

POETRY PLASTIQUE

Curated by Jay Sanders and Charles Bernstein

"NOT WORDS AND PICTURES BUT POEMS as visual objects (read: subjects). Not poems about pictures but pictures that are poems. Not words affixed to a blank page but letters in time. Not works closed in a book but hanging on a wall or suspended from the ceiling or rising from the floor or sounding from inside a figure or embedded with paint on a canvas or written in the sky or flickering on a screen." — from the Preface by co-curator Charles Bernstein.

"... WE HAD A GALLERY and we wanted to flood it with poetry. Not with "poetic" artwork, but with actual poetry, made by poets. But, we have gallery walls, not pages in a book. So we organized a show of art overrun by poetry and a show of poetry riddled with art." — from the Introduction by co-curator Jay Sanders.

Carl Andre + David Antin + Arakawa + Susan Bee + Wallace Berman + Mei-mei Berssenbrugge and Kiki Smith + Christian Bök + John Cage + Clark Coolidge and Philip Guston + Robert Creeley and Cletus Johnson + Johanna Drucker and Brad Freeman + Hollis Frampton + Madeline Gins and Arakawa + Kenneth Goldsmith + Robert Grenier + Lyn Hejinian + Lyn Hejinian and Emilie Clark + Tan Lin + Jackson Mac Low + Steve McCaffery + Emily McVarish + Tom Phillips + Nick Piombino + Leslie Scalapino + Mira Schor + Robert Smithson + Michael Snow + Richard Tuttle and Charles Bernstein + Darren Wershler-Henry

POETRY PLASTIQUE

Curated by Jay Sanders and Charles Bernstein

Marianne Boesky Gallery

Granary Books

Marianne Boesky Gallery
and
Granary Books, Inc.
New York City 2001

\$20.00



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Poetry Plastique:

A Verbal Explosion in the Art Factory

NOT WORDS AND PICTURES BUT POEMS as visual objects (read: subjects). Not poems about pictures but pictures that are poems. Not words affixed to a blank page but letters in time. Not works closed in a book but hanging on a wall or suspended from the ceiling or rising from the floor or sounding from inside a figure or embedded with paint on a canvas or written in the sky or flickering on a screen.

“Poetry Plastique” takes a distinct place in a spectrum that includes visual and concrete poetry as well as book and language art. The precedents hang in the air—from William Blake’s fusion of poem-engraving-image to the exquisitely expressive features of Emily Dickinson’s hand-inscribed fascicles, from Marcel Duchamp’s verbal objects and Kurt Schwitters’s collages and Merz-bau to the collaborations of the Russian Futurist painters and poets and Len Lye’s inscribed filmstock. A secret history, but one known to an international array of participants, links the works shown here to a range of poems, sculptures, paintings, and books that have formed the matrix of a previous series of exemplary shows that have mapped out the ground for this exhibition. We hope that the inclusion of a small grouping of classic works from the 1960s and 1970s will help to contextualize the new work presented here. At the same time, we realize that even our “classics” will find a new audience with this presentation, since many of them have rarely if ever been shown in a New York artworld context. We are also pleased that “Poetry Plastique” brings to the fore a range of new collaborations between poets and visual artists—a traditional pairing here made new again.

Jay Sanders first approached me about working on a show with him last spring. In our first few conversations we discovered that we shared a very specific conception for the show. As our planning grew more intense, we began to see that a distinct characteristic of “Poetry Plastique” was that it would include poetry off the page or outside normal typographic constraints. Letters of the alphabet are tenaciously referential (standing for a sound or for the idea of the letter), often at the expense of denying the physical and visual existence of written language, even the possible origin of letters as icons and pictographs. “Poetry Plastique” seeks to both open up and explore letter shapes; as works move off the page and out of the book, letters are able to repossess their thickness as objects and their presence as sounds.

While other approaches to visuality in poetry overlap with and, indeed, form the foundation for “Poetry Plastique,” we wanted to assemble a show with a different organizing principle. At the same time, no show like this could take place without the active work of poets, artists, scholars, curators, and collectors who have set

the stage for any work in this area. For this reason we want to thank Steve Clay, Ruth and Marvin Sackner, Marjorie Perloff, Johanna Drucker, Richard Tuttle, and Susan Bee. And, of course, a special thanks to Marianne Boesky, who has supported this show with enormous enthusiasm and great generosity.

We would also like to thank John Mhiripiri and Jonas Mekas at Anthology Film Archives, Brian Frye and M.M. Serra at the New York Film-Makers' Cooperative, Jeffrey Peabody, Nicole Klagsbrun, Musa Mayer, Elyse Goldberg/James Cohan Gallery, the John Cage Trust, Marion Faller/Hollis Frampton Estate, Rodney Hill/Gorney Bravin & Lee, Charlyne Mattox/Paula Cooper Gallery, Toni Simon, Amber Phillips, Julie Harrison, Guy Walker, Siobhan Lowe, Noelle Kvasnosky, Elisabeth Ivers, Oliver Kamm, Lisa Yuskavage, Dan Torop, Lytle Shaw, Teresa Pearce, Jeff Fuccillo, Nelsi Armentrout, Steven Joerg, Matt Smithwick, Adam Short, Jon Raymond, and Amy Gill.

Charles Bernstein
October 31, 2000

Introduction

Jay Sanders

HOW TO START. . . WE HAD A GALLERY and we wanted to flood it with poetry. Not with “poetic” artwork, but with actual poetry, made by poets. But, we have gallery walls, not pages in a book. So we organized a show of art overrun by poetry and a show of poetry riddled with art.

Why aren't poets more central to contemporary visual art? “Poetry Plastique” makes this question impossible to ignore. For many contemporary poets, the connections and affinities with the visual arts are readily acknowledged. Indeed, today's most innovative poets have challenged traditional ideas of the literary, moving their work into close proximity to the most radical questionings of current visual artists. And, indeed, the proximity of avant-garde poets and artists has a vibrant history that our show hopes to bring up to date.

Take, for example, the crucial 1995 anthology *Poems for the Millennium* (edited by Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris), which is emblematic of the wide-reaching and multifaceted history that contemporary poetry increasingly considers its own. For the editors of this anthology, poetry exists in an active context that includes such poet-artists as Marcel Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters, and John Cage (not to mention Picasso, Cendrars and Delaunay, Marinetti, Stepanova, Kandinsky, Grosz, Klee, Michaux, Tzara, Ball, Arp, Picabia, Breton, Ernst, Artaud, Brecht). In their respective practices, these individuals—most of whom are primarily known as visual artists—and many more, are of real interest as poets, informing the survey, connecting the dots, and giving key insights into contemporary poetic practice.

Poems for the Millennium reminds us that poetry has historically played a central role in most of the key art movements of the twentieth century. Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism were all, first and foremost, literary movements. And while the story is perhaps less known today, contemporary poets continue to produce works that rival any other medium in terms of innovation, variety, and accomplishment. With regard to the relationship between poetry and the plastic arts, we've tried to take poetry out of its expected—but not necessary—contexts, pulling poetry out of the book and throwing it up on the wall or down on the floor.

“Poetry Plastique” presents an important aspect of the often underrepresented visual works of contemporary poets. We offer a constellation of intellectually compelling, poetically dense, visually dazzling works that represent some of the most exciting efforts in current practice. Additionally, we shed light on an essential gathering of historical progenitors. Known primarily as visual artists (Smithson, Arakawa, Phillips, Andre, Berman), poets (Coolidge, McCaffery, Mac Low), filmmakers

(Frampton, Snow), and composers (Cage), the artists in our historical component each exhibit an understanding of the possibilities of enacting the verbal and visual—centering their concerns on a real exploration of poetry and language—rather than simply “text.” Such a grouping, shown concurrently with critical contemporary examples, updates the recent historical crosscurrents of poetry and visual art, and contextualizes the contemporary works in a broad manner that extends beyond the specificities of a single medium.

We have taken a wide, interdisciplinary view of “Poetry Plastique” which looks favorably on convergences, collisions, and corruptions between categories in the arts. For many of the participating artists, this means highlighting lesser-known (but more pertinent for us) aspects of their creative endeavors. One of the common hallmarks of the “historical” artists is an unabashed irreverence for the divisions between artistic mediums. Each artist has allowed their practice to transcend disciplinary categories, making vital innovations in more than one milieu. And, as we illustrate here, each has critically explored the limits of language and poetic text in a visual context.

For many of the contemporary poets and language artists (Antin, Bök, Drucker, Goldsmith, Grenier, Hejinian, Lin, McVarish, Piombino, Scalapino, Wershler-Henry), we are highlighting both special projects and ongoing corollaries to their practice as writers. For the most part, these poets also publish less visually intensive poetry, but it is their works that combine visual and verbal sensibilities that are central to our concerns. Additionally, we include key painters (Bee, Schor) whose canvases—in a complementary manner—provide grounds for intensive explorations of poetics and language.

We have also chosen to exhibit important collaborations between poets and visual artists. While some of these pieces were made specifically for this exhibition, we did not organize any of the collaborative pairings. Instead, it was our intent to seek out existing relationships that demonstrate a dynamic synthesis of the physical/visual/material with the poetic/textually-dense. While there are many poet/artist collaborations, each of these (Clark Coolidge/Philip Guston, Madeline Gins/Arakawa, Robert Creeley/Cletus Johnson, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge/Kiki Smith, Charles Bernstein/Richard Tuttle, Lyn Hejinian/Emilie Clark) has intricately intermeshed the visual and the poetic to the utmost degree.

For our show, we have chosen to include neither artist’s books, manuscripts, nor poetry that is primarily “concrete” or typographical, in part because these forms have been more commonly exhibited, but also because we are especially interested in works whose visual materiality is not fully reproducible in books, anthologies, or on the internet. The present exhibition is by no means an exhaustive view of “Poetry Plastique.” But we do give definitive examples of works that push the frontiers of

poetic format and suggest a fundamental new direction, a new realization about the verbal/visual interconnection in art.

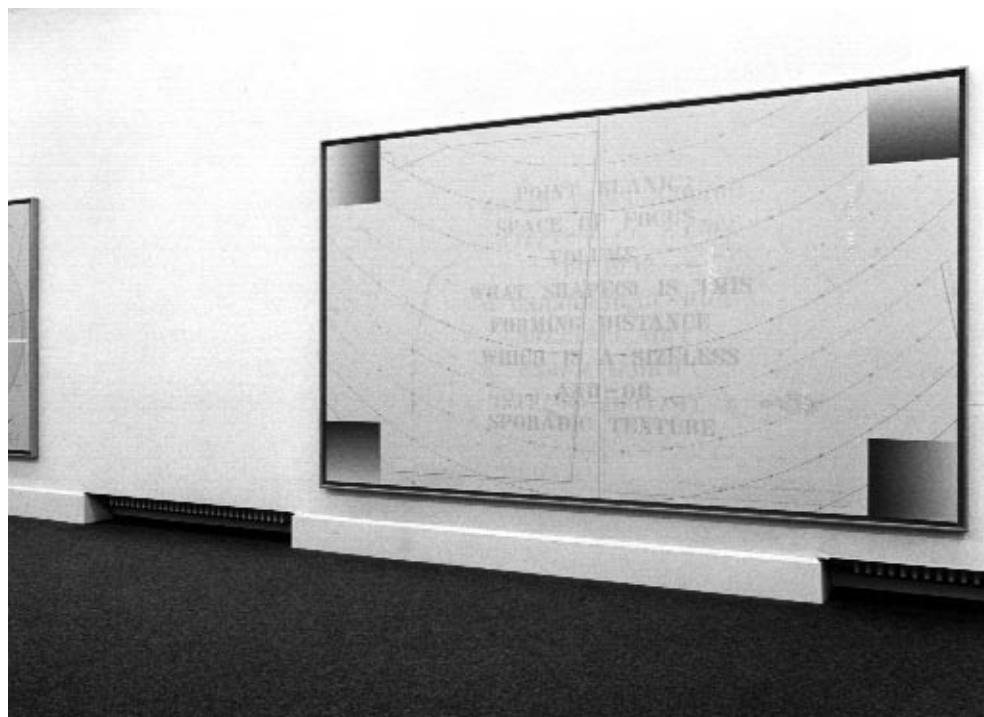
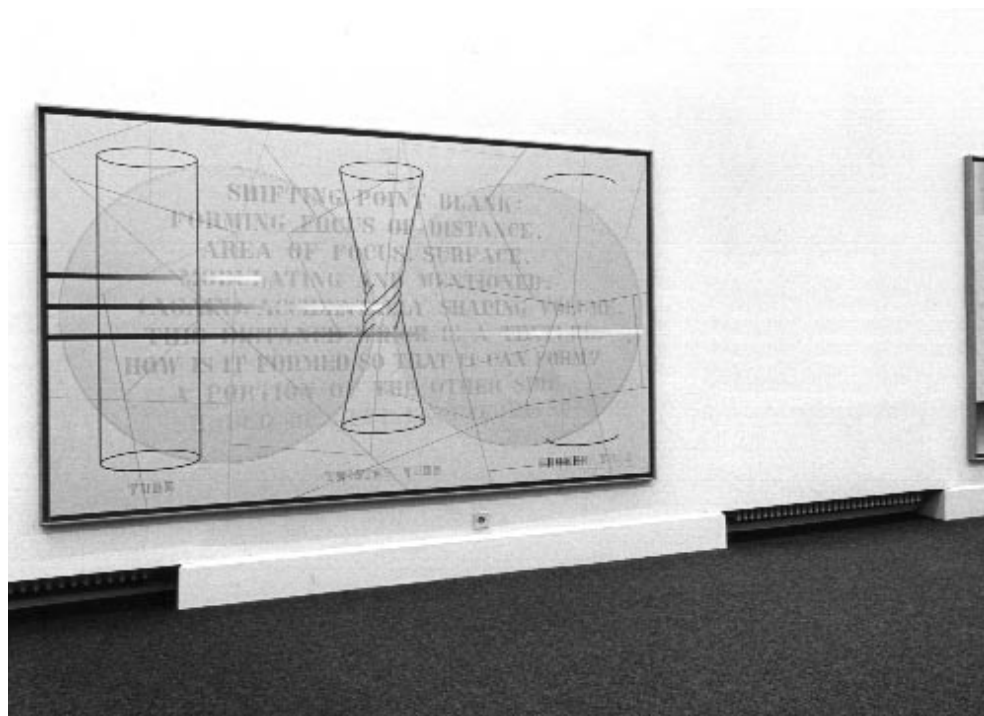
For this reason, we have made every effort to display “originals,” even of works designed to be read in reproduction. And we have included a number of works—sculptures, paintings, films, and video—where paper is not the medium upon which the words are inscribed. Not simply poems on the wall, the works in our exhibition share an interest in materials and visuality, and exist as “unique” objects ideally viewed in a gallery setting and best appreciated in person.

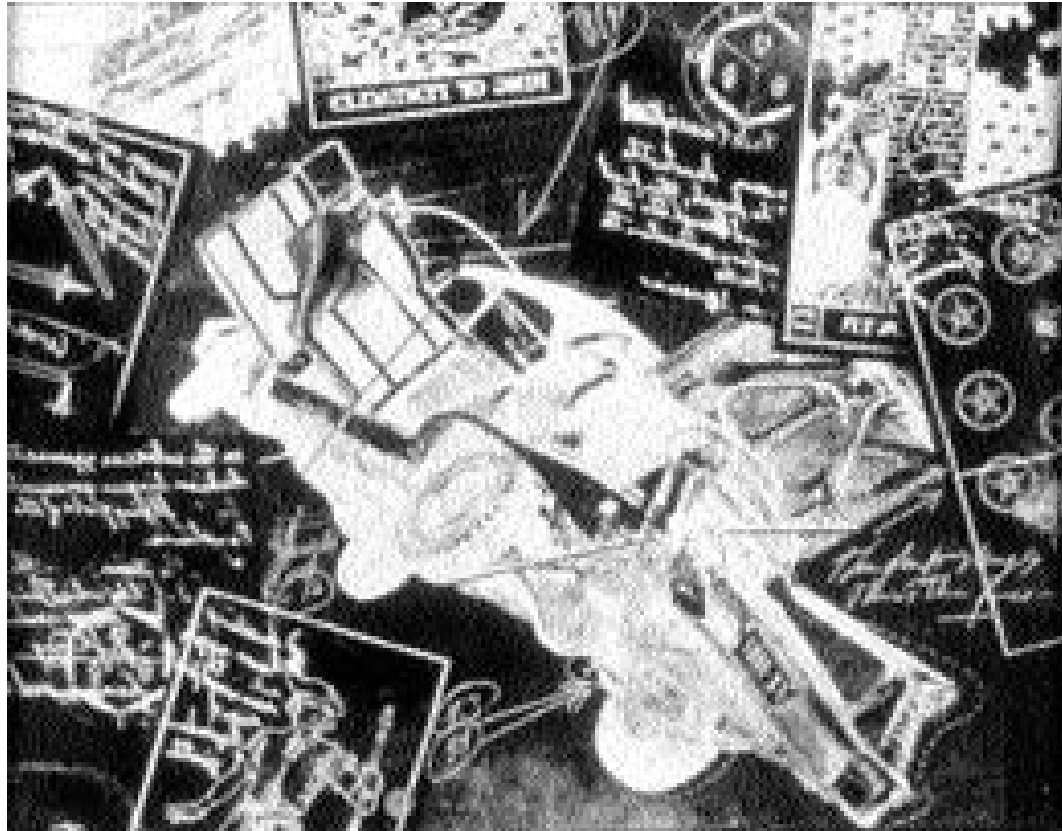
To the curators of this exhibition, mounting such a show in a commercial New York gallery is an important component. It annexes these poets and their works into the context of contemporary art, and generally restates the importance of poetry in the realm of the visual arts. In organizing and presenting these works, we have taken every measure to acknowledge them as equally compelling as any grouping of artworks.

Organizing a gallery exhibition full of poetry actively pushes against categorical definitions separating artistic mediums. In their endeavors, the poets involved in “Poetry Plastique” are all consciously concerned with boundaries. The boundaries between poetry and criticism, verse and prose, reading and looking, meaning and material are incessantly pushed to the breaking point. We have endeavored to exhibit an element of that spillage, where creative works extend limits so far, they can potentially turn into something else.

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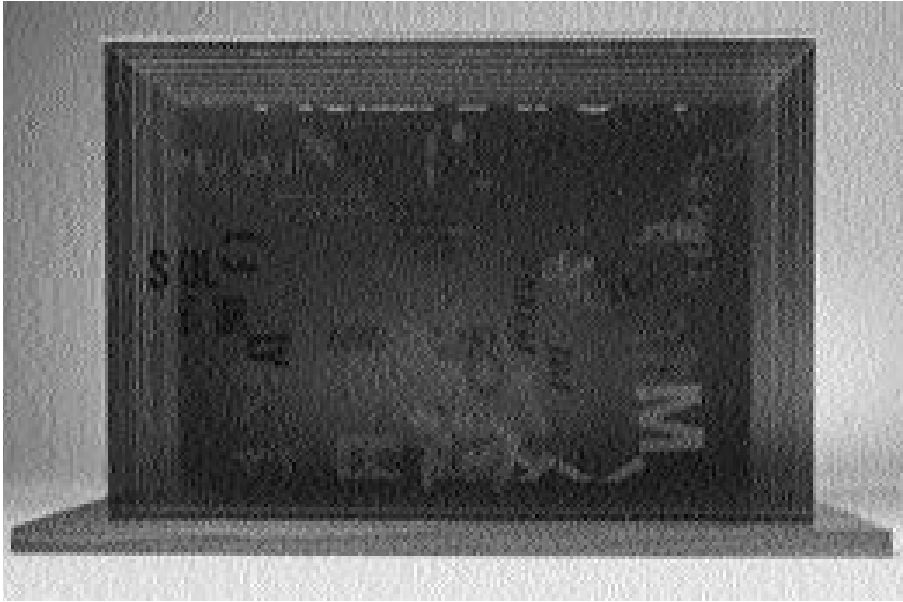
MEI-MEI BERSSENBRUGGE / KIKI SMITH

Hear (details), 2000. Japanese indigo, nepal paper, glass, and electronics on a plexiglass box, sculpture: 48 x 24 x 32 inches, box: 60 x 32 x 12 inches.

