nations of the postwar: Sweden (Oyvind Fahlström), Switzerland (Eugen Gomringer), Scotland (Ian Hamilton Finlay), Austria (Ernst Jandl), and especially Brazil (Augusto and

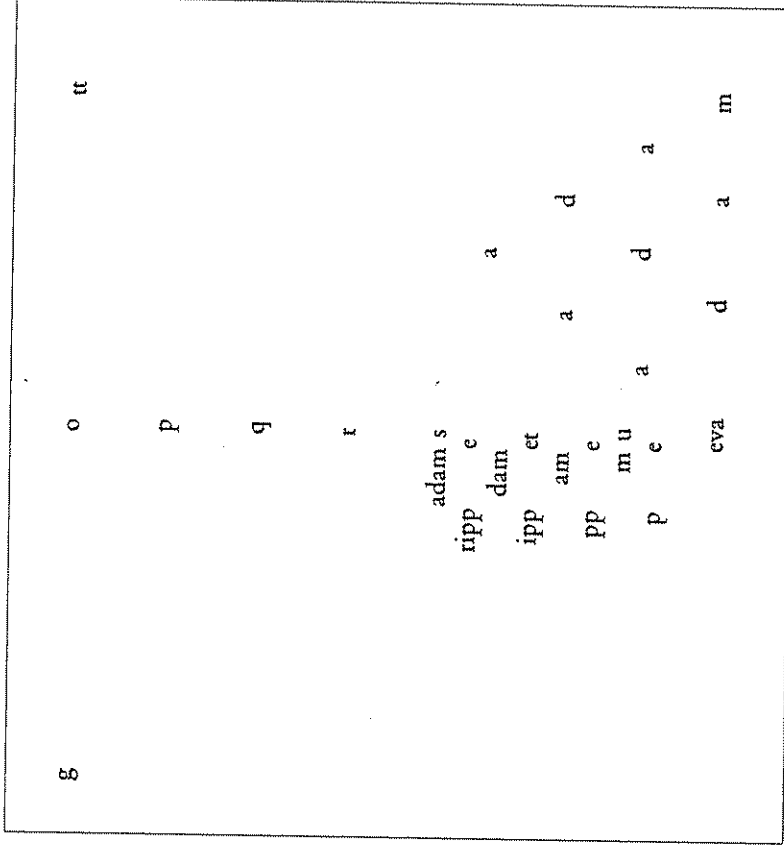


Figure 1.1. Ernst Jandl, “creation of eve.” *Poetische Werke* © 1997 by Luchterhand Literaturverlag, Munich, a member of Verlagsgruppe Random House GmbH.

Haroldo de Campos). The concretist program is best understood as a revolt against the transparency of the word, which had dominated the discourse of the 1950s and ’60s; in Ernst Jandl’s “creation of eve” (fig. 1.1), for example, the breath of life is viewed as issuing from the *o* in “Gott”—God’s mouth, so to speak—in an alphabetical sequence (*ophqrsta*) that culminates in the *v* of “eva,” even as, on the left, the word “adam” (Adam alone) disappears, while his rib (*Rippe*) is reduced, step by step, to its final letter, *e*, which yields the name “eva,” its last letter—*a*—providing the ground for Adam’s diagonal reemergence to Eva’s right.¹⁹

Such concretist texts—texts in which letristic or morphemic form is inextricable from meaning—anticipate contemporary digital poetics, where letter, font, size, spacing, and color are used to generate complex verbo-visual configurations. The German-Finnish digital poet Cia Rinne, for example, has recently produced a work called *archives zaroum*, the title fusing

the Russian *zaam* (transrational) with the German word *warum* for “why” and *darum* (because).²⁰ *Archives zarorum* consists of twenty-nine animated and interactive multilingual visual poems, emerging from a set of seven tabbed file folders, each with a title typed in black and red. Clicking on the tabs and on the diagrams — boxes, lines, circles, flow charts — within each file, one makes repeated discoveries. Take, for example, a still version of animated text from the first file called “1, 2, 3, Soleil” (fig. 1.2), with its tension between verticals and horizontal possibilities of “on” and “no,” between circle and point, its couplet

i am what i am what i ami
a mia mi ami a miami amen

and the love theme qualified by the ambivalence between the words “to,” “get,” and “her,” in their separate boxes, and the parenthesis containing “together,” as well as the juxtaposition of “a part” and “apart.” But of course in the animated version, where every word, letter, and pictogram turns out to be clickable, these “simple words and phrases yield further puns, rhymes, and anagrams, complicated by the layering of languages used.”²¹

