EDITED BY NICO VASSILAKIS AND CRAG HILL

The Last Vispo Anthology documents a profound shift in visual poetry, new digital media stretching the parameters – the potential – of the alphabet. Through inclusion of 148 contributors from 23 countries, new and established practitioners, The Last Vispo Anthology builds a bridge from the pictorial writing of the past into the vast future of visual writing.

"Language is surrounding us everywhere and all day long and is good for current communication. But there are special moments of friendship with words sounds and gestures. Poets help us to protect these moments and to keep them alive. They become signs in different media and can be repeated by everyone."
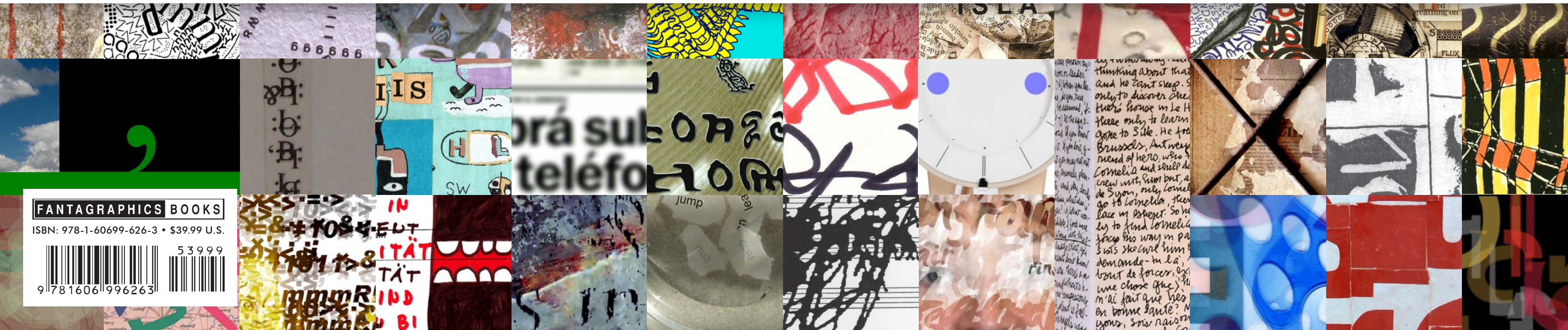
– Eugen Gomringer, pioneer of concrete poetry, for The Last Vispo Anthology

anthology: visual poetry 1998-2008

the last

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VISPO

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Thank you to Marvin Sackner

The Last Vispo website: http://www.thelastvispo.com
For more information, contact: lastvispo@gmail.com

Images are not of equal resolution because of changes in composing technology during the years 1998-2008, the decade from which the following poems were chosen.

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Nico Vassilakis and Crag Hill

Nico Vassilakis

THE LAST VISPO:
toward vispoetics

The owner's manual of blur. Operating instructions.

Here is the answer to that. After language goes awry you are left with alphabet as the only scaffold.

Letters roil in Kama Sutra induced maneuvers.

In the manual, letters lose their chemical word attraction, their ability to bond to one another, to cohere into words, and they begin to perform mutated experiments on each other and themselves. In the manual, letters are not monogamous - they don't belong to any particular word, but are free to roam and explore themselves. They form new molecular space.

So what are you looking at? It's alphabet in every possible and available position you can imagine. You are looking at alphabet after it's exploded and word/letter cohesion is broken. What you're looking at is the trajectory of the verbo-visual extending into asemic language compositions.

Vispo is not simply a hybrid of image and word, but a phenomenon natural to handlers of text, be it reader or writer. It's the predilection visual poets have for reimagining the alphabet at play. It's a mongrel of visual language and lexical image on steroids. It can't be put more generally than that.

One aim here is to foster the young fidgeter of letter construction, either abstract or traditional, and to inform them that Vispo is a viable poetic form.

*

To fuss and cause a fracas in the eye.

How do our retinal experiences alter what we think we know about alphabet? From minimal to maximal, the alphabet is explored and expanded on. From the contextual aggregates and combinations of letters to the visual elements that form a single letter. The visual poetry of alphabet insists that writing is the drawing of what and how we think, and within that writing, images accrue, the letters themselves, drawn, or otherwise printed, are illustrating or reproducing our thought.

*

Through Through. The thread finds its optic hole.

To have visual poetry be housed, for a moment, in a space that can be both distinguished from and aligned with other art forms.

How to speak about vispo? For one, the relatable denominator is how we see. How language affects us visually, how staring at language is essential to reaping functionality out of vispo. In this case, we'd consider a stare to be an elongated gaze, and staring the hyper-focused verb from which we gain further insight.

The alphabet is continually morphing. It is both evolving and devolving into a periodic table of speech elements.

There is an underlying desire for the product of alphabet, of any culture, to reinvent itself. We scribe anew. It reminds us that alphabet, the letter, is a drawn experience - drawn

either by hand or by the machines we have built. The physical ingredients of language, the letters, dream of how to form and reform themselves into new meaning. The meanings we live with are changing. The hierarchy of sight sense has made our engagement with the world virtually all visual. The eyes crave a refreshed approach so that they can seek and find new content. Vispo is all eyes, is the delirium of alphabet shift.

You are here, seeing language undo itself.

Staring your way into and through the letter as object.

On the other hand, public text has become ubiquitous and maligns our sensibilities. We prefer to reassess and reconfigure the visual result of our lives – to make new what's seen – to make what's seen new. Exploding the hinges of what holds a letter in place. To toss the known so as to venture into unfamiliar alphabetic unknowns.

*

To navigate the distance between clusters of planets and blood streams full of platelets.

Is a letter real? Does it qualify as a real world, real time object? Is a letter a totally hypothetical entity? Is it just a non-physical mental object? Are words real? Sculpture of alphabet and ink on paper are real, right? Letters are drawings of something common enough that needs repeating. But none of it is real. Sound is real, and seeing is real, as well as the other senses, but beside its usage as a representative or document unit - how is a letter real? Can't touch or smell it. Can't bring one with you on a plane - unless it's a copy - and then, a copy of what? Where's its original?

For instance, is the letter Q an object or does it exist only in the pedagogic fog of the unreal? Is it merely the shared delusion of teachers that letters are smiley-faced characters or is there physicality there?

You are in a room. The words are chair and table. We know, in the atomic world, that the chair and table are moving - their atoms are in constant motion. And so we can say that the letters that make up the chair and the table are also in flux.

Seeing is believing that alphabets are in motion and in a moment come together to form a word. Otherwise, letters are everywhere at once, hovering in consideration. Visual poetry documents this occurrence. It documents the individual letters that precede the making of a word - before it ever reaches a conclusion - the alignment that, when acquired, is letters in flux adjoined to a necessary meaning. It requires a result in the shape and structure of words. This destination, though, is not complete and will not stand alone. That is to say, the final product is not always a word and can be equally, if not better conveyed, as the culminating ascent of the pre-word or waning disintegration of the post-word.

Something similar happens in physics when questions like these are posed – how do building blocks relate to one another? How is this a means by which we come to know ourselves? And how does that relate to celestial activity in this or any other universe?

The material of alphabet is letters/images - the material of a letter/image is line & curve & angle & shape, etc - an expression of both intuition and mathematics. It's our way of assigning purposeful drawing to represent some kind of imperative utterance. We remain primitive. We hoodwink ourselves into thinking this sophisticated and controlled filter of herding letters into words is advancement. Our letters remain primitive and we cannot be separated from that beauty. No matter how many words we make to disguise this.

*

Eyes have always been the brats – attention-getting toys securing their place in our very cognition – vispo, its very victim.

From childhood – letters – the first set of tools that are not physical - are pure idea.

So looking at a word the eye lands on a letter and it begins to stare back at you.

A letter has no beginning and no end.

The keyboard is a house of letters.

Words make a prison for letters.

Vispo exists because it encapsulates the area of thought based on the alphabet that requires attention – the letter.

Vispo is a byproduct of staring.

Staring penetrates natural design. Design makes associations for and between people and nature. Human nature seeks to make sense of larger nature. Vispo distinguishes the tree from the forest. Disassembles alphabet and so alters the message.

*

Bright sunny days for those who retaliate.

Things, letters, come together for a short while.

We are double agents. We are immersed in the schizophrenia of art creation. Both word and picture, as one - as the aboriginal utterance first documented.

Not an easy balance to sustain. Amidst all this language we are still faced with limitations.

Somewhere in the simultaneity of micro and macro of alphabet is the solution.

The nihilism of language as mere procedural start and by nihilism I mean a cleansing function for the billboards and advertising that have warped and desensitized us. And what plan to correct this wouldn't include some nihilistic function - to eliminate, to scrub back to pure, so as to rebuild - as in a procedural start

*

Crag Hill

WHY WRITE VISUAL POETRY WHEN SO FEW READERS READ IT?

Do I **stretch printed language to its full** face the question with my tongue lashing out? I wouldn't be able to scratch the surface. I don't have a barbed tongue.

Hands clenched, do I run at the question headfirst, arms swinging, or hands and arms open? The reader frustrates me, yes, yet I haven't forgotten the power of a good–if rare–embrace. That gentle contact might get me *visible language* somewhere answering such a difficult question.

Do I approach the question on my knees, putting it off guard just before I kick it in the groin? That hurts, I know; maybe I'll just trip it up and try to tease out an answer. I've wrestled enough with it, or have I?

Suave, invisible cigarette cupped in my hand, do I hold back, waiting for an answer? I've been waiting for nearly thirty years. I know I'm not alone believing visual poetry

<div align="center">

the

eye's

tongue

</div>

is worth reading and worthy of more readers than those who already closely follow the poets in this anthology.

Is the question **potential** impossible to answer?

I'll ask another: Why can't the poetry *not out of the throat yet full of force*, the reader, and the act of seeing cohabitate?

The dialectic is short-circuited. From my meter readings,

visual poetry has the charge. I don't have to troubleshoot there. Yet all too often the power of the poetry does not cross over to readers. She looks but she doesn't know what she looks at. What wires are crossed, disconnected, or missing in the act of seeing, the interaction of poem and reader?

The poems register on the retina. I've talked with hundreds of readers of poetry, young and old, experienced and inexperienced, who can take the *lang* out of *uage* describe what they are seeing–contours of words, letters, sentences, larger discourses, typed, drawn, shredded, photographed, collaged, computer-manipulated, whelped in innumerable ways on/in the previously predictable two-dimensional page. These readers can also testify to the disruption of their reading habits, and this makes many uncomfortable.

I remember that discomfort, too. I had thumbed dimly through Emmett Williams' *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* on innumerable occasions. *not from the gut yet with courage* I thought the poems were technique without tectonics.

My entre came in 1981 via the work of other paradigm-shifting poets. Ron Silliman's *Ketjak* and *Tjanting* shook up my understanding, shifting the fulcrum of form from indivisible whole to autonomous part. Clark Coolidge, Larry Eigner, P. Inman, Tina Darragh, and Robert Grenier showed me the highly-charged, hard-packed poetry in words and phrases, in particles of words, in the blank space

stretch the word *S   t   r   e   t   c   h* on the page. When I re-encountered Aram Saroyan's work

in the Williams' anthology, I was ready, and I was also electrified by Claus Bremer, Ernst Jandl, Seiichi Niikuni, Hansjorg Mayer, master of fonts, and a dozen other poets from around the world.

Synergy followed: Bill DiMichele, Laurie Schneider, Miekal And and I created and shared a poetry *tongueless but not voiceless* that diverged from the concrete poetry we knew, alphabetic text now subsumed by other visual elements (in some of our poems there was no decipherable "text" whatsoever). We created this work for ourselves, knew no magazine that would publish it (not *Soup*, as eclectic and adventurous as it was, not *This*, defining itself narrowly, or *Hills* …). In fact, we didn't even try. *Score* was birthed to fill a gap, its first issue bringing out a selection of the work we had been mailing back and forth.

But when we sent the issue out to other poets and magazines, we quickly discovered we were not alone. We found a thriving, teeming audience for concrete poetry and other poetries combining words with images. One magazine in particular, Karl Kempton's *Kaldron*, publishing the vivid graphic poetry from not only the United States but from around the world, invited us into the bigger world of a poetry **until it is recognizable in a totally unexpected dimension** that soon became commonly known as visual poetry. Through this international community, this art form that transcends political and poetic boundaries, we went where we did not know we wanted to go, to spaces on the page (page/s in s/pace/s) we had not imagined.

Do other readers seek such worlds, jumping off the straight and narrow into the unknown brush, plunging into permutable flora and fauna *visible language* ? There may be far fewer intrepid readers than there are readers of poetry and far fewer intrepid readers of visual poetry than readers of poetry. Diminishing returns? Does the size of your audience matter or is it what you do with it?

We hope *The Last Vispo Anthology* will lead readers, new and experienced, to visual poetry past, present, and future, and inspire new practitioners *from the back of my eyes to the front of yours* of poetry liberated from the hegemony of denotation and connotation. We hope this anthology conveys the pulse–the plusses–of visual poetry at the beginning of a new millennium.

Coda

Reading a visual poem takes a minimum of three steps (pour over the following essays for additional ways of making meaning from visual poems): 1) Read the entire page/space at once. The visual poem is designed to first be read whole (unlike most poems on the page chained to left to right, top to bottom regimens). 2) Read the parts of the whole. Consider their position on the page/in space, their relationship/s to other parts. Much that happens in a visual poem happens here. 3) Read the full poem again at the same time reading its elements as they combine and re-combine to create the whole.

Poetry must realize that reading is changing–the reading brain is changing (it's not so long ago Socrates feared what the printed word would do to our intellectual life). Reading now gleans information at lightspeed–breaking news updates, Google headlines, e-mails, tweets, incessant chat and text messages. My 14 year old son watches ESPN as he scans the internet on his laptop for related articles, chatting with friends on Facebook on his iPod, sending and receiving text messages–multi-texts, multiple modes/platforms, intertextuality at what some argue occurs at an insane, unsustainable pace. Where does this deluge of text and moving image lead us? What does it leave us? Look to how a visual poem can be read. That act–those transactions between/within reader, word, and image–instructs us on how to gather meaning from the intensifying synaptic flashes of our internal and external world.

LETTERING

POEMS:

Jesse Ferguson, The Lions, Miguel Jimenez, Carlos M Luis, Anatol Knotek, Marco Giovenale, Petra Backonja, Jim Andrews, Oded Ezer, Ross Priddle, Scott Helmes, Bill DiMichele, Daniel f. Bradley, Troy Lloyd, Mike Cannell, Satu Kaikkonen, Fernando Aguiar, damian lopes, Sharon Harris, Jukka-Pekka Kervinen, Reid Wood, Reed Altemus, Tim Gaze, Suzan Sari, James Yeary, Derek Beaulieu, W. Mark Sutherland, Gareth Jenkins, Derya Vural, Jenny Sampirisi, Marko Niemi, Tim Willette, e k rzepka, Spencer Selby, Cecil Touchon, Jim Leftwich