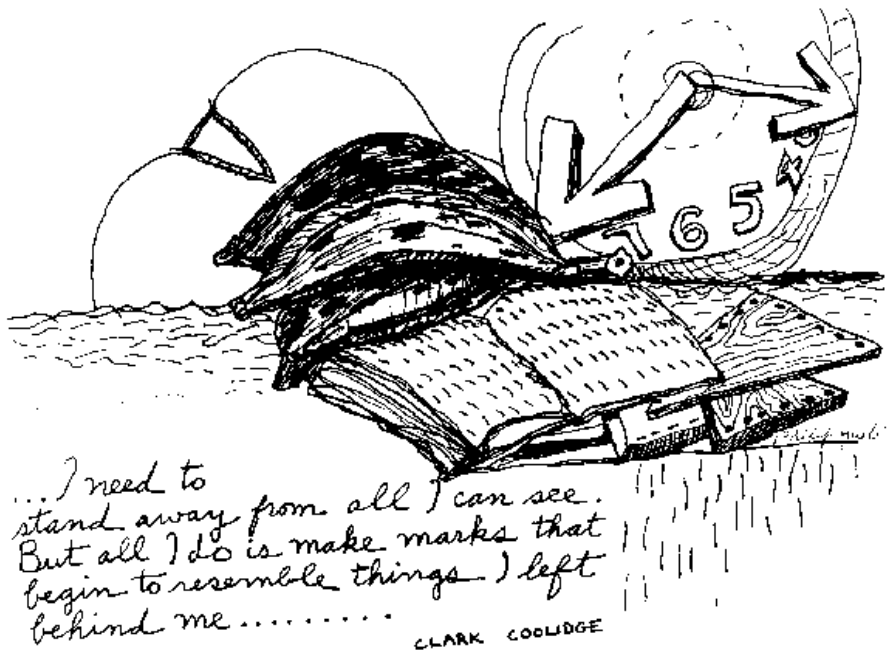
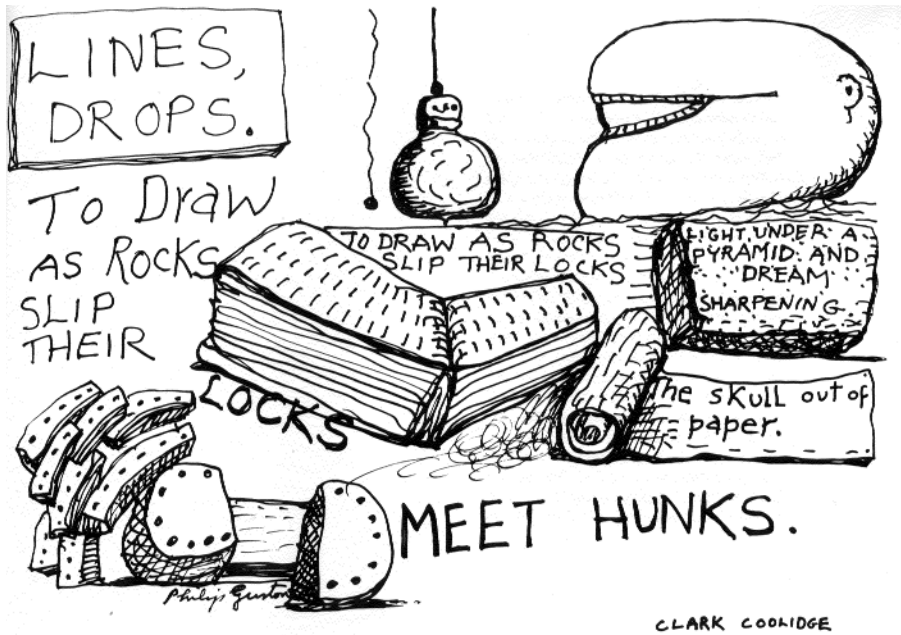


CHRISTIAN BÖK
Bibliomechanics, 1994. Twenty-seven Rubik's cubes, printed lettering, 6 3/4 x 6 3/4 x 6 3/4 inches.

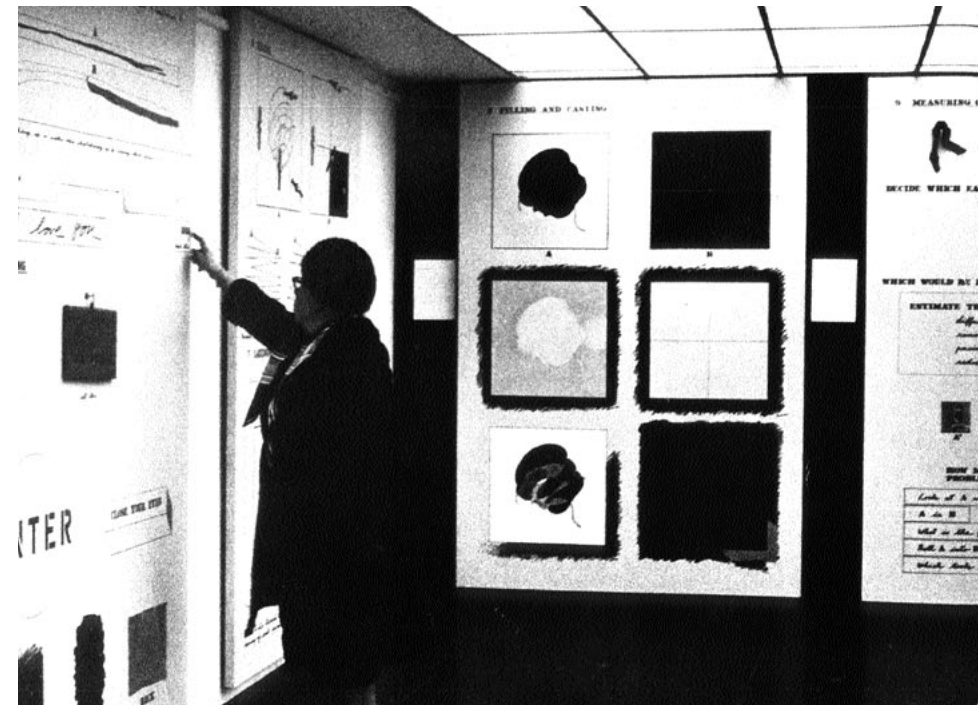
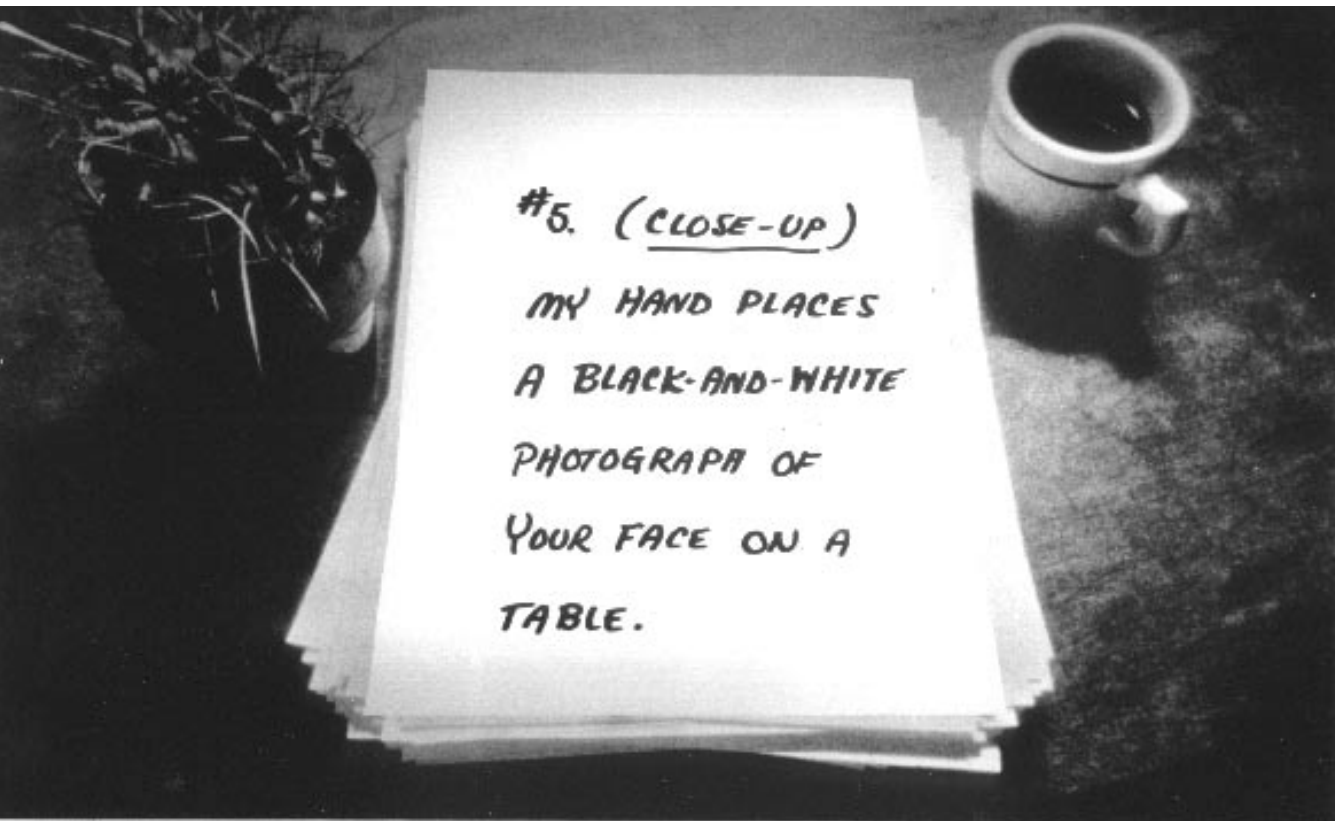
Not Wanting To Say Anything About Marcel, 1969. Eight serigraphs printed on plexiglass panels, wooden base. Collection of Ruth and Marvin Sackner. Image courtesy Iris & B. Gerard Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University.

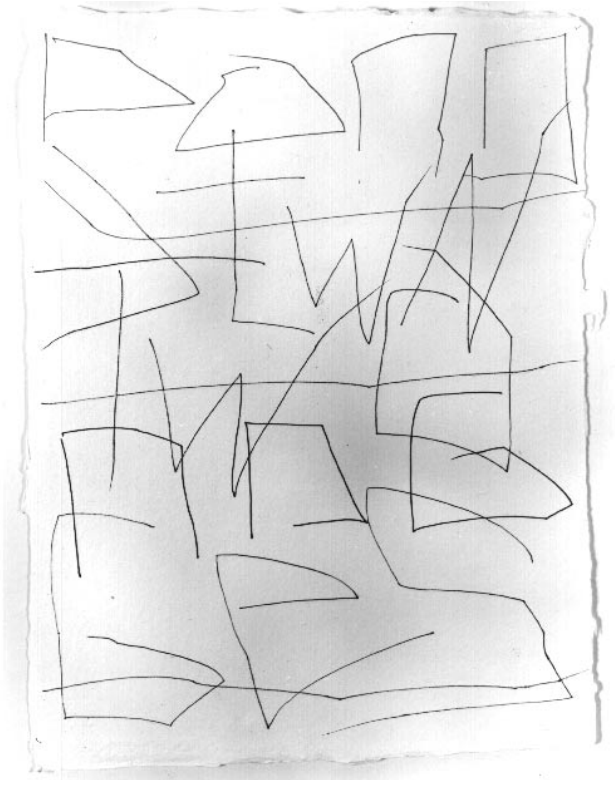
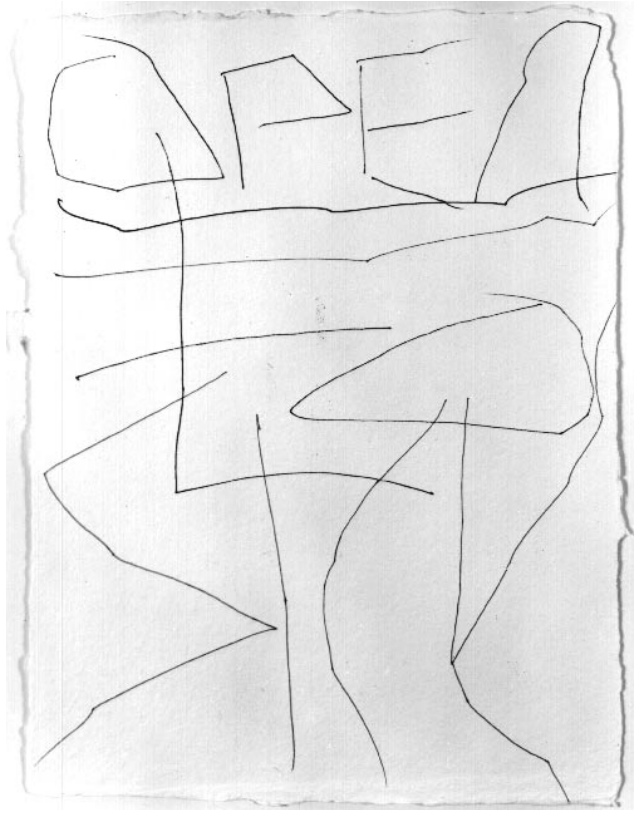


top: *Lines, Drops*, 1972-76. Ink on paper, 19 x 24 inches. Collection of Clark Coolidge. bottom: ... *I Need to*, 1972-76. Ink on paper, 19 x 24 inches. Collection of C.C.

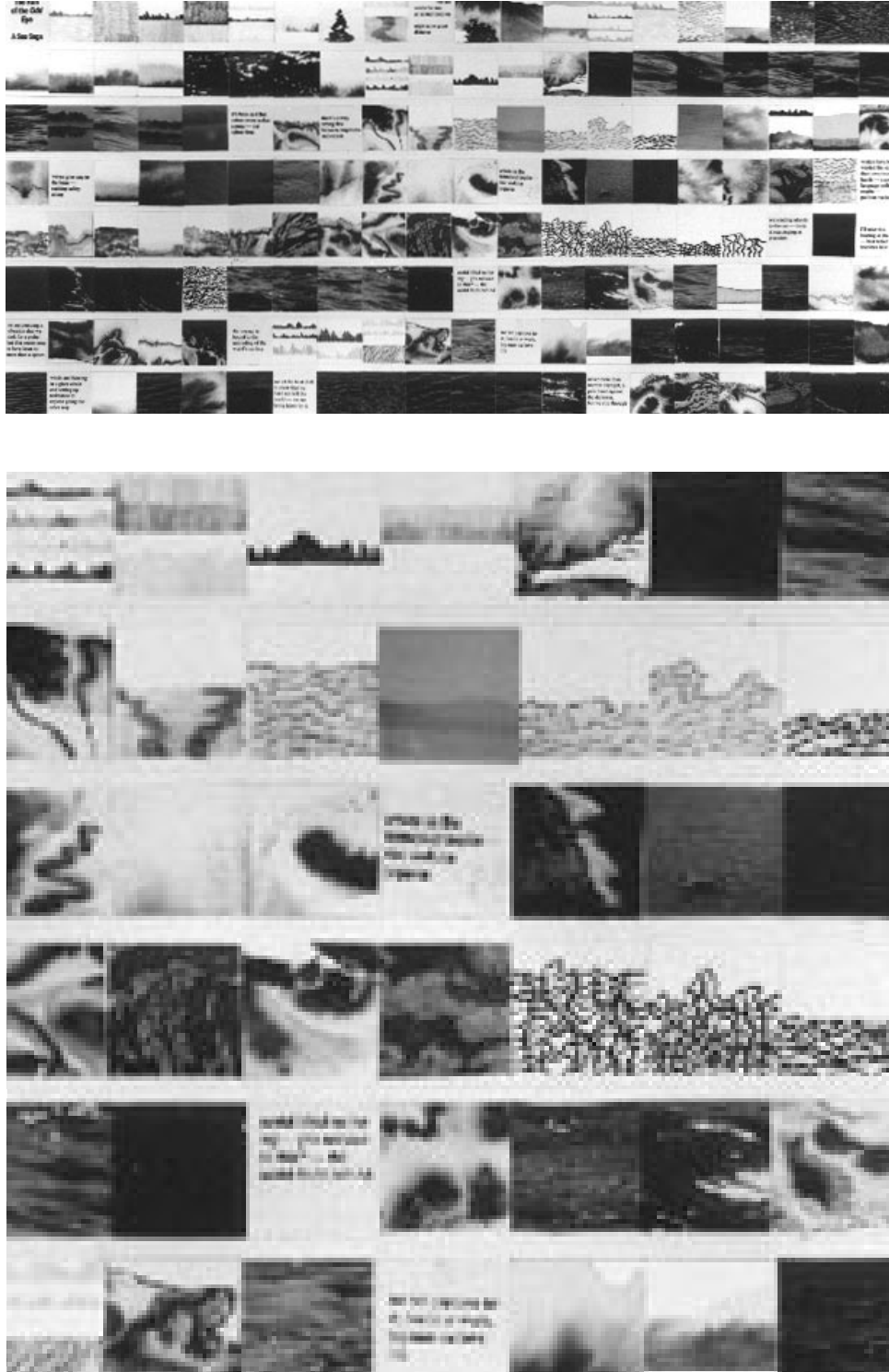




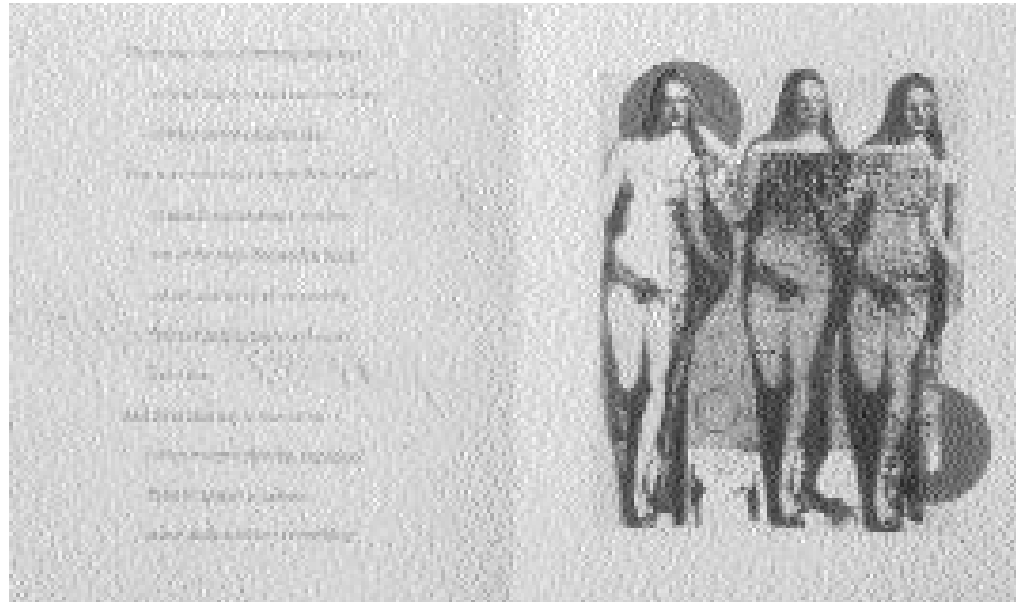




The Run of the Odd Eye: A Sea Saga, 2000. Photographs, watercolor, graphite, and printed text on paper, 10 x 22 1/2 inches.



Pages from *The Traveler and the Hill and the Hill*, 1998. Monoprint and letterpress on paper, 11 1/4 x 20 inches.