A second precursor of twenty-first-century poetics was the Oulipo (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle), founded in Paris in 1960 and still going strong. The aim of Oulipo, as one of its founders, Jacques Roubaud, puts it in an introductory essay, is “to invent (or reinvent) restrictions of a formal nature [*contraintes*] and propose them to enthusiasts interested in composing literature.” The *potential* of constraints is more important than their actual execution. But the constraint is not just some arbitrary rule, randomly chosen and imposed on a given text. On the contrary, in Roubaud’s words, “a text written according to a constraint describes the constraint.”²² Thus Georges Perec’s *La disparition*, a lipogrammatic novel written without using the vowel *e* (in French the most frequent letter of the alphabet), tells the story of a group of people who disappear or die, one after the other, their deaths being occasioned by their inability to name the unnamable — the letter *e* in *eux* (them), for example, *eux* being the “undesirables” who “disappeared” in World War II.

Like concretism, Oulipo thus insists that the verbal cannot be separated from its material representation and vice versa. In such recent incarnations as Jan Baetens’s *Vivre sa vie* (2005), a “poeticization” of Jean-Luc Godard’s well-known film, source material for the poet’s “writing-through” is often drawn from popular culture — film, comic strip, newspaper column, how-to manual. But at its best, the constrained text never just replicates source mate-