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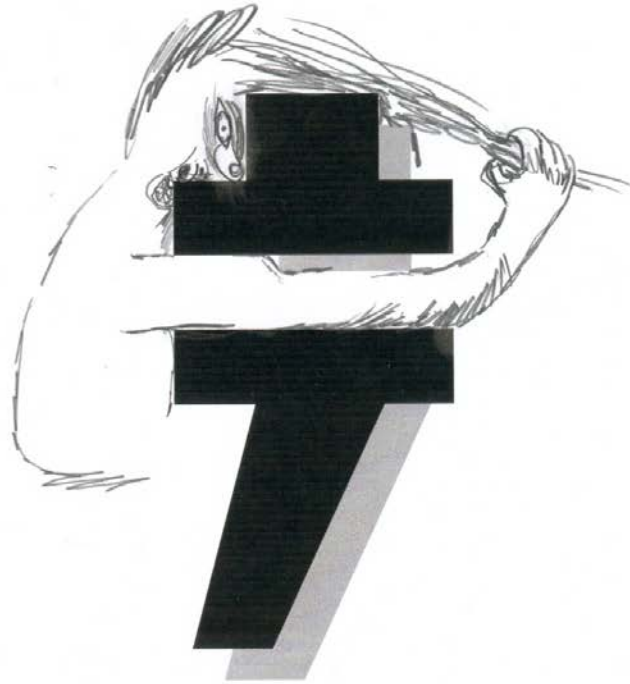
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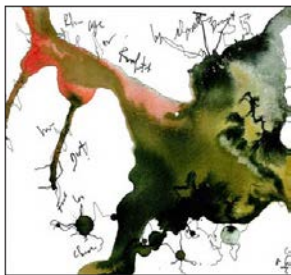
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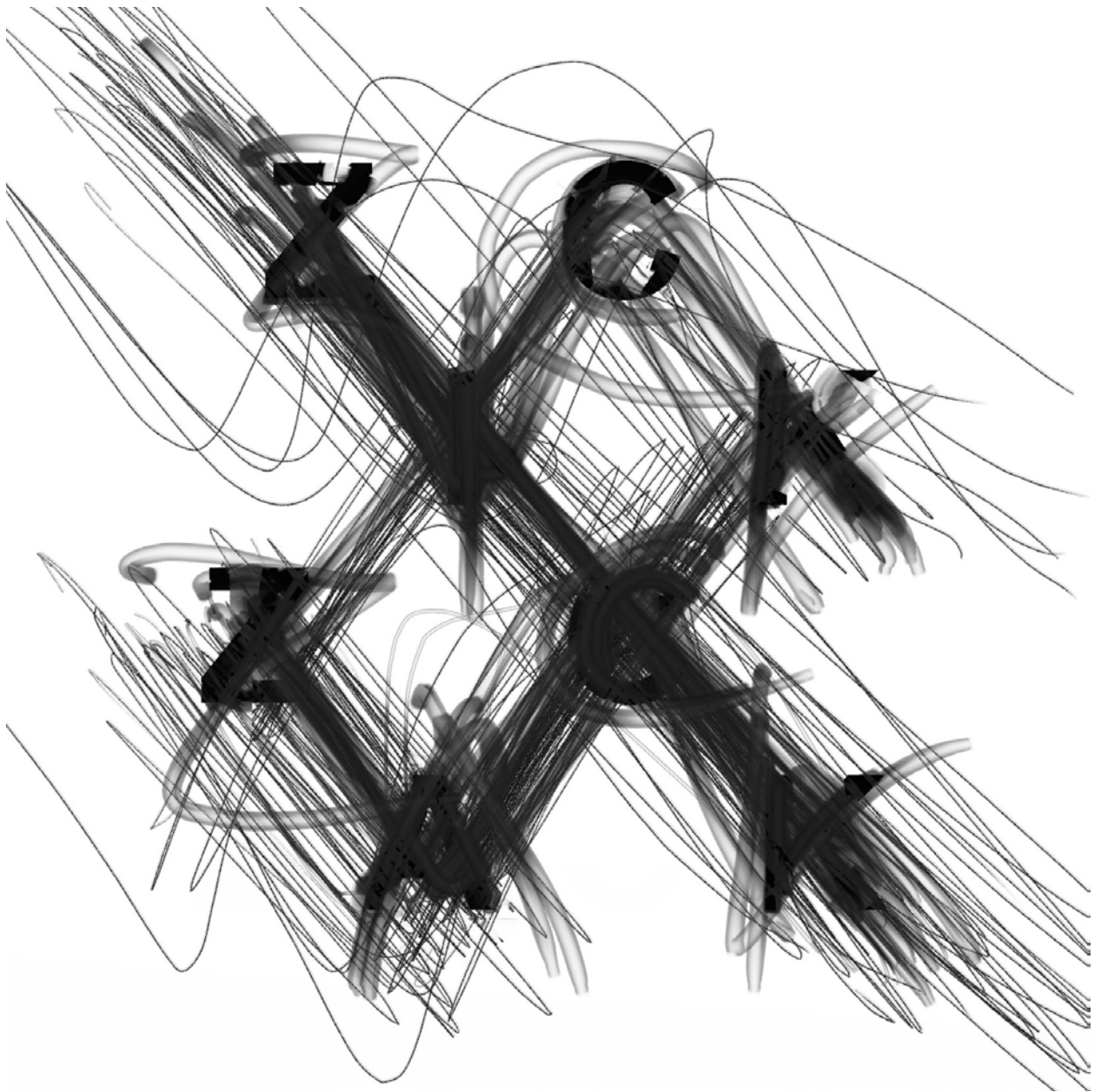
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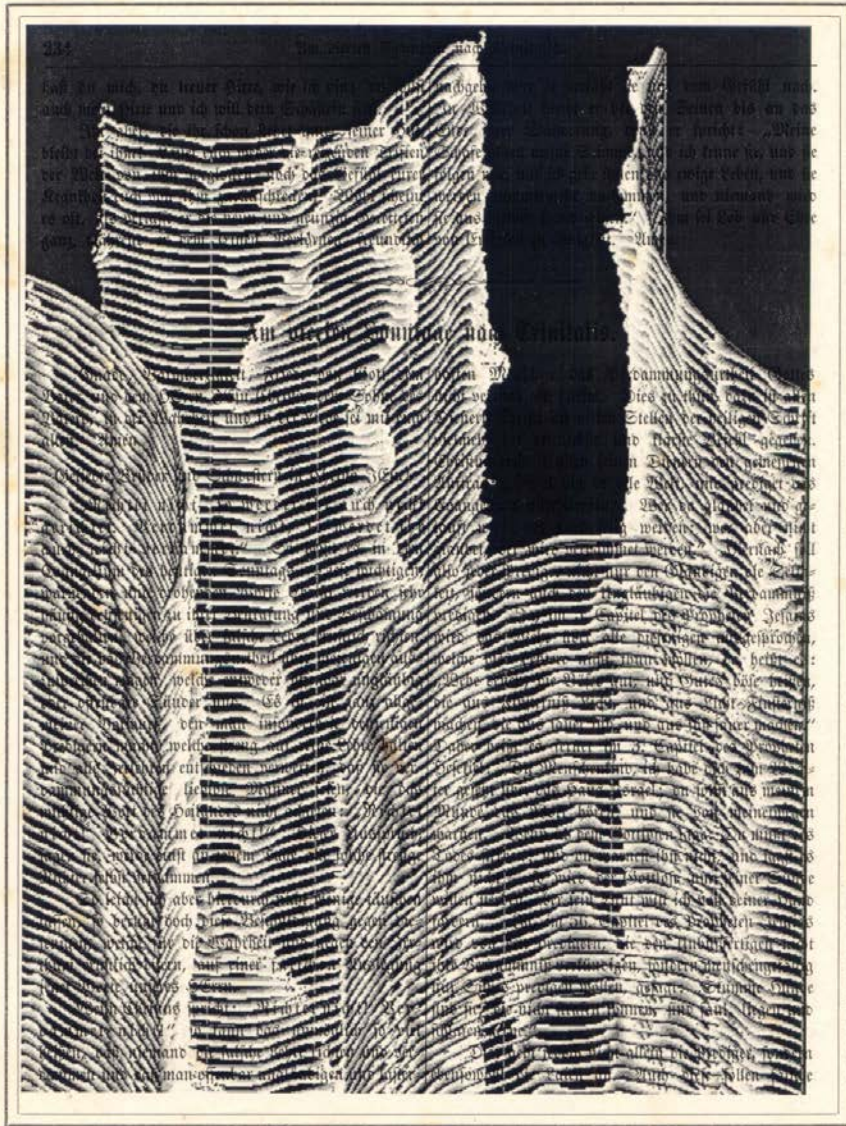
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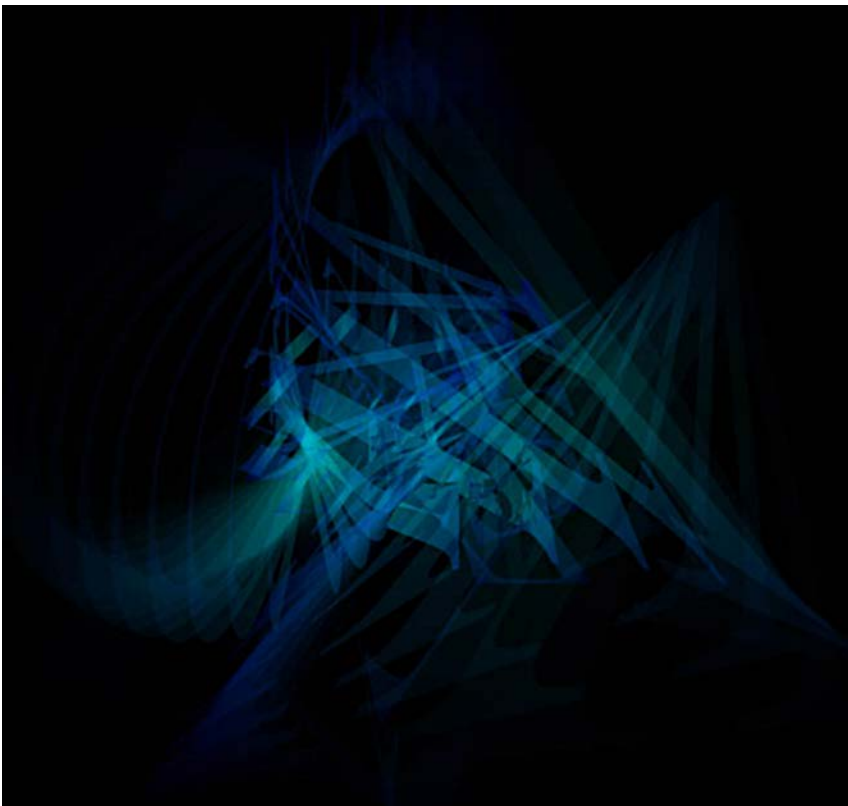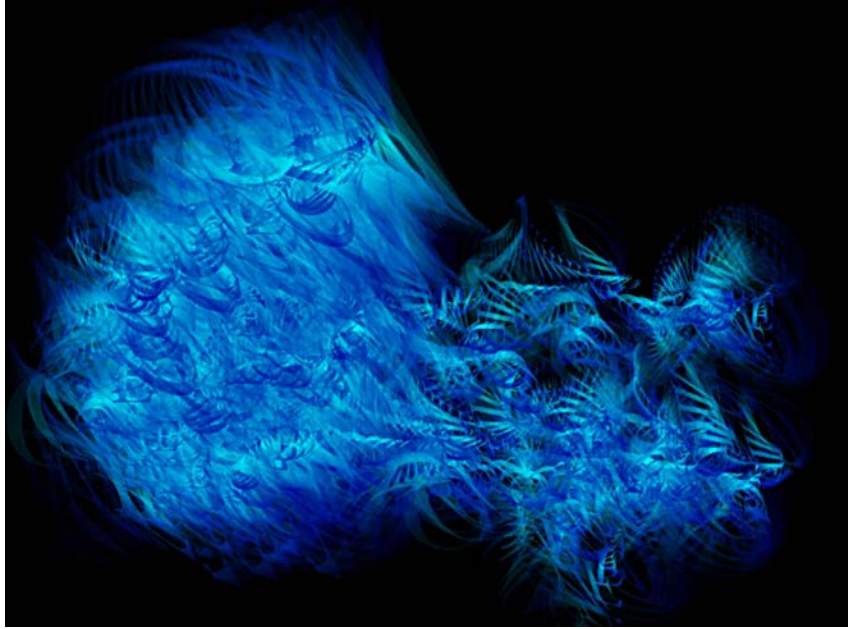
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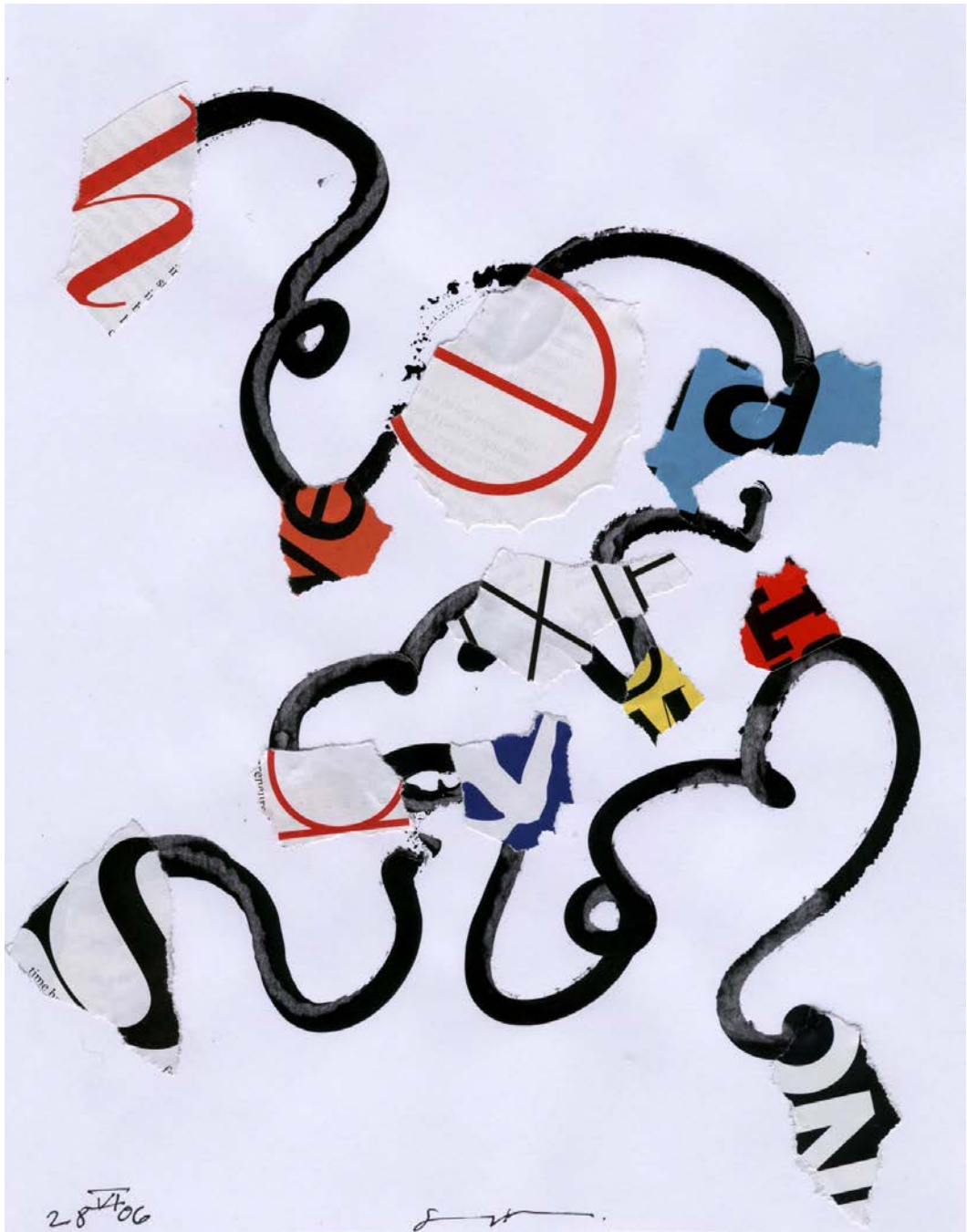
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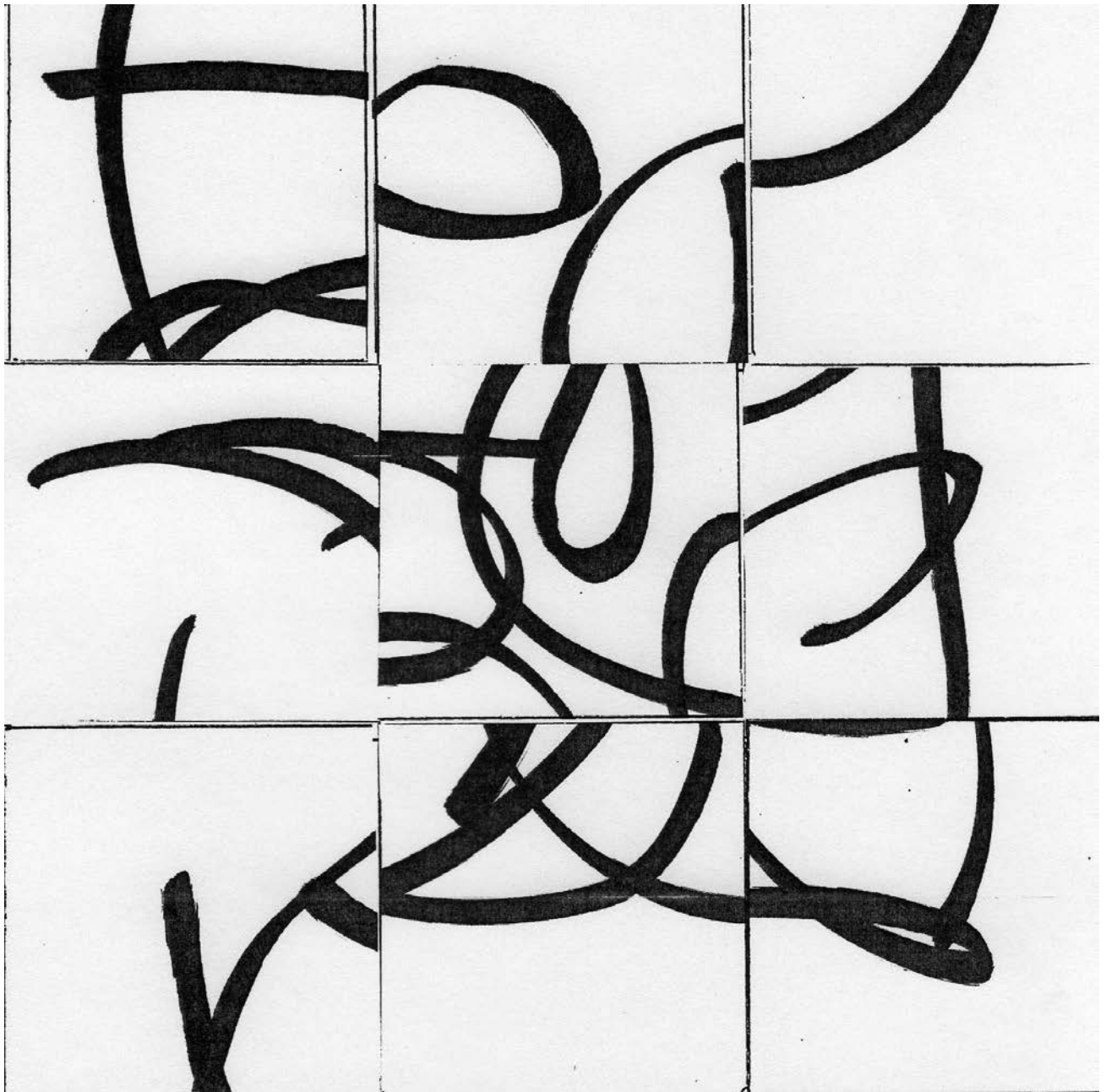
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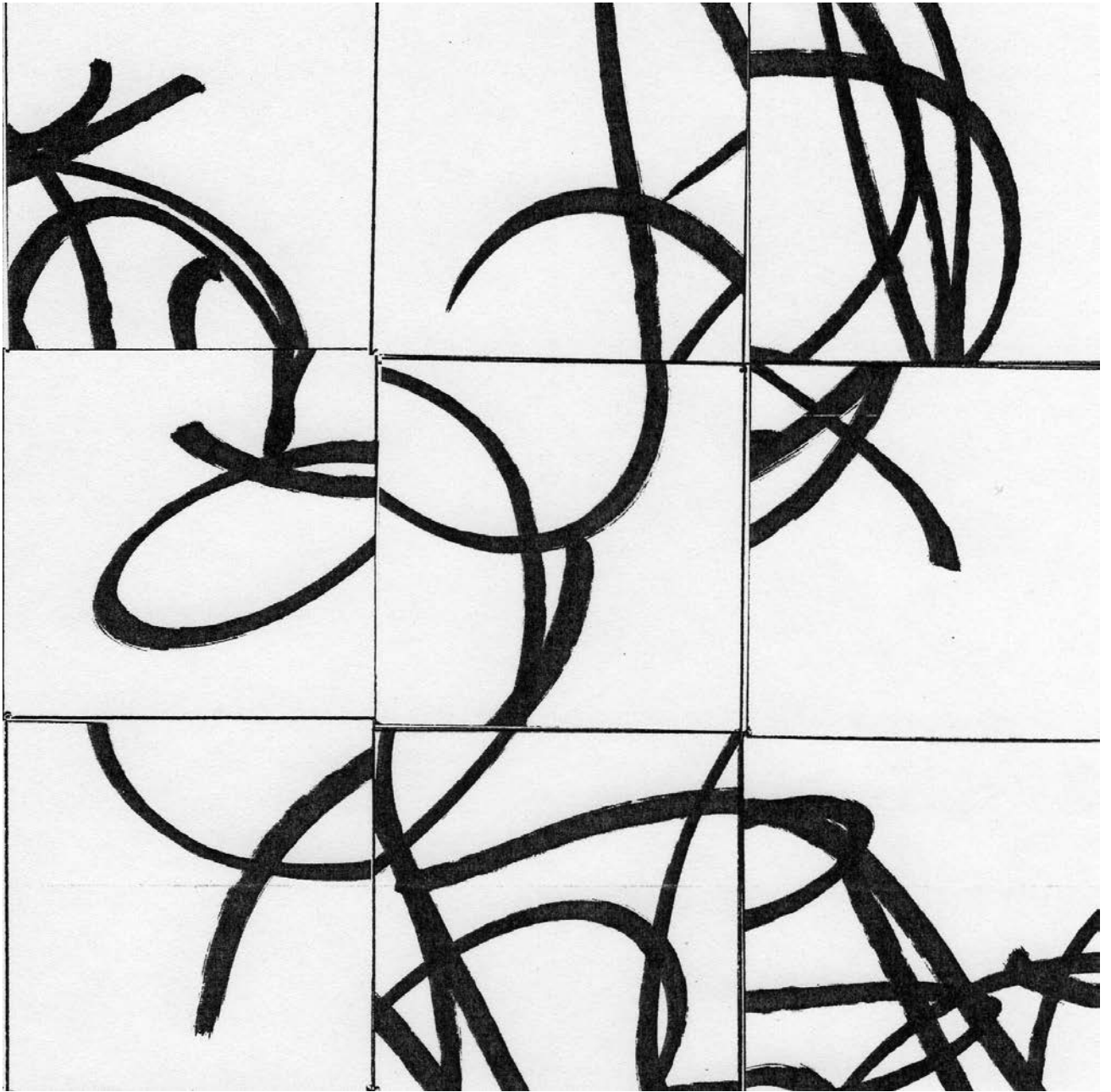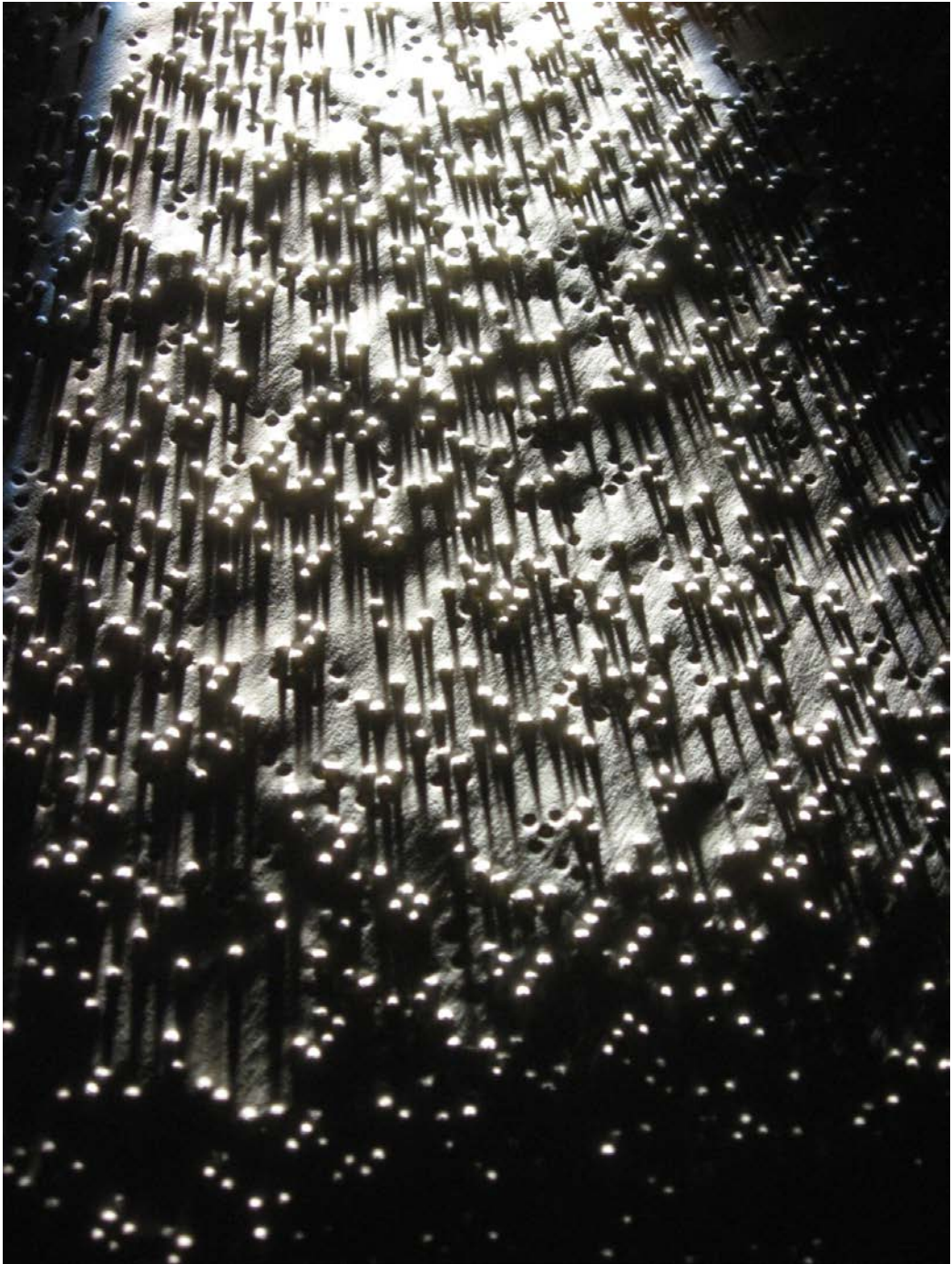
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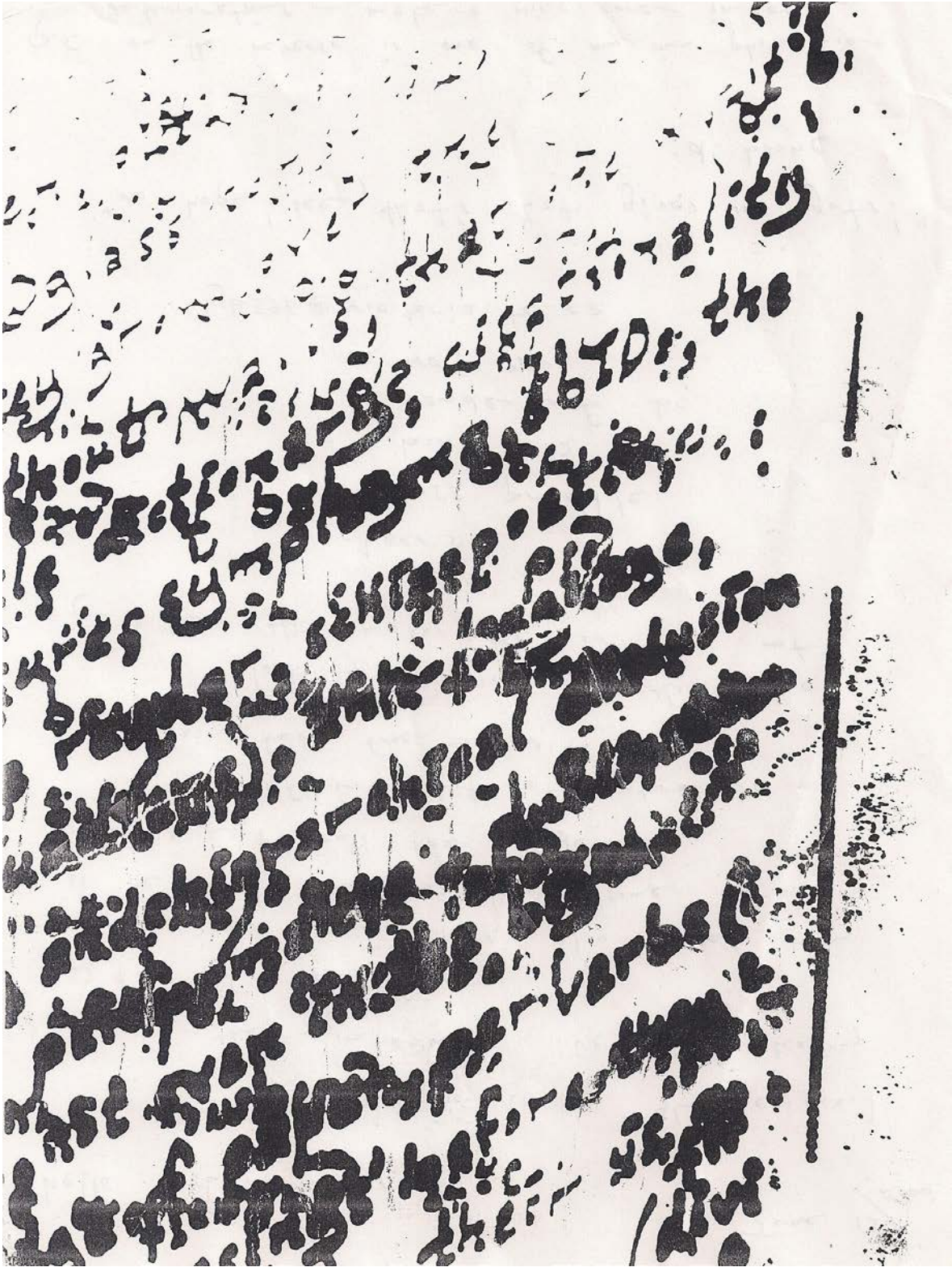