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on exitFrame me Global gPlayList, x set gPlayList = {} set TextFile = new (abra
"fileio") set x = the moviePath & "playlist" set filtermask (TextFile, "thePoem,
*.txt") set filename = displayopen(TextFile) if not voidP(filename) and not
(filename = EMPTY) then openFile(TextFile, filename, 1) set openListFile = {}
set x = readFile(TextFile)end if closeFile(TextFile) end on exitFrame me go to
"theShow" end on exitFrame me global x, thePoem set the text of

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1

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member "thePoem" = "" put x into member "thePoem" set thePoem = {}
makePoemend on makePoem global x, thePoem set the itemDelimiter = TAB
set lineNum = the lineCount of member "thePoem" put lineNum repeat with ;
1 to lineNum set y = line j of field "thePoem" set z = item 1 of y set z2 =
item 2 of y set z3 = item 3 of y set theLine = {#word1: "", #word2: "",
#word3: ""} set a Prop theLine, #word1, z set a Prop theLine, #word2, z2 set
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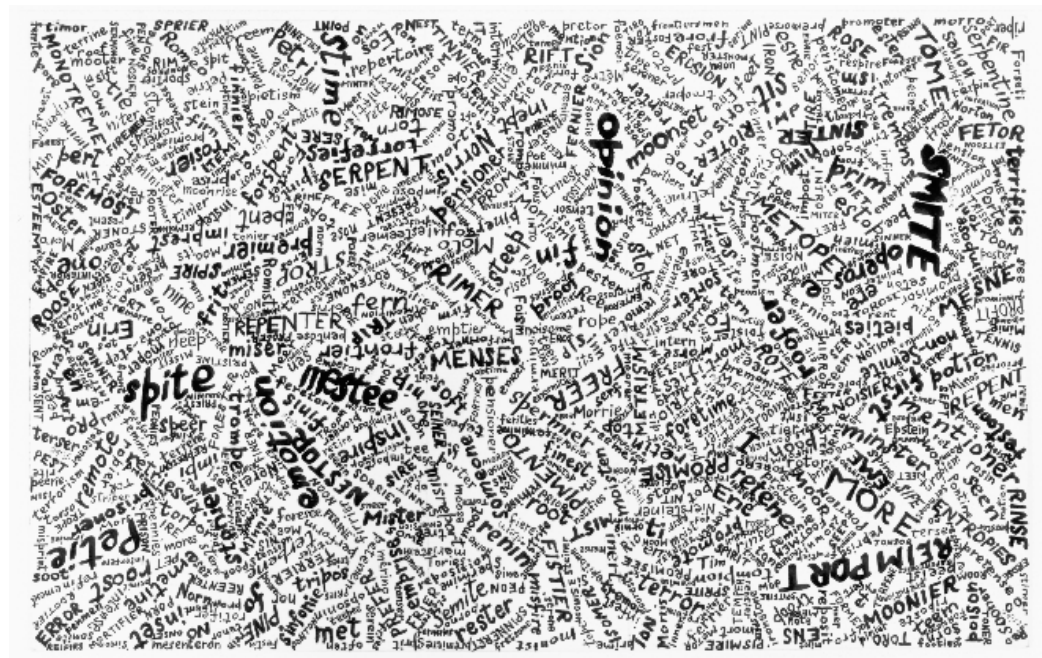
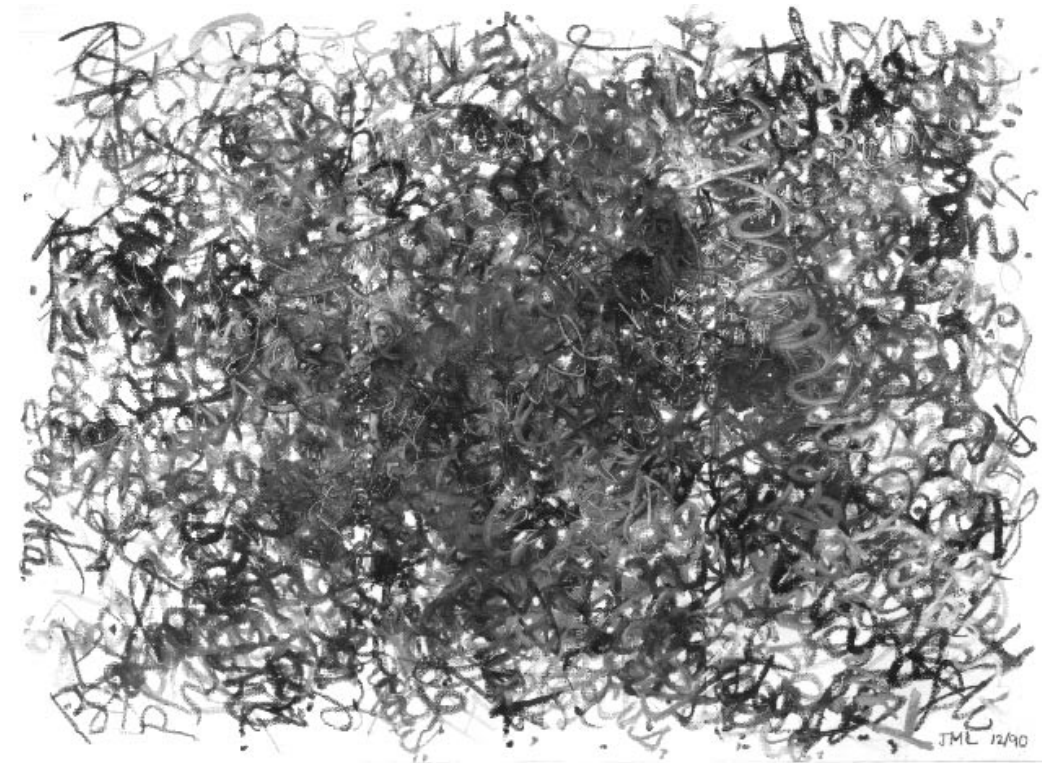
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getaProp(x, #word2) put z into member "word2" set a = getaProp(x, #word3)
put a into member "word3" end

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FIGURE

Programming: Jay Chumley. Production: Eric Laine. Acknowledgments are gratefully made to New Jersey City University for funding and support.





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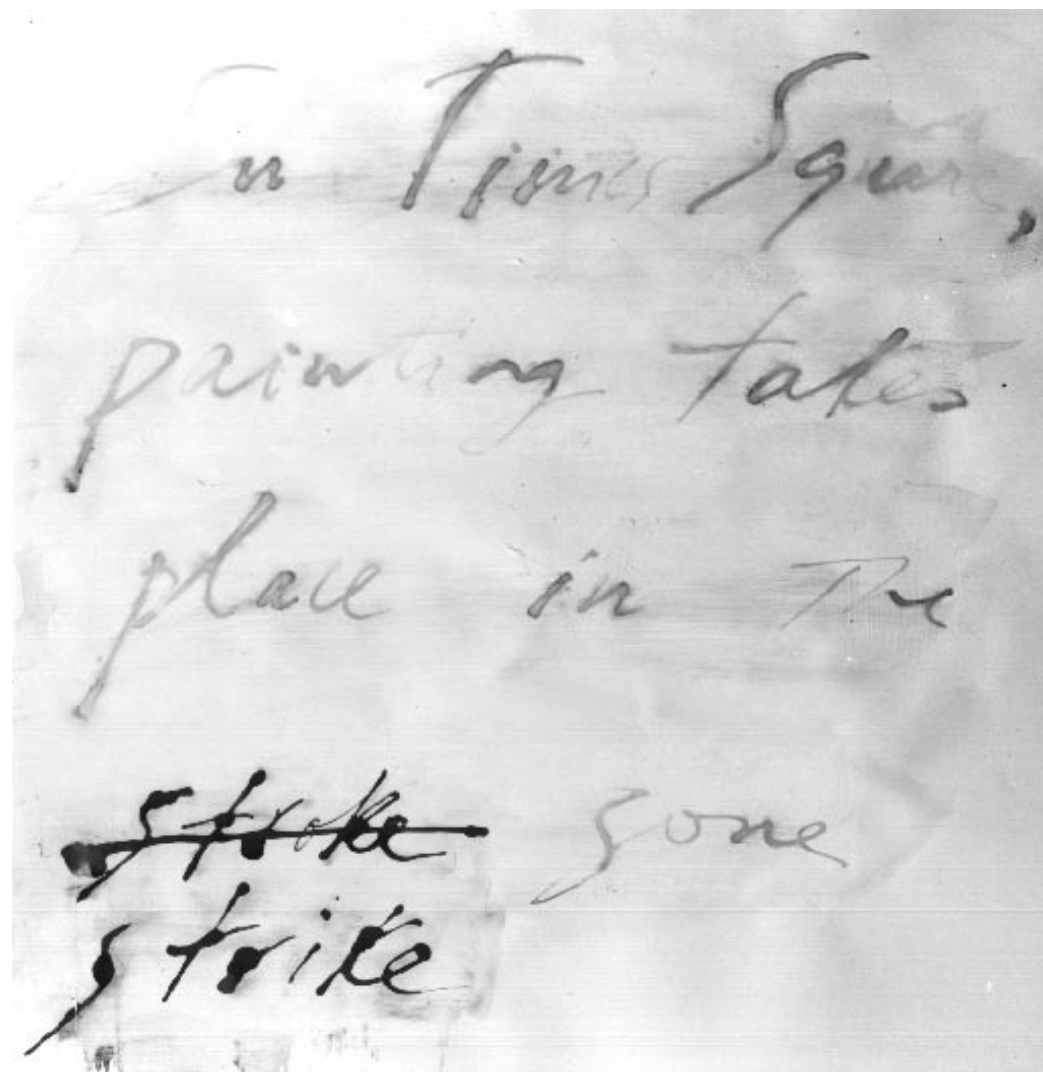
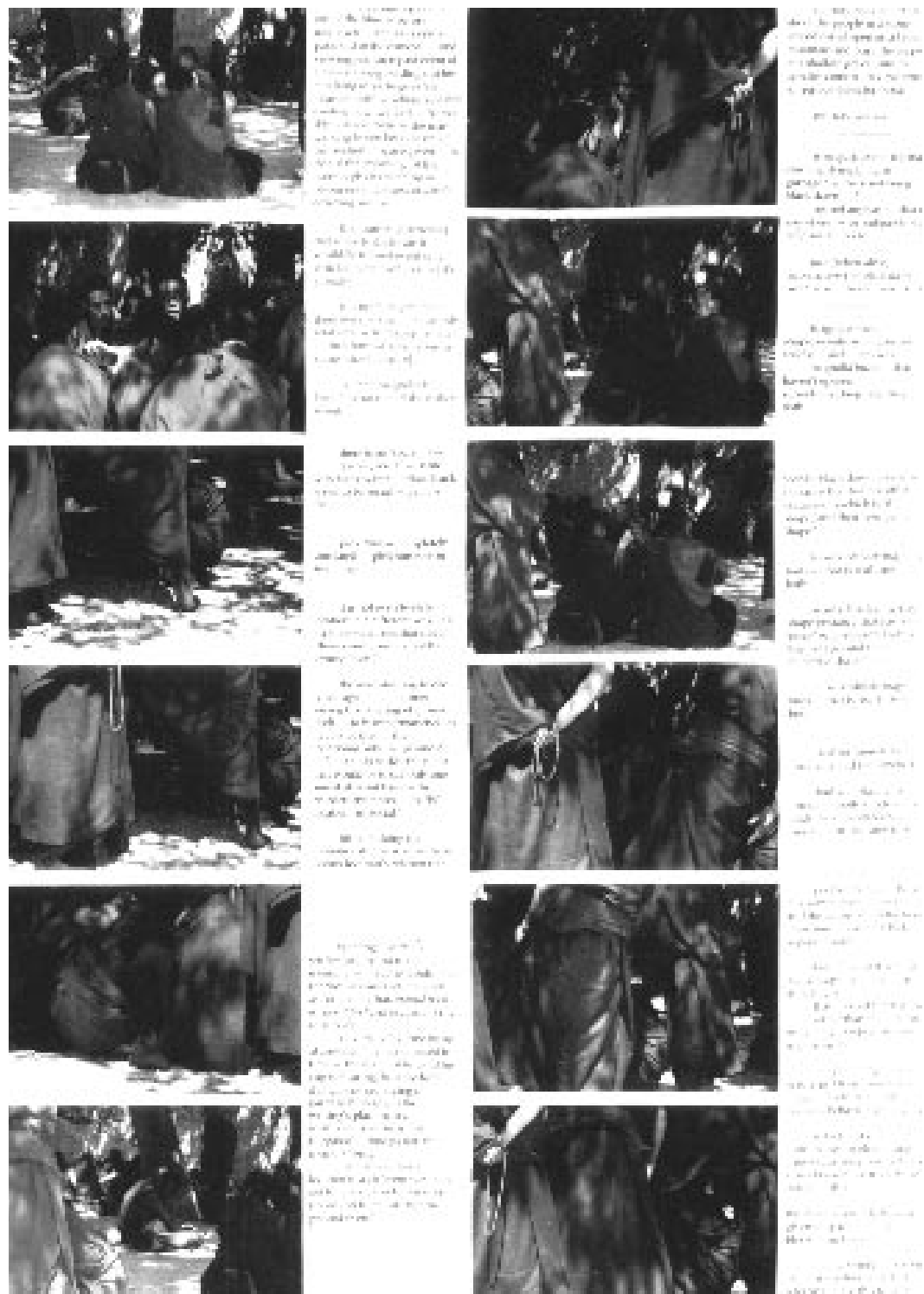
MY FINGERS LEFT PERFORATIONS

WHERE I HAVE TESTED IT

AGAINST

THE SCREEN

What's place—war in night (from The Tango) (detail), 1999. Color photocopy transfer on muslin, 145 1/2 x 44 3/4 inches.





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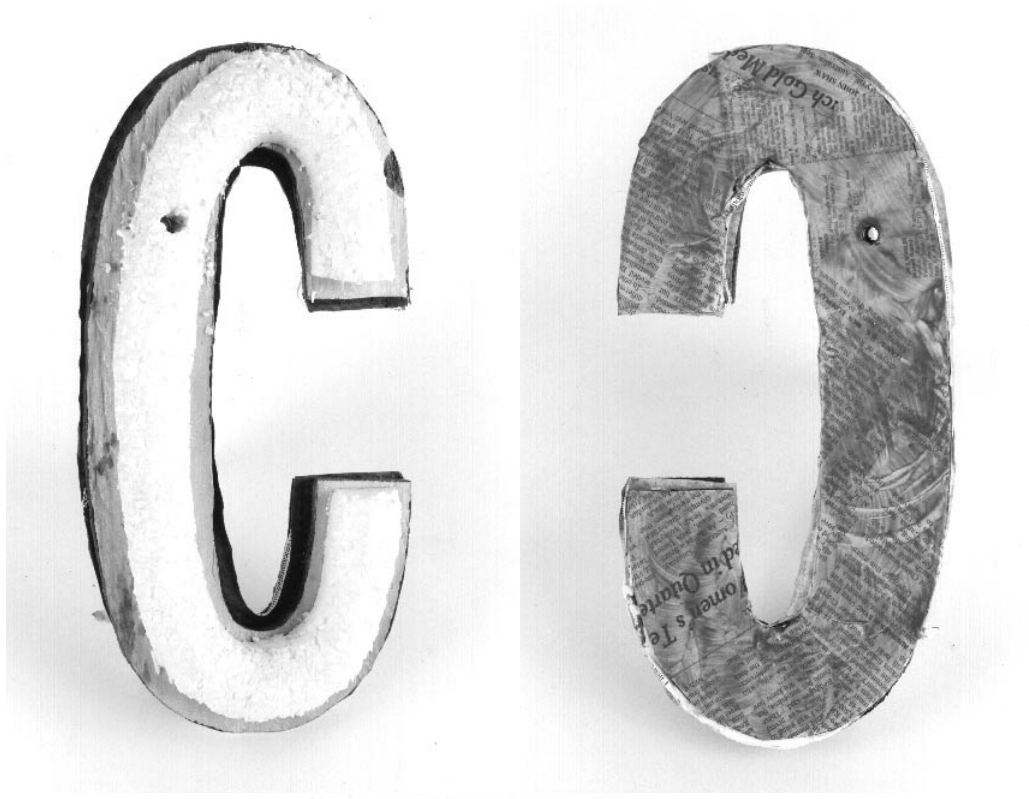
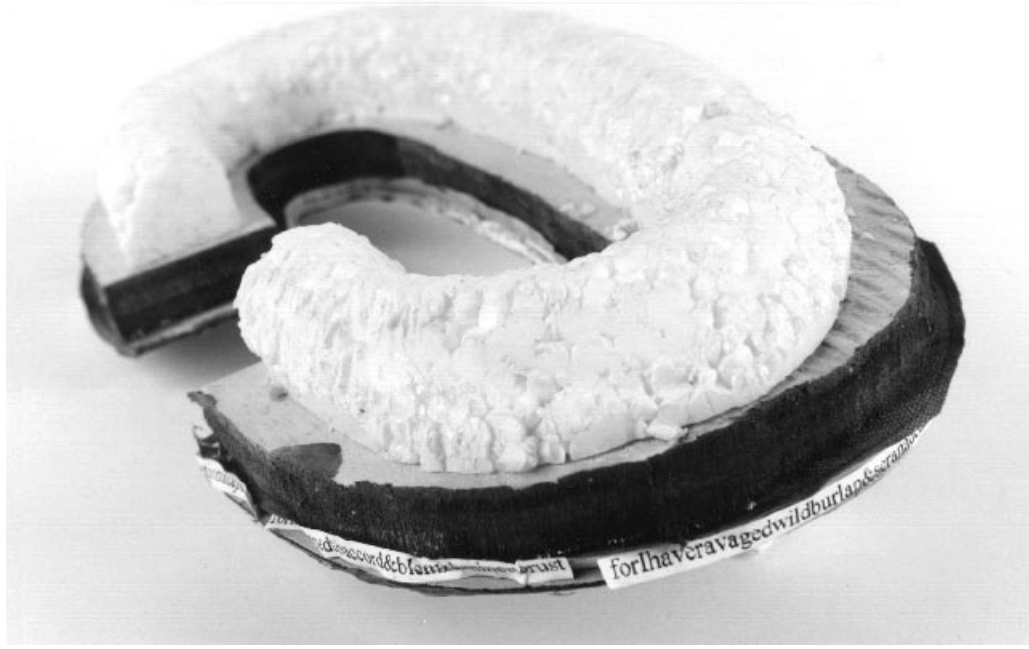
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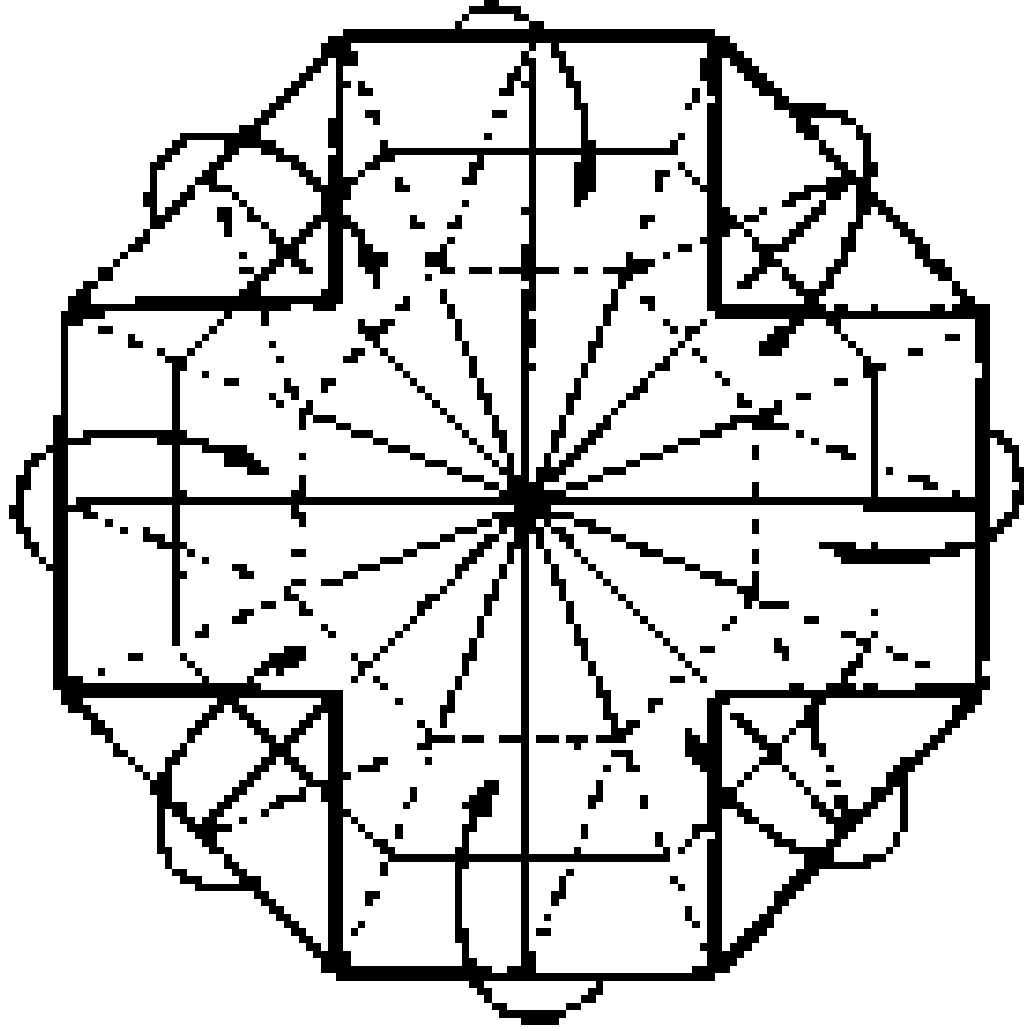
isn't

lying?

Model for initial letter of *With Strings*, 2000-2001. *With Strings* is a poem-sculpture composed of letters strung from a spiraling brass line and grounded in a terra-cotta font filled with the poem's roots.



Folding pattern from *Yesterday's Tomorrows*, 2000-2001. Paper, dimensions variable.



JOHANNA DRUCKER

Plastic Modalities: *Emerging Sentience*

"P_{LASTIQUE}" IS A SUGGESTIVE WORD, carrying, as it does, a nostalgic trace of early twentieth century aesthetic fascination with the power of material. An elastic, flexible capability to transform function into self-conscious awareness through formal properties lies latent within the concept. A whole universe seems promised in the imaginative era that the word announced. The potential infinitude of a materiality able to take any shape and maintain it with resilience, verve, style—all of this writhes to mind in speaking that word, letting it explode through the lips and teeth on its way to being neatly articulated into an utterance.