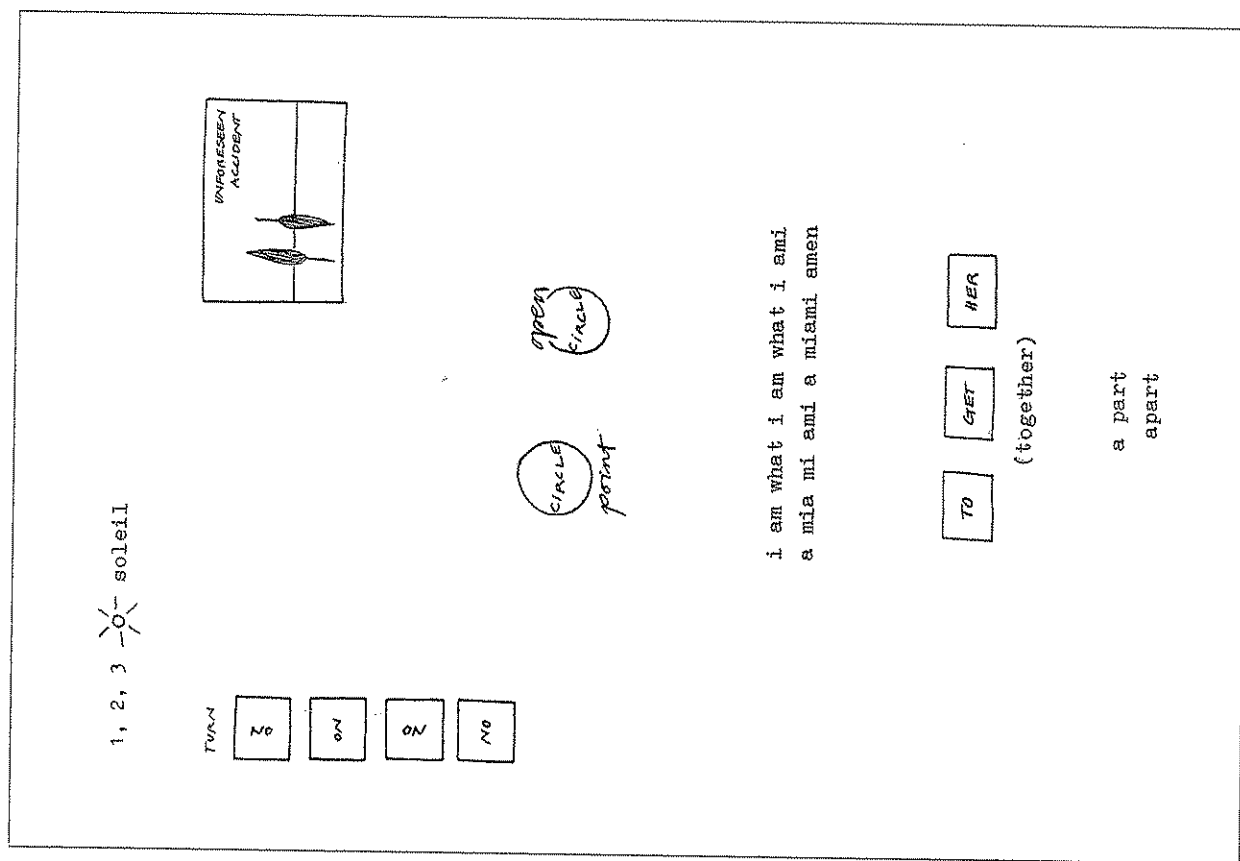


Figure 1.2. Cia Rinne, page from *zarorum* (Helsinki, Finland, 2009). Reprinted by permission of the author.

rial; rather, the submission to a chosen rule becomes, as Baetens says, a way of freeing oneself “from the burden of the stereotypes of one’s own culture,” of calling one’s own identity “radically into question.”²³

A third poetic mode now prominent is what might be called *translational poetics*—a poetics for the twenty-first century that has two poles: multilingualism on the one hand, exophonic writing on the other.²⁴ Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*, with their insertion of Chinese characters, Greek and Latin phrases, lines from Guido Cavalcanti, or passages of American dialect and phonetic spelling, provide a paradigm for the former, which has recently given us such works as Caroline Bergvall’s French-English “About Face” and her syncretist Middle/Modern English version of Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath’s Tale,” *Alyson Singes*. The *exophonic*, familiar to us from the French poems of Paul Célan or the English lyrics of Fernando Pessoa, has become much more common today, thanks to the current state of mobility and migration, in which the use of English (or French or German or Dutch) as a second language has become almost normative.²⁵ Consider the writing of Yoko Tawada, who composes in the German of her adopted nation—a German made strange both phonemically and syntactically by the overt *mise en question* to which it is subjected by this native Japanese speaker. Homophonic translation, now practiced by many poets—for example, Charles Bernstein in “Laurel’s Eyes,” based on Heine’s *Lorelei*—is a form of exophonic poetry, whereas the dialect and hip-hop poems of Tracie Morris exemplify multilingualism.

Writing poetry in a second language is, of course, itself a major constraint. In a discussion of sound and poetry, for example, the Finnish poet-translator Leevi Lehto remarks on the difficulties of translating Charles Bernstein’s poem “Besotted Desquamation,” in which every line contains four words beginning with the same letter:

When I sat down to translate Charles’s poem into Finnish, I was disappointed, confused even, to find that the words my dictionary suggested for replacement seemed to begin with just about any letter. I began to have doubts as to the very fundamentals of the profession of translation. I mean, how can we imagine how to translate anything, when we cannot even get the first letters right? Eventually, I think I did find a problem to the solution. What I did was to put the original away—for good, I never looked at it again. . . . I then proceeded, not to translate, not even to rewrite, but to write the poem, exactly the way Charles had done before me.²⁶

Haroldo de Campos called this practice “transcreation.” A multilingual poet like Lehto—and there are now many such poets, especially in the Scandi-

navian countries or in South America—can recreate another’s poem with great finesse. At the same time, more and more poets and their readers in the English-speaking world cannot read any language but their own and so rely on translation as if it were the primary text. Again, Lehto has an apt comment:

I tend to see translation—and the translation of poetic sound in particular—as part of a larger dynamics of cultural development and interaction. In a sense, I don’t think of translation as having anything to do with interlingual communication, and I’m all for inverting the currently dominant paradigm where the languages are seen as something primary, translation as a secondary, ensuing “problem.” To me, “in the beginning was translation.” Translation, not languages per se, forms the *basis* of cultures—meaning, among other things, that translation is always also (already) political.