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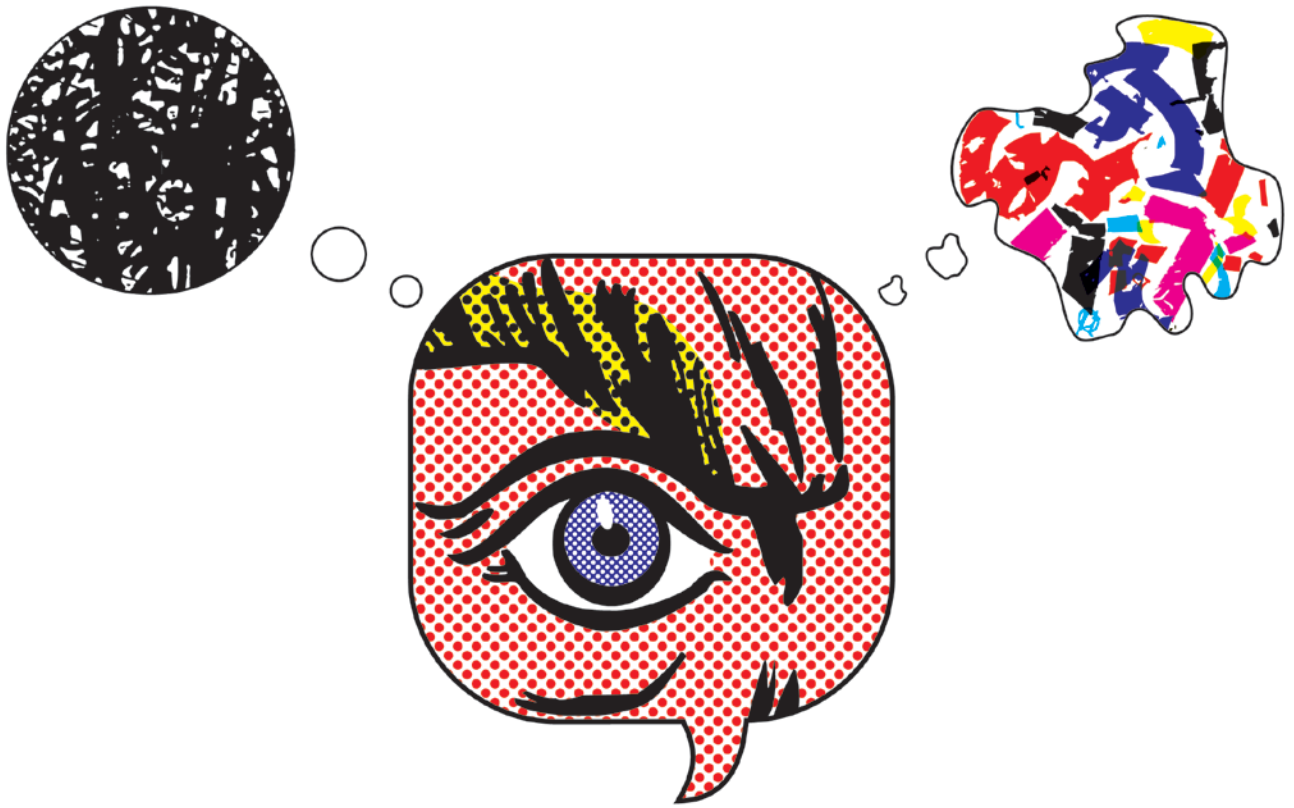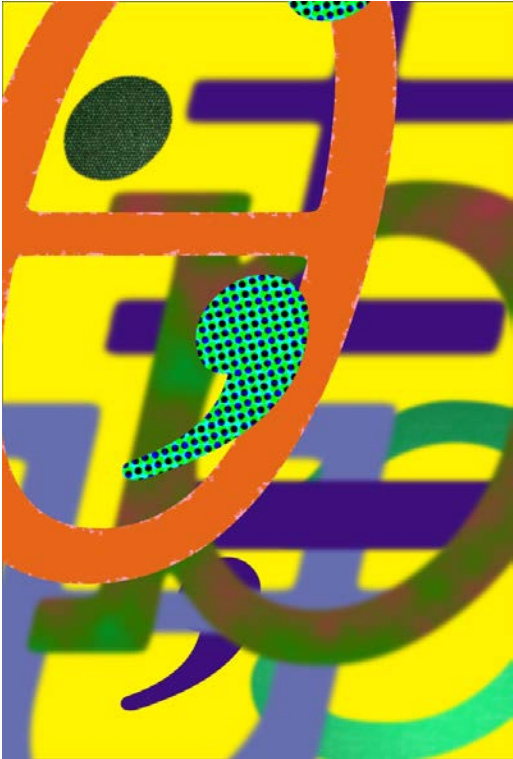
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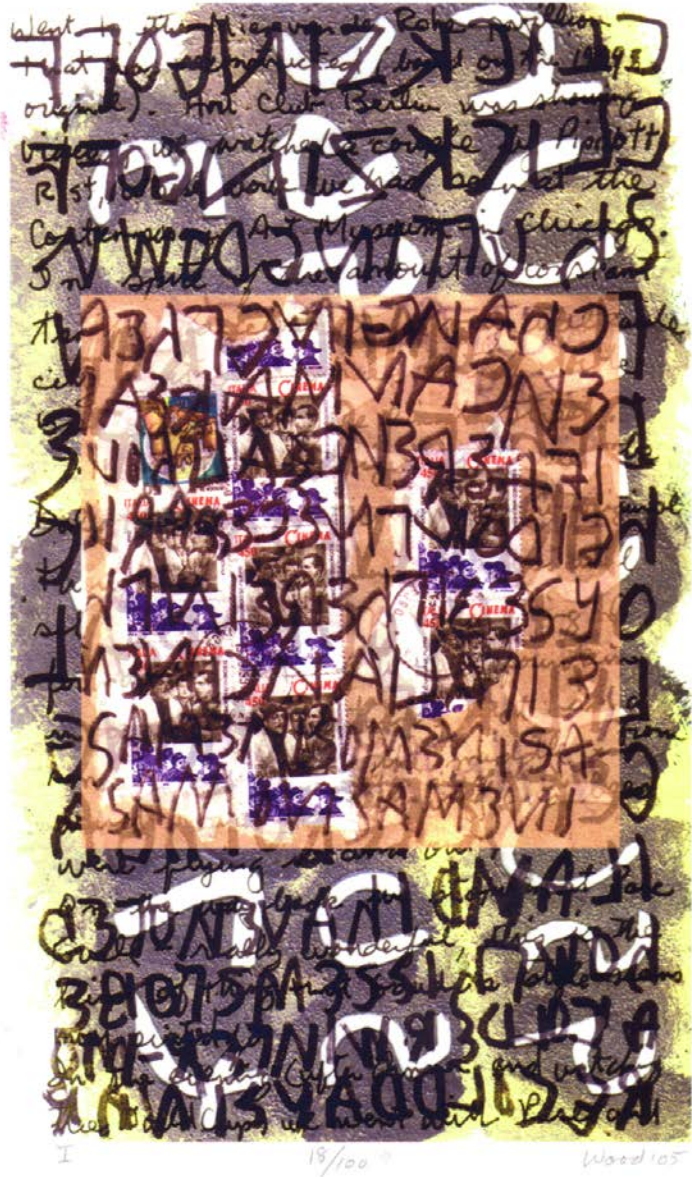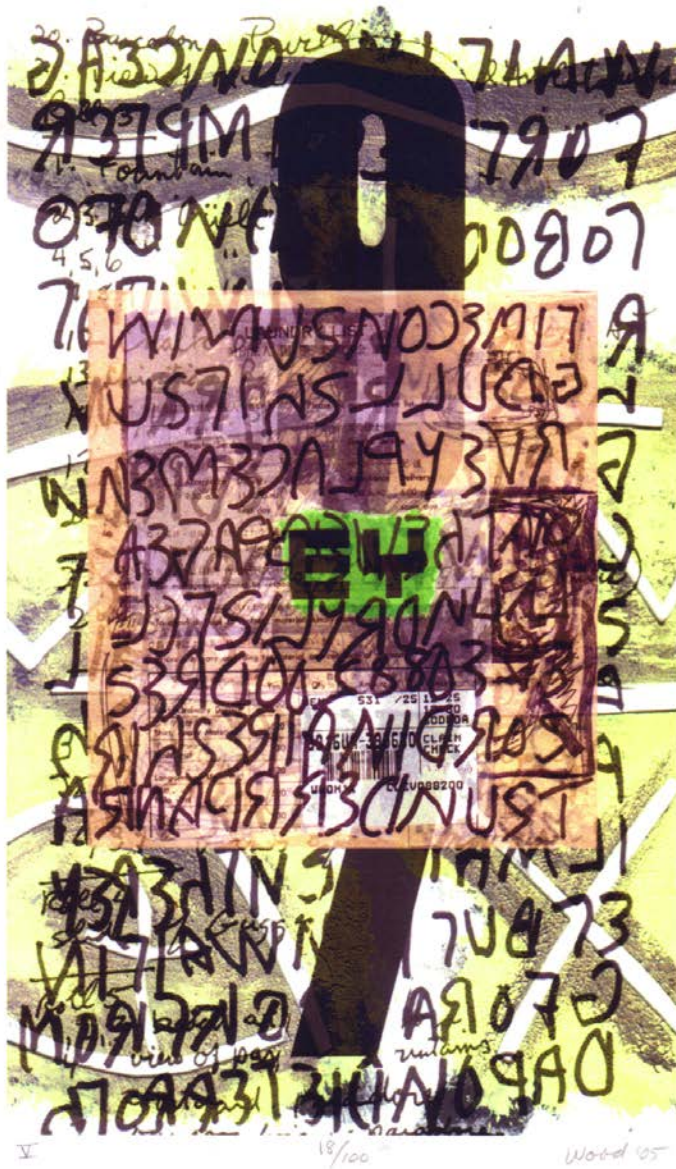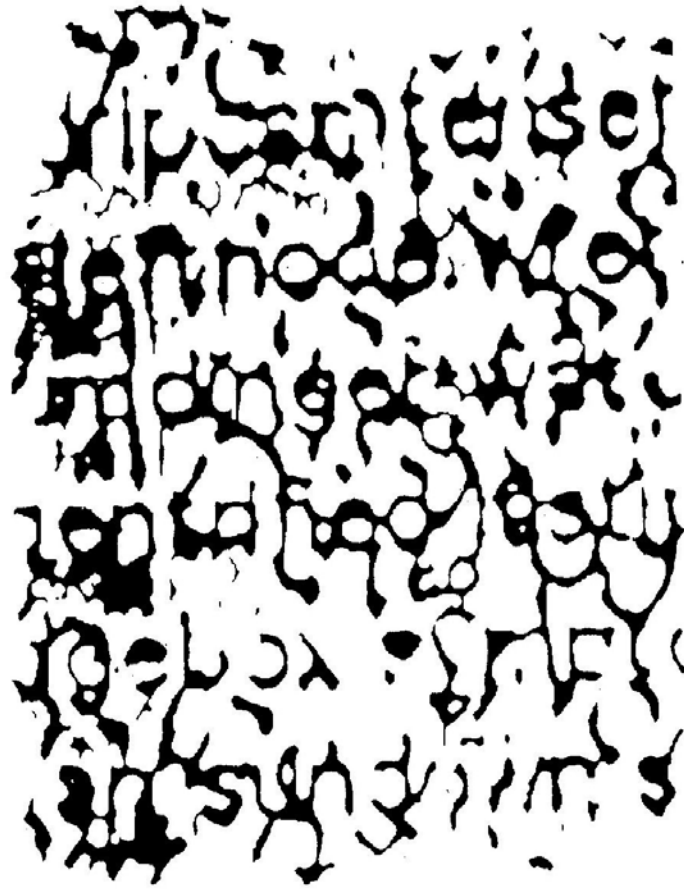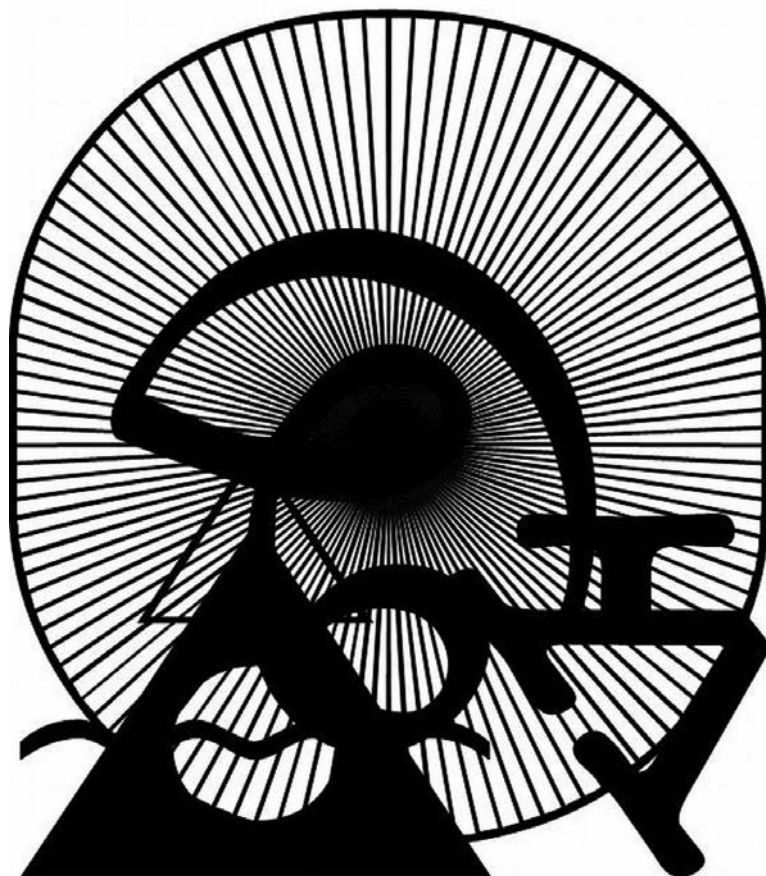
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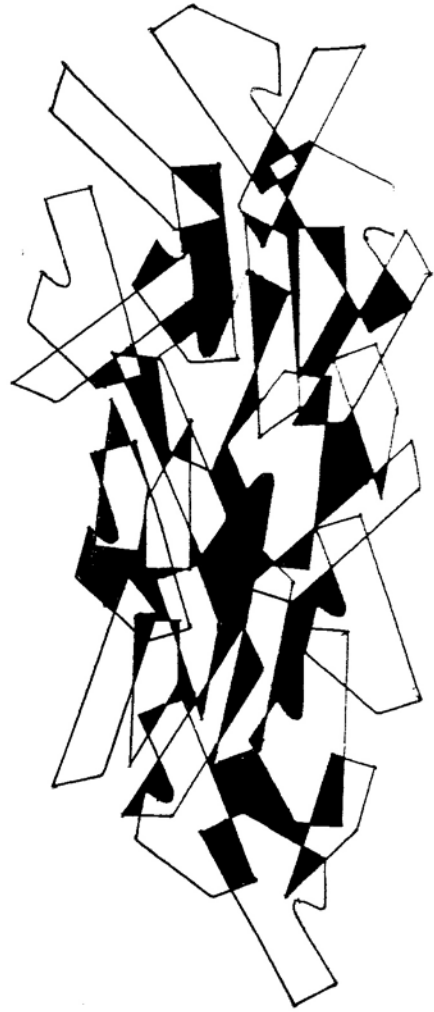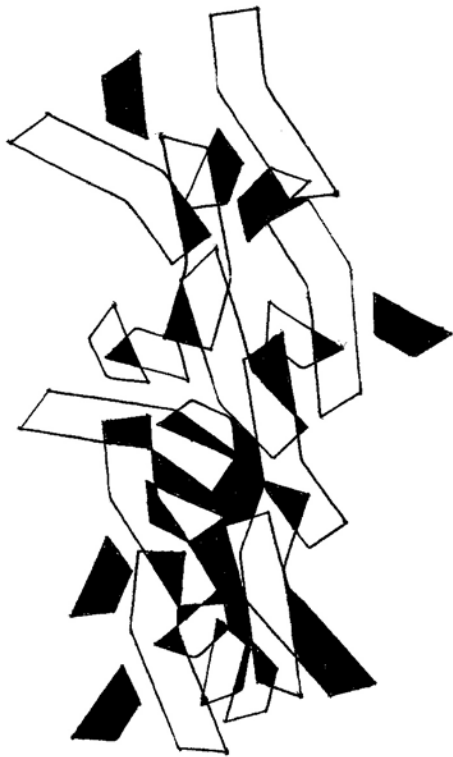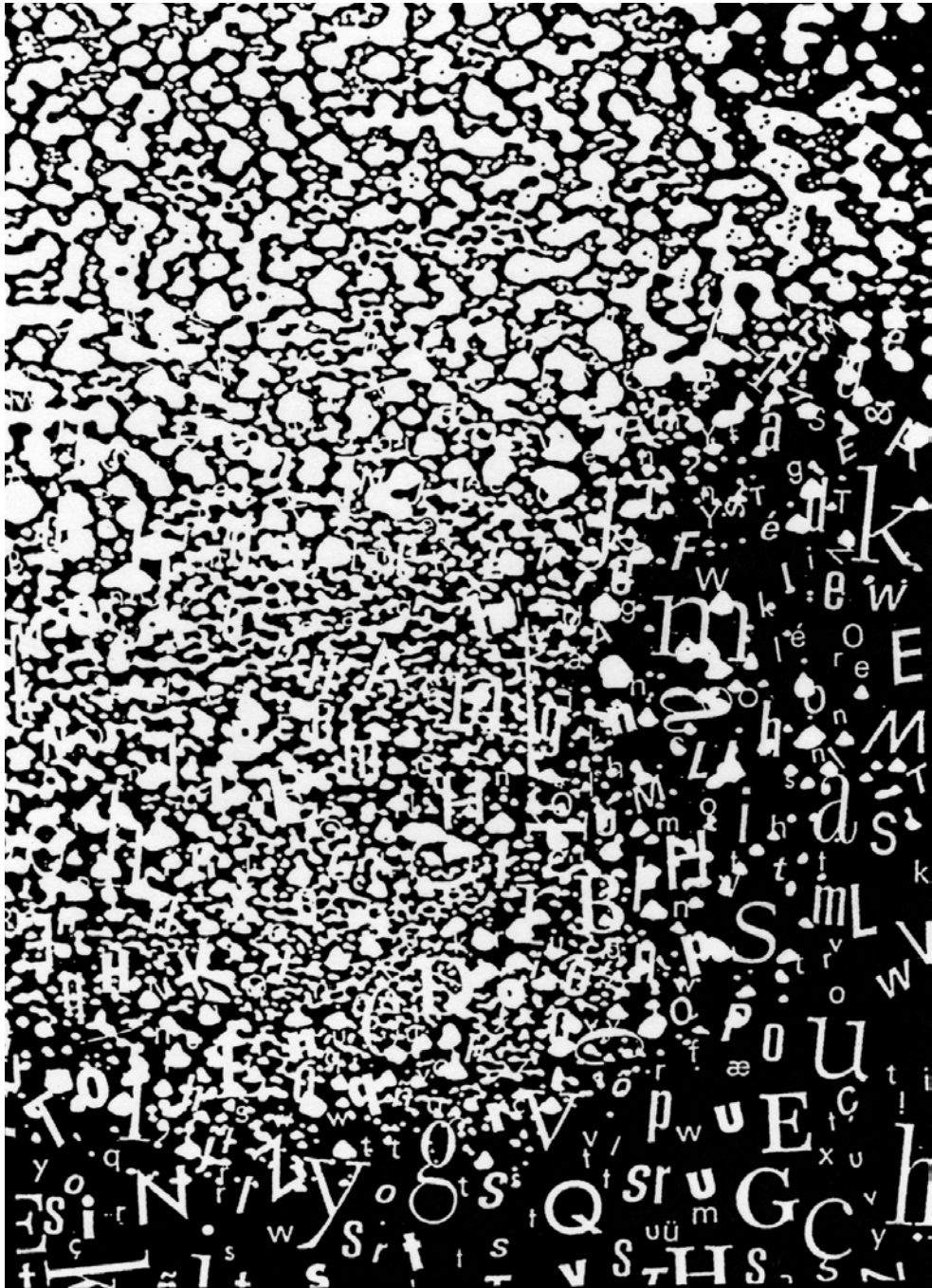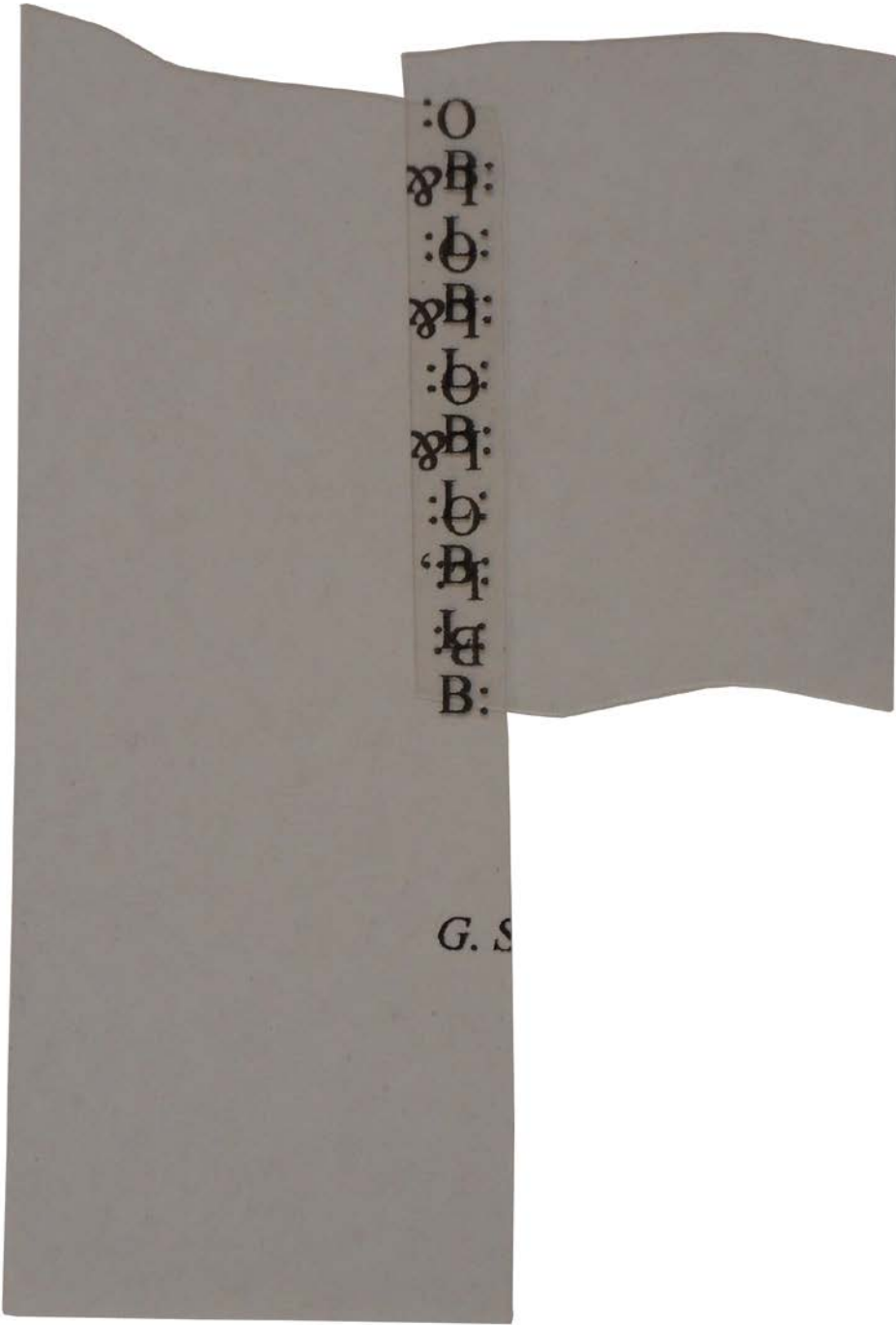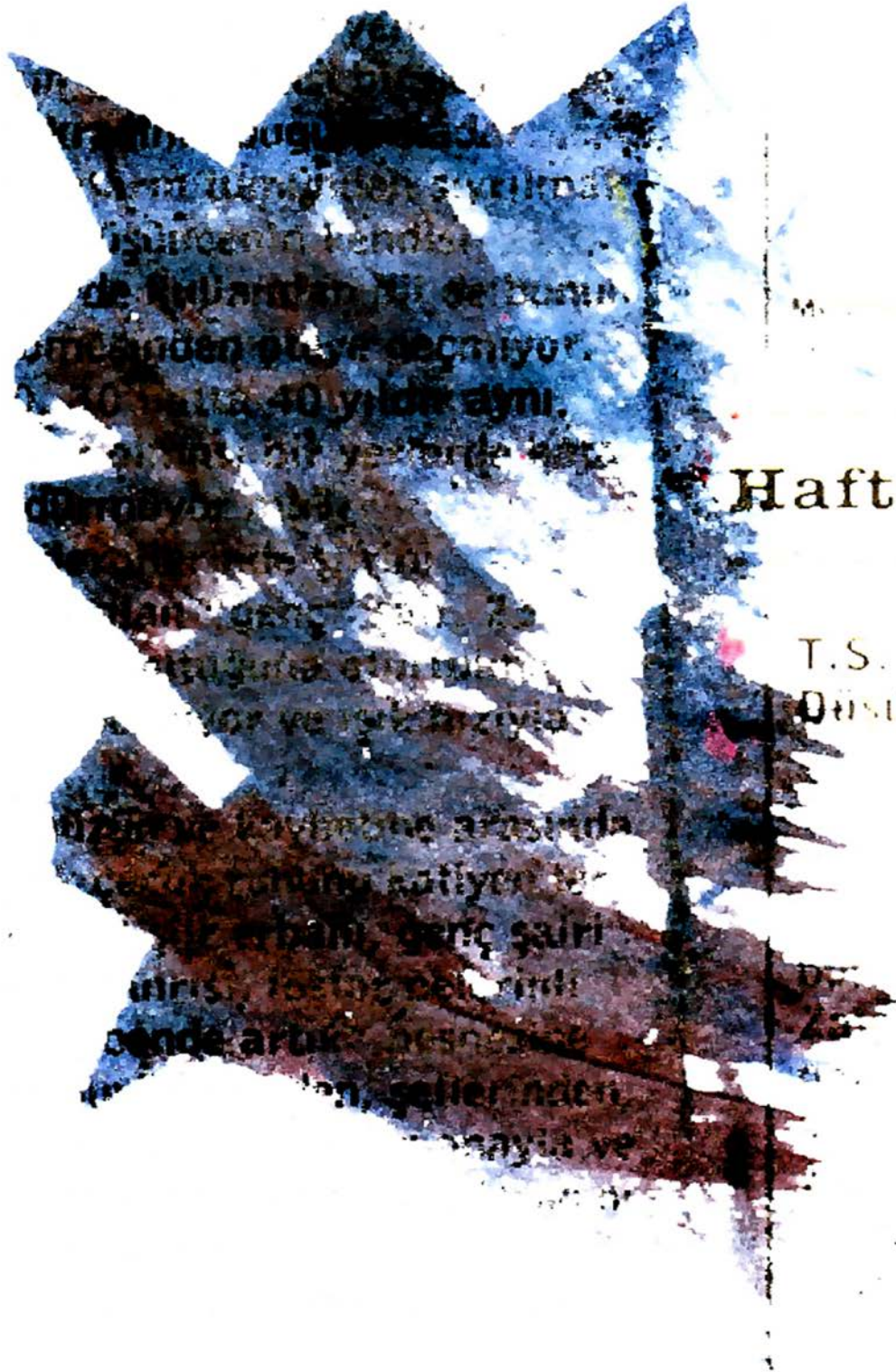
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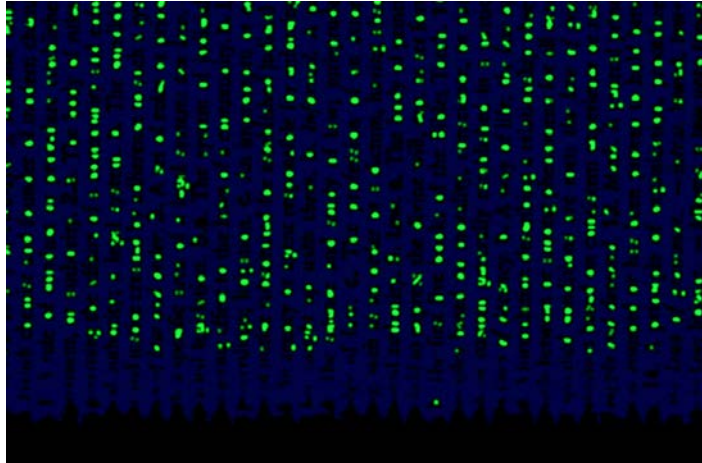
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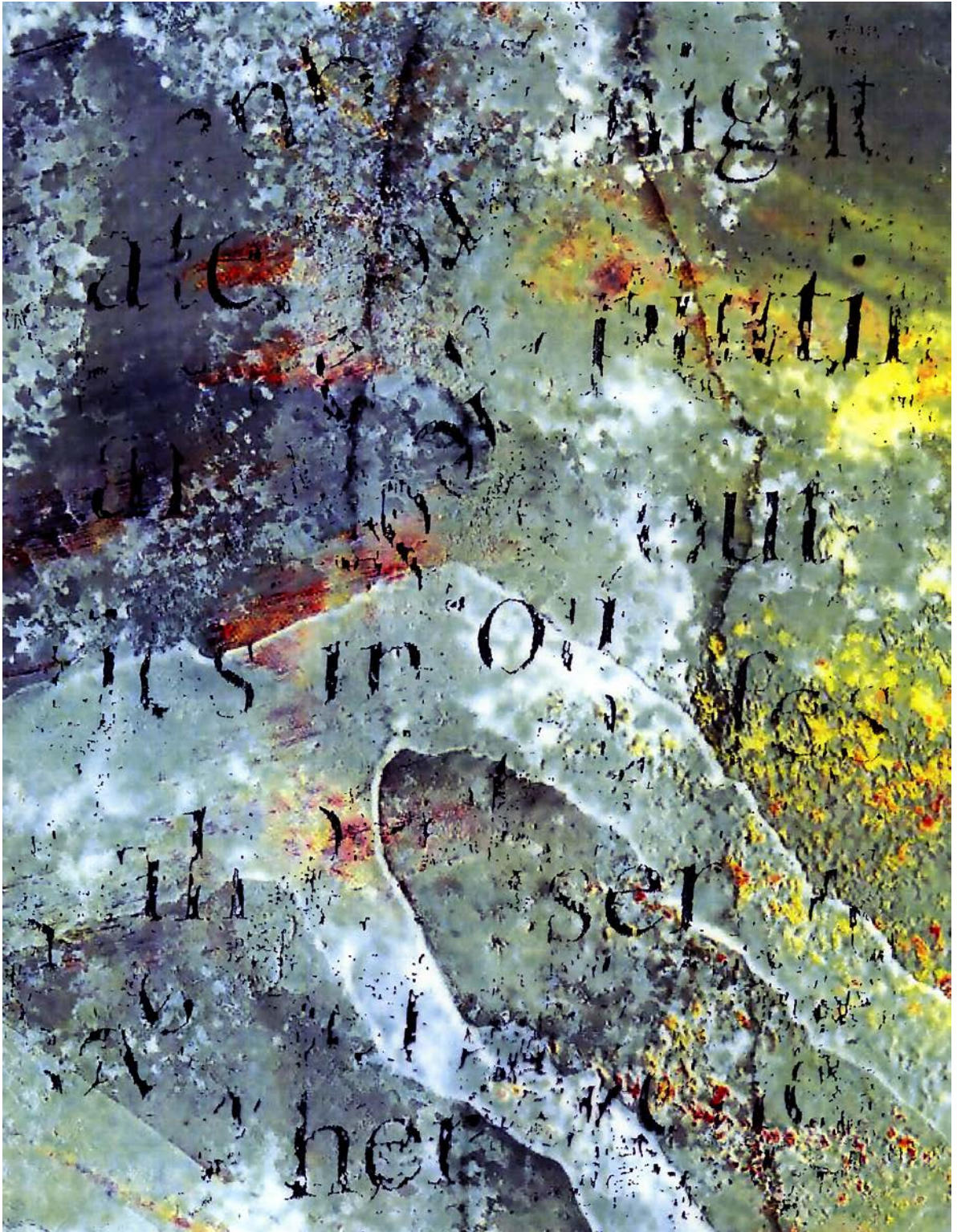
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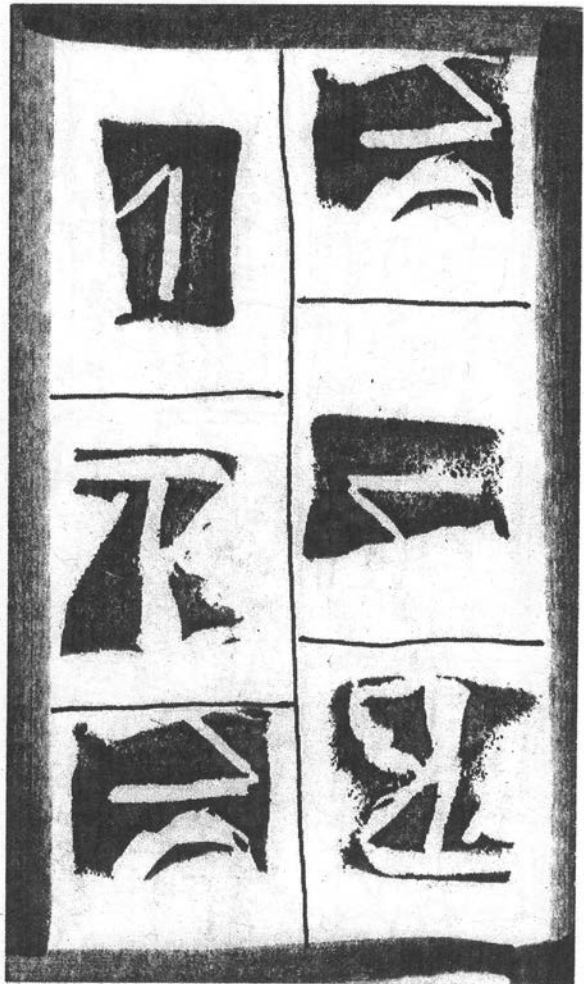
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Donato Mancini