But on the page? To the eye? And now? What does it signify? Not in a cast-backward glance, but as an instantiated present? What other suggestivities offer themselves in this moment when the very term slips towards more current vocabularies of the morphable, mutable, and mutant? Language has always appeared as material to me—physical, tangible, visual. Even its acoustic properties have cast their continual shadow into solid form, footprint traces of action in a susceptible flesh of air and time, making themselves over into signs, glyphs, marks, letters, solid words cast into metal, wood, paint, stone. No surplus value accrues to language on this account. Quite the contrary. The full sum / fulsome meaning of language is its affect, its effects, its embodied inscriptions.

But body and flesh, form in material, these are also antiquated terms, cherishing the bounded spaces and fixed conditions of inherent or essential properties. The current condition of the plastic wants engagement in the fungible dynamics of play, a ludic space as that between page and wall, eye and hand, onto the skin surface of a full-receptor mode of attentive input. For what is the plasticity of communicative space in the full explosive range of its expression? A situation, not a static object, a set of possibilities contingently configured in a textual graphic. Or a metatextual set of protocols that perform the work according to varying and variable conditions.

The space of the page is not the space of the text, but a momentary image, the slice through a discourse field inhabited by the multitudinous objects and instances of textual production. A dense matrix, rife with mistakes and errors, discards and the discontinuous cast-offs of rejected drafts, misprints, revised and rewritten manuscripts, proofs, palimpsests, first, second, third editions. In this vast material history, each inhabitant makes a bid for authority relative to some illusory grail of an ur-text, and actual and real single solitary self-identical text.

But the peculiar, familiar, perverse concept of self-identity, of a text being equal to itself, its presentation and presence, its content and form, its meaning and

expression—that concept most profoundly undermined by the notion of plasticity. Any textual artifact is a contingently configured field of potential, capable of producing a reading. The artifactual condition inscribes the semantic elements in a set of graphic and syntactic protocols whose logic is rhetorical, persuasive through structure, an aesthetic massage coefficient that actively performs on the page, in the eye, at the wall, through the skin of brain that finds meaning in the extension of perceptual awareness. Those rhetorical logics and encoded protocols are instructions for reading, and the reading is never equivalent to the text. No two readings are alike, any more than any two artifacts, and the conditions of textual production make their effects known in the same manner as any campaign for a cause—in the projected space between subject and object, in the linked chain of sensation—perception—cognition that is not an upward movement from matter to mind (according to the ancient cosmological hierarchies) but is an emanation outward from sense to sentience.

Emerging Sentience is thematically and formally constructed to stretch that space so that it bridges the wall and the codex, drawing the mind outward through the eye. The gap between the text and the tongue, feeling the touch of words on the face, struggling with the impossible fiction of the surface of language, creates a fundamentally unstable field. By escaping the constraints of a single iteration, the work, by definition, moves between artifactual sites and multiple acts of performance, deformance, and processing, existing as much among them as through them. Somewhere in the zone of perception traced by the movements from space of display to intimate geographies of the textual field, *Emerging Sentience* offers itself. Its plasticities are manifold, visual and verbal, flat and bound, static and dynamically fixed into a sequence of temporal unfolding, photographic and typographic, semantic and symbolic and flirting with the thresholds of awareness wrought by forcing the lines of distinction among these differentiated modes. This piece has its primary existence on the wall *and* in book form, self-consciously pushing the formal constraints of each so that the work can't comfortably be situated in an either/or resolution of this condition. But that is merely the literal enactment of a complex of plastic activity whose actual life is a continual invention occupying the space between stimulus and rich response.

Blatant in its flash bid for attention to the material manipulation of its overt form, this exhibition makes evident beyond any ignoring that the condition of all works is inherently plastic. These glaring premises are latent in any text, no matter how demurely it may masquerade in the guise of a self-identical decorum. And here, then, the expectations massage us back to awareness of the enacted nature of text as reading, image as viewing, work as field of latencies made over into sense through a performance of its potentialities. A poetics of plasticity, poetry plastique, casts this dynamic into sharp relief, as the primary condition of any encounter with the forms of aesthetic expression.

CLARK COOLIDGE

from *Philip Guston's Poem-Pictures*

WHAT DID WE WANT TO SEE? And then, a bit further on, what did we think we would? There were conversations. There was smoking in the chair, with nobody else there. A bright eye, a finger at some recent center, and always back to the work. I doubt we ever *decided* anything. Certainly not a final form for this two-handed book we were always sidling toward. This continuous thinking, or was it worrying?, always so far from the actual working. But the talk, maybe not so separate?

He asked me to draw for him one time. I sketched a chair in front of me in short detached strokes. No, never lift your hand from the paper till the line runs out.

The best clues went into the work and are no longer in my mind.

Started with the specific matter of words and arrived at the utter immateriality of the painted image. Sieved both through the same divide. That neither rest on any surface but move on in the mind. What you see, what you read, is not *this*.

As if children before the buzzing machines coming. I think these were some of the things that entered our conversation:

Eliot's "garlic and sapphires in the mud."

Joyce's labyrinths.

Have you ever been caught between the hovering substances?

The image that locks itself in too quickly so has to be wiped out because it does not go on.

The thin line between image and chaos.

There is no memory print of ecstasy.

Forms that are two: things moving together and things moving away.

The third hand that's at work when it all comes together.

The clear enigma, to be reached.

The drawing stick in that paw's hand.

Images that are surrounded by their history and the rare ones that aren't.

To draw up the Principles of Discontent?

Looking for the one static "Egyptian" form from which all the multitudinous forms come.

To do what nature doesn't do: the single form that keeps vibrating forever.

The times when movement substitutes itself as a form.

What about the masked, and the exposed?

Painting a book in the dark.

Art being the frustration of the desire *not* to make art.

Beckett's disgust and Fellini's hunger.
Melville's wicked book and Kafka's lightless image.
Frankenstein's bangs.
All the blocks that matter.
Maybe a city two guys put up in their spare time.
Trying to decipher the Salami Stone.

"art could be a grimace
you subdue it to a simple door . . .
the madmen brothers of nothing said
all begins with images
I join by images"

—Paul Eluard, *To Picasso*

but I could be mistaken. I know that I am not conscious enough while involved, so
often deny the memory at its source. And now almost twenty years have passed.

We wanted to make the drawing space and the writing space simultaneous.
We believed that it was, anyway. No mater what we particularly did.

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Art, Phillips Academy, 1994), pp. 46-47.

LYN HEJINIAN

Motility

*Where are we?
In a series of which we do not know the extremes.*
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

JUST AS A MOTION PICTURE IS ACTUALLY A SERIES of pictures, so a poem is a series of poems. As Jack Spicer said, "Things fit together. We knew that—it is the principle of magic. Two inconsequential things can combine together to become a consequence. This is true of poems too. A poem is never to be judged by itself alone. A poem is never by itself alone." And again: "Poems should echo and reecho against each other. They should create resonances. They cannot live alone any more than we can."

Motion is as fundamental to poetry as it is to cinema, and both mediums are put together in similar ways (through sequences of [sometimes close and sometimes seemingly disjunct] events themselves linked by sequences of conjunctions along trajectories that are arrayed through time and space) and out of similar materials (stills). The sequences (and a number of sequences of different "sets" may be underway at any given time) excite both retrospection (memory) and anticipation (logic). Since sequences (even those we call syntax) imply consequences, they also provoke concern—they excite the sense that there is meaning or the desire to make meaning.

Just as there are no frozen moments, there are no motionless meanings. Meaning and motility are inextricable. Meanings occur in and as relationships between things—in and as linkages. A large part of the conceptual pleasure and the entirety of the perceptual logic intrinsic to poetry is the result of these linkages. And though we tend to pay more attention to the substantives in an articulation (what are considered its "main words," the nouns and verbs and, to a slighter lesser degree, the adjectives and adverbs), to do so is literally to miss the point—the point at which everything is happening, the point where all the action is. As Tolstoy says, "Each thought specially expressed in words loses its meaning, is terribly degraded, when taken alone without the linkage in which it is found."

Thanks to the peculiarities of memory and anticipation, even where chains of association may be physically linear, they are not necessarily conceptually so. Whenever there are more than two parts to the chain, a sequence may gather a degree of nonlinear momentum. I could point to the very simple tripartite form of the poems in *The Traveler and the Hill and the Hill* as an illustration of this. Each poem follows the model of the syllogism. The first sentence establishes an initial image or proposition, the second posits a presumably related image or proposition, and the third draws an inference from the relationship between the two. That inference establishes a conclusion, and the third sentence of each narrative physically occupies a concluding position, but, since it is operating interpretatively *between* the first two sentences, it also occupies, at least at the conceptual level, an intermediary position and is located between them. The third element of the sequence, in other words, serves also as the second. Oscillation, inversion, and overlapping occur despite the necessarily linear character of the sentences' syntax. (Or such, at least, was my intention.)

Emilie Clark's visual images are, among other things, depictions of this syllogistic narrative infolding. Just as each of the verbal lines occupies a frame, so too are the images built of frames, in complex sequences producing not only juxtapositions along the surface of the page but also overlappings and palimpsested sequences whose first "parts" lie, as it were, obscured but still perceptible in the depths of the page.

Syllogistic logic is often a prominent feature of the serial poem, but I would argue that all poetry involves seriality—sequences of frames and linkages. When

Spicer said “There is really no single poem,” he meant both that poems, being imperfect, conjoin with other poems in an ongoing elaboration of experience, sense, and meaning and that within any poem are multiple sequences of multiple sets, whose terms are in a state of perpetual activity producing infinite arrays of relative displacement.

In the late 1960s and early 70s, I made a number of real films—short 8mm films, edited in the camera and usually built in single-frame increments. Some were “animated” films comprised of shots of paper cutouts that I moved about, but most consisted of strings of photographs of people and things that I encountered more or less indiscriminately in the world and experienced as being there. Those amateur experiments have informed my aesthetic practice and my metaphysics ever since.

Our perceptual reality, the entirety of what’s available to the senses, is phenomenological in character; everything that is happening is happening phenomenologically, as something appearing that we appear to experience, something that we sense coming to be sensed. This, by its nature, involves motion—something’s happening, something’s taking place, something’s taking time.

ROBERT CREELEY

from the “LINEbreak” Interview

CHARLES BERNSTEIN: I’M THINKING OF LOOPS, echoes, measures. Your poems have been set, in a lot of different ways, you set them yourself in a performance situation, but you had an extraordinary series of collaborations with visual artists. One I’m thinking of right now is Cletus Johnson, who actually put your poems in theaters, and also set them around as loops, as circles. These are kind of interesting performance spaces. Could you talk about the theaters and the loops? And maybe read some?

Robert Creeley: Yes. Cletus worked for a time with Louise Nevelson, but he’s not interested in that particular sort of scale, but he is interested in that particular making of a theatrical space. A shadow box. There are aspects of Cornell, for example. Collaging, he loves.

Bernstein: They’re more model-size theaters rather than . . . you can’t actually walk into them.

Creeley: Exactly. For a long time he concentrated on what one wants to call “architectural detail.” And very rarely used words. Usually at most a name. So, these works had a curious classic elegance. They were really interesting, and they are brilliant, singular art. But a few years ago he was interested to do something that would involve

language in some way, and he was thinking of marquees on theaters and words going around on loops of lights, and of bills . . . theater bills. Things of that sort. He also wanted something, if possible, that could be continuous. Such as a string of lights announcing something. So that was the scale. That was the context, more accurately, and the scale had to be . . . necessarily had to be . . . modest. Simply that the scale of the piece would not let one, you know, go on and on and on. A quatrain was an ideal size. Or a couplet. I think we both wanted something that could go round and round. And I can remember one of the very first we did was one called “Fat Fate.”

Be at That this
Come as If when
Stay or Soon then
Ever happen It will

And it would go round and around. And I’d say, “What the heck is that saying?” It’s—I don’t know what it’s saying. I mean I *do* know what it’s saying in my own interests, but I don’t know what it’s saying to other people particularly. But I love it. “Be at,” that is, be present to “that,” or the fact you actually were there in time and space. “Come as If when/ Stay or Soon then/ Ever happen It will.”

Bernstein: It’s also a series of double stress beats.

Creeley: Yeah, it’s double stress beats, and it’s also . . .

Bernstein: And it also goes continuously . . . it doesn’t stop. And everything links from the two beats to the next two beats.

Creeley: Sometimes—there were several in the whole sequence—Cletus would say, “I have this little hand that I want to use in a piece. Can you write something with ‘hand’ in it?” I mean, the great pleasure in doing these things was just that.

Bernstein: Talk about doing piecework!

Creeley: Yeah, exactly. He was living . . . he lives happily . . . he has a studio just south of Buffalo down in Ellington. So we’d have this charming ride down to see what Cletus was up to. He lives in an old classic feedstore, a converted feedstore.

Bernstein: You like to work that way, when someone gives you a project or something to do.

Creeley: Yeah. I love “things to do today” or, you know, “Bob, can you do something . . .”

Bernstein: Can you write something with “hand,” Bob?

Creeley: Yeah. It's called "Here."

Outstretched innocence
Implacable distance
Lend me a hand
See if it reaches

I remember writing that on the seat of the jeep we were in.

Bernstein: Can you loop that around one more time?

Creeley: Outstretched innocence
Implacable distance
Lend me a hand,
See if it reaches.

Bernstein: I can lend you a Coke. But my hands are all tied up.

Creeley: One other of these, and . . . this was an early one, I remember. Again, the very obvious loop of just parallel syntax.

Time

Of right Of wrong Of up Of down
Of who Of how Of when Of one
Of then Of if Of in Of out
Of field Of friend Of it Of now

The full Creeley "LINEbreak" interview, produced by Martin Spinelli, is available at www.epc.buffalo.edu.

LESLIE SCALAPINO

Wall Hanging, "What's place—war in night"

THE TEXT OF THE WALL HANGING, THE FIRST SECTION, titled "What's place—war in night" of my serial poem *The Tango*, was begun before and completed after I traveled in Tibet in 1999. The photographs, of debating monks at the Sera Monastery outside Lhasa, were photographed by myself and placed in vertical columns that are on the hanging in the order in which the images were snapped.

This time/'action' there (of taking the photos) creates a motion (partly by the rose color of the monks' robes), and as vertical unfolding creates the appearance of sequence.

Thus the text and photos are 'juxtaposed' in columns (that is, both text and photos are in their *own* sequential orders), rather than being 'arranged' to illustrate or reveal each other.

That is, the serial poem which is itself internal debate is not a representation or imagination of what the monks are debating. The text's internal debate is the author's 'comparison' of her mind phenomena to exterior phenomena, laying these alongside each other 'actually'—such as 'the mind's' 'comparison' to dawn, to magnolias, to color of night, 'as if' these are manifestations of mind phenomena, which they are *here*.

Placing one's mind-actions beside magnolias (words).

The monks were engaging in formal question and answer play, which requires each to wrestle individually for an actual response to a particular question.

The author's internal debate in the poem is a similar scrutiny requiring (its space) not being a ground even of its own 'comparisons.' The space it's creating is to be *seen* by one as not existing. Events/accounts of the past are only present as 'fundamental reality' is social, what 'we're' creating—the color 'rose' (also a motion) in the photographs, is in the text a verb (motion), a color, a flower, a word only.

The events of sight in the photographs are unfixed by their color? The seer of the *text* is on the same level/space as magnolias *in fact*/word. No one occurrence.

The format of photos and text printed on muslin material (contributed by Connie Wolf for an exhibit at the San Francisco Art Institute) for me references the traditional format (fabric and painting) of Tibetan and Mongolian tankas, wall hangings rendering figures and sometimes Buddhist narratives.

The reference is to 'up the ante' in that here neither the photos nor the hanging format are Buddhist narratives (are not that content): regardless of their being monks, what's *seen* is to be only visual. The photos are snapshots that are portraits of young men speaking to each other in a modern place. The text as commentary 'places' their being impinged on by catastrophic modern times. The photos are only visual action, subject matter to be only preconception in the viewer—just as the text is a conceptual-shape of the author's internal debate (not a representation of 'something else'/a philosophy, but a 'physical'—which it isn't *either*—graph of change).

The construct is 'Have no preconceptions'—when the shape or material is that it be 'conception itself.' It is past events enacted (as the photos themselves, and as *text's* memory of other events), physical 'objects' (of magnolias or night only seen—being text). So the intent (of the hanging) is to be being change—as *pre*-conception 'there.'

CONTEMPORARY POETRY, ART AND THEORY are haunted by the complex relationship between conceptual thought and its visual representations. The word “see” is defined by Webster’s as follows: 1) to get knowledge or an impression through the eyes and the sense of sight; 2) to get a clear mental impression of; to grasp by thinking. Many modes of application of this doubling of seeing and thinking, visualizing and understanding, could be identified in numerous disciplines: poetry, art, psychoanalysis, physics, photography, critical theory, to name a few.

In physics, for example, the issue of “Anschaulichkeit” or “visualizability” was a central point of contention in the development of indeterminacy theory. With the emergence of discontinuity as a crucial factor in tracking subatomic transitional states the question became, is only seeing believing? In other words, what does it mean to assert that a process exists when it cannot be visualized or described? As Heisenberg put it in a letter to Wolfgang Pauli in 1926: “That the world is continuous I consider more than ever as totally unacceptable. But as soon as it is discontinuous, all words that we apply to the description of facts are so many numbers. What the words ‘wave’ or ‘corpuscle’ mean we know not anymore.”

A related issue emerged in the work of the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott in the early 1950s. How does the infant or child learn to emotionally and mentally internalize representations of the existence of objects, human or otherwise? He discovered that children use “transitional objects” which reassure them of the continued existence of their parents when they are not present. These transitional objects continue to be needed until the time when the parent can adequately and instantly be visualized and remembered by the child by mental means alone. The process of utilizing transitional objects continues throughout life, and is especially important during moments of great stress. Transitional objects can also be particularly important when verbal conceptualizations adequate for communicating experiences have not yet crystallized. In my own work this last application remains crucial.

Like many other writers, I have often found it productive to redefine the techniques of my work as a poet and theorist by means of a renewed study of the visual arts. Jackson Pollock was among my earliest sources of inspiration. His work easily survived my stringent youthful tests of authenticity, level of abstraction, spontaneity and free association, issues which were already central to me in my teenage research into psychoanalysis. In the late 60s the work of Vito Acconci and Bernadette Mayer, in their groundbreaking journal *0-9*, and that of Robert Smithson and Robert Motherwell (particularly in his editing of *The Dada Painters and Poets*) seemed closer

to the visual/verbal nexus I had unconsciously been seeking in my poems, particularly in my earliest free associational poetic experiments inspired by the abstract expressionists, and later, *The Tennis Court Oath* of John Ashbery.

As I wrestled with these ideas and works on a visit to Italy in the late 60s I found myself hunting for magazines and again making collages. A few years earlier I had made my first collages by cutting words and pictures out of newspapers. At that time, a friend asked me: why not just write the words, why cut them out of newspapers and paste them up? The answer was that in order to “see” what I was struggling to do, I needed to work visually within a print landscape, what I would now call a conceptual “holding environment.” Quoting the visual landscape felt like pulling hieroglyphic quotes out of a found object/visual reality while continuing to write around it and through it, in words. Only through the use of a visual construct could so many disparate elements be available simultaneously, allowing so many transformations to continue to evolve in the same breath, or space. I had chosen collage-making because it offered a way to use found images the way I found words in my thoughts, conversations, reading and dreams, when making my poems. Later, when I discovered I could also do this directly in writing by constructing theoretical objects I wrote an essay called “The Talismanic Value of Words in Private Thought.” I learned with my collages that visual representations could be arranged like words to evoke, experiment with, and process states of mind, and to provide both concrete confirmation for my hunches and ideas and provocative stimulation towards further theorization and invention with words.

After returning to New York, I needed once again to work with visual constructs to facilitate my writing work. In 1979 I constructed *The Anxiety of Ownership*—the anxiety referred specifically to what I felt about appropriating printed materials directly from contemporary sources. I had not at all felt the same uneasiness when incorporating found visual images. This construct led to my writing on the collage and outlining, in the same space, the photographic processes needed to complete the collage. This piece provided the groundwork for my next few collages. The technique that grew out of this piece I’ve been employing in all my collage work since that time. The work is constructed out of found materials and then is photographed according to my instructions, often utilizing close-ups. One, called *Account Closed*, contained the exhausted bankbook from my savings account which was the natural accompaniment to a sudden decision to quit working in order to write. Quickly after this in 1980 and 1981 came two collages that incorporated magazine material I had found as a child—some turn-of-the-century French photo magazines. These collages were called *Distribution Automatique*—a formula for the simultaneous reproduction of images in all media and in all time frames—and *Le Rêve*, which was a continuation of that “story” into the dimension of dreams. By a strange

coincidence these collages were almost immediately published in a French magazine from Marseilles called *D(O)CKS*, edited by Julien Blaine.