In the beginning was translation: the layering of languages is one variant of the citational or intertextual poetics I spoke of earlier. From the Eliot of *The Waste Land*, the Pound of *The Cantos*, or the Marcel Duchamp who reproduced his early ready-mades and notecards in *The Green Box*,²⁷ to Charles Bernstein’s “writing-through” Walter Benjamin in the opera-libretto *Shadowtime*, and the use of appropriated text, including archival material, documentary, informational manual, and, most recently, the discourse of the Internet from hypertext to blog to database, *citationality*, with its dialectic of removal and graft, disjunction and conjunction, its interpenetration of origin and destruction, is central to twenty-first-century poetics. Indeed, *écriture*, as Antoine Compagnon calls it, is the logical form of “writing” in an age of literally mobile or transferable text—text that can be readily moved from one digital site to another or from print to screen, that can be appropriated, transformed, or hidden by all sorts of means and for all sorts of purposes. This is not Pound’s “Make it New!” but Jasper Johns’s “Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it.”²⁸ In his *Introduction* to the *UbuWeb Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, Craig Dworkin puts it this way:

What would a non-expressive poetry look like? . . . One in which substitutions at the heart of metaphor and image were replaced by the direct presentation of language itself, with “spontaneous overflow” supplanted by meticulous procedure and exhaustively logical process? In which the self-regard of the poet’s ego were turned back onto the self-reflexive language of the poem itself. So that the test of poetry were no longer whether it could have been done better (the question of the workshop), but whether it could conceivably have been done otherwise.²⁹

The rejection of the “lyrical interference of the ego,” aggressively formulated by Marinetti in his 1912 *Manifesto of Futurist Literature*, has, of course, been with us at least since Charles Olson’s “Projective Verse” (1950), and it was a major theme in language poetics: witness Charles Bernstein’s *Content’s Dream* (1986), with its strong critique of “voice” models and the “natural look” in poetry.³⁰ But appropriation, as manifested in Bernstein’s own later works, goes much further than the earlier constructivist model, advocating, in Goldsmith’s words, “uncreativity, unoriginality, illegibility, appropriation, plagiarism, fraud, theft, and falsification as its perceptions: information management, word processing, databasing, and extreme process as its methodologies” (“Conceptual Poetics”). “You didn’t write a word of what you read!” — the famed Death of the Author has, in recent poetry, finally become a fait accompli.

Or has it? Here it will be helpful to look more closely at that “death,” as formulated by Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and, closer to home, Fredric Jameson.

Whose Death?

“Writing,” Barthes declared famously in “The Death of the Author” (1968), “is the destruction of every voice, every origin. Writing is that neuter, that composite, that obliquity into which our subject flees, the black-and-white where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes.”³¹ Barthes was countering, of course, the still popular belief in the Author as origin — as the “past of his own book” and hence its supreme expositor — as well as the corollary claim that we must look to biography or autobiography for the necessary explanation of the work. “To assign an Author to a text,” Barthes wrote, “is to impose a brake on it, to furnish it with a final signified, to close writing” (53). He wanted, instead, to give the authority over a text to its reader — “that *someone* who holds collected into one and the same field all of the traces from which writing is constituted” (54). The reader, freed of interference by the author, can make his or her own way through the text, allowing its multiple and subliminal meanings their full play. “The birth of the reader must be required by the death of the Author” (55).

When Barthes made this somewhat grandiose pronouncement, he was hardly devaluating the genius of a Balzac, a Proust, a Mallarmé — the writers he alludes to in his essay. On the contrary, he takes the greatness of Balzac’s and Proust’s novels as such a given that he longs for a subtler, deeper, more nuanced reading of these texts than any biographical explanation or source study would allow. In essence, he is carrying to its extreme the Modernist no-

tion contained in D. H. Lawrence’s aphorism “Never trust the author, trust the tale.” For Barthes, as for the Foucault of “What Is an Author” (1969), to read critically is to understand that “writing is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears.”³²

But what would Barthes, or the Foucault who declared that “the writing of our day has freed itself from the necessity of ‘expression’ . . . the confines of interiority” (116), have made of the conceptual poems and fictions of our own time? What role, they would have asked, can the individual imagination play in a work like Caroline Bergvall’s *Via*, a sequence, in alphabetical order, of the forty-seven English translations archived at the British Library of the first tercet of Dante’s *Inferno*? An opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears into the words of some unknown and some famous Dante translators from the mid-nineteenth century to the present? A black-and-white text where all identity is lost?