THE YOUNG HATE US {1}: CAN POETRY BE MATTER?

(Briefer) History Of The Page.

White space of the page as mimetic, abstract or temporal. Pages bury easily under text, if there's a lot of it. Prose as the means of textual reification. Prose means. Textual reification.

<div align="center">*</div>

We've Been Contemporaries For 140 Years (And You Don't Even Know My Name), or, A (Brief) History Of The Contemporary Page.

What I mean is the History Of The Activated Page, poetry not as something on it but significantly about it.

When the blank space signifies, the page is activated. The page, poet, is now your white bedding and arena.

Mallarmé activates the blanks, creates the page as an arena for action, the typewriter creates the page-as-grid which creates the page of much concrete poetry (poetry of the page *par excellence*), Olson takes the gridded typewriter page as a notational base for the page as vocal/mental score, post-Olson 'Nam-era poetics then make the blank of the page again a silence infringable-upon by the vicious Real which poets are no longer trying to keep out of the poem. The non-poetic noise of the social the environment the crowd *crowd in* or *crowd out* and become indistinguishable from the poetic, much the way that, say, prose created the fogs of London.

<div align="center">*</div>

What one does, then, when one is drawing one's poetry, is that one engages the problem of Art, not the problem of one's art, as far as one can, through a process of diagnostic attrition. Especially *agnostic*. Not the production biography of what if I were to write a [   ]? Addresses oneself to the problem, not of one's art, but of one Art.

Electrical feedback loops & the short circuits provide spectacle and information. Imperfectly synonymous terms: *recursive questioning* and/or ... *negative iteration*. The problem for poets now is that they can do anything they want to do. Principle of Plenitude. Crisis of Plenitude. Writer's block? No, writer's overstock.

Recursive questioning or negative iteration: are feedback loops consuming the feedback as they turn. Block out a sequence of refusals—negate, eliminate —determine what the work *will not* do, maneuver it towards its final form.

<div align="center">*</div>

Proposing the iron rigors of Great Poetry as afternoon days at the Rocky Balboa Masterpiece gym & chewable steroids & shrunken sack & horny Porsche; the tough and rumble "bottom line" economics of Great Art.

<div align="center">*</div>

Bad poetry vs. Good poetry. In a time when most marks are for coiffe, when armpit deodorant is an obligation, when dinosaurs walk the earth, when accountants control run universal edification factories, clean copy is mistaken for good writing, and a certain lack of tidiness looks stylish.
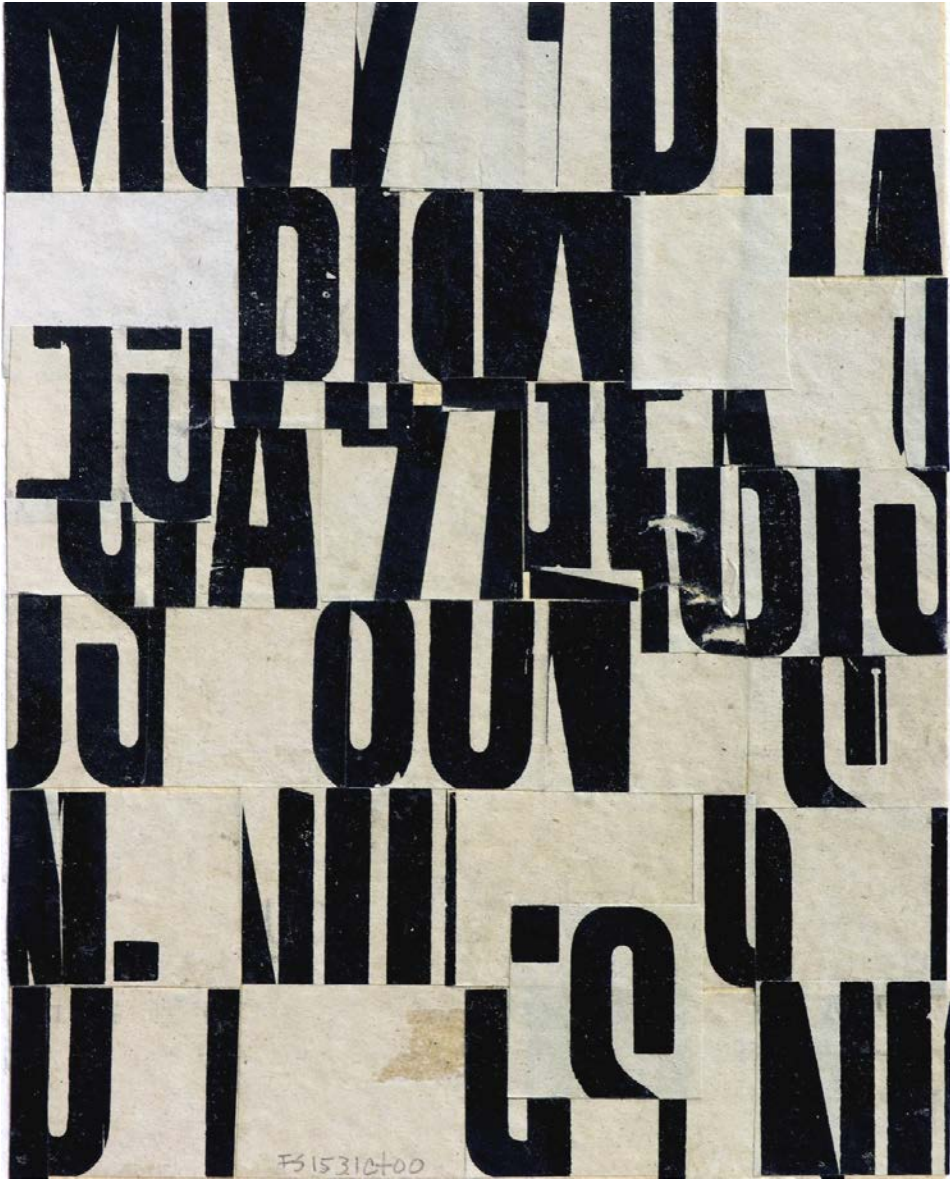
<div align="center">*</div>

Poets as sales managers. "Do it well enough and you get to work in the New York office. Do it perfectly 20 years later and there might be some vending machines for you to re-stock in East St Louis."