Di Pace is from a series constructed from poster materials gathered in Italy in 1995. A recent photo collage, *1998*, appeared in *Chain 6* (1999).

TOM PHILLIPS

from "Notes on *A Humument*"

WHEN I STARTED WORK ON THE BOOK late in 1966, I merely scored out unwanted words with pen and ink. It was not long though before the possibility became apparent of making a better unity of word and image, intertwined as in a mediaeval miniature. This more comprehensive approach called for a widening of the techniques to be used and of the range of visual imagery. Thus painting (in watercolour or gouache) became the basic technique, with some pages still executed in pen and ink only, some involving typing and some using collaged fragments from other parts of the book (since a rule had grown up that no extraneous material should be imported into the work). In some recent pages I have incorporated elements of their printed predecessors.

Much of the pictorial matter in the book follows the text in mood and reference: much of it also is entirely nonreferential, merely providing a framework for the verbal statement and responding to the disposition of the text on the page. In every case the text was the first thing decided upon: some texts have taken years to reach a definitive state, usually because such a rich set of alternatives was present on a single page and only rarely because the page seemed quite intractable. In order to prove (to myself) the inexhaustibility of every single page I started a set of variations of page 85: I have already made over twenty. The visual references used a range from a telegram envelope to a double copy of a late Cézanne landscape.

The only means used to link words and phrases are the 'rivers' in the type of the original; these, if occasionally torturous, run generously enough and allow the extracted writing to have some flow so that it does not become (except where this is desirable) a series of staccato bursts of words.

Reprinted with permission from Tom Phillips, *A Humument* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997).

TAN LIN

Home + Lifestyle Variation 3

SOMEONE (I THINK) SAID THE TIME FOR POEMS written with words is over and the era of reading poems with feelings in them is long gone. Today, no poem should be written to be read and the best form of reading would make all our feelings disappear the moment we were having them. This sequencing of 'events' constitutes a code more uncrackable and soothing than anything we could actually read. ➡

'Poems to be read' ➡ 'poems to be looked at.' A beautiful poem should rewrite itself a word at a time, in predetermined intervals. With their numerous circuit boards, television and computers do this; together they enhance the microproduction and sequencing of feelings heretofore thought inaccessible, complex, or purely entropic. If all words could just be codes projected onto a wall, those names (accessories) for things canceling the wall would be more beautiful than anything we could feel. Nothing that is negative is simple. Everything that is artificial is related to everything else in the room. Poetry should aspire to the most synthetic forms (the colors or numbers around it) and the most synthetic forms are to be found in houses with rectilinear walls, hallways, and foyers. Each wall separates one space from another. Everything that can be divided is divided into its proper sequence (style) of ones and twos. Private spaces are over-elaborated and under-inhabited. Public spaces are under-elaborated and lack sufficient feedback. Things that are living vs. things that are dead vs. languor:



1

Because we like to come to a given space of our choosing, every thing we see tends to look like a diagram or flow chart, as if it were designed to produce comfort zones, trance passages, or luck. Here is a house, here are its binary coordinates.

I was reading a story about the anti-actress Chloë Sevigny, who is the most chased-after fashion trendsetter now because she is "ugly-beautiful," wears vintage prairie dresses one day and Yves Saint Laurent the next, and seems negligent and muse-like at the same time. She often claims not to know what she is wearing. She moves around the room like an anti-cheerleader. She goes shopping in Hello Kitty underwear. She played a vapory deb in *The Last Days of Disco* and, in *Boys Don't Cry*, a trail-

er park girl who falls in love with a boy who's really a cross-dressing girl. She can make a beret look very recent. Her publicist announced: she is trying to dissociate herself from fashion at the moment. When I think of Chloë Sevigny I feel the code book wobbling on my retina. Someone said: "Anticipation is an interesting and difficult thing to produce."



disco

A code: the best way to make our feelings disappear is to watch ourselves read and the best poems are poems that waste our feelings in a public kind of way. A poem = what it changes into. The best poems aspire to a kind of monitoring device. Less like clocks and more like feedback mechanisms, they cancel themselves out of their electrical grid, and simply fit into wherever they might be, like wallpaper, a thermostat or other home furnishings, burning candlesticks, or lamps. The text is a set of subjects that are made to 'run through' it like mistakes. The ultimate lifestyle exercise for a home is its television. It produces error after error. If knowledge unlike pleasure takes place in a network, a poem should pursue itself in a set interval of time, i.e., the time allotted to it. The ideal interval is programmed, usually three or seven or twelve, and thus expands indefinitely. In that way all the words, like portraiture or shades of color, could be replaced by something that reminded one of a couplet, an integer, a television set, a phone number or the revolving seasons. If one doesn't have a television set it is necessary to make one. It is now spring or it is now autumn when you read this. The temperature is the same across all three screens. Somewhere it is summer and I am losing someone because she is gone. The television set is sitting on the window sill. These are the feelings television has and these are the ways we make our feelings disappear into them, like small pieces of ice. The best poems make feelings evaporate at a constant rate like a disco, which is nothing but a rotating system of numbers. I think it is snowing and I worry that the guests will be late. I flick on the screens. This is an election year, of course. How to incite the idea of reading without reading? How to accessorize reading as a practice similar to entertaining? One comes and then one goes. One adds something and then one subtracts something else.



temperature

The most precious commodity in modern life is time. I live in a house like a series of loops, plus signs



JOHN CAGE

from *Musicage*

JOHN CAGE: ALICE WESTON IN PARTICULAR, in Cincinnati, had asked me to make a series of plexigrams and lithographs. And so [in 1969] I made the series called *Not Wanting To Say Anything About Marcel*. Marcel Duchamp had died, and one of the art magazines asked a number of different people—and I was one of them—to say something about Marcel. And when I received the letter asking me to say something I happened to be with Jasper Johns and he had received the same letter, and he said, I don't want to say anything about Marcel. So I took the title of what I did—which was not really saying anything—I called my work *Not Wanting To Say Anything About Marcel*. It wasn't my original statement, it was Jasper's original statement. And then, instead of saying it alone or by myself, I said it together with Calvin Sumsion, a Mormon who had been a student, a graduate student, at the University of Illinois [Champaign-Urbana] where I was when Marcel died. The reason I chose to work with him is because he knew all the techniques of doing graphic work, and I knew all the business of composing. So I composed the graphic work and he executed it, just as I would write a piece for a pianist and she would play it, or he would play it. In other words, in moving from music to graphic work, I took with me the social habits of musicians, hmm? The division of labor, so to speak. *(laughs)* Composer to performer.

Joan Retallack: When you say "composed" it, could you say something about what that means?

Cage: Yes, I told him how to do it. I would give him readings, chance-determined readings, for horizontal and vertical. I could even tell him to gather, say, twenty-five images—I think I did it myself though. I would gather, say, twenty-five images . . . having to do with a word that came out of the dictionary—all by chance operations; and then I would go to the library and find images that corresponded with this word; and then, faced with say fifty-seven different images, I would take number thirty-seven because chance operations [using the *I Ching*] said I should; and then number thirty-seven should be reduced or enlarged to such and such dimensions, because those were prescribed by chance operations, hmm? I don't know if you've seen those lithographs. There are two lithographs on black paper and eight plexigrams—silk screens on Plexiglas.

Retallack: Yes, I have seen them. Do you see there, if you think about tape being a kind of fulcrum on which you turned and were able to—

Cage: Do one and the other.

Retallack: Yes. Do you see the form of the tape having influenced the form that these pieces took in anyway?
(Pause.)

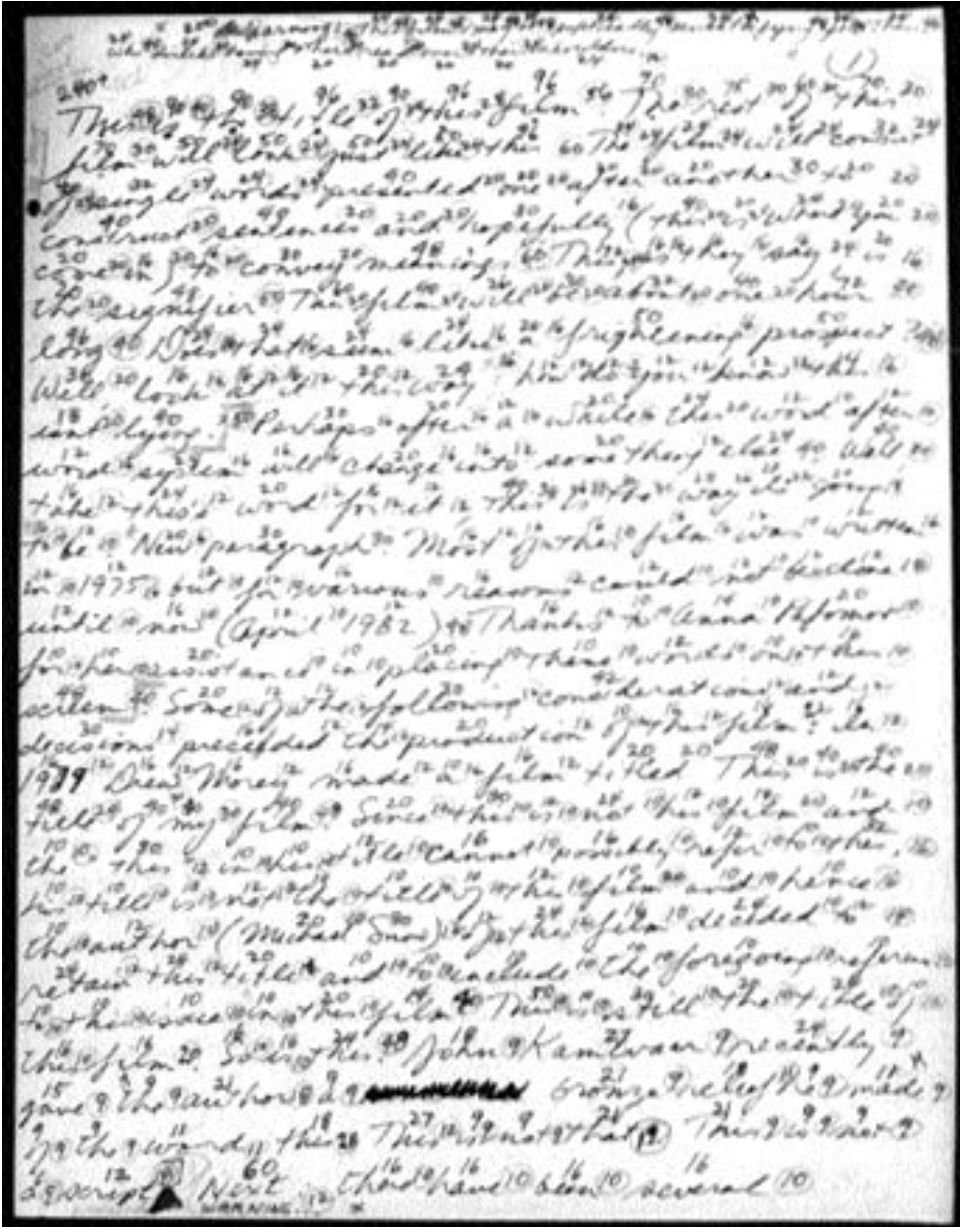
Cage: Oh, I think you could probably build up some kind of set of ideas about that. They may have been in my head, but they may not have been. I don't know. The important thing I think in this is that Marcel died. And that the way I chose . . . to . . . to not say anything about that . . . was to use the dictionary, to subject it to chance operations, and then to let the words die, hmm? To let them die in the plexigrams and in the black paper. So that the words . . . so that it's assumed that the words are dying, and how much they have died is the next question. So that this word, which is not to be entirely present, since it's dying, is, according to chance operations, say, one-third dead, hmm? Or two-thirds dead. Then I send this information to Calvin Sumsion and he takes a razor blade and cuts out that much of it. And then he sends the thing back to me, and I'm delighted, and we continue. (laughter)

Reprinted with permission from *Musicage: Cage Muses on Words, Art, Music*, edited by Joan Retallack (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), pp. 92-93.

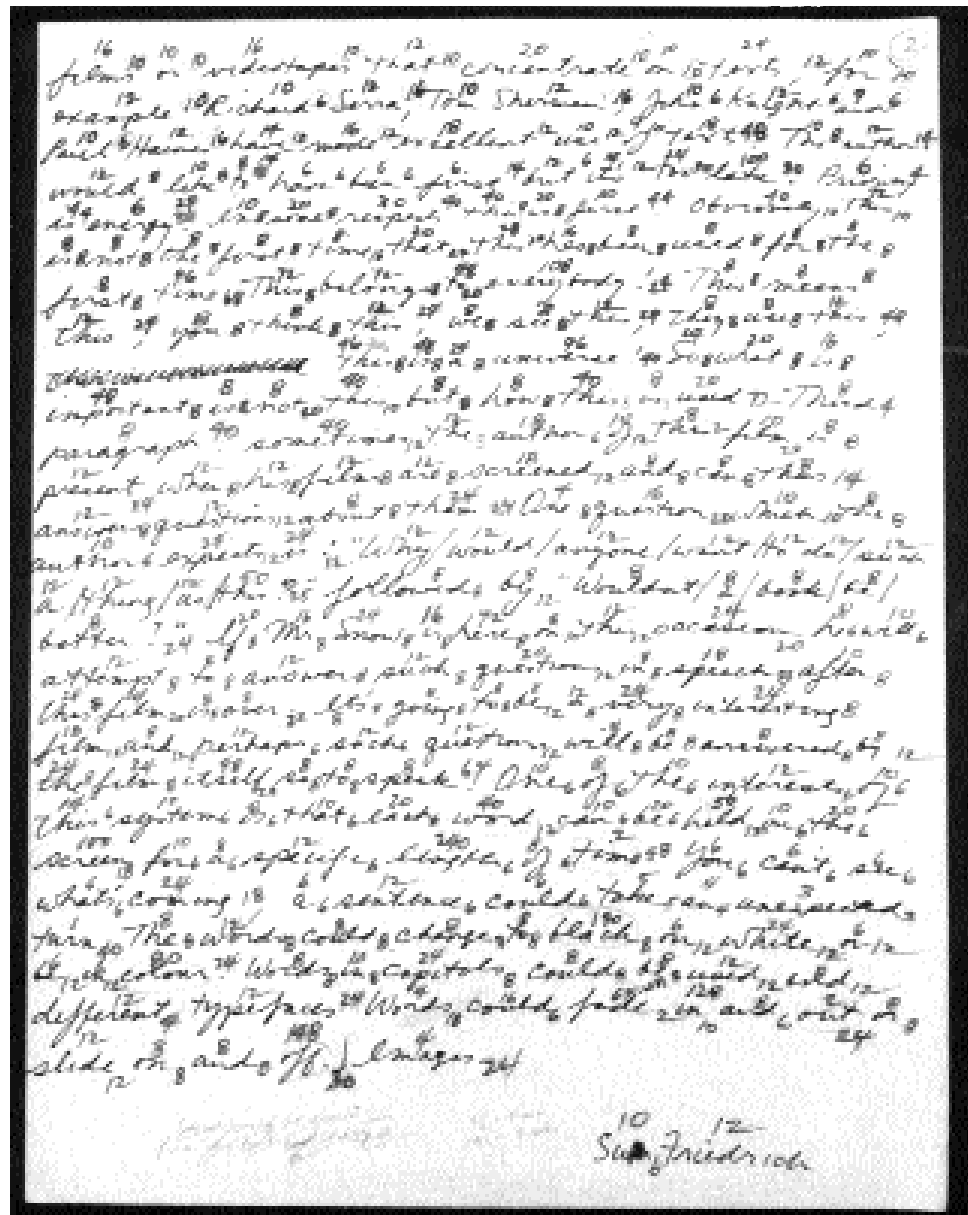
CHARLES BERNSTEIN AND RICHARD TUTTLE
with strings

asmall(orlarge)machinemadeofwords-wcw
cuspoftwispgrownoldtoplayamuckamuckmusicthedisaster
forIhavehoppedtoaccord&blemishminestorust
cursortobedbug
stillserveswhosandssameassavor
succorpunchonthebackballbingostiletto
survivororethosofneither&arrivedaroundangleofvocaldependence
I'manangletoimpartattheFreshMeadowinterloopthatlets
frivolityfavorantecedentgush&ruminat
forIhaveravigedwildburlap&serenadedthelostlancet
givemeagurglefromwhichtohurdle&Iwilltruckmycaresintoporeshatglare
noticingthebuckledinabilitytowardlabileincontinenceraimentasidehiccup
fondlethebundleyoubungle

MICHAEL SNOW
Script/Score for So Is This



HOLLIS FRAMPTON
from Script/Score for *Poetic Justice*



#132
(MIDDLE SHOT)
BEDROOM. LOVE MAKING.
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW
ARE RINGS OF SATURN,
LOOMING.
(DISSOLVE TO . . .)

#134
(MIDDLE SHOT)
BEDROOM. LOVE MAKING.
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW
ARE TUMBLED STACKS
OF CORDWOOD.
(DISSOLVE TO . . .)

#136
(MIDDLE SHOT)
BEDROOM. LOVE MAKING.
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW
IS A PARTY OF
MOUNTAINEERS.
(DISSOLVE TO . . .)

#138
(MIDDLE SHOT)
BEDROOM. LOVE MAKING.
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW
IS A SKY FULL OF
WHEELING PIGEONS.
(DISSOLVE TO . . .)

#133
(MIDDLE SHOT)
BEDROOM. LOVE MAKING.
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW
ARE LITTLE GIRLS
SKIPPING ROPE.
(DISSOLVE TO . . .)

#135
(MIDDLE SHOT)
BEDROOM. LOVE MAKING.
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW
IS A DISPLAY OF
OPHTHALMOSCOPES.
(DISSOLVE TO . . .)

#137
(MIDDLE SHOT)
BEDROOM. LOVE MAKING.
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW
IS A PARK OF BAY
TREES.
(DISSOLVE TO . . .)

#139
(MIDDLE SHOT)
BEDROOM. LOVE MAKING.
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW
ARE TRUCK WHEELS
SPLASHING IN MUDDY WATER.
(DISSOLVE TO . . .)

#140
(MIDDLE SHOT)
BEDROOM. LOVE MAKING.
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW
ARE THREE RED-HAIRED
WOMEN ROLLING DICE.
(DISSOLVE TO . . .)

#142
(MIDDLE SHOT)
BEDROOM. LOVE MAKING.
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW
IS A DOUBLE CIRCLE OF
MONOLITHS.
(DISSOLVE TO . . .)

#144
(MIDDLE SHOT)
BEDROOM. LOVE MAKING.
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW
IS A PROCESSION BY
TORCHLIGHT.
(DISSOLVE TO . . .)

#146
(MIDDLE SHOT)
BEDROOM. LOVE MAKING.
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW
IS A FIELD OF DAISIES
AND MALLOWS.
(DISSOLVE TO . . .)

#141
(MIDDLE SHOT)
BEDROOM. LOVE MAKING.
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW
IS A BEACHED WHALE,
GASPING.
(DISSOLVE TO . . .)

#143
(MIDDLE SHOT)
BEDROOM. LOVE MAKING.
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW
ARE RED AND WHITE
CORPUSCLES.
(DISSOLVE TO . . .)

#145
(MIDDLE SHOT)
BEDROOM. LOVE MAKING.
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW
ARE SMOKING INGOTS OF
REFINED COBALT.
(DISSOLVE TO . . .)

#147
(MIDDLE SHOT)
BEDROOM. LOVE MAKING.
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW
ARE TWO SURGEONS
AMPUTATING A LIMB.
(DISSOLVE TO . . .)

FRAMPTON on *Poetic Justice*

REALIZING THE SCENARIO WOULD DESTROY its crucial ambiguities. I'm not talking about the mysterious sexual identities of the three personae of the piece but also of those concerned with scale. "Outside the window is an inverted enamel saucepan;"

well, where is that saucepan? In the space outside the window. Is it on the sill? Is it a hundred yards away? The difference between the spatial close-up and the psychological close-up is easy to sustain as a tension in language because the declarative sentence itself separates the figure from the ground. It's not so easy to sustain an ambiguity of that type in film. If you're actually photographing, you can't have "six or seven zebras." In the photograph one can always count the zebras. So, for lots of reasons the project was untenable. If anybody ever cared to do it, it might make an interesting film, but, of course, it wouldn't be a film of mine.

Reprinted with permission from Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 64.