The problem is compounded in the historicist turn such formulations as the “Death of the Author” were given in the 1980s and ’90s. In the conclusion to his seminal *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Fredric Jameson is less concerned with the disappearance of the subject in the interstices of a writing that “speaks” its author than in the contrast between a Modernist epoch of Great Authors, of “demiurges and prophets,” and a postmodernist ethos in which the very concept of “genius” is irrelevant.

“If the poststructuralist motif of the ‘death of the subject’ means anything socially,” writes Jameson, “it signals the end of the entrepreneurial and inner-directed individualism, with its ‘charisma’ and its accompanying categorical panoply of quaint romantic values such as that of the ‘genius’ in the first place.” The new order “no longer need prophets and seers of the high modernist and charismatic type. . . . Such figures no longer hold any charm or magic for the subjects of a corporate, collectivized, post-individualistic age.”³³ Jameson goes on to spell out how, in the age of the simulacrum, genius theory is simply passé. Indeed, the Modernists themselves have now been reified as classroom “classics” — and hence become safe and largely unread and uninteresting.

Or have they? Jameson himself returns to the Modernist masters in his more recent collection of essays *The Modernist Papers* (2007). The critic who had asked dismissively, “Whatever happened to Thomas Mann and André Gide?” and “Is T. S. Eliot recuperable?” (*Cultural Logic*, 303), is now writing trenchant analyses of works by Baudelaire and Rimbaud, Kafka and Joyce, Yeats and Mallarmé, William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, and Wallace Stevens — and yes, Thomas Mann. *The Modernist Papers* contains two essays

on Mann, the first on the dialectical irony of *The Magic Mountain*, the second on rereading *Dr. Faustus*. If, as Jameson posits, these “great” and now classical writers failed in their attempt to transform the institutional system in which they produced their work, they were also notable for their willingness to “believe success is somehow possible.”³⁴ Following Adorno, Jameson rejects the simplistic equation of the Modern with “the new and innovation and analogized by comparisons with scientific discovery,” in favor of a negative dialectic:

What drives modernism to innovate is not some vision of the future or the new, but rather the deep conviction that certain forms and expressions, procedures and techniques, can no longer be used, are worn out or stigmatized by their associations with a past that has become conventionality or kitsch, and must be creatively avoided. Such taboos then produce a desperate situation in which the nature of the innovation, to continue to use such language, is not traced or given in advance; rather what emerges then determines the form by which the blocks and taboos of the next generation will be governed (and in this sense, postmodernity and its pluralisms have been seen as a final turn of the screw in which it seems to be just such taboos and negative restrictions that have themselves become taboo). (*Modernist Papers*, 5)

Given this—and Jameson often implies this—our own literature can only be a kind of end run: its “final turn of the screw” (but why final?) can produce a “postmodern” art significant only for its overturning of previous taboos and negative restrictions in what is held to be a “desperate situation.” That art, as Jameson made clear in his earlier essay “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” is characterized by “the ‘death’ of the subject itself—the end of the autonomous bourgeois monad or ego or individual,” the dissolution of “the high-modernist conception of a unique *style*, along with the accompanying collective ideals of an artistic or political vanguard” (*Cultural Logic*, 15). And in this new culture of pastiche, talk of “great writers” and artistic genius is obviously meaningless. *Après Modernism, le déluge*.