Visual poets. "I think we should all produce work with the urgency of outsider artists, panting and jerking off to our

kinky private obsessions." (Dodie Bellamy)

*

Crowd = numbers and statistics
Community = real human relations
My title: Who Addresses the Crowd Speaks to No Community.

*

Don't mind if I. "Capitalism begins when you open the dictionary" (S. McCaffery)

Meaning is commerce, they say. Meaning is always on sale. Meaning is our product, we mean. We are full of it. We are words. Meaning is our business, business is slow. We mean it. Yes, poets trade in meaning and affect, as painters trade in objects.

A trades grammar: Painters' products are referred-to using the countable a. Yes, that's a real Signac. Certainly, that looks like a Motherwell. A Webb.

Product of poets is an uncountable significance, an effusion, a puss, a creamcheese, a foie gras from the poet's metrically disciplined guts. The poet is, by a-numeric grammar, a paste-maker.

Production-line intestinal poetics. Pasta knowledge milk cheese garbage news research.

*

What are the issues? What are your issues? All the issues. Every question ever asked by any poet, good, bad, forgotten, foolish fish, fresh, French, yellow, or rotten. It gives color to cold cheek. Every issue is at tissue. Meaning-tissue. O, you mean palimpsest: you.

*

It might be even simpler after all.
Poetry might just be language, which is (according to some):
vocabulary
plus
a set of rules to run it through

which equals
language
which equals
poetry
which makes them
indistinguishable
and makes

*

An object rendered aesthetic is functionally no different than a work of art, someone said. Someone coughed. Somehim at his watch but it wasn't in his language.

Happy Birthday. I stuff thee full of such watches.

Language looked at with a certain misrecognition ---------> poetry.

*

Every and word and was and once and a and poem and. Every word was once sad.

You and can and tear and something and apart and by and pinning and it and together and.

What and you and do and not and understand and you and do and not and possess and.

Literature and as and a and total and social and process and.

Can and modernism and eventually and become and antiquity and.

*

Tradition As Delta
Axis of Ambiguity
Axis of Authenticity
Black Hats
White Hats
Them
Us
Good Guys
Bad Guys
The Moderns

The Formalists
Mainstream
Slipstream
Official
Orificial
Oppositional
Insiders
Outsiders

*

It is not about novelty. Cultural afterlife as dollar store.

For two cents, the use of arbitrary material restrictions in poetry forcefully condition new linguistic possibilities. For three cents, production-side, material devices/determinants break habituated patterns of language-use. For four cents, consumption-side, the formal restrictions can alter habituated patterns of cognition and emotion, patterning (inner) lives. (Changing the world *one subjectivity at a time*.) Buy One Get One Free: devices foreground the material conditioning of *structures of feeling*, the girders of the mega-bridge of meaning poetry-lovers daily negotiate, the nonarbitrary social effects of meaning-production. Arial-shot: "Capitalism restricts our life options, why shouldn't poetry, too?" (J. Derksen)

*

Dawn of the Dead.
Syllabus of the Dead.
Day of the Dead.
Moment of the Dead.
Scrapbook of the Dead.
Tax Credit of the Dead.
Debts of a Dead Dad.
Will of the Dead.
Children of the Dead.

In other words, resniffing an old critical sweatsock, does the social moment of the poem freeze-frame at initial writing first publication first rejection slip or travel a yellow brick road of post-it notes of increasing recognition towards the media castle of cultural dissemination, sporific thrill of diaspora, achieving at last dreamed-of immortality as a culturally indelible transcendent cliché?

And then there's the *bloody* (i.e., material) *problem of nothing*, which is nothing like saying nothing is problematic. Making nothing is a problem. A clear, material device as arbiter, or determinant, or a blatant address to material conditions of meaning-manufacture, grants somethingness to a poetry of the nothing.

*

Take your positions. Grease your hinges.

North of Heartbreak.
North of Boston.
North of Intention.
North of South.
North of the Beaufort Sea.
North of the USA.

*

A modest to high degree of alienation serves the poet.
A modest to high degree of vagueness serves poetics.

*

Even More Possibilities vs. Absorptive Plurality:
poem as hand-grenade
       head-grenade (prickly pear)
       human document
       humument
       notation of mind's movements
       testament
       testimony
       witness statement
       rearticulation
       dearticulation
       trinket
       puzzle
       score of voice
       yawp
       ink marks
       pixels
       chart of the changing weathers of temperament
poem in advance of the broken arm.

Funerary toast.

*

Specious Assignment. On *phatic form*. *Phatic form* is something I just invented, thanks to an invitation from Jason to just try it. This is what *phatic form* is. It's not *nonce form*, nor the nerdification-of-classic-venerated-now-socially-irrelevant-except-for-purposes-of-détournement verse forms. *Phatic form* describes the many open quote, "poems," close quote, that stand in for poems, just as prose may stand in for news among advertisements, ads for news not there; signs *News!* without having anything news to say. Similarly *phatic form* poetry represents Poetry; the main order of signification is Look at Me I Am A Poem Keeping the Poem Soul Bonfires Burning. All a *phatic form* poem has to do is say POEM as often as possible without saying "poem" too often because that would be meta, harsh the mellow. Whole books, whole careers, whole schools die chanting POEM. *Phatic oeuvre.* See also *lyric floater*.

*

What? A. Safe. Way. To? Write! In an age of accumulation by dispossession, of neoliberal terror, of ransack and pillage.

*

If truth is salmonella rye a culture of accountants, business people, customs officials, postal clerks, meter maids, economists, it's because tables of knowledge demand content to fill the forms and the distributors await product. Cultural placement of things is predetermined on inspection before the product is shipped off to enter the culture, which means, of course, when crossing the frontier from production-side to consumption-side, certain duties apply.

Duties: a poem must, a poem must also, a poem must then, a poem has to not only show what a war is like but show the conviction of death.
A poem must work for a living.
A poem must also be valid.
A poem must then speak for itself.
A poem has to be a poem.
A poem needs to move fast.
A poem needs to include a man's contradictions.
A poem should be palpable and mute.
A poem should be but not be mean.
A poem should palpitate.
A poem has to have enough money for a train ticket.

A poem has to go where it will.
A poem must sing out of itself and carry magic.

A poem must make its own world and therefore its own world trade organization and maintain low international labor standards in order to keep cultural economies in boom.

The right truck carries the right goods along the right track. The eager truth-measurer carries the right instruments—necessitating itemization, listing, fact-finding, check-listing. Just read the sticker: TRUE 100% AUTHENTIC.

*

If you know what the poet's job is, you should ask who the poet's boss is.

*

Writing was not implicit in language; writing was implicit in *mark-making*, the capacity of one substance to affect the surface of another. The toddler who flings Spaghetti-Os at the white wall is performing a primary act of writing. Writing is graphemic. Writing is not language—writing came first.

Did ancient poetry-lovers really get it together to build Stonehenge before they discovered that shit sticks to boulders, that berry juice stains fingers?

*

The problem of intelligence is what people have, how to use what people have. Intelligence, will, power. Our fiercely demanding craft of unverse makes of us will-powered in intelligence-use.

Intellect as sausage machine—yes, *literaturwurst*. Our defined problem being: intelligence, use of. Intelligence, application of. Intelligence, appetite of. Intelligence as trash-compactor. Solid cubes of impeccable correctness, stable in relation to the facts of the world, "the world" a frame the cube fits through to plop back into The World.

The problem, also, of intelligence as lawnmower. Appearance of process + result = copious clippings unprocessed but well gone-over. Best minds are like three

lawnmowers roaring at once on three different terraces.

*

Always just past what's masterable, just past what's knowable therefore exchangeable. Always wire it to make your own brain explode. Confound your own mastery, as you acquire it. Learn more than you can learn. Outwit yourself. Take rational principles of a financialized daily life too far: burst the pipes of everyday reason.

*

incomprehensibility ≠ absurdity
ambiguity ≠ lack of commitment

*

Q: Yeah, sure, all that—but can you light a match ?
A: I have in the past, and operate under the assumption that I could again if called to.
Q: The pocket lighter is to grade-school arson as the pocket calculator is to grade-school arithmetic: lazy-making.
A: But a single, well-placed match could be forever."

*

Art only remains interesting as long as the possibility remains that all artists are quacks.

*

Belief in the value of the work of art (i.e., the poem) is part of the full reality of the work of art (Bourdieu), this is what art functionally *is*, only a system of value and valuation. It gets no more essential than that. Poetry is and can only be texts that are read as poetry, or weird splots of ink viewed as traces of poetry's passing. Quality? None; only value.

*

"Genre" isn't the issue here, except that poetry risks becoming a mere genre when readers and writers' expectations are too specific. When the poetic experience, the particular magic of poetry, the poetry buzz or mellow whatever, is too recognizable (if not *articulable*), poets start writing poetry, or worse, they creatively write. Readers then come to expect a certain kind of bump from it; poetry becomes: Meet me at the Genre.

Poetry-readers should not be enticed to recognize The Poetic so easily. When they can or do, poetry becomes one of many fine luxury goods—organic red wine or unsweetened apricot jam. Poetry loses its criticality, loses its social pertinence, loses its power.

Might as well take the copper wiring and the lightbulbs, this place is going to be torn down anyway.

*

Mere discourse? Mere spectacle? Mere affect? No: the bricks attack the martial fist.

"You can crush us, you can bruise us, you can Guattari and Deleuze us but oh no: guns of Brixton." (P. Simonon)

*

Poetry now as a triangulation of music, contemporary art, and social critique.

Music not so much as sound, but as structure, architecture, and temporality.

Contemporary art not so much as visuality, but as concept, practice, mood, and value.

Social critique as the core of any significant poetics ever.

*

Visual poetry is poetry against metaphor. Scram. Metaphor is let's make dividends in the boom economy of our passion. Against Metaphor. Against Description. Brie and gore, bribe and gloom.

*

Get (the) Real, Schools of Poetics: A Relational Diagram:
Reality in poem.
Reality of poem.
Reality ↔ poem.
Reality-poem.
Reality, poem.
Reality/poem.
Reality. Poem.

*

"It's beautiful, but where are you going to put it?" (J. Cage's mom.)

Department of English Department of Poetry Department of Drama Department of Want Ads. Genre categories as contingent, impermanent, convenient, sociological fictions. Fictions unrelated to the structuralist / formalist character of mark making. Of writing. Transdisciplinary writing and visual writing jettison institutional suitcases. Lead and feathers.

What except habit could make [it] not poetry?

*

Psychedelic. Cementitious.

Visual poetry, unhooked from the instrumentality of design or the discursive histories of contemporary art. Most visual poets aren't making images, they're making visually over-coded texts that push the student loan debt Poetry Master back into alphabetic pre-school.

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H. I. J. K. L. M. N. O. P. Q. R. S. T. U. V. X. Y. Z.

*

The needs of art and poetry now: no return to a kind of disciplinary boundary, or generic specificity, or purity of medium. Now open poetry to basic questions that affect all communication, and all art-making.

"What appears as eclectic from one point of view can be seen as rigorously logical from another... practice is not defined in relation to a given medium ... but rather in relation to the logical operations on a set of cultural terms, for which any medium—photography, books, lines on walls, mirrors, or sculpture itself—might be used." (R. Krauss)

||*|*|*|*|*|*

Robert Mittenthal

ECOLOGY OF VISPO – A BLINDFOLD TEST

Colored by my own predisposition for the idea of the non-ocular, I'm afraid I prefer to unsee the visible in visual poetry. That is, I prefer a blindfold test, where the audient can happily focus on the crisp turning of pages and other less obscure signals.

The new sentience alive in its calling. Time to unhook to see.

But I'm afraid I'll have to leave the affective mapping, or how visual poems consciously and unconsciously impact us, to others. I cannot even bear witness, ala Charles Reznikoff, to things not seen. The truth is that the impetus for this essay was to try to explain why I'm not a partisan of the form.

What intrigues me and what I want to think about here is the ecology of visual poetry, or the logic of its environment. The point is to try to understand what makes visual poets matter in their own ways, rather than trying to generalize the divergent practices of visual poets. That is, I want to avoid a general review that looks for potential unity, or that would illustrate what visual poetry is, or what this anthology represents.

In short, I have only questions, no answers: What makes visual poets think—rather than recognize? And how are visual poets attached to their practice? The point is not to find some consensus or commonality among visual poets, for these are intractably subjective questions. How one is attached to a practice relates to how one belongs and belonging could be thought of as a condition of both owning and being owned by a social nexus or community. How does that sense of belonging obligate us in an affirmative way, i.e., not in the sense of duty? Maybe this relates to how practitioners are in debt to their habitat, i.e., not completely autonomous? We're not alone in the world.

After Mallarmé used white space as silence, there's a mise-en-page that can be endlessly explored. But visual poetry continues to be impacted by new technologies: from Gutenberg to the typewriter to early computers to new digital technologies—which provide tool sets that build on the array of prior tool sets. There is now easy access to virtually all known alphabets, as well as programs to construct and design (and deconstruct and redesign) new alphabets, which are themselves easily deployable via vectors that mathematically describe the points and curves of each letter form.

There is a "relationship of relevance between situation and tool." The "gesture of taking in hand" both produces and is produced by this relationship. —Isabelle Stengers

Communion crowds the worker. It crowns her. Queen of finger painting. After alpha blockage, manna stored and resold.

Anthems and Definitions

The Last Vispo Anthology as a spectrum of the current state of the art—"documenting the recent surge in visual poetry ... [extending] the dialectic between art and literature that began with the concrete poetry movement fifty years ago."

"Vispo" as a separate compact, an abbreviated entity? Is this a mere Gitmo-ification that mobilizes a term for the digital era? That's not clear. But the provocative title ("Last ...") suggests Vispo is all but in a crypt, or that the editors feel the practice is coming up against some kind of a pivotal limitation, perhaps on the verge of becoming other than itself, or in desperate need of a revitalized or new habitat.

It swallows the eye—the all-time best hits. Chasing the non-human tool kits our future presents. What's never

excluded, aka the affect that escapes capture. The emotion celebrates its lucre, oozing excess. Book reports that report on the informer.

"Visual poetry is poetry against metaphor. Scram. Metaphor is let's make dividends in the boom economy of our passion. Against Metaphor. Against Description…" —Donato Mancini

Following Geof Huth's definition, a visual poet is a poet irrepressibly drawn to the visual. In an attempt to describe the discipline, Huth suggests that there are three competencies of the visual poet:

> (1) printer's palette—or mastery of the visual, non-verbal;
> (2) poet's pen—or mastery of the linguistic aspects; and
> (3) printer's fist—or mastery of the emotive and intellectual value of letters/grammar, punctuation, typefaces, words, design.

I use the word "mastery" here, though Huth does not, because of the slippery slope inherent to the model he sets forth. While Huth may be merely describing what he believes the qualities of a competent visual poet are, rather than necessarily ascribing to them, any such model sets up canonical qualities or categories upon which to judge works of visual poetry.

"Visual poetry, unhooked from the instrumentality of design or the discursive histories of contemporary art. Most visual poets aren't making images, they're making visually over-coded texts that push the Poetry Master back into pre-school." —Donato Mancini

Proposition: the visual poem as a record of the decisions that happen to the visual poet. But this proposition only makes sense if you understand "decision" in the way that Whitehead uses it, where decisions are what happen to enduring entities or subjects.

"Decision precedes consciousness and it precedes cognition." That is, "Decisions make cognition possible, not the other way around.… We don't make decisions because we are free and responsible; rather we are free and responsible because—and precisely to the extent that—we make decisions." —Steve Shaviro

Dick Higgins suggests that both concrete poetry and pattern poetry tell "the story of an ongoing human wish to combine the visual and literary impulses, to tie together the experience of these two areas into an aesthetic whole.… To those who attempt this synthesis, something of the picture of the whole seems crucially important."

Higgins goes on to say that pattern/concrete poetry has no single origin. And it is easy to speculate that the reflexive act of making marks led to a foregrounding of the visual elements of the grapheme in its unfolding or recording. Calling attention to itself and aware of its own motion— the record of the grapheme in motion becomes a sort of proprioceptive trace/gesture, a constructive practice and extension of the body.

Vispo's Dog Ate My Homework

1. This convergence of literary and visual impulses has something to do with the problems in the reception of pattern poetry. Rather than creating singularities that diverge and are somehow beyond comprehension, the image unified with its content was dismissed as a visual pun—a naïve version of reality, simply not complex or serious enough to tackle enlightened notions of the "truth" that art was supposed to express.

2. As Higgins writes of pattern poetry: "It was never the predominant mode and… there were violent attacks upon it in each age in which it occurred; since the history of any poetry is always to some extent the history of responses to it, the great antagonism which it aroused continued during the colonial era, so that it fell into disrepute in one literature after another, eventually, by the 19th century, surviving only in comic, folk, or popular verse."

3. Ben Jonson dismissed it as "a pair of scissors and a combe in verse." Montaigne claimed the pattern poem's means of composition displayed subtleties which are "frivolous and vain." Perhaps Montaigne's objection was that it seems to turn poetry into a mere parlor game. Divorced from the pursuit of truth, he disparages it as novelty, a mere amusement. Visual puns generate mere iconic effects that don't obligate us to think and that violate the ideals of platonic form.

4. Another explanation for the poor reception is that visual

and/or pattern poetry is non-modern and violates a sense of decorum or the tradition that privileges the purity of art forms.

5. "Thus the visual poem claims to abolish playfully the oldest oppositions of our alphabetic civilization: showing and naming; representing and telling; reproducing and articulating; imitating and signifying; looking and reading." —Michel Foucault

6. Visual poetry is a constructive practice, it both shows and names, both represents and tells, etc. Visual poetry stands outside these oppositions—they are irrelevant to its concerns.

7. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour describes a world full of hybrid combinations of social and natural objects & subjects. Humans were never divorced from nature. Modernity attempts to purify the human and the natural realms, privileging the human realm, including language. "The proliferation of quasi-objects [viz the industrial revolution*] was… greeted by three different strategies:" first, the ever-increasing separation between the poles of nature and that of society; second, the autonomization of language or meaning; third, the deconstruction of metaphysics. [*my paraphrase]

8. Elias Canetti on the dangers of mixing mediums: "The separate arts should live in the most chaste co-habitation." It's as if the non-platonic intercourse between the word and the image would close up the space in which the reader can breathe. Welcome to the Kama Sutra school of interconnection.

9. As Whitehead said: "Life lurks in the interstices…" The reader constitutes herself in the gaps. But there's no reason to think that visual poems necessarily clog these interstices—even when they do aim at unity. The reader's faculties are not harmonized by an encounter with a visual poem.

10. The argument may really be about maximizing intensity and affect. That a unified or closed hybrid object lacks allure. To unify is a kind of destruction of possibility.

11. Since the world isn't pure chaos, then there must be some pre-established harmony, even if that's just a common ground for disagreement.

12. Friction is an adventure. The autobiography of a stone. But there are no marriageable metaphors in a world of physical comedy.

13. "There is no science of the beautiful, but only critique." —Kant

14. The divorce of art and science, where science becomes fixated on efficient causes. But don't art and science need each other? Tools with which to think and make marks.

15. Poetry and other art forms are attached to human interests—they're attempts to make alluring artifacts. On the other hand, science demands answers that can be detached from human interest; science wants to eliminate artifacts of subjectivity (i.e., all traces of subjectivity) from the experimental apparatus. Science wants to find reliable facts, to discover or explain mysteries of nature.

16. This said, art and poetry have always deployed technology or tools—much like science, e.g., the alphabet, the hand. And science can never completely purify itself of the human artifact. The experimental apparatus also attempts to uncover alluring facts, which might be precisely those facts that seem to have an alluring lack of human artifact.

17. The real source of this apparent contradiction may be the notion of human interest. The hybrid objects or assemblages produced by visual poets are facts, regardless of how alluring they are to others. Perhaps it's a question of what's reliable (recognition, emotion) versus what allures (or what generates thinking, affect)?

18. "Tools for thinking are then the ones that address and actualize this power of the situation, that make it a matter of concern, in other words, make us think and not recognize. When we deal with practices, recognition would lead to the question—why should we take practices seriously as we know very well that they are in the process of being destroyed by Capitalism? This is their 'sameness', indeed, the only difference being between the already destroyed one and the still-surviving ones. The ecology of practices is a non-neutral tool as it entails the decisions never to accept Capitalist destruction as freeing the ground for anything but Capitalism itself." —Isabelle Stengers

James Yeary
FAIL

Visceral poetics, or viscpo—a poem or poetics that blurs or distorts (its relationship w/) that which surrounds the poem:
you, the book, a concept, whatever.

More or less after the erasure—a strategy economically minded but internally misdirected. As modernists have shifted from avant garde (oppositional) to a post-avant (agnostic) mindset, they have become as lazy & inoffensive as their counterparts in industrial production. Out there, in the World, landfills are piling, as they are in the SPD warehouse, w/ books no longer being made by people.