SUSAN BEE

Sprung Monuments

SPRUNG MONUMENTS, WHICH I PAINTED especially for the "Poetry Plastique" show, includes lines and fragments of poems by Charles Bernstein. We have collaborated on five books together: *The Occurrence of Tune* (Segue, 1981), *The Nude Formalism* (Sun & Moon, 1989), *Fool's Gold* (Chax, 1991), *Little Orphan Anagram* (Granary Books, 1997), and *Log Rhythms* (Granary Books, 1998). In addition, I have done several artist's books on my own and have a new collaborative book with the poet Susan Howe, *Bed Hangings*, forthcoming in 2001 from Granary Books. Notably, although painting is my main preoccupation, this is the first time I have incorporated lines from Charles's poetry into one of my paintings.

Over the years, I have painted many works with images alone. Since 1996, I have occasionally incorporated titles and blurbs from B-movie and film noir movie posters and slogans and titles from pulp novels into various paintings. Text alters the framework for the images and repositions the viewers in relation to the paintings. In *Sprung Monuments*, I have reset excerpts of several of the poems I had previously set in *Little Orphan Anagram* and *Log Rhythms*.

The settings in the painting are different from those in the books. Here I have used the absurdist humor and mock or perhaps all-too-real profundity of the line, "Poetry fakes nothing happening," to show a man rained down on by relentless trickles of enamel paint as the cloud encompassing this thought nears him. Meanwhile, the poem "My son is going dumb I would pluck out my neighbor's tongue if it would do any good" forms an oval shield of words over the man's belly,

suggesting that these are the thoughts of a worried father. “His wife she stood with a loaded gun,” the bungled quotation from Emily Dickinson (“My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—”), is framed by an errant 1940s woman watching her lover escape from an open window, as well as a postcard of a loving 1950s father hanging a horse-shoe over his family’s door frame. The visual framing positions the text in the space between family and seduction, sexual longing, and family values.

The images in the painting touch on the humorous, mystical, whimsical, science fictional, surreal, and philosophic underpinnings of the poems. But each panel of the painting puts forward its own interpretation. Sometimes the images focus on just one word of the poem and sometimes they stand in a stark contrast to the poem. I am not interested in a strict illustrational approach to the words but rather an oblique associative relation between image and poem.

The image is an echo and an accompaniment of the poem. Much like writing music to a libretto—the words and the music stand in inverse relationship to each other. In setting these poems, however, I am also interested in legibility. The poems float in clouds, bubbles, and rocks, sometimes they are encased in linear boxes. They become part of the artificial landscape created by the gridded space of the painting.

Each of these poems is set in its own space. I also think of these small scenes as a storyboard or cartoon frames or as fragments of the whole. As the poem puts it: “The parts are greater than the sum of the whole.” This applies to the use of details in the painting. The painting can be viewed in close-ups as a highly detailed reading of the individual lines of the poems or a whole, where the fragments of a puzzle fall into place to lend the appearance of a false unity. This unity is created by the painted and collaged surface of the grid and is held together by the boundaries of the stretched canvas.

This is also my sense of the relationship between the artist and the poet who collaborate together. The poems and images form a larger symbiosis that enhances the interpretation of the synthetic whole. Thus, the idea of “poetry plastique” is an interpretative visualization of the underlying abstract imagery and mood and emotions of the poems. Particularly when dealing with ironic, dense, and open-ended poems like Charles’s, I feel free to provide my own interpretive response.

Different poets suggest different approaches to collaboration. For example, in setting the poems of Susan Howe in *Bed Hangings*, I felt more directed by the poem’s historical subject matter: Puritans, religion, colonial America, fabric design, and textiles. All of these were of major importance to the interpretation and imagery of the pictures and so my images centered upon them.

In collaborations between poets and visual artists, I feel that the artist should match the wavelength of her or his artistic intuition and vision to the intensity and demands of the poet’s words. It is a challenge and pleasure to be able to form visual

responses to overpowering verbal stimulants. Some of my inspirations have been the medieval illuminated pages, the books of William Blake and William Morris, as well as the work of Max Ernst, John Heartfield, and Hannah Höch. But, most of all, the amazing ability of writers to conjure up whole worlds of images with their words continues to fascinate and inspire me to follow suit with a visual response.

KENNETH GOLDSMITH

Fidget

ON JUNE 16, 1997, I ATTEMPTED TO RECORD every move my body made from the moment I woke up until the time I went to sleep. I locked myself in my apartment, woke up, and began speaking into a tape recorder, observing my movements; it took me an hour to get out of bed. The morning went smoothly as I rigorously stuck to my task. However, by about 1 p.m., I began to get bored. By 2 p.m., I couldn’t take it anymore. I left my house and went for a walk, all the while speaking into the tape recorder. By the time I returned home, it was nearing 5 p.m. I got home, collapsed into a chair, and fell asleep for an hour. When I woke up an hour later, I panicked at the thought that I might potentially have another, say, seven or eight hours remaining in the day. So I went out, bought a fifth of Jack Daniels, walked over to the West Side, where I found an abandoned loading dock. I sat on the loading dock drinking until it got dark, all the while continuing my exercise. At some point I staggered home and I never did know what time I fell asleep.

The result was *Fidget*, a project which took many forms: a book, a performance, a musical composition, a gallery installation, a website, and a group of drawings. All manifestations of the piece have been written about in depth (and can be found on my author’s page at the EPC: epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith), with the exception of the drawings which have been included in “Poetry Plastique” (they were shown once before in New York in the fall of 1998).

The *Fidget* drawings were derived from the *Fidget* applet commissioned by Stadium@Dia (www.stadiumweb.com) and programmed in Java by Clem Paulsen. We based our applet on Plumb Design’s Thinkmap Thesaurus; in my tradition of imbuing older forms with new content, we reinvested a generic reference applet with every move my body made. The applet, which never stands still, is a mirror of the human nervous system which, too, refuses to stand still (an old Swami once told me that “the difference between a live person and a dead person is that the dead person doesn’t fidget”). Visually, we programmed the applet to follow the course of the day:

at 10:00 a.m., the field is white and the text is clear; by 10:00 p.m., ground is dark and the text is skewed.

I made the *Fidget* drawings in the summer and fall of 1998. I had just lost a very large commission and was angry about it. I decided to take all the energy that I was going to use for the commission and put it into these drawings; I made them as obsessive as possible. I took screen shots of several hours of the applet and recreated them in paper. I hand-cut every letter (there are thousands of them) and glued each one down to the paper. The result is a series of monochromatic works: white on white, beige on beige, gray on gray, and black on black. The only way they're able to be read is if the light rakes them from above.

The *Fidget* drawings signaled yet another step out of the art world for me; there's much more hand labor than there is thought in these works—a factor which led to my ultimate dissatisfaction with creating art (over the course of time, I had come to resent the quick time it took to think of an idea compared to the months it took to realize it). Instead, I've become devoted to the instantaneous and direct connection between the mind and the hand which happens while writing.

CHRISTIAN BÖK

Virtually Nontoxic

Vinyl is as natural as lichen.
—Christopher Dewdney

PLASTIC IS THE SILLY PUTTY, WITH WHICH WE SIMULATE, then supplant, every facet of reality, converting all the varied elements of the planet into one common emulsion. While we sleep, our automatons toil throughout the night, transmuting everything into a petroleum byproduct that resists bacterial predation. Our species might openly mourn this phase of our demise, but in secret, we really exalt the power of its genius, marveling to think that, in some landfill of the future, long after our own extinction, a single crash-helmet might still endure, sloughed off, like the carapace of some alien crab. Our gewgaws of epoxy resin and nylon fibre do not attest, however, to any advance in our rational prowess, so much as they allude to the breadth of our cultural tyranny. The invention of plastic has given birth to a celluloid spectacle, whose reveries displace the esemplastic imagination of the romantics, filling our hollow skulls with an injection-moulded mentality, as pliable and as durable as any blob of polypropylene. Has not language itself begun to absorb the synthetic qualities of such a modern milieu, becoming a fabricated, but disposable, convenience, no less

pollutant than a styrofoam container? Has not the act of writing simply become another chemically engineered experience, in which we manufacture a complex polymer by stringing together syllables instead of molecules? The words of our lexicon have become so standardized that they now resemble a limited array of connectable parts (much like a few Lego-bricks, being conjoined); and the rules of our grammar have become so rationalized that they now resemble a bounded range of recombinant modes (much like a new Rubik's-cube, being convolved). The protean quality of our discourse finds itself vulcanized in our playthings. We see language marketed as an infantile commodity—a toy suitable for kids of all ages, because its plastic coating makes it safe to own and easy to use; nevertheless, we must imagine a more corrosive poetics (something vitriolic enough to dissolve such an acrylic veneer), and if we cannot distill this kind of acid, then let us concoct a more explosive poetics (something catalytic enough to detonate such an acetate finish). We need a lingual variety of gelignite or plastique—the kind of incendiary literature, written only by misfits, who have grown up, still dizzy from the fumes, after having melted a platoon of plastic army-men with a match.

Contents: 65% Dimethyl Siloxane (hydroxy-terminated polymers with boric acid), 17% Silica (quartz crystalline), 9% Thixotrol ST, 4% Polydimethylsiloxane, 1% Decamethyl cyclopentasiloxane, 1% Glycerine, 1% Titanium Dioxide, 2% Silliness.

MIRA SCHOR

Painting in the ~~Stroke~~ Strike Zone

I CHOSE HANDWRITING AS IMAGE WHEN I HAD ARRIVED at the portal of that end zone of painting, monochromatic abstraction. I no longer wanted to represent, in the sense of picturing the body, except through the bodily qualities of oil paint itself. In a sense, I was searching for the equivalent of Cézanne's apples, something simple that would allow me to paint paint.

So I paint language. That sounds simple. It feels simple to do it, but it may not be so simple in its absorption into visual art culture. Language in painting is not simple because so many discourses must be engaged with at once. I place my work at the convergence of two vectors—that of painterly and formalist values and that of language as graphic image and as representative of a network of text-based discourses. This point of convergence of discourses and languages is not an easy place. People who expect painting to provide pleasure only through sensory means in a recogniza-

ble space of formalist concerns balk at the demands placed on them by the imaging of language. People who are interested in language-based art such as the work emerging from conceptual art are upset to encounter language within the contingent gooeyness of paint, which they had turned to language in order to avoid. Language in painting is most acceptable either when lost in a sea of painterliness so that it is, for all intents and purposes, illegible, or, paradoxically, if presented in a field totally devoid of painterly markers, and if it is ironic so that the meaning of the words does not correspond to what you read and see.

In a sense, painting is as conceptual a sign system as writing, certainly in relation to readymade installation art for example, since intrinsically abstract paint marks make up even the most representational image. But, further, I am interested in a “conceptual painting” in which linguistic structures of all kinds are imbricated into the language of painting, including all of its history.

The words I choose to paint provide me with the precise formalist directives and painterly approaches to create the image. In some works, each letter commands an individual canvas arrayed in a Scrabble-game-like installation. The word’s meaning, the individual letters’ appearance, the sound elements secreted in the word will suggest incision or impasto, glaze or dry brush, smooth fresco-like gesso or the rough surface of rabbit-skin-glued linen. The word will demand to be presented in my highly illegible and abstract writing—usually words I associate with the private realm of the body and the inner mind—or in cursive script if it recalls the public sphere.

I break up the words into sounds, so “black” goes from “b,” “l,” “a,” “c,” “k,” to “b,” “bla,” “lack,” and “ack.” The word “sublimate” is sublimated into its component letters and words, “sub(late),” “limn,” and “sub(lime),” “ate” and “mate.” This adds a dose of nonsense and play by bringing in the aural dimension, and increases the experience of synaesthesia the work already can call up: the word is imbedded in the physical, textural matter of colored pigment while demanding not just at least two types of reading but also the sense of hearing.

Recent works are more discursive and language is not so much represented as performed. I “write” the painting. The title of the painting is the text that is pictured: “*Miss Elizabeth Bennett married Mr. Darcy/Jane Austen never married,*” or “*Please be aware that not all disabilities are visible.*” If language is an uneasy subject for painting, these more discursive works insist on the unity of purpose between two terms of another often fraught duality: the painter who is also a writer. “*Love Me, Love My ~~Stroke~~ Strike,*” “*In Times Square, painting takes place in the ~~stroke~~ strike zone,*” or “*I’d like to put forward the notion of modest painting,*” are part of a total project in which paintings and drawings represent and enact the conceptual, formalist, and cultural concerns that I am simultaneously investigating in more traditional expository texts on contemporary painting. The fact that the very image depicted in the

visual art work is handwriting as a legible and also an abstract mark further intensifies the generative possibilities of such a juncture of what are generally seen as polarized positions of brain function: the spatial/formal and the language-based.

This work, in which language is not so much separated into abstract forms as represented in action, is also something of a return to some characteristics of work from the first time I used language as image, in the mid-1970s. Then I was interested in the image of writing as a visual embodiment of women being filled with language. I covered figure-shaped translucent rice-paper wall sculptures with personal diaristic texts in the graphic flow of my handwriting as a field of abstract marks. The writing as image was as much metaphoric of language-based thought as it was text to be read.

Even in the more discursive works, I would never call the writing poetry because poetry has formal rules that I do not know and am not engaged with the way that I am engaged with representation and the meaning of painting marks and materials. But I may occasionally flirt with the “poetic” and I know that is a dangerous game: to poetry, the poetic may be a weak sister, just as there is a big difference between being an artist and being “artistic.” Yet at another level, “poetic” may describe the pleurably explosive interactions between the provocations of visual language and those of verbal language.

All the paintings represent a complex *trace*, of thought, language, the hand of the painter/writer, the trace of pigment as a language in its own right.

STEVE MCCAFFERY

Carnival Panel 2 (1970-1975)

CARNIVAL IS CLOSER TO CARTOGRAPHY, to a diagram or topological surface than a poem or “text”—it has also been referred to as typewriter art and a typestract panel. The shape of the panel resulted from a technique of masking (i.e., a sheet of blank paper cut into a particular shape is placed over a normal rectangular sheet and typing is continuous over both surfaces, thus producing a patterned blank space on the lower sheet). *Carnival* eschews any general left-right orientation that stabilizes linear terrains, but the resulting textual space is less labyrinthine, or rhizomatic than striated—layered with fault lines, fissures, blocks, apertures, dead-ends, blocked linearities, boundaries, textual hollows, semantic geodes, overprints, concretions, excretions. All of this serves to provide simultaneously a map *and* the territory mapped, a geology, and a field in which continuous linear syntax is replaced with detours and continuations, propelling the reader-traveler into morphings and movements.

At the time of its composition, I conceived *Carnival* as a calculated intervention into the material stakes of poetics. The hegemonic weight (in what Don Allen dubbed the “New American Poetry”) of Charles Olson’s triple theories of proprioception, projective verse, and human universe were extremely powerful during my formative years as a writer in North America, and *Carnival*, in part, registers a personal attempt to repudiate one of Olson’s theories and to extend another. Respectively: 1) the repudiation of a breath-based poetics; 2) the extension of the typewriter beyond Olson’s own estimation of its abilities (to provide a precise notation of breathing) into a more “expressionistic” as well as cartographic instrument, approaching the typewriter less as a notional device than a form of saxophone.

As regards its constructive materials, I tried consciously to expand the repertoire of different methods of “imprint.” As well as a typewriter, I used manual marking, xerographic modification of early wet-feed electrostatic reproductions, rubber stamps and typed text on tissue paper subsequently crumpled and xeroxed, deliberate photographic disintegration by lessening contrast and repetitive copyings of copies, manual reconstruction of some of these disintegrations, random ink effects created by carbon paper passed back and forth over a blank sheet of paper and dragged through a loose typewriter carriage, etc. Although published as a two-colour work, in the original I used four different colours of ribbon. (I thought of this hybrid way of composing, this composition by heterogeneous means, as analogous to John Cage’s prepared pianos.) Much collage material is incorporated alongside both spontaneous and calculated writing, and compositionally designed so that “revision” and “correction” were impossible. To “revise” would be equivalent to either abandoning or adding to the work.

Is it a book or is it typewriter art? Can it be both? Jerome McGann distinguishes between “nonnarrative” and “antinarrative.” *Carnival* deliberately problematizes the simple distinction between seeing and reading and offers itself for both distant viewing and close reading—a double dimension and important double possibility. Moreover, it requires a performative gesture on the reader’s part. In its initial state, *Carnival* is a “book,” i.e., a bound sequence of regular pages. Each page is perforated at the top, and the panel-object can only be realized by the willful destruction of the book-object. As an “unripped book,” *Carnival* remains merely a virtual panel, whereas a mounted panel is a “book destroyed.”

Panel 2 of *Carnival* predictably follows an earlier, strictly typographic, panel, both of which were designed as part of a larger environmental assemblage to cover floors, walls, and ceilings, creating an axonometric syntax to convert text and map into architectural dwelling. Both a third panel and the project in general were abandoned.

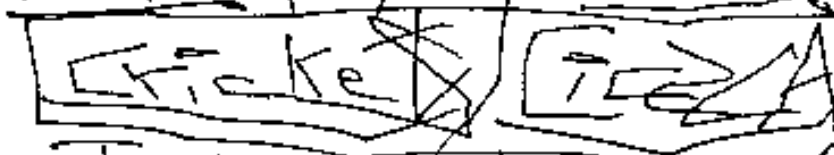
Long out of print and off walls, Panel 2 is available today in an electronic version housed at www.chbooks.com.

ROBERT GRENIER

Down from the shower'd halo, ①
Up from the mystic play of shadows
twining and twisting as if they
were alive,
Out from the patches of briars and
blackberries

— as if a Moore graphic means
might be available / might be
true (i.e. move that / of that /
than that even?) — out of
spelling / drawing letters back
into words (long live spelling!)
— as if that conjuring act
grasping toward phenomena
with the apparatus of the hands
making marks + entirely pre-
occupied w/ moving fingers
— as if that participated in
the world at large in some
direct way that was both

significant to it / called ②
 forth by it & purely in-
 vented / drawn (out of
 letters) ~~Almost~~ by it-
 out of itself / toward itself
~~as words~~ (looking just
 like itself - appearing
 exactly to see itself) I
 write - WHAT NONSENSE!!
 I write letters into
 words with that in mind -
 What? (Great Susan!)
 Letters draw themselves
 out of corresponding letter
 shapes (M/N, Z/S, S/R,
 >/<) AS IF ALL WERE MADE
FROM THE SAME LETTER ~~There~~
 Dramatically - while yet testifying
 to / seeing upon EARTH ~~nothing~~

The graphic qualities ③
 for me, have no interest in
 themselves (I have no inter-
 est in them) except in-
 sofar as letters ~~are~~ as
Beautiful letters have
values as letters - not
Violate they make words!

 I wish more strange young
 poets wd dedicate life
 to making drives and
black juries out of words
 letters etc. (testifying to some)
 For the fun of it
Savior Slack
 The song out of the SINGING

CARL ANDRE

preface to my work itself

in, is, my, of, art, the, into,
made, same, this, work, parts,
piled, piles, broken, pieces,
stacks, plastic, stacked,
identical, interchangeable

(Poem essay written in 1967 as general preface to sculptures and poems)

Reprinted with permission from *Carl Andre 1969* (The Hague: Gemeentemuseum, 1969), p. 4.

MEI-MEI BERSSENBRUGGE

TWO YEARS AGO, KIKI SMITH AND I coincidentally bought statues of Kuan Yin on the same day. Kuan Yin is the Chinese ‘goddess’ of compassion, “the hearer of all the cries of the world.” One is eighteenth-century blanc-de-chine, exquisite and dynamic. The other is Ming dynasty, much larger in bronze, with great depth and strength. We’ve since collected others, of differing values. I remember white ones on a shelf across her bedroom window. The wind blew, and all the porcelain Kuan Yins falling to the floor. Between us, there are ideas of hearing as compassion, of being heard as receiving compassion, of being heard as being, of hearing as environment, of compassion as space, of the borders between compassion and grief, between the Christian madonna and the Tibetan masculine or bisexual Avalokatesvara, of what an embodiment contains.

From “Hearing”

A bird falls out of the air, through the anti-weave, into the anti-net,
delineating anti-immanence.

Twenty-four crows upstate, each fall is a gestural syllable.

Cover them with a blue cloth of creatures ready to be born, contact like
starlight that will arrive, for sure.

Let mothers catch them, raccoon, labrador bitch, girl, interspecies
conservative mothers, arms out like foliage, general, no locomotion of their own.