But of course no turn is the *final* turn. In a series of studies made in the 1920s, the Russian Formalist critic Juri Tynyanov gave, like Jameson, a dialectical account of literary change but one that is less teleologically driven.³⁵ “Evolution,” Tynyanov held, “is caused by the need for a ceaseless dynamics. Every dynamic system inevitably becomes automatized and an opposite constructive principle dialectically arises.”³⁶ A device obsolete in one period can be restaged and reframed at a different moment and in a different context and once again made “perceptible.” The poetry of Velimir Khlebnikov is a case in point. “Transrational language” [*zauim*], writes Tynyanov, “always

existed in the language of children and mystics, but only in our time did it become a literary fact. And, on the other hand . . . charades [and] logographs are children’s games for us, but in [Nikolai] Karamzin’s period [the 1790s], in which verbal trifles and the play of devices were foregrounded, they were a literary genre” (*Russian Formalism*, 106–7). An example closer to home would be the turn in Language poetry from the ubiquitous short free-verse line of mainstream poetry in the 1960s and ’70s to the “New Sentence” as a way of calling attention to a poeiticity that does not rely on lineation as marker. And the New Sentence has been in its turn replaced by citational or documentary prose, drawn from a variety of source texts, high and low, as well as by the use of visual layout on page or screen, used to defamiliarize poetic material.

Once we grant that current art practices have their own particular momentum and *inventio*, we can dissociate the word *original* from its partner *genius*. If the new “conceptual” poetry makes no claim to originality—at least not originality in the usual sense—this is not to say that *genius* isn’t in play. It just takes different forms.

Make It (Not) New

Original genius: the common phrase is, at heart, a tautology. The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that *original* comes from the Latin verb *oriri*, to arise, to be born; the Latin *genius*, like *genesis*, derives from *gen*, the root of *gignere* (to beget), which comes from the Greek *gignesthai*, to be born. In classical pagan belief, a *genius* was “the tutelary god or attendant spirit allotted to every person at his birth, to govern his fortunes and determine his character; and finally to conduct him out of the world; also the tutelary and controlling spirit similarly connected with a place (*genius loci*), an institution, etc.” (OED). Until the later seventeenth century, good and evil geniuses controlled our fates; the first occurrence of *genius* in the modern sense of “natural ability or capacity; quality of the mind, the special endowments which fit a man for his [sic] peculiar work” is in Milton (1649), and although men might have a genius for this or that, the notion of an individual person being a *genius* was a nineteenth-century invention, especially in Germany in the age of Sturm und Drang. And of course the genius of Beethoven or Goethe had to be *original*: the noun *originality*, defined by the OED as “the fact or attribute of being primary, first hand: authenticity, genuineness,” made its first appearance in 1776 (H. Swinburne’s *Travels in Spain*): “One of the most valuable pictures in the world. I do not know how Amiconi came to doubt its originality.”

In this example, *originality* refers to the “real” work as opposed to a copy

or simulation. In this sense *originality* is, of course, an important legal concept with respect to intellectual property. In Walter Benjamin's famous formulation in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility*, "The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity," and it is the original, not its reproduction, that has full *aura*. But in the looser sense, *originality* means (OED, 4b) "made, composed, or done by the person himself (not imitated from another), first-hand." Originality is often defined by what it is *not*—not derivative, not arising from or dependent on any other thing of the kind, undervived. And further: originality, whether in the arts or the sciences, is synonymous with novelty, invention, creativity, and independence of mind. Plato, according to Benjamin Jowett (1875), was "a great *original genius* struggling with unequal conditions of knowledge" (OED 5b).

The "death of the author" in the years of poststructuralism meant, of course, the death of genius theory as well, with social theorists like Pierre Bourdieu turning their attention to the way culture creates the illusion of "genius" for the evidently gullible masses. "It is this ideology [that a work *produces*, the painter, writer, or composer, in short, the 'author,' suppressing the question of what authorizes the author, what creates the authority with which authors authorize." And again, "The ideology of creation, which makes the author the first and last source of the value of his work, conceals the fact that the cultural businessman . . . by putting it on the market, by exhibiting, publishing, or staging it, consecrates a product which he has 'discovered' and which would otherwise remain a mere natural resource."⁷

But Bourdieu was himself by no means immune to the attraction of that "otherwise . . . natural resource." The whole second section of *The Field of Cultural Production* is devoted to Flaubert, whose fiction is taken to exemplify the "literary field and *habitus*" of his time. The opening lecture begins with this comment on Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*: "I believe that this fascinating and mysterious work condenses all those enigmas that literature can put to those who wish to interpret it. A true example of the absolute masterpiece, the novel contains an analysis of the social space in which the author was himself located, and thus gives us the instruments we need for an analysis of him" (145). *Absolute masterpiece*: what enabled Flaubert, rather than, say, the Goncourt brothers, to produce such a "fascinating and mysterious," such an emblematic work? And if masterpieces were produced in the mid-nineteenth century, is it really plausible to believe that it is no longer possible to produce a "fascinating and mysterious work" today? Or is it just that our own "masterpieces" no longer make the claim to be "original"?