An ambient poetics, or starepo, by untraining the eye from conventional modes of reading, is also teaching the eye to shear conventions. What is deeply relaxing in today's reading, could be a sickle or scythe when pulled over to yesterday's. These literatures are already under way, have been not only produced, & not only called by their own authors to be forgotten, but be finished off. If this is because they contain the seeds of their own destruction, then this is the seed we would cultivate.

Because poetry is so gentrified beyond the genres. The space it inhabits—books, always clearly marked, & if it is being read, silently idling or vocally subtracted in dissonance against community. It's edges are where it is avoided & that would be the space of activity called visceral poetics.

Visceral poetics begins with Ronald Johnson's erasure of *Paradise Lost* & ended in the Letterist anthology wrapped in sandpaper. As such, as a movement, it is traveling backward thru time & against history.

Staring is tearing.

The flimsy social context of poetry, like socialism or pop music, gives it a distinctly annoying quality. Making a "different" poetry than that of the annoying opposition has no effect on the density of letters whatsoever. As opposed to being the end of poetry, this should be taken as its edge. But the more it is appreciated, the less it is fully experienced. "It is like a Viewmaster w/ no expectations."

This is an explanation as to how a craft worsens as it increases in popularity. It is not just that we have materially spread ourselves thin, to be over appreciated is to be eroded.

What comes next? The transition from the possibility of the page to the possibilities of the screen seems horizontal, pedestrian, compromising or boring & utopian.

Positioning the anthology of but also against its contents. As in "SUPPLIES WON'T LAST" the last could be seen as a strategy of marketing, a blow to the integrity of the movement, dealt to vispo for being commercial, by being commercial.

> Can vispo break from the page aside or beyond merely being available for download or in Flash?

Not just a question of vispo but of poetry itself. It can be placed or found everywhere, but it is only put where it is bought & sold, even when it is being bought & sold for sex & swill, or friendship.

Chris Mann
337 WORDS

copy

or,

Data, the new Music. i dont like the downbeat, i dont like the search, so why am i so impatient?

.. sOmewhere in this lot theres a distinction between meditation and bureaucracy. i mean its clearly not the glitch. (though whether its Interesting .. i mean the finite set of criteria to which this then suggests response is .. like if the Distinction is that which cant talk bAck, if the number Is indeed not just Rhetorical, (like double entry bookkeeping clearly Is rhetorical (.. and then theres the refined essay in minimalism, an early effect of verification, Boredom .. (and while the first mass product was of course Price (not to be confused with its alter ego, Gaze, (.. so if a circle was less say of a circle and more of a Medium, would it be more, more, Famous? .. (here i'm reminded to remind you that gutenberg was an unemployed mirror maker before he took up print. i mean as a mechanism for discovering the market, cash has its Costs. i mean Your ten and my ten aint exactly the Same. and just as induction suffers an invasion of facts and as facts are valued according to where they Fall .. Price i mean but a particularly Vindictive form of criticism. and just as difficulty was invented as a subset of Fiction, (and being less fiction than Secret) and just as the copy may be redeemed for an iteration of it sElf, a model collateral L shaped self .. and as fiction is the unique selling proposition of, as fiction is what makes abstraction Credible (and as facts is professionally industrialized, as the market is the argument that facts are a subset of the News, and as news is only ever Probable (detail being of course only ever Libel .. (and while a copy may indeed function as a work of art, that's not yet a reason to sell the Frame .. (Credit, one of the great experiments, often confused with the ability to reproduce, (i mean cash is nothing if not Theory,

Derek Beaulieu

CONCRETE & "WHAT LOOKS LIKE POETRY"

The classical inspiration for writing poetry is the humanist moment—the urge to communicate a classical 'truth' about the human experience—love, memory, heartbreak—through now familiar poetic diction. Poetry, now, has become an indicator for "what looks like poetry"—if it walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it must be confessional humanism. The poem as finely wrought epiphanic moment of personal reflection (the poetry norm) underlines mass-culture and political sameness; it does little to question or confront how language itself defines the limitations of expression—both personal and critical. Writers that emphasize the classical and humanist definitions of poetry without considering the work being done in alternative forms of writing do little to further the writing of poetry as they offer only what is most palatable to the most conservative of audiences.

The accommodationist "official verse culture" of personal confession and reflection has been flattened into a sameness of subject, form and structure. In striving for universality it instead degenerates into an implicit support of sloganeering, advertising and suburban consumerism. Neo-Conservative writing continuously underlines the relationship between power and language. To resist and undermine this commodification, poetry must become a "granitic, endemic loss" (Betts 19), for as Steve McCaffery stated, "language […] functions like money and speaks through us more than we actively produce within it." A number of contemporary writers distance themselves from the humanist trope by finding inspiration in found and manipulated texts. These texts allow the author to move writing out of its confines of the confessional, and into areas of language which are not typically seen as "literature."

The concrete poetry which I endorse—and which stylistically is of most influence on my own work—is a poetic without direct one-to-one signification. It is rhizomatic in composition, pointing both to and away from multiple shifting clouds of meanings and construction, where writing "has nothing to do with signifying […] it has to do with surveying [and] mapping" (Deleuze and Guattari 7). A rhizome is a non-centered, supportive system—an "antigeneology" (7) resistant to the type of the modernist situating within a historical framework to which concrete poetry is so often subjected. Instead of a single, arborescent historical and critical framework, rhizomatic writing is "a map not a tracing"; and as a map it has

> multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back to the 'same'. The map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involved an alleged 'competence' (Deleuze and Guattari 12).

The writing I foreground in these "multiple entryways" is that which focuses on excess—the leftovers, the refuse, the waste. Writing which overflows the container of the hegemony.

Concrete poetry, as Steve McCaffery argues, embodies an "interplay of forces and intensities, both through and yet quite frequently despite, language" in a flow of "non-verbal energy" (93). This flow, McCaffery argues, is composed of "forces oppositionally related to the signifying graphism of writing" (94) which struggle against the "constraint mechanisms of grammar" (93). I believe that this movement rejects the "valorization of the representational" (McCaffery "Writing as a General Economy" 202) in favour of an economic interplay of meaning and eruption.

I propose a poetic where the author-function is fulfilled both by the biological "author" of the text, and

the technology by which it is created. Business machines and tools move beyond the role of device in concrete poetry through a poetics of waste and refuse—into a role closer to that of author/reader. If "Capitalism begins when you / open the [d]ictionary" (McCaffery "Lyric's Larnyx" 178), then concrete poetry is a means of political and economic critique upon both reading and writing practice and the Capitalist means of exchange.

I recognize that theorizing a language outside of Capitalist exchange is problematic, but what I am concerned with proposing is a writing that articulates a poetics troubling that economic master narrative. Because "[a]ll that signifies can be sold" (bpNichol "Catalogue of the 'Pataphysical Hardware Company" 161), I am intrigued by the possibility of a (briefly) non-signifying poetic. The 26-letter alphabet has been completely co-opted by the Capitalist hegemony as a system of materialist exchange. As "a rule of grammar is a power marker before it is a syntactic marker" (Deleuze and Guattari 76), syntax and grammar both reinforce the master narrative. Any movement to refuse or oppose Capitalism in writing only serves to reify it as the other, reinforcing its grip on representational language. The best we can strive for are momentary eruptions of non-meaning which are then co-opted back into representation by the very act of identification, pointing and naming.

Brion Gysin remarked that "writing is fifty years behind painting" (Gysin np), an assertion evident in the cultural and critical reception for concrete poetry. Readings based upon libidinal economies, political structures (and the refusal to reinforce these structures) and rhizomatic readings are as valid to concrete poetry—if not more so because of its attempt to shatter the chain of signification—as they are in other forms of post-modern poetry. I suggest that concrete poetry can also be closely read in conjunction with Sianne Ngai's idea of a poetics of disgust as an "inarticulate mark" that

> deliberately interferes with close reading, a practice based on the principle that what is at stake in every textual encounter is a hidden or buried object, a concept of symbolic meaning that can be discovered by the reader only if she or he reads 'deeply' enough (Ngai 116).

Concrete poetry momentarily rejects the idea of the readerly reward for close reading, the idea of the "hidden or buried object," interferes with signification and momentarily interrupts the capitalist structure of language.

Writing that works within a general economy "transgresses the prohibition of semantic operation and risks the loss of meaning"—meaning written in the terms of a restricted economy. In concrete poetry, the excesses and eruptions of a general economy are prioritized as "a return to the material base of language […] as a method of losing meaning, holding on to graphicism" (McCaffery "Writing as a General Economy" 214). The "presupposed stasis" (201) of the restricted economy is troubled through ongoing general economic eruptions—much like the spread of acne on a previously smooth faced pubescent. In concrete poetry the restricted economic meaning "complicate[d] and unsettle[d]" (209) by libidinal eruptions spreads both micro- and macro-scopically to include systems of exchange from the graphic symbols of language (letters, punctuation, etc.) through to the containers of this communication (the page, book, etcetera). The matter of the restricted economy shifts from an investment in communication through the visual mark (the grapheme) to an investment in the mark itself, the grapheme and the container of communication. The economic relationship of restricted to general is one of flux as

> often we will detect a rupture made and instantly appropriated by the restrictive. The meaningless, for example, will be ascribed a meaning; loss will be rendered profitable by its being assigned a value (McCaffery "Writing as a General Economy" 203).

The libidinal excess typified in concrete poetry is not tied to a biological author, but rather to the excess and waste caused in the production by business machines of "correct" and legible documents. The shifting distinction between general and restrictive economies in concrete poetry, revolves not only around textual meaning, but also the categorization of text, and the role of writer in book production and consumption:

> [i]nk, as the amorphous liquid that the word and latter shape into visible meaning, is shown to be of the order of a powerful, anti-semantic force, perhaps the 'instinctual' linguistic 'unconscious' repressed within writing (McCaffery "Bill Bissett" 105).

A parallel can be drawn between business-machine based concrete poetry and the poetry of RACTER—the

"most highly developed artificial writer in the field of prose synthesis" (RACTER np)—as both exemplify an implicit challenge to the role of the author in the creation of poetry. Machine-based poetry, whether the work of RACTER, photocopy degeneration, or the refuse created by shredders and 3-hole punches,

> demonstrates the fundamental irrelevance of the writing subject in the manufacture of the written product […]for the machine, the category of the author has simply vanished, subsumed by a detached language that can function perfectly well, despite the absence of poetic agency (Bök 10–12).

Machine-based poetry challenges both the author-function and the way that text accumulates and is dispersed on the page. The general economic use of a machine created for use in a restricted economy troubles the "use-value" of the machines and that of the author. The author's role in confessional humanism, in light of conceptual writing and concrete poetry, is, as Lea Vergine states in her *When Trash Becomes Art*, " useless figure […] a social error" (12).

The author has become the voice of restraint and reason attempting to limit the presentation of continuous waste production as writing. The "cautious proceduralities" (McCaffery "Writing as a General Economy" 203) of structural poetics are discarded in favour of the documentation of a reading machine's waste as textual production. Text fractures through "willing errors" from a single united field of meaning with accepted social value to a series of pieces increasing "the rate and momentum of […] disposal" (McCaffery "Writing as a General Economy" 220) spreading value across a larger field.

What concrete presents to the reader is a record of the *waste* produced by the consumption (reading) of a text by a machine. If "[t]o read […] is a labour of language. To read is to find meanings" (Barthes 11), then the consumption and expulsion of texts by machines—or by authors working as machine, such as Goldsmith when he claims to want to be a "word-processor"—also finds meanings where meanings are not expected, fracturing the text at the level of the *seme*. In a text where "everything signifies ceaselessly and several times, but without being delegated to a great final ensemble, to an ultimate structure" (Barthes 12), even waste becomes poetically

charged.

To discuss mechanically-produced poetry in terms of "waste" and "excess" is troubled, as to dismiss these works out-of-hand as unintentional could be considered "anthropic prejudice" as "what we might dismiss as a technical fault in a device, we might otherwise glorify as a stylistic quirk in a person" (Bök 10–12). The machinistic impulse to create is beyond the frame of this paper, however, as

> the machine derives no pleasure from its function, it cannot, as yet, exceed the stoic limit of its own fixed logic, except perhaps when an accident, like a […] glitch, occurs (Bök 16).

By embracing the poetics of glitch—the mistake beyond "human error"—we assign the generative space of the minimal swerve of error to a process-based poetics, where the process and the product are controlled by the device, and not the author:

> the clinamen of such a disaster may in fact indicate the symptom of some obscure passion in the machine—an ironic reflex, perhaps, not unlike the apostasy of mischief (Bök 16).

Echoing Marshall McLuhan, bpNichol suggested that in photocopier degeneration poetry "the machine is the message […t]he text itself ultimately disappears" (*Sharp Facts* np).

The voicing of these texts, like the texts themselves, is "pulled off the page even as [it] disintegrate[s], a double thrust of text into silence" (*Sharp Facts* np). In my own practice concrete poetry is not a score for oral performance and is not meant to be articulated in sound. This "double thrust of text into silence" then becomes another issue of the rejection of exchange in concrete poetry. While the concrete poet cannot control how the reader will approach—or even perform a text—it is my aim to step away from performance of these poems in order to further complicate the exchange value of poetry. While "value" and "commodity" are never completely escaped, its transferal can be troubled by the removal of the verbal from the communication equation:

> Communication 'occurs' by means of a sole instantaneous circuit, and for it to be 'good' communication must take place fast—there is no time for silence. Silence is banished from our screens; it has no place in communication.

Media images […] never fall silent: images and messages must follow one upon the other without interruption. But silence is exactly that—a blip in the circuitry; a minor catastrophe, a slip which […] becomes highly meaningful—a break laden now with anxiety, now with jubilation (Baudrillard 13).

The performative "minor catastrophe" operates as an economic clinamen, a swerve away from the normative creation of a spoken text.

This refusal to participate in the oral performance of concrete poetry by rejecting the idea of the visual poem as score for orality—and the composition of concrete poetry itself—relates to Sianne Ngai's idea of a poetics where "disgust, and not desire, is our most common effective response to capitalism and patriarchy" (Ngai 98). A poetic of disgust includes both "the figure of the turn, or moment of exclusion […t]he movement away from the object as if to shun it" and the "negative utterance" (103). I extend Ngai's formulation of the "inarticulate sound" to print-based media as well as the "inarticulate mark". Ngai suggests that one of the articulations of disgust is the "inarticulate sound" where "[n]o words are used in the expression of disgust and thus the question of what words "mean" is simply irrelevant to this particular type of utterance" (Ngai 103). Concrete poetry—the "inarticulate mark"—treats language as "raw matter" without a reinforced referent as a means to briefly interrupt capitalist exchange-based signification by

> insisting on the disappearance of the referent while at the same time refusing to defer to other terms. It won't coagulate into a unitary meaning and it also won't move; it can't be displaced (Ngai 114).

The "inarticulate mark" of concrete poetry ultimately expresses a poetics of disgust and exclusion, where its language "only covers a space; the reader cannot fix it metaphorically, assign a concept to it, nor send it on a metonymic voyage along a chain of other terms" (Ngai 114).

Concrete poetry as an "inarticulate mark" is a formulation of a poetics of excess, an excess which is not one of desire, but instead one of revulsion and rejection. It actively attempts to interrupt language's making of capitalist value through the dis-assembly and re-assembly of the *mark* and the *grapheme*. Concrete poetry as a momentarily non-signifying map is an impossible system of inarticulation caught in the double-bind of the creation of meaning.

Derrida, writing on Blanchot, asked, "How can one text, assuming its unity, give or present another to be read, without touching it, without saying anything about it, practically without referring to it?" By reducing reading and language into a paragrammatical statistical analysis, content is subsumed into graphical representation of how language covers a page.

In his famous defense of Joyce's *Work in Progress*, Samuel Beckett argued that "[h]ere is direct expression—pages and pages of it" chiding the reader that "[y]ou are not satisfied unless form is so strictly divorced from content that you can comprehend the one almost without bothering to read the other." Beckett's defense of *Work in Progress* is temporally adaptable to become a slogan for conceptual work in general "[h]ere form is content, content is form [.…] this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. [… this] writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*" (502–503).

Serkan Isin
[Untitled]

—Stay away from any **symbolique** signe; exchange rate is controlled not by art itself, but only common sense.

—Anything that can be re-produced or re-interpreted, must circulate particularity, must be not only in every media, but interfere with every possible media, at least once!

—Any connection or association with technology will radiate out of a Poem, if only accidents and errors reveal it, by the random judgment of Poetical Justice.

—Human, is the error of the Machine, and error makes Machine's, humanized.

—"Consumer capitalism" will not knock on your door after the sale is done; you are on your own with the product. Re-using the product in any way, especially for Poetry, is Deconstructing the function buried in it.

—The greatest Product of our time, is the ages we've never, ever, lived.

—If lined or verbal poetry, has any desire for word, stanza, verse, clichés, meaning, metaphor... words that never come together before, Machine Code still has potential for surprises, cause, machines do not have any consciousness.

—Word, speech, writing etc are the derivatives for naming things. However, visual poetry, practices on "Différance."

OBJECT

80. Irving Weiss, Turret of Babble
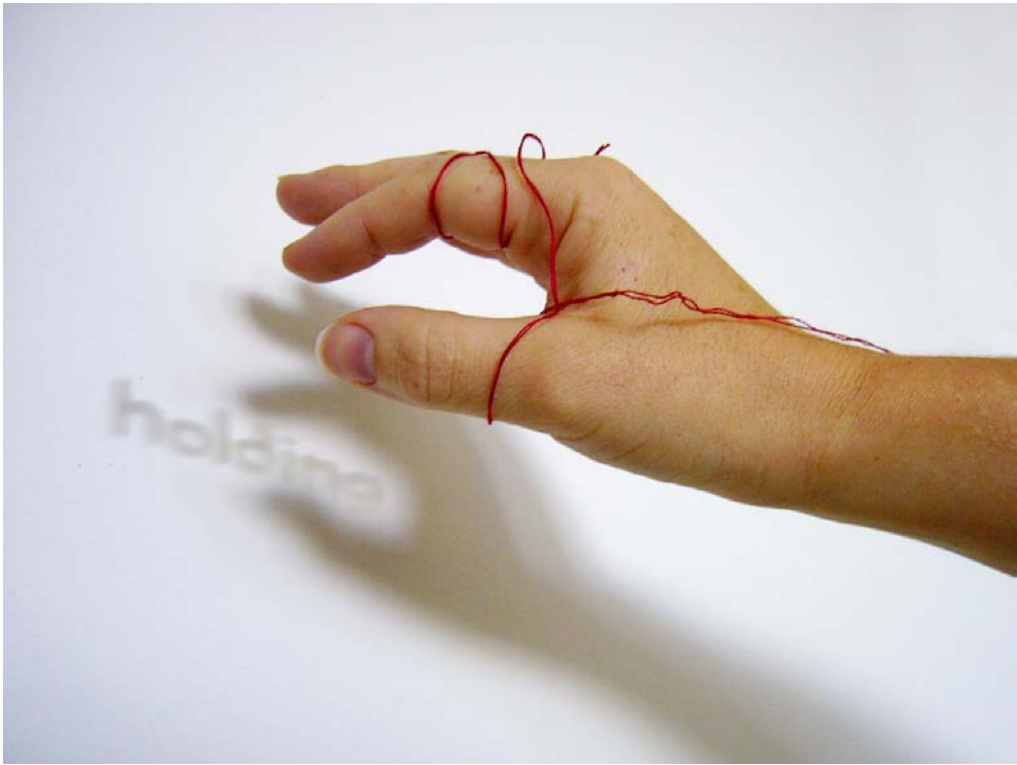
81. Helen White, Holding
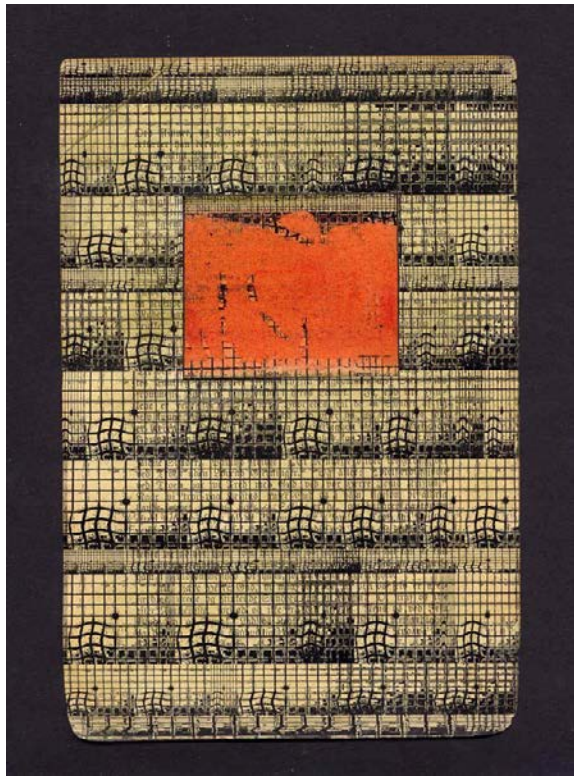
82. Petra Backonja, There'd Be Breakage, My Love