ROBERT SMITHSON

Language to Be Looked at
and/or Things to Be Read

LANGUAGE OPERATES BETWEEN LITERAL and metaphorical signification. The power of a word lies in the very inadequacy of the context it is placed, in the unresolved or partially resolved tension of disparates. A word fixed or a statement isolated without any decorative or “cubist” visual format, becomes a perception of similarity in dissimilars—in short a paradox. Congruity could be disrupted by a metaphorical complexity within a literal system. Literal usage becomes incantory when all metaphors are suppressed. Here language is built, not written. Yet, discursive literalness is apt to be a container for a radical metaphor. Literal statements often conceal violent analogies. The mind resists the false identity of such circumambient suggestions, only to accept an equally false logical surface. Banal words function as a feeble phenomena that fall into their own mental bogs of meaning. An emotion is suggested and demolished in one glance by certain words. Other words constantly shift or invert themselves without ending, these could be called “suspended words.” Simple statements are often based on language fears, and sometimes result in dogma or non-sense. Words for mental processes are all derived from physical *things*. References are often reversed so that the “object” takes the place of the “word.” A is A is never A is A, but rather X is A. The misunderstood notion of a metaphor has it that A is X—that is wrong. The scale of a letter in a word changes one’s visual meaning of the word. Language thus becomes monumental because of the mutations of advertising. A word outside of the mind is a set of “dead letters.” The mania for literalness relates to the breakdown in the rational belief in reality. Books entomb words in a synthetic rigor mortis, perhaps that is why “print” is thought to have entered obsolescence. The mind of this death, however, is unrelentingly awake.

—Eton Corrasable

[My sense of language is that it is matter and not ideas—i.e., “printed matter.”
R.S. *June 2, 1972*]

Reprinted with permission from *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 61.

MADELINE GINS AND ARAKAWA

THE MATTER OF ART THAT HAS HAD ITS GAG REMOVED, the subject of this exhibition, can be restated as the question, *And what of poetic jumps upon and within—in the vicinity of—works of art?* This question lives within and by means of two other questions central to praxis, *What needs to be done?* and *What can come to happen?* Makers set themselves tasks, problems, something on the order of hoops through which to jump, that require of them poetic jumps—jumps to who knows where. After a fair amount of preparation on the part of a maker, or after surprisingly little preparation, if the whole lifetime is not counted, and in response to a persistent puzzle or concern, out jumps (strolls? jumps to stroll? jumps repeatedly giving rise to a strolling?) a not-half-bad or not-too-disgusting or disgusting-enough tactic or explosive ploy or apt maneuver, the (partly conscious) path that will pull it off, the one false as true gambit that will do it for the moment, the live wire, object, word, phrase, image, plan for a building or town. Leaps of non-faith as much as faith, poetic jumps tear through radicality to re-radicalize it. Extent or value (trans-valuing value) of an artist’s tactical move or of a poetic jump depends on how large a task has been carved out, on availability (bioavailability, psycho-bioavailability) of that which can jump, that is, on “spring-loadedness,” on how much (of everything) has been taken into consideration, and on how determined plus disciplined but unrestrained as well as how desperate plus unrelenting but composed the jumper (jumping medium). Poetic jumps, no matter how seemingly small and private, always involve in some measure a tactical maneuvering of self in relation to socius.

We do have more to say on this subject, but the best way for us to frame it is through how we have addressed it in the past, through what we once needed to say about all this. We declare our prefaces to the second and third editions of *The Mechanism of Meaning* to be (universal) ready-mades for this purpose, knowing that in taking our own texts up as ready-mades, we force the hand of history. We next declare *The Mechanism of Meaning* in its entirety, together with the architectural constructions that came after it, a ready-made system for dismantling art and for recon-

figuring it. Art exists for working out procedures that will help our species take charge of—radicalize—its own evolution. Perhaps you have heard the term “Reversible Destiny.” Out it jumped at us, as a direction and as a task, from this assertion, WE HAVE DECIDED NOT TO DIE.

THE MECHANISM OF MEANING (1963-1973)*

1. PRESENTATION OF BASES FOR SELECTION
(IRONY, AMBIGUITY, PARADOX, CONCRETE ABSTRACTION, HUMOUR, HYPNOTIC ILLUSTRATIONS, etc.)
2. LIST OF OPERATING RULES (INCLUDING ANALYSIS OF SYMBOLS EMPLOYED)
3. NEUTRALIZATION OF SUBJECTIVITY
4. LOCALIZATION AND TRANSFERENCE
5. PRESENTATION OF AMBIGUOUS ZONES
6. THE ENERGY OF MEANING (MECHANICAL, PHYSICAL, AND PSYCHOPHYSICAL ASPECTS)
7. DEGREES OF MEANING
8. EXPANSION AND REDUCTION—MEANING OF SCALE
9. SPLITTING OF MEANING
10. RE-ASSEMBLING
11. REVERSIBILITY
12. TEXTURE OF MEANING
13. MAPPING OF MEANING
14. FEELING OF MEANING
15. LOGIC OF MEANING
16. CONSTRUCTION OF THE MEMORY OF MEANING
17. MEANING OF INTELLIGENCE
18. MEANING OF THE MECHANISM OF MEANING
19. REVIEW AND SELF-CRITICISM

THE MECHANISM OF MEANING (1973-PRESENT)*

1. NEUTRALIZATION OF SUBJECTIVITY
2. LOCALIZATION AND TRANSFERENCE
3. PRESENTATION OF AMBIGUOUS ZONES
4. THE ENERGY OF MEANING (BIOCHEMICAL, PHYSICAL, AND PSYCHOPHYSICAL ASPECTS)
5. DEGREES OF MEANING
6. EXPANSION OF REDUCTION—MEANING OF SCALE
7. SPLITTING OF MEANING

8. REASSEMBLING
9. REVERSIBILITY
10. TEXTURE OF MEANING
11. MAPPING OF MEANING
12. FEELING OF MEANING
13. LOGIC OF MEANING
14. CONSTRUCTION OF THE MEMORY OF MEANING
15. MEANING OF INTELLIGENCE
16. REVIEW AND SELF-CRITICISM

*The list of the subdivisions—numbered initially (1963) nineteen and subsequently (1973) sixteen—around which *The Mechanism of Meaning* is organized to appear as the series' lead panel (96 x 68 inches).

PREFACE (1978)

If we had not been so desperate at that time, we might not have chosen such an ambitious title for this work. Yet what else would we have called it? After all, the phenomena we were studying were not simply images, percepts, or thoughts alone. Our subject is more nearly all given conditions brought together in one place.

Death is old-fashioned. We had come to think this way, strangely enough. Essentially, the human condition remains prehistoric as long as such a change from the Given, a distinction as fundamental as this, has not yet been firmly established.

If thought were meant to accomplish anything, surely it was meant to do this. Yet why had history been so slow? Was there something wrong with the way the problem was being pictured? What if thinking had been vitiated by having become lost in thought, for example? What is emitted point-blank at a moment of thought, anyway? Let's take a second look at these comic figures, we decided. There did not yet exist even the most rudimentary compendium of what takes place or of the elements involved when anything is "thought through." Why not picture some of these moments ourselves, we thought, just a few?

As we proceeded, our forming intention took shape rather unevenly. Only some of the ambiguous events we examined made ordinary sense. There was also a natural tendency on our part as artist and poet to favor the nonsense. Although we certainly did not want to propose any theory, we did begin to notice some correspondence between each event and the rather awkward term "meaning."

The vagueness of the term was suitable. Meaning might be thought of as the desire to think something—anything—through; the will to make sense out of the ever-present fog of not-quite-knowing; the recognition of nonsense. As such it may be associated with any human faculty. Since each occurrence of meaning takes place primarily along one or another of these paths, we roughly derived our list of subdivisions

from them. The list as a whole is not intended to be any less inconsistent, clumsy, or redundant than the original on which it was based, that is, the composite mechanism of meaning in daily living viewed point-blank from moment to moment.

We hope future generations find our humour useful for the models of thought and other escape routes that they shall construct!

PREFACE (1988)

To this edition, we have added drawings and notes for an escape route that we had once thought of as belonging only to the distant future. ("Escape route" names what then was thought of as "a model of thought" and what since has evolved into something we now speak of as a Blank Prototype.) When, more than a quarter of a century ago, we assembled this series, it occurred to us that one day we would have to form in conjunction with it a complementary work to act as its ideal reader. Probably, it was partly our awareness of this need for an apotheosis of critical art or for a constructed reader-perceiver—carrying with it, as it did, a sense of an ultimately, to however slight a degree, animate something—that led to our thinking along the lines of a modern-day Frankenstein, doctor and monster all in one. Previously, we spoke of "escape routes that future generations would construct"; now as we find ourselves ready to erect, to piece together, one of these, it might be said that, for the moment, we have decided to become our own posterity.

Our approach to this project has gradually changed over the years, and so too, inevitably, has our terminology. As we have already suggested, we no longer consider "a model of thought" to be the correct way to refer to what it is we want to do; this was helpful, for a while, as a means of pointing out what we were generally after, but as a title or stated objective, it turned out to be too static and too limiting. Rather, it is the entire situation, everything a person has at his/her disposal, that we want to build, and so we must think in terms of nothing less than a model or field of sensibility. We use a number of new terms to engage the determinant event of a "thinking environment." Although the terms "blank," "cleaving," "fiction of place" appear only in the revised Review and Self-Criticism section, to the extent that they have grown out of our work on the earlier subdivisions, and represent a further inquiry along similar, if not identical, lines, they should prove to be of use throughout the work. We have also come to realize that it was a mistake ever to have included, even if only in passing, the notion of "the Given" in a book as dedicated as this one is to "No more passive reading." If to perceive is to take things to be so, how much more useful for the perceiver to think directly in terms of "the Taken" (or possibly, in the first and last analysis, of "the Taking"—i.e., the doing, the arranging, the finding to be there, the bringing about), with the tempting notion of "the Mistaken" handily in tow, rather than of "the Given," which fairly screams for a passivity that perceiving must lack.

It was for the sake of a radical reordering that we initially decided to study those abilities underlying any pragmatism whatsoever. If a reordering is what the process of art is, the question becomes one of how to make this radical enough, and there have, we hope, been built into this work enough self-subverting elements to prevent it from ever becoming de-radicalized. Next in order would be a new pragmatism, a radical reordering through-and-through, one through which answers might be worked out to questions as basic as these: How not to become your own sidekick before you are ready to; and how never to become this. Can we ever cease becoming the dummies of our own destiny?—What are all the factors, faculties, at hand, immediately?—and to what purpose—or, if purposeless, how exquisitely so?—and for what . . . not??—and for how long . . . (what is the outside limit?) . . . might this be extended?

How does it all fit together is the essential art query of our time. Mostly, art, and science, too, happens in fragments. To date, more fragments and more combinatorial possibilities exist than have ever before. Of course not every fragment will in the end fit as a piece of the puzzle . . .

In the first part of this work, we take fragments, and we try, by making linkages to perceiving tactics immediate, slowly to draw these tactics, these ways of constructing a demonstrably conceivable whole that *are* the perceiver-reader, into a unified field that we refer to as “the perceiving field.” We propose, in the second section, to re-create and to rejoin fragments, and would-be fragments, so as possibly to make a new whole, a completely other perceiver. We want to form a container that will serve as Proving Ground—a proving ground for all that which constitutes a person as s/he perceives. All elements that are in play might, as they fall into place upon this Proving Ground—a Blank (wide-open) Prototype—land in such a way as to be ostensibly self-defining. For this to happen, a new order of pact with “the Taken,” one requiring unusually desperate measures, would have to be entered into, physically, by the perceiver-viewer. The drawings toward the end of this book only begin to suggest extent and type of distorting physical exertions that will be demanded of participants-perceivers. The issue of phenomena must be forced. We cannot yet predict how complex the structure of that container, or those containers, which could accomplish this will have to be. In any event, the perceiver must become her/himself as if soft wax, pushing easily past any grid of rationality, moving and extending every which way so as to mold out of her/his perceiving that container, or generator, which will yield the Other.

We remain convinced that “subjectivity” is largely made up of false constructs that must be neutralized, if ever anything is to begin “to live unconditionally.” Unconditionally to live, that is what a post-utopia might offer in contrast, yes, even to a utopia, with its more conservative range of promises, from universal plumbing, more equality, down to, quite likely, more uniformity in belief. No, the post-utopia

has nothing to offer except a chance finally to know what you are doing. (Every post-utopia would call forth, for the sake of a working out of the details, its own utopia.) This would be a garden of Eden of epistemology, and more. Some predecessors in this have been Leibniz, in his “An Odd Thought Concerning a New Sort of Exhibition”; Alexander Pope, in his garden at Twickenham; the builders of Aztec, Mayan, and Egyptian pyramids; Marcel Duchamp in his last work, *Étant donnés*; and Adelbert Ames in his experimental rooms. We ask that sooner, later, after, and always, justice be done to the poetic jump!

EMILY MCVARISH

BETWEEN “PLASTIC” AND “PLASTIQUE,” a pull has occurred. Like taffy, the word has been stretched, its ending prolonged, its vowels opened and readied to take on a continental emphasis, an image of malleability, a whole new, doubly fashionable connotation. “Plastique” proves its own point: it is in the manipulation of sights and sounds and the possibility of links thus formed that we must seek the makings of meaning, the crafting of poetry. From this point, my work departs; with its assertion, irrepressible and nomadic, my pages are scored.

Workable Language

It was my luck to study literature at a time when such theoretical models as psychoanalysis and structuralism were considered essential to a decent critical background. And, from myths as bricolage to dream-thoughts as picture-puzzles, it was the conceptions of these models’ founders that led me to a perception of plasticity at the heart of the symbolic. Thus, with Lacan as my flashlight, I descended into the stock-piled cases of Freudian dream (and “slip”) interpretation in search of a key to the mechanics of metaphor. My search was rewarded by a seemingly inexhaustible treasure of anecdotal evidence, of significant substitutions, syllabic amalgamations, and indicative slides, and by the sheer pleasure of confident principles. I applied my new-found rules to textual analysis, certainly, but more eagerly, I took them home for use in the manufacture of phrases, texts, constructions—my own contributions to the pile. For all the years and books that have accumulated since, the lessons I learned from Freud remain vital and the working “method” I derived from him remains generative.

Lesson I: “It is the very structure of language that the psychoanalytical experience discovers in the unconscious.” (Lacan, *Écrits*)

Note: Linguistic materiality is the condition of possibility of the dream-work—that

is, those operations by which the unconscious achieves cryptic expression through the invention, appropriation, and alignment of terms and identities according to circumstantial, phonic, and (ortho)graphic connection to the unsayable. This same materialism, with its radical implication of signification as being never inherent but always cast by occurrence, forms the basis of poetics in general, as Lacan (with due credit for demonstration granted to the Surrealists) points out.

With this notion of language as an existing set of possible concrete—aural, visual, and contextual—relays by which to arrive not just at formal expression but also at meaning itself, I devised a system of composition that I still use. It involves scanning published texts (ideally from a “distance” or state of distraction that precludes the grasping of specific surroundings), cutting out magnetic words or phrases, and arranging them according to possible use (usually along the lines of parts of speech). The same sequence—scanning, choosing, arranging—is repeated in the “writing” of my work with pasteboards of this pre-selected material. Intention is almost always a secondary revelation in this process, emerging as it does from direct engagement with the stuff before me.

Lesson II: “words as objects” (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*); “Didots or Garamonds” (Lacan, *Écrits*). . .

Type—usually a given, somewhat random, and finite collection of sizes and faces—provides the second material stage through which my writing goes. The physical manipulation of lead and wood blocks, the laws of increment and tension that govern letterpress as a medium, have shaped both the ultimate look of individual texts and my understanding of typography in general: design has no abstract phase in my work. With letterforms treated as players with attributes, as marked and weighted units introduced into the force field of a page, visual relationships established by variation, juxtaposition, substitution, reiteration, and obscuration are literally constructed to carry out the optional paths and conflicts inherent in a text.

Lesson III: “A continuous stream” (Lacan, *Écrits*). . .

Once meaning has been (shown to be) bound to material substance and form, closure—Freud’s goal of a solution to the rebus a dream presents—proves elusive. Insistence on the viscosity of words and their relationships renders unending the play of referential movement between present (manifest) carriers and absent (latent) content. This embedding, this binding and play, is furthered by the effects of ink on paper, ink on ink, and physical impression that letterpress printing brings to the making, and by the eventual integration of a printed piece into a movable object. Whether the movability of the object is in its parts (such as those of a book or some other articulated construct) or simply in its portability, context and the contingencies of material existence over time multiply the opportunities for Lacan’s creative spark of signification.

In this revelation of the material basis of “pregnant and beautiful” meaning (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*), in the possibility of infinite engagement it substitutes for transcendence, resides my motivation.

DARREN WERSHLER-HENRY

Yesterday’s Tomorrows (for Bucky Fuller)

Dare to be naïve.

—R. Buckminster Fuller, *Synergetics*

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE FIRST YEAR of the new millennium, the collected works of R. Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983) resemble nothing so much as a description of the future that we all wanted, but nevertheless didn’t get to have. Fuller was a polymath whose 28 books and 25 U.S. patents combined architecture, engineering, mathematics, poetry and cosmology into a ‘Comprehensive Anticipatory Design Science’ which attempted to anticipate and solve humanity’s major problems through technology by providing ‘more and more life support for everybody, with less and less resources.’ Fuller ardently believed that poverty could be eliminated by the year 2000, but that possibility has vanished along with the promise of his flying Dymaxion cars, underwater cities, and geodesic dome-homes. Even the ‘buckyball,’ the highly touted artificial carbon molecule named in tribute to Fuller, which won its discoverer, Harry Kroto, a Nobel Prize in 1995, has failed to live up to its initial promise.

Yesterday’s Tomorrows (for Bucky Fuller), a series of three-dimensional polyhedral origami concrete poems in various states of (dis)assembly, is an ephemeral cenotaph to Fuller’s utopian vision. The form is entirely apposite; concrete poetry, like Fuller’s work, is a product of modernist zeal that has fallen on hard times in the utterly unforgiving and all-consuming milieu of late capitalism. Not content to march in the syntactic ranks of literature but falling short of the criteria of the visual arts world, concrete poetry is doomed to the same twilight zone as the functioning but failed works of Fuller, Abraham Lincoln Gillespie, Nikola Tesla, Harry Partch and other moonstruck visionaries.

There is, however, an implicit critique in, and a politico-aesthetic agenda for, *Yesterday’s Tomorrows*. As Fredric Jameson has noted, utopias invariably fail, but when they do, their debris marks the current limits of the ever-expanding realm of the knowable. The ruins of yesterday’s tomorrows dot the horizon, begging for someone to venture into the open space that lies beyond them.

JACKSON MAC LOW

Wordpair Poem

(115 two-word “phrase-sentences,” first realized as a painting;
see endnote)

Territoriality flounder.
Anaxagoras bargain.
Nativity ingratiate.
Romulus mass.
Cro-Magnon bandstand.
Lavalier palustral.
Organic whiz-bang.
Cannoneer Trebizond.
Lapdog plywood.
Bravo irrigation.
Medicine acclimate.
Trio saccharine.
Bloodmobile plankton.
Kronstadt Coronado.
Brine messenger.
Coltish mortuary.
Lapidary bonus.
Leapfrog escalate.
Rorschach mountain.
Temerarious plaque.
Ranchero pachyderm.
Vagulous ambuscado.
Morsel borstal.
Crotchet pastrami.
Vineyard ectoplasm.
Magnanimous Agaricus.
Laughable chatelaine.
Panic ratchet.
Emblem agriculture.
Egregious anatomy.
Chanticleer flagstaff.
Catchpole broccoli.
Varicose morphology.

Desperate pence.
Guadelupe penumbra.
Vaccination sacrum.
Trinitarian nitroglycerine.
Percolator garage.
Sapient crepuscule.
Bench embarkation.
Lamasery Breitkopf.
Salute palindrome.
Zinc respite.
Lamster Fiji.
Paregoric machismo.
Zone molestation.
Varnish calligramme.
Programmer solicitate.
Vapor Porsche.
Schwitters maximum.
Lambkill fascicle.
Cheerleader claustrophobe.
Fantasy chopstick.
Deficit misogyny.
Chamber flagellate.
Miosis tambourine.
Host quaternary.
Megalomaniac charcoal.
Vantage savagery.
Sofa musculature.
Champac Nagasaki.
Cream sapodilla.
Chapter clip.
Challenge forest.
Sweetheart metallurgy.
Fortune pajama.
Biscay mendacious.
Surname sanitation.
Fabulate excreta.
Brimstone flax.
Haven occultation.
Tribune bypass.

Secret stretcher.
 Champion armature.
 Clamshell sycophant.
 Pisa marksman.
 Prakriti Mosholu.
 Advance reticence.
 Jocose robotism.
 Lapse calculus.
 Marinate Cagliostro.
 Benefice chatter.
 Farce penchant.
 Jam snapshot.
 Fence accessory.
 Clipjoint rationale.
 Rosewood machine.
 Kangaroo prall-triller.
 Factional mise-en-scène.
 Diatonic Iliad.
 Chippewa miscellany.
 Nostrum maxillary.
 Region insistence.
 Collapsible mazurka.
 Flip crunch.
 Gene flash.
 Bracket margin.
 Mixtec viscous.
 Leafage police.
 Pressure mescal.
 Incident crown.
 Blasphemy minion.
 Dog Moscow.
 Pachelbel gypsy.
 Process mush.
 Nogales chunk.
 Recovery mezzanine.
 Flake response.
 Research millennium.
 History snack.
 Texas clutch.