Appropriation, citation, copying, reproduction—these have been central to the visual arts for decades: one thinks of Duchamp, whose entire oeuvre consists of "copies" and found materials; of Christian Boltanski, whose "artworks" treated photographs of his actual childhood classmates; or of the carefully staged auto-images of Cindy Sherman. In the poetry world, however, the demand for original expression dies hard: we expect our poets to produce words, phrases, images, and ironic locutions that we have never heard before. Not words, but My Word. As Hart Crane puts it in the concluding stanza of his great lyric sequence "Voyages":

The imaged Word, it is, that holds,
Hushed willows anchored in its glow,
It is the unbetrayable reply
Whose accent no farewell can know.³⁸

Despite the bravado of that conclusion, within six years of "Voyages," Crane's last published poem, "The Broken Tower," contains this passage:

My word I poured. But was it cognate, scored
Of that tribunal monarch of the air
Whose thigh embronzes earth, strikes crystal Word
In wounds pledged once to hope, — cleft to despair?

(*Complete Poems*, 106–7)

Was the crystal Word "cognate"? For Modernist poets from Crane to Robert Lowell or Sylvia Plath, and well into the present, the drive to "pour" out one's *own* Word was assumed to be the poet's primary mission. But as the various avant-garde movements demonstrated as early as the 1910s—think of Khlebnikov's *Tables of Destiny*, Pound's *Cantos*, the Merz-works of Kurt Schwitters—there were other ways of Making It New. In the year Crane published "Voyages," Walter Benjamin, living in exile in Paris, began a project called *Das Passagen-Werk*—a huge collage-text/commonplace book, made up in large part of the words of others. This encyclopedic set of handwritten notes, not published in anything like complete form until 1983 (and in English not until 1999), is not, strictly speaking, a poem, certainly not a lyric one. Nor is it a narrative or even a fiction. And yet, as I shall argue in my next chapter, its juxtaposition of poetic citation, anecdote, aphorism, parable, documentary prose, personal essay, photograph, diagram—indeed every genre—makes Benjamin's assemblage a paradigm for the poetry of "unoriginal genius" to come.

Afterword

Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith's new *Anthology of Conceptual Writing*¹ features many texts that have anticipated or taken up the challenge posed by what Goldsmith has called "uncreative writing." Vanessa Place's *Statement of Fact*, for example, is composed of actual court records and police reports, detailing such cases as that of sixty-plus counts against a particularly indefensible rapist, followed by his fruitless appeal—a record that become more and more ambiguous, puzzling, and contradictory as the detailed facts are laid out and the felon's victims' own complicated stories unfold.² The more doggedly factual and informational the set of documents presented, the more it manifests a surreal edge.

A similar process occurs in Craig Dworkin's own *Parse*.³ As the endnote tells us, *Parse* is a "translation" of a widely used 1874 grammar book by the Reverend Edwin A. Abbott called *How to Parse: An Attempt to Apply the Principles of Scholarship to English Grammar*. Abbott's treatise, available to this day and currently a Google book, tries to rationalize every possible grammatical slot, beginning with the definition in chapter 1, "Subject and Object": "The Subject of a Verb in a stating sentence is the word or collection of words answering to the question asked by putting 'Who?' or 'What?' before the Verb." In Abbott's system, this definition is followed by "Caution I. If the Verb is accompanied by an Adverb, as 'He seldom sleeps' . . . the Adverb should be repeated in the question: 'Who seldom sleeps? Answer: 'He,' Subject." But as Wittgenstein shows so fully in the *Philosophical Investigations*, not every word in the language can be thus defined. Dworkin's own parsing provides literal renditions of every single punctuation mark or word in Abbott's how-to book, creating a composition with a surreal edge, as in the following:

parenthesis cardinal Arabic numerical parenthesis marks of quotation *Definite Article subject preposition of the infinitive active present tense transitive verb infinitive mood definite article direct object past tense verb period marks of quotation* (*Parse*, 18)