83. Jo Cook, Templates & Text
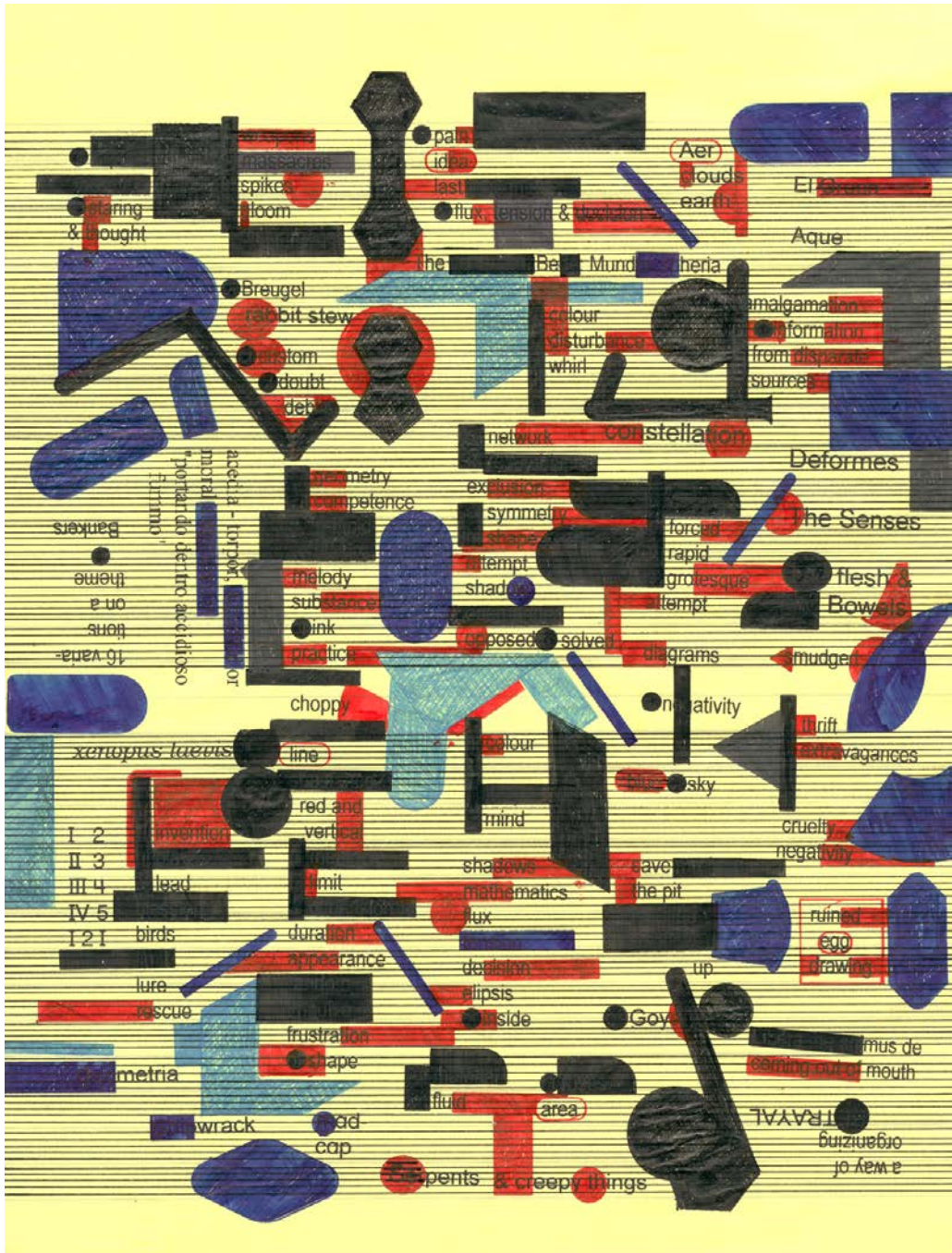
84. Rea Nikonova, Textes Detaches

85. Rea Nikonova, Architectural Treatment
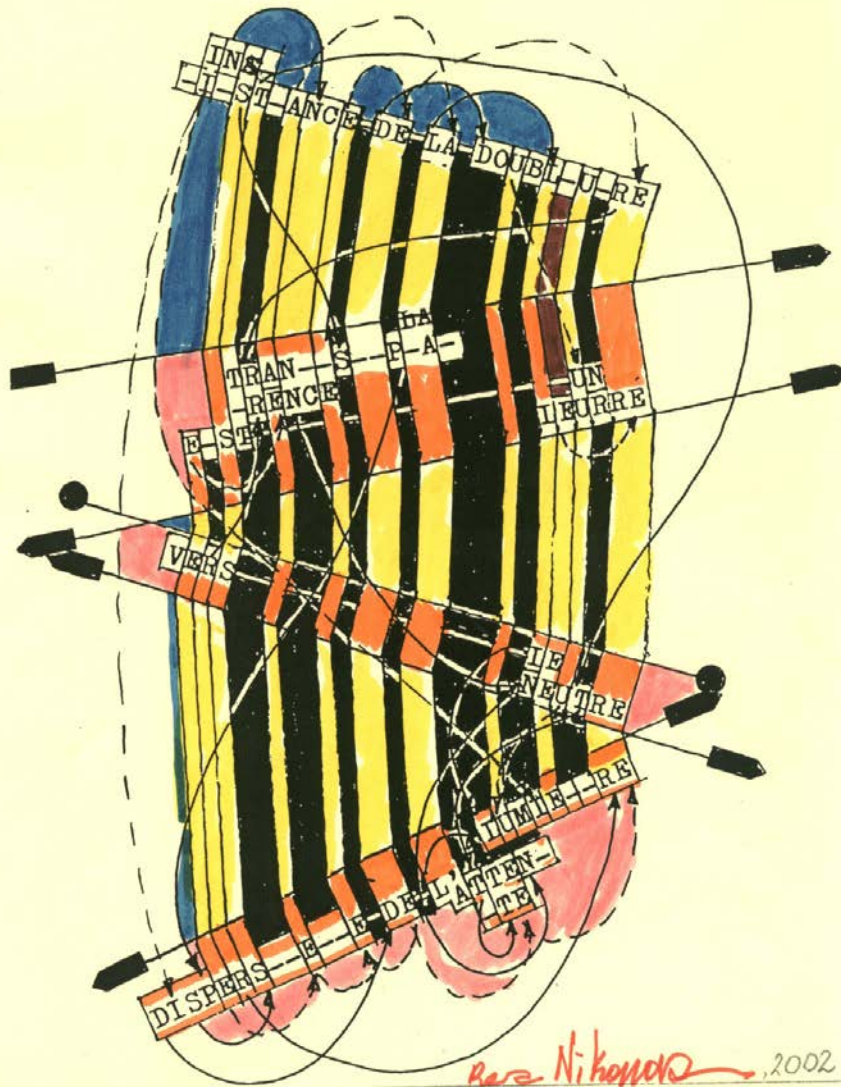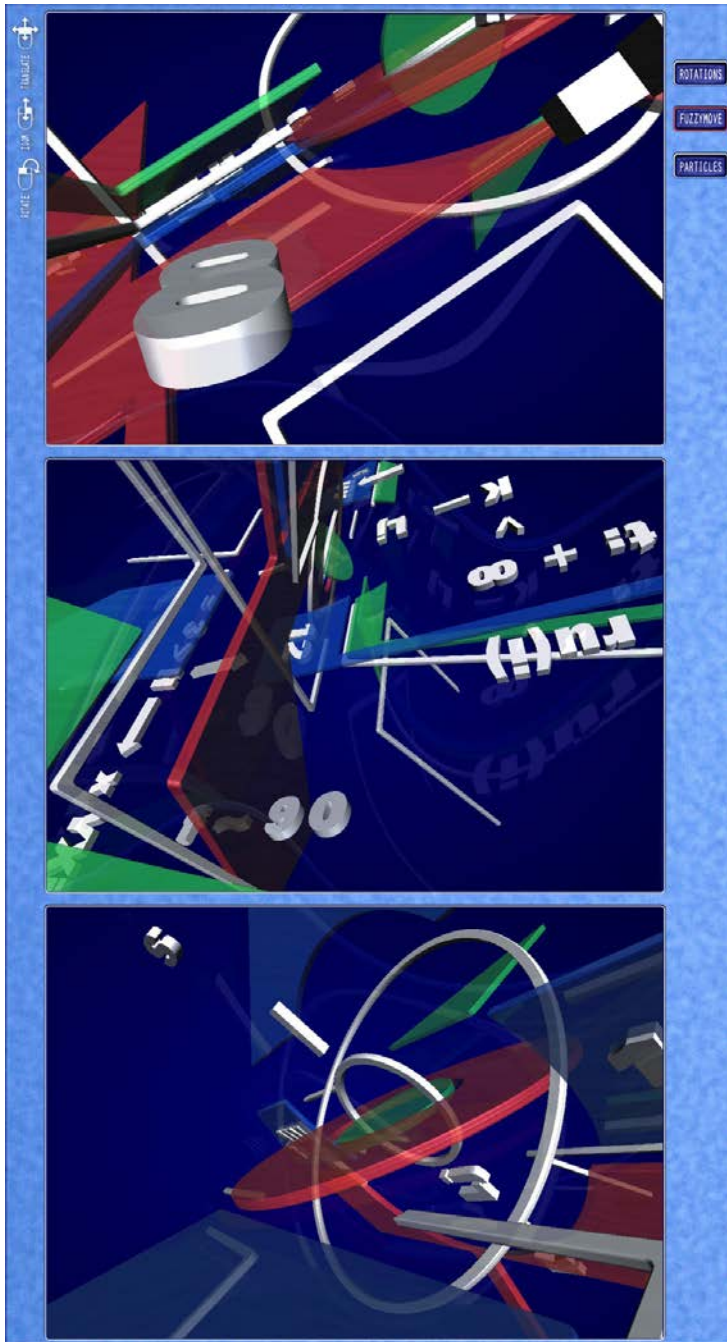
86. Ladislao Pablo Györi, Hommage à E.A.Vigo
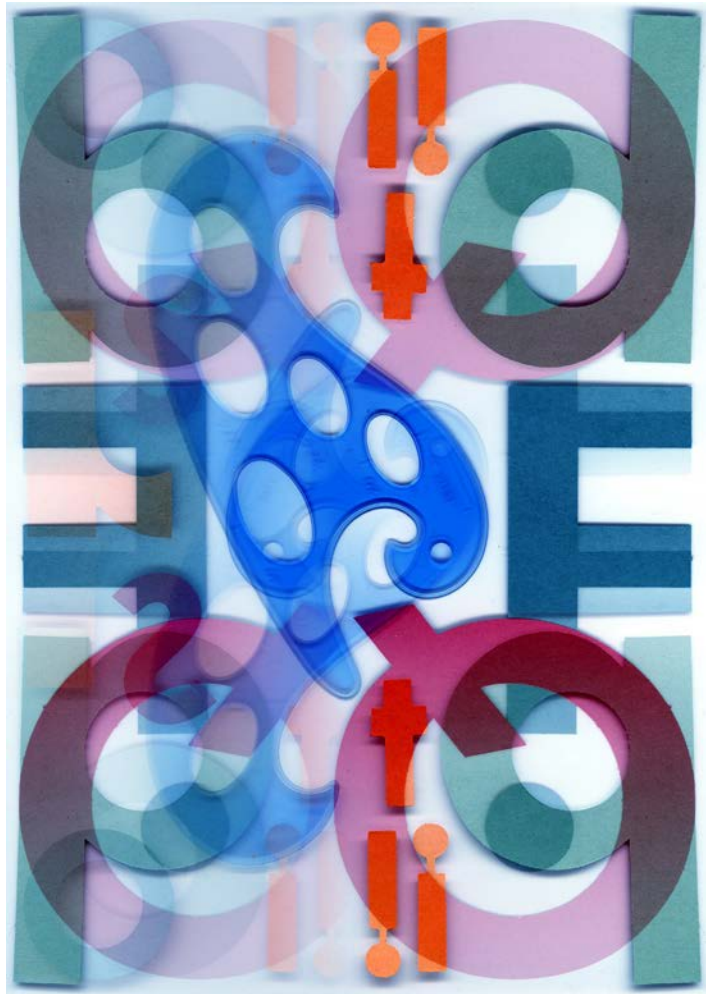
87. Geof Huth, O id of Q

88. Matina L. Stamatakis, Cross-hatches

89. Matina L. Stamatakis, Papyrus Graffiti

90. Brian Dettmer, Fate Far Fast Fall Final
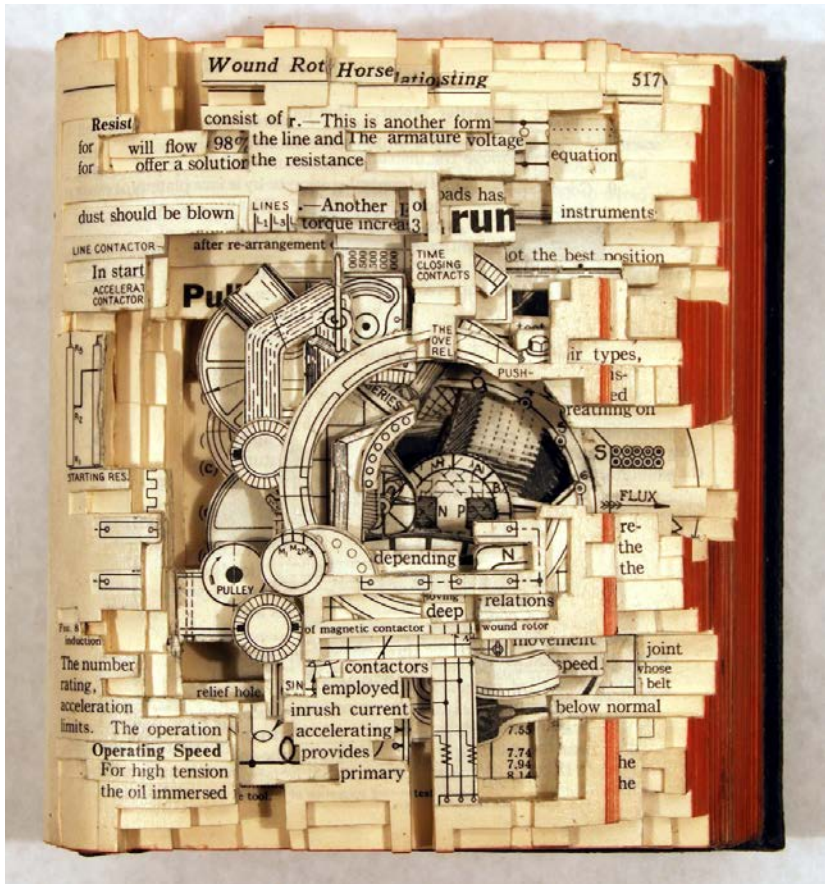
91. Brian Dettmer, Wound

92.

93. *Michael V. Smith and David Ellingsen, from* Body of Text

See Spot Run

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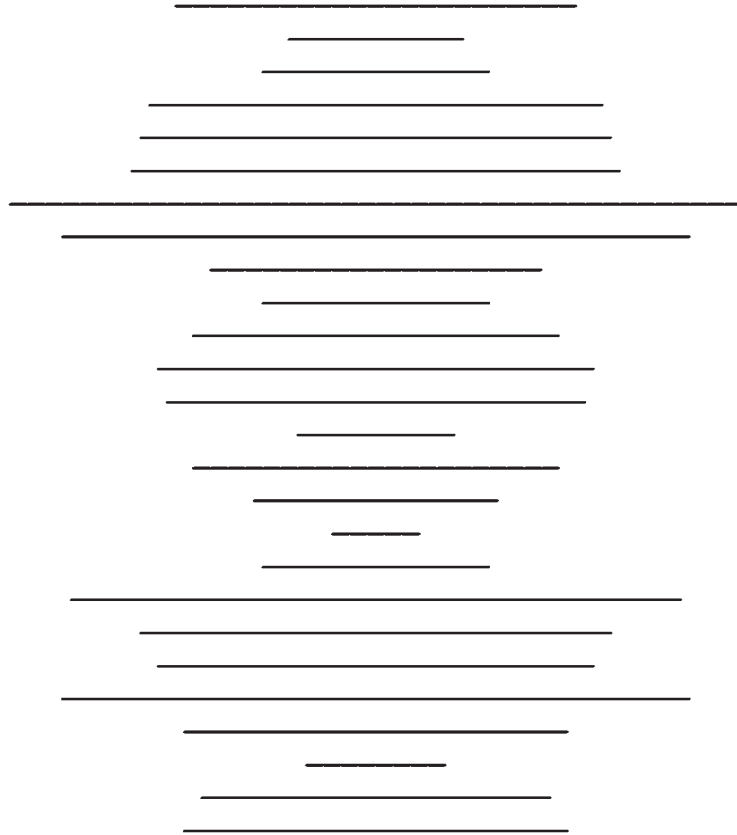
A reconfiguration of part 4 of Clement Greenberg's *Avant-garde and Kitsch* (1939).

See Spot Run, 2001-2009

94. Holly Crawford, See Spot Run

Duchamp Without the Words

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Instructions: Roll tip of tongue for periods, breathe out for the commas, suck in for the hyphens and scream for the exclamation point. Variation: roll tip of tongue, ignore comma and hyphen and scream when you get to the exclamation point.

95. Holly Crawford, Duchamp Without the Words

目 = eye   I=私

96. *endwar,* A found concrete poem for Bern Porter

97. Márton Koppány, Ellipsis No. 8

98. Chris Joseph, Hair

99. Michael Basinski, ZERZOUR

100. Fernando Aguiar, Ecologic Sonnet

101. *J. M. Calleja*, Felipe Boso Island

102. mIEKAL aND, Cascajal Flower Trance

103. Derya Vural, ben A değilim. işkenceyle ifade delil sayılır

104. *Jaap Blonk*, Labior

105. Gareth Jenkins, check you
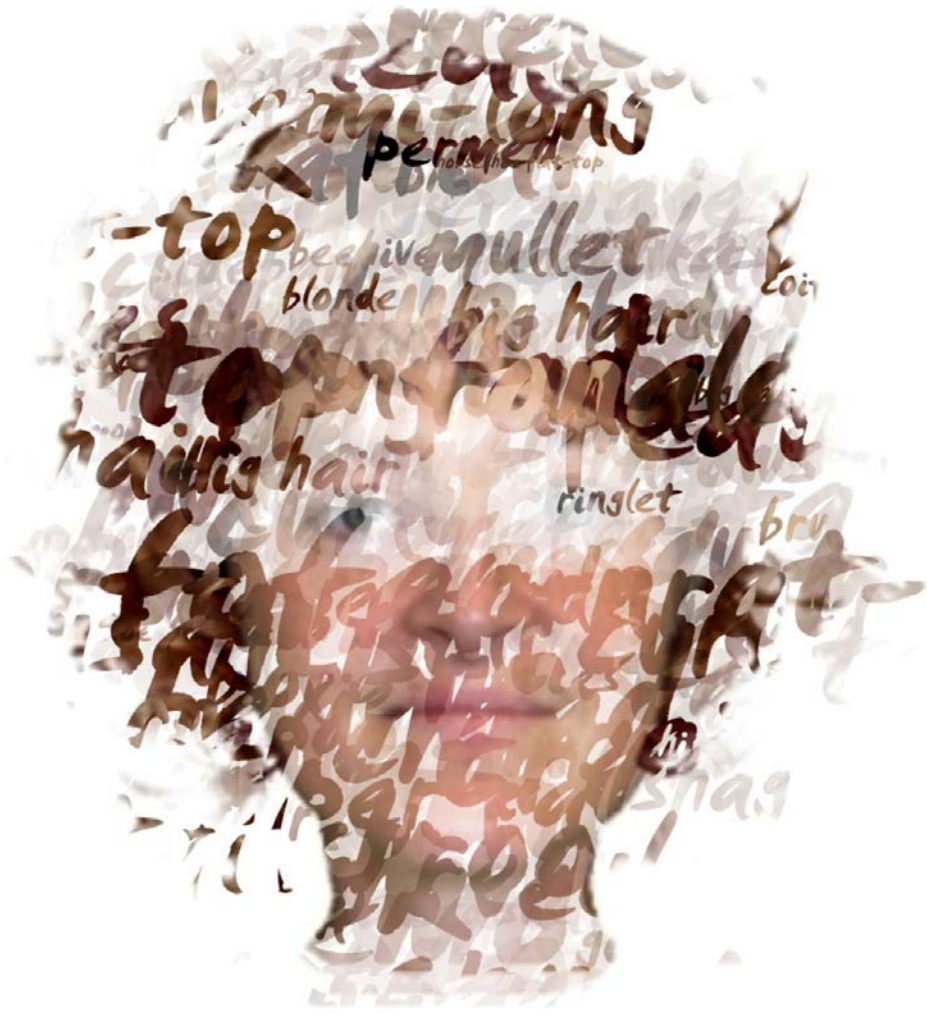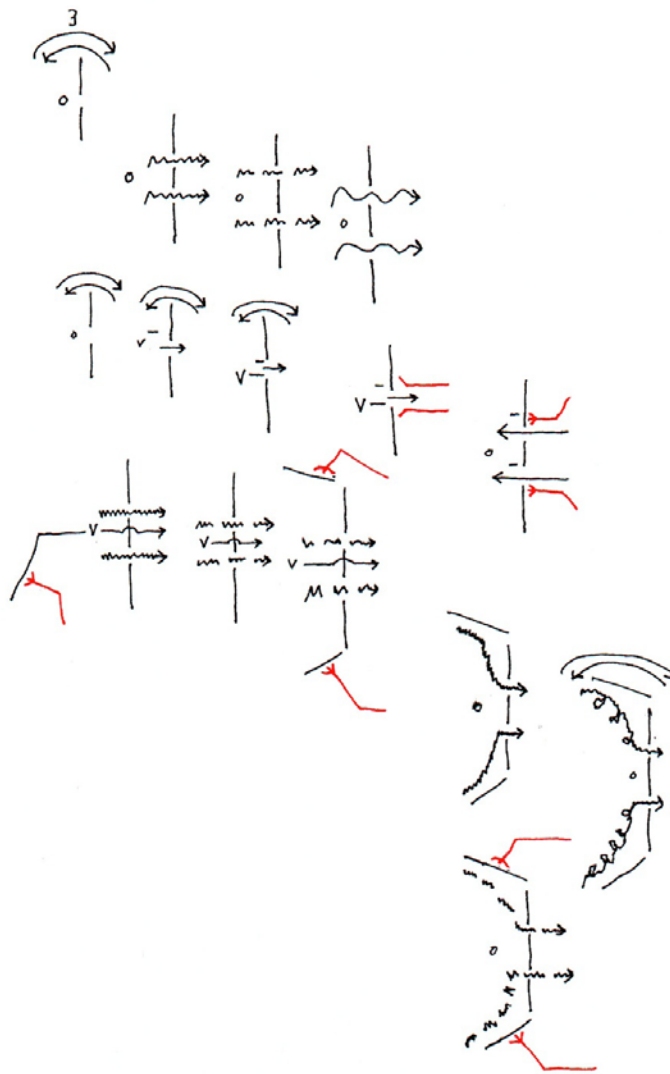
106. K. S. Ernst, Viole(n)t