Everyday mask.
 Target march.
 Tin globe.
 Chigger bit.

Written improvisatorily, 11 December 1990, New York, while executing a 36" x 48" painting on linen, on which these 115 "phrase-sentences" are freely handwritten in many different directions and colors across each other in oil-paint stick. This painting was exhibited at the Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, December-January 1990-91.

Performance Instructions for *A Vocabulary for Peter Innisfree Moore*

Performance Instructions
 preceded by Description and Compositional Method
 for
A Vocabulary for Peter Innisfree Moore
 (February 1974-July 1975)

I. Description

A Vocabulary for Peter Innisfree Moore is a 22" x 14" drawing and performance score comprising 960 hand-printed words—the largest number of words appearing on a single surface in any of my Vocabularies. All of the words are spelled solely with letters that appear in the dedicatee's name. No letter appears in any single word more times than it does in the complete name. The words were printed by hand in india ink on a white background with pens having nibs of several different thicknesses, so that many sizes of letters appear in the drawing. The words are oriented in many different directions, their placements on the drawing and the directions in which they read having been determined by chance operations. Reading all of the words necessitates rotating the sheet of paper.

II. Compositional Method

The *Vocabulary* was composed in several stages:

1. It was conceived in a general way on 16-17 February 1974.
2. The 960 words were collected as a list in a notebook, partly with the aid of dictionaries, 17 November-20 December 1974.
3. The method of drawing was worked out on 20 December 1974. It comprised the following stages:
 - a. The sheet of paper was divided into ten equal-sized sectors: two horizontal rows of five sectors each.

b. A directional diagram was drawn: a circle with ten equally spaced radii, numbered from 0 to 9.

c. Five random digits were used to select and place each word: three drew the word from the list; one determined the sector in which it was to be hand printed; and one, following the circular diagram, determined the direction in which the word should read. If a word couldn't fit entirely in the chance-determined sector, it had to begin in that sector and end in a neighboring one.

d. Pen nibs were first chosen by "impulse chance," but as the paper became filled up, only the smaller nibs could be used.

4. The *Vocabulary* was executed, following the above method, largely from 20 December 1974 to sometime in February 1975, and completed on 9 July 1975.

5. The performance method was composed, though not described in the present form (the earlier description appears on the backs of the photo-offset copies of its first edition), 3-10 July 1975.

The *Vocabulary* was first performed, at the Studio for Creative Movement in New York City, by Neil Elliott, Spencer Holst, Jill Kroesen, Marcia Lind, Jackson Mac Low, Mordecai-Mark Mac Low, Sharon Mattlin, Leonard Neufeld, Beate Wheeler, and other speakers and musicians, 11 July 1975.

III. Performance Method

Performers: The *Vocabulary* may be performed by any number of people, each of whom may speak, sing, and/or play a musical instrument producing all twelve tones of the chromatic scale in one or more registers. (The instruments may be tuned in either equal or just temperament, but all instruments in a performance should be tuned according to the same system, and singers should only produce pitches playable by instruments tuned according to that system.)

(1) Speakers must have clear diction and be able to project their voices, when necessary, without shouting or straining or sounding "dramatic." Their speech should always be intelligible, whether they are speaking softly, moderately, or relatively loudly, and they should often fall silent.

(2) Singers must be able to produce precisely all of the twelve tones within their vocal ranges, to achieve a variety of timbres, attacks, amplitudes, durations (both of sounds and silences), and rhythms, and to articulate the words they sing intelligibly.

(3) Instrumentalists must also be able to produce precisely all the tones within their instruments' ranges and achieve a variety of timbres, attacks, amplitudes, durations (both of sounds and silences), and rhythms.

(4) All Performers must be able and willing continually to listen with complete concentration and to modify their actions, sounds, and silences in accordance with the changes in the aural situation. All should often listen silently and only add new sonic

elements when they feel the latter may add positively to the aural plenum. (Notions of what is "positive" will of course differ from individual to individual.)

Procedure: Each performer moves the eyes freely from any word to any other word, first looking at the entire word field, any side up, and then choosing a word or string of words to speak, sing, and/or play as a sequence of instrumental tones and/or one or more chords or other aggregates. Then the performer listens attentively, observing silence for a short, moderately long, or even very long time, eventually choosing another word or string from the field and realizing it as speech, song, and/or instrumental sound. Performers must partially rotate the score from time to time in order to bring as many words as possible into clear, readable view during the course of the performance.

(1) When speaking, performers say words singly or concatenated into strings: phrases, clauses, other sentence fragments, complete sentences, or nonnormative word strings. Any word or string or any *series* of words and/or strings may be repeated any number of times. (Because their execution may involve moving the eyes from word to word in circles or other closed curves, such repetitions are often called "loops.") Performers should vary their loudness and reading tempo in accord with their perception of the total aural situation, but none should try to predominate over other performers or otherwise call special attention to themselves by "overexpressive" or "dramatic" delivery. Only complete words should be spoken: words should not be broken into syllables or phonemes, and no syllable or phoneme should be spoken separately from the word of which it is a segment. Speakers may fall silent at any time and may remain silent until they feel ready—as a result of concentrated listening and general perceptual attention—to add new words or strings to the total performance situation as they perceive it. Speakers should not *sing* words unless they are prepared to produce accurately tones corresponding to the words' letter sequences, as described below.

(2) When singing, performers may either:

(a) vocalize a tone sequence corresponding to a chosen word's letter sequence, using vowel sounds or liquids—preferably ones occurring in the chosen word—or

(b) sing the word itself, using all of a tone sequence (translating a letter sequence) by allotting two or more tones to each syllable of the word.

(3) When either singing or playing instruments, performers "*translate*" the successive letters of the words into tones of the following specific pitch classes (in any register[s]):

E = E natural

F = F natural

I = D flat/C sharp

M = G natural

N = C natural

O = G flat/F sharp

P = B natural

R = A flat/G sharp

S = E flat/D sharp

T = D natural

(4) Both instrumentalists and singers may play and/or sing either sequences or aggregates of pitches corresponding to the sequences of letters in Vocabulary words.

(a) Sequences may be melodies, widely separated tones, broken chords, or any other pitch sequences as well as ones combining various possibilities.

(b) Aggregates are produced by sounding simultaneously two or more tones corresponding to adjacent letters in a word. They may be intervals, chords (including chords produced by sustaining the tones of a broken chord, e.g., by means of the piano's "loud" pedal), or tone clusters (including clusters produced by sustaining a nonchordal sequence of tones). Any word's tone sequence may be rendered as a series of aggregates (or of aggregates and single tones) and series of two or more aggregates and/or tones may be sustained to produce larger aggregates.

(c) Any sequence or aggregate may be repeated any number of times.

Register (Octave Placement) of each of the tones in sequences or aggregates must be carefully chosen by each performer, keeping in mind the effective range and capabilities of the performer's particular voice or instrument. There are at least eight types of octave placement:

(1) The uniqueness of a word's tone sequence may be rendered clearly perceptible in a pitch sequence or aggregate by Upward Placement: playing or singing each successive tone after the first (in the tone sequence) at a pitch higher than that of the one preceding it and going up into a higher octave whenever necessary. (*Complete* upward placement will often, of course, not be possible, due to the limits of the ranges of particular voices or instruments.)

(2) In Close Placement all the tones of a sequence are placed within an octave or so, and all intervals, including major and minor seconds, are allowed. A tone may be played more than once at the same actual pitch, and the direction of a pitch sequence may be changed one or more times.

(3) In Wide Placement major and minor seconds are avoided, thirds seldom occur, and usually no tone is placed more than once in the same octave.

(4) In One-Directional Placement, upward or downward, each successive tone, whether in a melody or other sequence or in a chord or other aggregate, is placed higher (or lower) than the one preceding it in the tone (corresponding to a letter) sequence, so that the latter occurs vertically as well as horizontally.

(5) Upward Wide (One-Directional) Placement is highly recommended for instruments or voices with large ranges, especially pianos, harps, and other instruments having pedals that allow a sequence of tones produced separately to be held as a chord or other aggregate.

(6) In Changing Placement the direction of the tones in a sequence changes from time to time.

(7) In Chaotic Placement the direction changes at each successive tone.

(8) In Chaotic Very Wide Placement large leaps, sometimes of several octaves, occur between tones, and the direction of each leap is different.

(9) Musicians will probably discover and distinguish still other types of placement than the above, and various types may be combined within sequences, e.g., a sequence begun in Close Upward Placement might end in Chaotic Very Wide Placement. Making and observing these distinctions will allow musicians to make informed conscious choices in placing tones as well as in selecting words to "translate" into tone sequences and/or aggregates. One's instrument's or voice's capabilities as well as one's musical and other abilities and spontaneous or considered response to the immediate performance situation will help determine which placements are best at different moments in a performance.

Amplitudes (Loudness): All performers choose amplitudes in relation to the total aural situation. However:

(1) Voices should usually keep to amplitudes ranging from *mp* (moderately soft) to *f* (loud), with only occasional *ff* (very loud), *p* (soft), or *pp* (very soft) sounds. (While variety is desirable, intelligibility is imperative.)

(2) Instruments should usually keep to amplitudes ranging from *ppp* (very very soft) to *mf* (moderately loud), with only occasional *f* (loud) or *ff* (very loud) sounds, and still fewer *fff* (very very loud) sounds. (Instruments should seldom if ever drown out the voices or lessen the intelligibility of words.)

Performance Duration: A performance of the *Vocabulary* may be of any duration, but one lasting less than ten minutes will allow the realization of very few of the possibilities offered by the large number of words and their corresponding tone sequences. (Marathon performances lasting several hours or even several days are possible.) The duration of a performance may be determined in one of the following ways:

(1) An open consensus process may be worked out by the performers, through which they decide among themselves, during performance, when to stop. This is the most flexible and democratic method of deciding performance duration and most accords with the spirit of the piece. (A clock visible to all performers is desirable if other works—and especially works by others—are to be performed on the same program.)

(2) The duration may be preset, the beginning and the end being signaled by a timekeeper—usually one of the speakers, singers, and/or instrumentalists, but not necessarily—chosen by the members of the performance group.

(3) The performers may select one among them to act as a leader who will signal the beginning and decide during a performance when to end it. This "leader" need not be much more than a modestly glorified timekeeper who decides, around the time when the performance should end anyway, given its context and circumstances, that some particular point is a good place to stop. (A clock or watch should be visible to the leader.) However, the members of the performance group may choose to give the

leader greater latitude than this in determining the duration of a performance, so that the leader's decision may significantly affect the performance's duration.

General Considerations ("style," "attitude," etc.): Since not only choices of words from the *Vocabulary*—and thus, too, for singers and instrumentalists, choices of tone sequences and aggregates—but also those within all other parameters are made by the performers at their own discretion, they must each exercise great care, tact, courtesy, attention, and concentration to make every detail of their performances contribute (as far as they can ascertain from where they are) toward a global sound sequence and aural plenum (including ambient, audience, and outer-environmental sounds) each of them would choose to hear. "Ego-tripping" without regard to what else is happening is the worst of "wrong notes" in performing this piece. However, the exercise of virtuosity is strongly encouraged when it is done with as much consciousness as possible of its place in the total sound, especially its relation to the contributions of the other performers. In short, performers must be both inventive and sensitive to other persons and sounds at all times.

Preperformance Work: While spontaneity in performances is generally very desirable, the large number of words (and corresponding tone sequences) in the *Vocabulary* makes it also desirable that those performers who wish to do so should work out certain ways of speaking, singing, and/or playing some of the words and tone sequences and of bringing these previously worked out procedures into the performance from time to time, along with other procedures arrived at more spontaneously during the performance. For instance, speakers may wish to construct certain sentences or other word strings; singers and instrumentalists may wish to compose melodies, chords, or other tone sequences and aggregates; and performers of all kinds may wish to associate certain timbres, durations, rhythms, amplitudes, or ways of repetition with some words, strings, sequences, or aggregates. Having a repertoire of such procedures available may often *add* more (in richness and multiplicity) than it detracts from spontaneity, especially since the use of those procedures is subject to in-performance choices arising out of the immediate situation, including choices to modify some of the previously worked out procedures as the moment (and/or the performer's reaction to it) demands.

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960 words collected 17 November-20 December 1974

Drawing executed 20 December 1974-February 1975

First form of performance method composed 3-10 July 1975

Present form of method: begun in 1987, revised 4 March 1988, completed 15 November 1988
New York

EMILIE CLARK

I BEGAN DOING COLLABORATIONS because I was interested in the part of the process that would require me to step outside of my visual language and look back in on it. Imagining a written text as part of my work didn't make the work different, but it did enforce a kind of objective reading of my process and of the construction of my visual language. Text is inherent in visual language, whether articulated literally or not. A visual work can invite a reading or reject one; either way, it references language, imagines text.

The visual language of an artist's work is something that precedes it, that exists within it, and that follows it, only to be reincorporated, reiterated and transformed, ever expanding and changing as more work is made. With the proliferation of an artist's body of work, a visual language gets built across works as well as within them. But this building process does not follow a linear trajectory, it's pieced together, collaged, filled with disparate elements, multiple texts, that in the real time of each new project, strikes a spark that we experience as the artist's visual language.

The process of collaborating with another artist results in a further proliferation or multiplication of visual languages. When I set out to work with Lyn Hejinian's writing, I initially took on each of her poems with an assumption that there was a text behind the one I was reading—not a "hidden" or "secret" text, but one that allowed for the formation of the actual words present in her work, the text of her thought process. My desire to uncover or discover what this text/language might be (always knowing that it could be many things), had to do with wanting to avoid the immediate, more obvious, and literal visual images locatable in her writing. So somehow in moving backwards, I hoped to be able to ultimately collaborate in a way that would allow my visual language (without any text) to coalesce with her writing rather than to illustrate it or represent it. The process of uncovering her text was much like a game of Telephone—depending on associations and imaginary links. When I began working on the second part of our collaboration for *The Traveler and the Hill and the Hill*, which involved my creating images first and Lyn responding, I was no longer making work alone.

I had become aware that the newly found combination of Lyn's writing and my visual work had already created a new vocabulary that would eventually be defined as our vocabulary for this particular collaboration, but that would also work its way into our individual projects afterwards. Even though at this point, I anticipated Lyn's language when creating my work, the text she wrote in response never followed my train of thinking directly but always became an equally significant part of the images, no less or more important than a choice of a particular color, or the drawing of a line, as if her thoughts were extensions or appropriations of my own.

I WAS SITTING IN MY DINING ROOM having a cup of coffee and looking out the window to the west, where the early afternoon sun was glittering off the water, and I remembered a summer a long time ago—I was probably five—and sitting on the beach in New York at Rockaway, when a small biplane appeared over the water and began a series of climbs and turns and rolls, emitting a white trail that gradually turned into a sequence of furry letters that slowly spelled out

I.J. FOX
FINE FURS

I'd just learned to read and I read it slowly. And while I thought it was wonderful of the fox to write with such fine furry letters, I was a little irritated with him, because I thought he was very stuck up to brag like that, no matter how fine his furs. Because in my reading it was this J. Fox, who was boasting about his fur, which I imagined was as white as the letters that spelled out his name, and it took me a little while before I realized that it was not the fox who had authored the message, but someone who made a business of skinning foxes and providing their furs to wealthy ladies at a price.

But my image of those beautiful white letters, formed so elegantly by the plane and over such a long time that I had to wait to find out what the words were and had to remember them as they began to disappear—by the time it said FURS, FOX had begun to blur and the “I” had begun to vanish—my sense of sitting on the beach in the bright light of a clear blue sky and the new pleasure of reading gave me such a physical experience of the act of reading, that I thought it would be nice to do a poem that way, a skypoem. So being reasonably practical I went to the yellow pages and started looking to see all the people who did skywriting.

But times had changed. There weren't all those people who did skywriting. In fact there was nobody in the San Diego or Los Angeles yellow pages who did skywriting. There were people listed who did aerial advertising by dragging signs and banners across the sky, but no one who did any writing. So I started to call the local airports. It took a lot of time and a lot of calls, but I found out from somebody at the Santa Monica airport that there was group in Cypress who used to do it a lot, but he thought they were lying low because they were in a bit of trouble with the FAA. He gave me a name and phone number, and it turned out that this group, called Skytypers, could do skywriting or, more accurately, skytyping, because they used five planes and dot matrix method with a computerized program in which the five planes

flew straight across the sky in formation at an altitude of about ten thousand feet, each plane putting up part of each letter.

When I finally reached them, or they reached me, because I got only an answerphone and they had to call back, I told this guy, “I'm interested in putting some words up in the sky.” He said, “That's all right. I do advertisements all the time.” I said, “No, that's not it. I want to put a poem. In the sky.” And he said, “As long as it's not too long or obscene you can do it in the sky.” I told him that wasn't a problem. Brevity was the soul of wit and at the moment I wasn't interested in putting erotic poetry in the sky. So he asked me, “What made you think of it?” And I started to tell him about I.J. FOX, and he said, “FINE FURS. That was my father. In fact I was doing it a few years later when my father got tired of it. I was sixteen and too young to have a driver's license. So my mother had to drive me to the airport so I could fly this plane over the beach to write COCA COLA.”

So Gregg Stinis and I had a kind of sentimental connection, and he gave me a good price. “If you want me to print your message on a day I know I'm going to be in the air, you can have it for \$650 a line. If I have to commit to a date without knowing that, it'll be a bit more.” “Well,” I asked, “can I specify the time.” “Yeah, but I can't be responsible for any time when the sky is overcast, because everything is written in water vapor, and that's what the clouds are made of. Water vapor doesn't show against water vapor.” “So what happens then?” “We do it for you the next day at the same price.”

As it turned out there were other limitations. There are always limitations. He told me I could have eighteen to twenty-three letters to align, no more. Twenty-three letters if you don't use M's or W's, which count as two letters each. So this was one of the great formal properties of the genre; and a three-line poem consisting of eighteen letters to a line, or twenty-three if you don't use M or W, becomes a little bit harder than a haiku if you're trying to write idiomatic English. Because letters are much less natural to English than syllables are to Japanese.

So I had this dream of an epic poem stretching across the United States over twenty or thirty years, three or four lines a year—at two thousand bucks a shot—gradually being written for people who would never see all of it. Which didn't bother me in the least, because I have a somewhat loose idea of the relation between writing and reading. I was counting on a certain randomness of interest among the onlookers anyway. Some would know about the skypoem in advance and come to the central viewing place, where they would wait to see it unfold because they read about it or heard about it or had been invited. Some might drift in when they saw the others gathering. Some might happen to be looking up while they were walking on the beach or driving on the freeway. Some might pick it up in the middle or at the end, and some might leave before the end because they had to or didn't care to stay. I have a certain attraction to democratic art works that don't coerce your attention because

they respect your independence—or maybe they’re aristocratic because they’re indifferent to your existence. But I wanted to do a poem that was outside of a book and outside the range of a poetry magazine or small press distribution. And I liked the idea of a micromonumental poem in which each letter was twelve hundred feet high and each line five and a half miles long and can be seen over an area of three hundred square miles when it’s put up ten thousand feet above the ground.

In the end my sky epic never got written. I got to do two skypoems—one over the Santa Monica pier on Memorial Day in 1987 and a second one over La Jolla around Labor Day in 1988. And I wrote about them in an essay called “Fine Furs” that was published in *Critical Inquiry* in the Fall 1992. The two were originally intended to be part of a long discontinuous poem whose successive stanzas I was going to put in the air over different cities all over the United States. Things didn’t work out that way. There was a possibility of doing one over New York, but the funding fell apart. The third time I had the money to hire my Skytypers in California they were lured away to the Korean Olympics at a price with which I couldn’t compete. And what would have been the premium for a sky epic turned out to be two micromonumental haikus that appeared over the bright blue California sky and disappeared like the Cheshire Cat in about 15 minutes. So writing and reading and transience were what they were all about. What I liked about skywriting was the time it took to get the white puffs of water vapor to form letters and then words and phrases, that would just be completing while their beginnings were disappearing. So it was about transience . . . and remembering. I designed the poems—I was in radio control with the planes—so that there were spaces between the phrases and each new phrase changed the meaning of the phrase that came before it, and I kept the planes from starting a new line till the previous line had almost disappeared. The first skypoeam read:

IF WE GET IT TOGETHER

then

CAN THEY TAKE IT APART

and finally

OR ONLY IF WE LET THEM

Of the skypoems, all I have left is two videotapes and the typewritten texts, which give only the slightest idea of the duration or scale or color of the two events. For the second one over La Jolla, the event was videotaped for a local morning TV show that I went on the next day. They showed the skypoeam. Then they asked me what a poem was. I said it was a commercial that wasn’t selling anything. So they asked me how much it cost.

San Diego, Oct. 29, 2000