The more complete the description of the units in a given sentence, the less we know. Indeed, the hyper-rationalism of Dworkin's codified grammar recalls Beckett's *Watt* in its mania to communicate what is finally incommuni-

cable. What, the Duchampian author seems to be asking, *is* grammar anyway? And could we return to origins, “translating” Dworkin’s sentences back into the sentences they purport to describe?

In his earlier *Dure*, Dworkin’s intertext is an unsigned 1519 self-portrait by Albrecht Dürer that bears the inscription “Do der gelb fleck ist and mit dem finger darauff deut do ist mir web,” which Dworkin translates, “Where the yellow spot is and where I am pointing with my finger, that is where it hurts.”⁴ The title *Dure*, from *durus* (Latin for “hard”), refers both to the enigmatic art of Dürer as well as to the English derivatives of *durus* like *duration*, *dearable*, and *endure*. And Dworkin’s intricate citational mosaic-poem examines the poet’s own ability to *endure* a particularly painful but very obliquely treated love affair.⁵

In a related vein, the Belgian poet Jan Baetens, whose work has close ties with Oulipo, has produced a witty and moving “novelization” of Jean-Luc Godard’s classic 1962 film *Vivre sa vie* by transposing the film’s twelve “chapters” into fifteen highly formal love poems—pantoums, hepta-syllabics, reduced sonnets, rhapsodic verses—that bear witness to the power of lyric to distance the banality of everyday life and to ironize the film’s didactic approach to that life via homage to its visual images, the very images the lyric sequence can render only verbally.⁶ As in the case of Dworkin’s *Dure*, Baetens’s experiment allows for the revival of love poetry by other means.

Meanwhile, Goldsmith is working on a new book to be called *Capital*, modeled on Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* and set in New York in the century leading up to the turning point of 9/11/2001. For the past five years, Goldsmith explains, he has been scanning and digitizing every book he could find “about” about New York and then electronically cutting and pasting their “best parts,” throwing away the remainder “like empty husks.” Thus although the book, which will be finished when it is the exact length of *Arcades*, is made entirely of appropriated text, the passages in question, sorted into folders with alphabetically arranged titles (ranging from “Abstraction,” “Advertising Signage,” “Alcohol, Bar, Drugs,” and “Amnesia” to “World’s Fair 39,” “World’s Fair 64,” and “Writing”) and cross-referenced without attribution (except in the bibliography at the end), the actual composition of *Capital* will depend on the artist’s particular choices. “In the end,” says Goldsmith, “I want this to be neither reference book nor history book. It should not have any function whatsoever except to give a completely poetic and subjective view of the way one person might find his way through the mass of literature written about the capital of the twentieth century, New York.”⁷

The selection process, rule-bound as it is, with Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*

providing the parameters, is ultimately carried out *according to taste*, as John Cage put it some twenty years ago in characterizing his own “writings-through,” ostensibly generated by chance operations.⁸ *According to taste*: it is important to remember that the citational or appropriative text, however unoriginal its actual words and phrases, is always the product of choice—and hence of individual taste. Let me cite once more Antoine Compagnon’s *La seconde main*:

When I cite, I excise, I mutilate, I extract. There is a primary object, placed before me, a text I have read, that I am reading, and the course of my reading is interrupted by a phrase. I return to the beginning; I reread. The phrase reread becomes a formula, isolated from the text. The rereading separates it from that which precedes and that which follows. The chosen fragment converts itself into a text no longer a bit of a text, a part of a sentence or a discourse, but a chosen bit, an amputated limb, not yet a transplant, but already an organ, cut off and placed in reserve.⁹

In the twenty-first century, it is those “reserve” organs, no longer mere fragments but often the texts themselves, that people the poetic landscape. Sometimes the graft works, sometimes it doesn’t. But the difference, in Gertrude Stein’s words, is spreading.