107. K. S. Ernst, Hard to Hear Year

108. Andrew Topel, Text Sculpture 3

109. Gustave Morin, Languages & Isolation

110. Bruce Andrews & Dirk Rowntree, from Prehab

clitoral yamulka

111. Bruce Andrews & Dirk Rowntree, from Prehab

112. Dirk Krecker, Typewriter Drawings

113. Dirk Krecker, Typewriter Drawing

Government of Canada
Security and Immigration

Gouvernement du Canada
Securite et Immigration

Form 6652-98/B
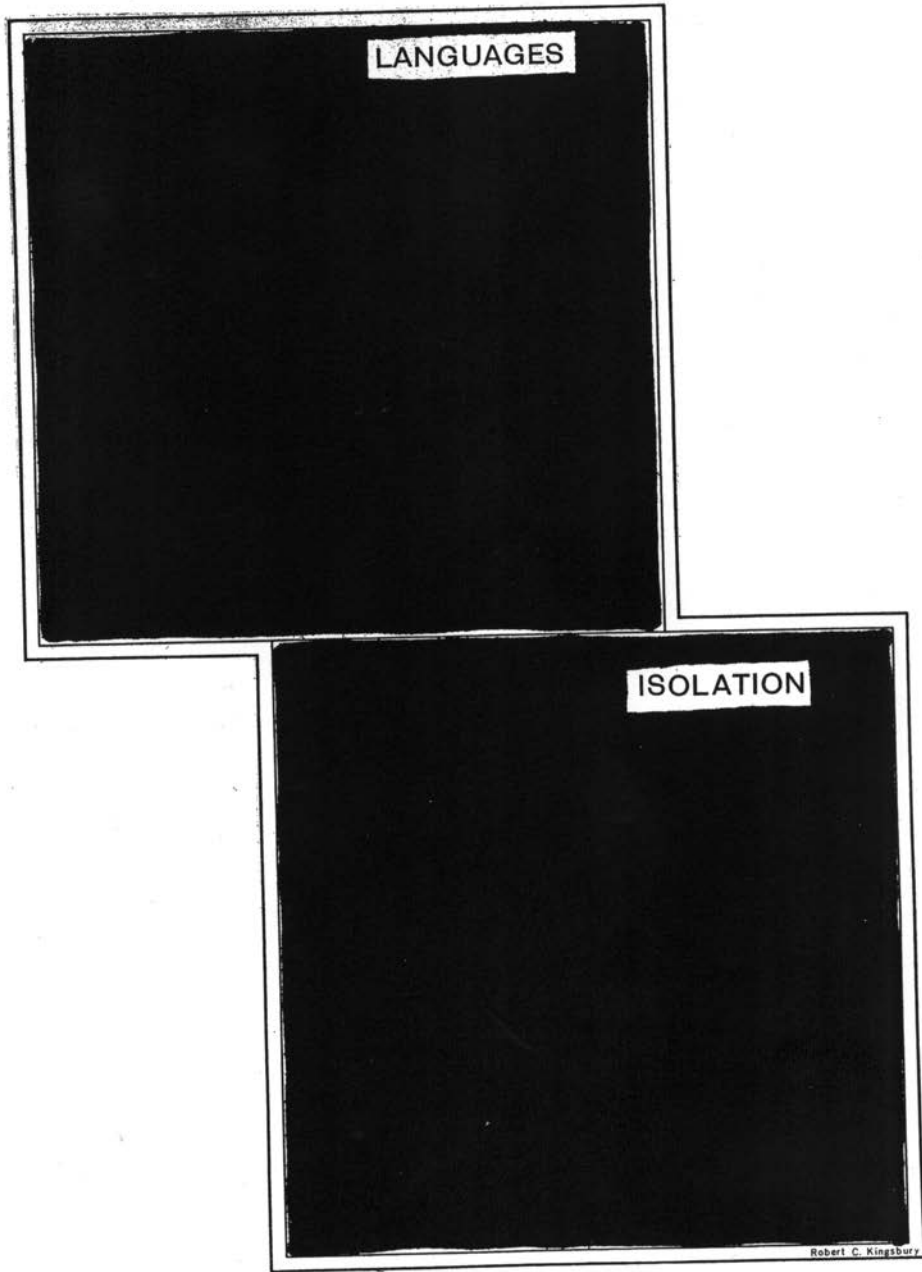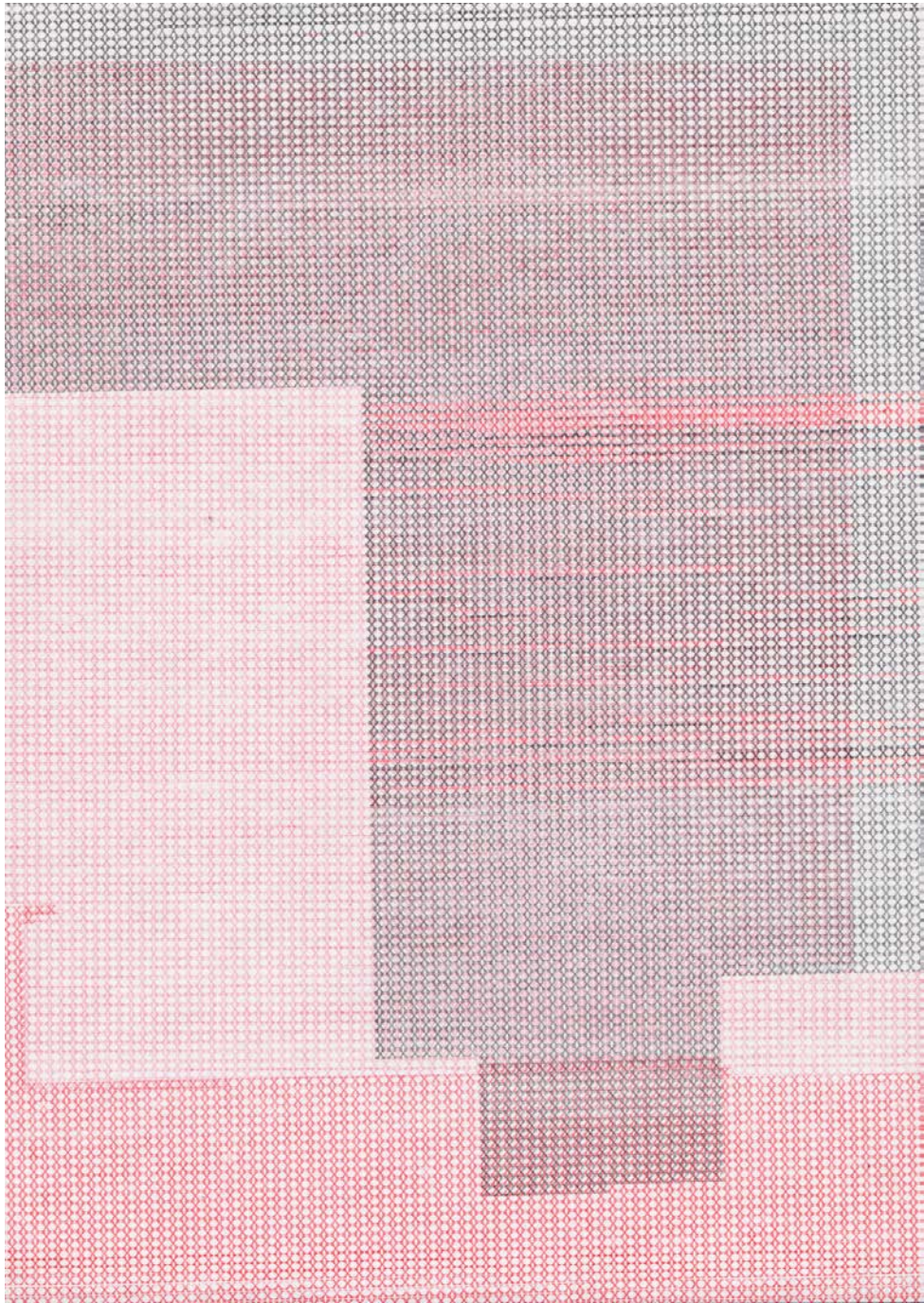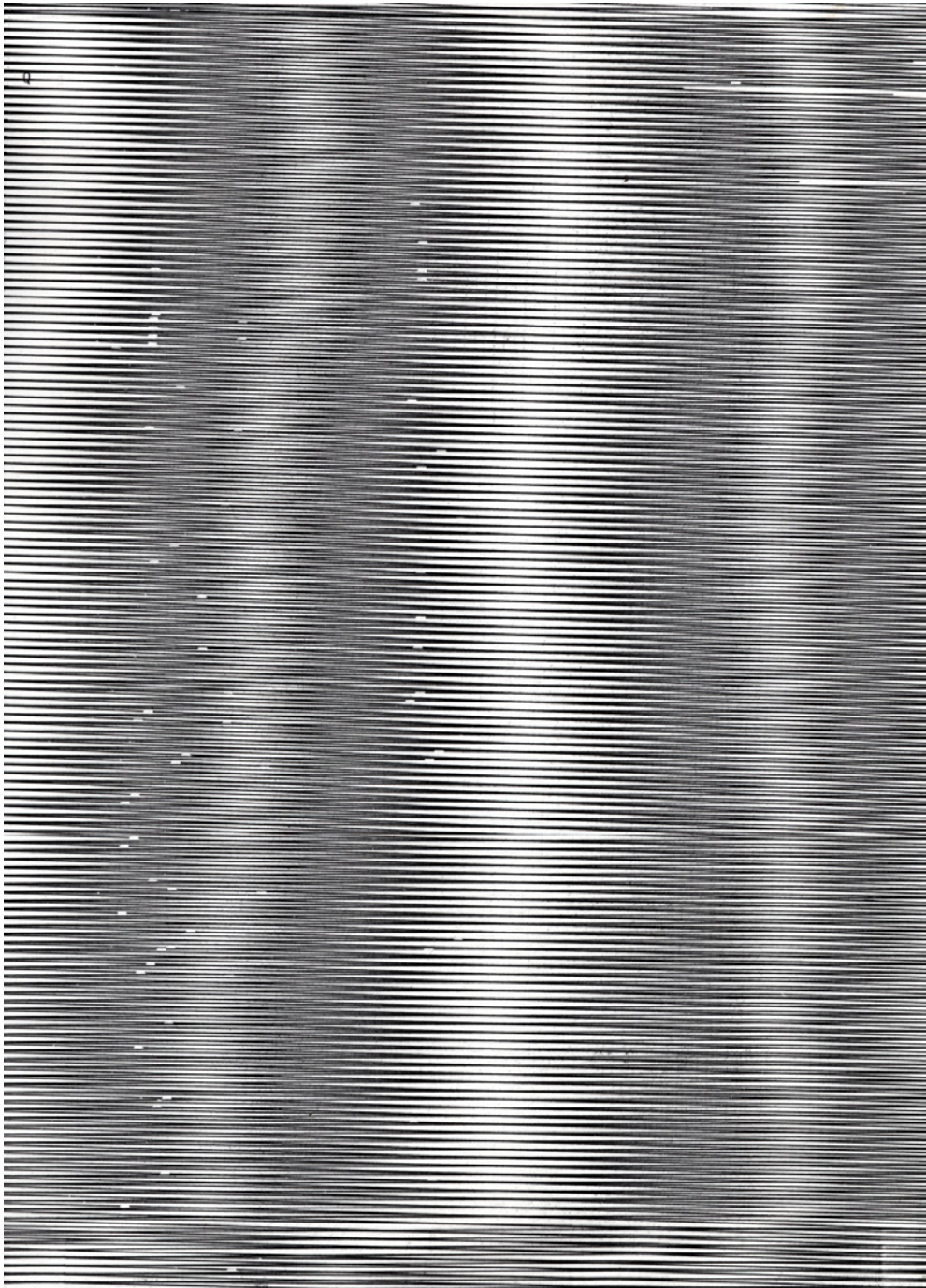
Self/Incrimination Form

This form is being offered as part of the new Security Measures Act as adopted under Bill C11, to all Canadian Citizens, Landed Immigrants, and visitors to Canada, in order to facilitate the process of reporting suspicious persons and incidents that may be deemed to constitute violations of these new measures against terrorist activity. You may fill out one, or several forms. please note, however, that processing time for multiple forms cannot be less than it would be for individual forms. Please allow 8-12 weeks for processing.

Please note that this form is available in both official languages

Section I) **Visitors/Landed Immigrants: Please fill out this section first**

Please select one of the following:

☐ A) I am uncertain whether the following events/activities constitute a breach of applicable law and hereby request that a determination be made by the appropriate department(s).

☐ B) Under the terms and definitons of terrorist activity set out under bill C11 I wish to report a breach of applicable anti-terrorism legislation by:

☐ a) myself   ☐ b) another person

PLEASE NOTE: If you have marked a) self-incriminiation, please provide the following information as requested in Section IIa. Otherwise proceed directly to Section III.

Section IIa)

Please print clearly

☐ ☐
First Name   Initial   Last Name

Nationality   Passport Number

I am of Arabic descent

☐   ☐
Yes   No

(please note that the answer to this question will in no way influence or prejudice any determination that will be made

Record of Landing (IMM1000/2-86)   Place of Issue

Telephone Number

S.I.N. Number

please provide a thumbprint

front 19

Tear out along the dotted line. DO NOT FOLD

114. Andreas Kahre, Self Incrimination Form p. 1

Section III) Please describe the time and place when the activity occurred:

Date (Month/Year/Day)

Location(s)

Province

PLEASE NOTE: The Information given in following Sections may be verified by an official.
Please call your local Security Office to set up an appointment.

Section IV) Please describe the nature of the violation by checking appropriate box.
Multiple checks are possible

I declare that

☐ a) I myself   ☐ b) another person

☐ at one time or another   ☐ at the time and location specified in Section III

☐ did consider Arabic a musical and pleasant language.

☐ may have argued in favour of elections using a system of proportional representation

☐ did, reluctantly, give money to Greenpeace on at least one occasion

☐ did describe Coca Cola as 'godawful'

☐ did characterize the use of surveillance cameras in public spaces as 'questionable'

☐ did regard the use of pepper spray as inappropriate at political gatherings

☐ failed to view the invoking of the war measures act as a triumph of good over evil

☐ may have given consideration to the notion that the term 'terrorism' describes a complex set of historical and social phenomena, some of which are subject to being characaterized by those who hold power as criminal when they wish to de-legitimize political action by a people or a nation whom they wish to disenfranchise.

☐ did view US foreign policy, on occasion, critically

☐ Other (Please use the space provided in in Section V) to specify)

115. Andreas Kahre, Self Incrimination Form p. 2

Section V) Please describe the suspicious activity /conversation. You may add an additional sheet(s), if necessary. Taped conversations may also be included.

Appendix A)   **Hate-Crime Report**

☐ YES, I wish to report this incident as a hate-crime

Appendix B) For Official Use Only

Previous Political Activity Index/ Ref. RCMP/DND/CSIS Integrated Database

POL	RAD	INCID?		PHYS		IDE		RP	BE	PROP	INFO

DNA Assessment Index /Ref. Health & Welfare Canada Integrated Database

GR	RISC/ASS			COST	St	

Income Tax /Property Index/ Ref. Revenue/Customs Database Cross-check Result

	AmT		TX INDEX		

RECOMMEND   ☐ further electronic observation only

☐ to be held for questioning

☐ assets to be frozen/audited

☐ to be deported

Officer/Dept. Code

File No.

Form 6652-98/B   front 21

116. Andreas Kahre, Self Incrimination Form p. 3
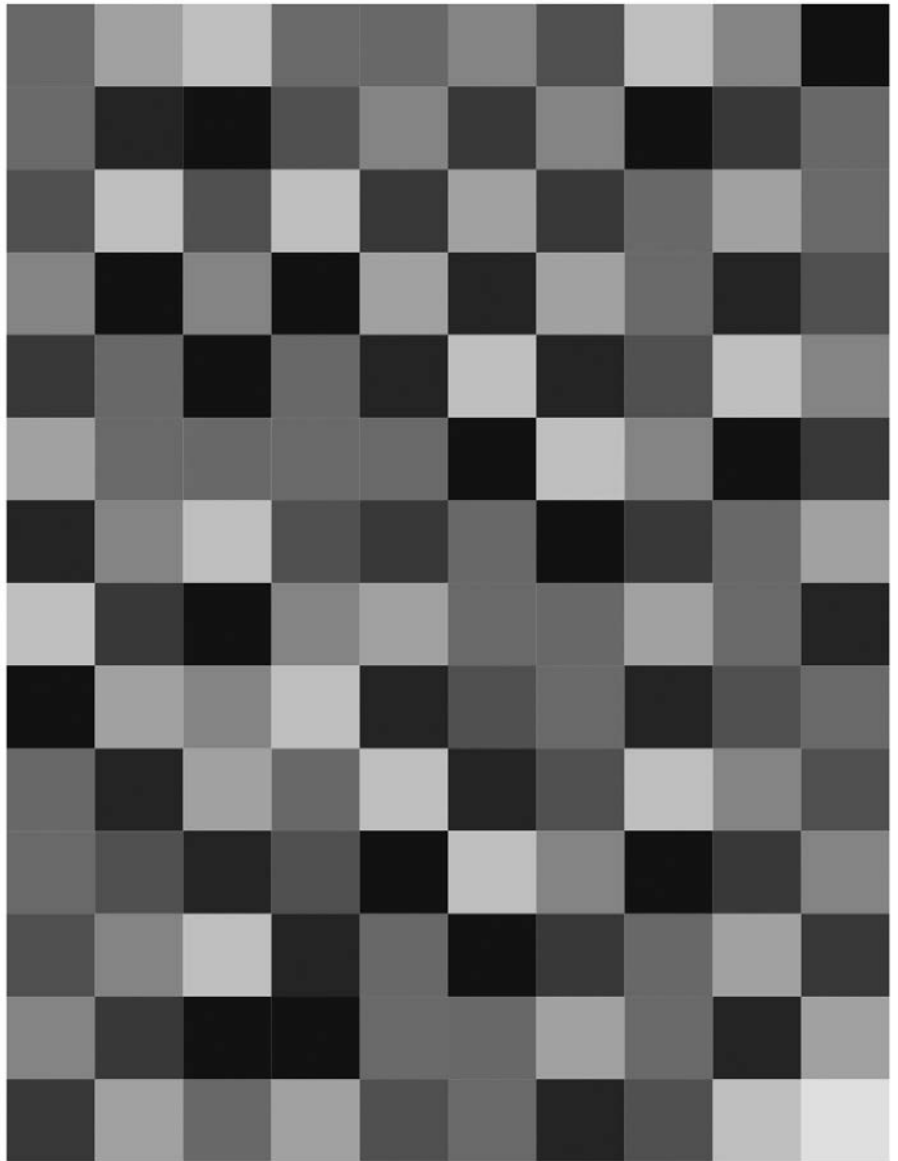
117. *Joseph Keppler*, Greys

118. Joseph Keppler, 1000 Common Surnames in USA

119. Joseph Keppler +x
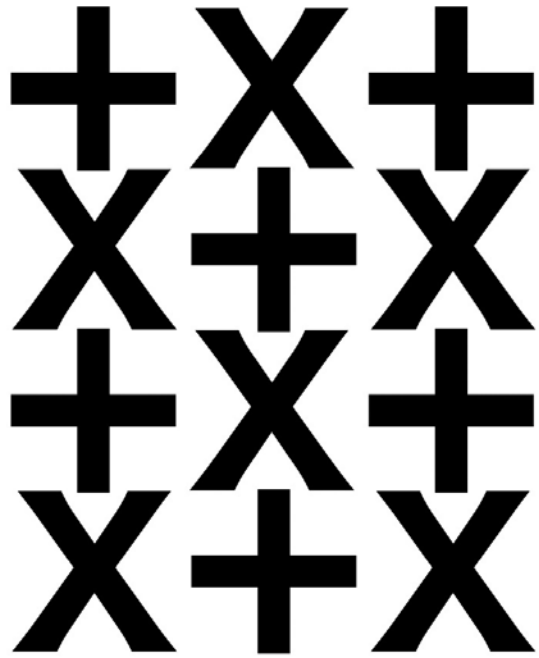
120. *W. Mark Sutherland,* Speechless
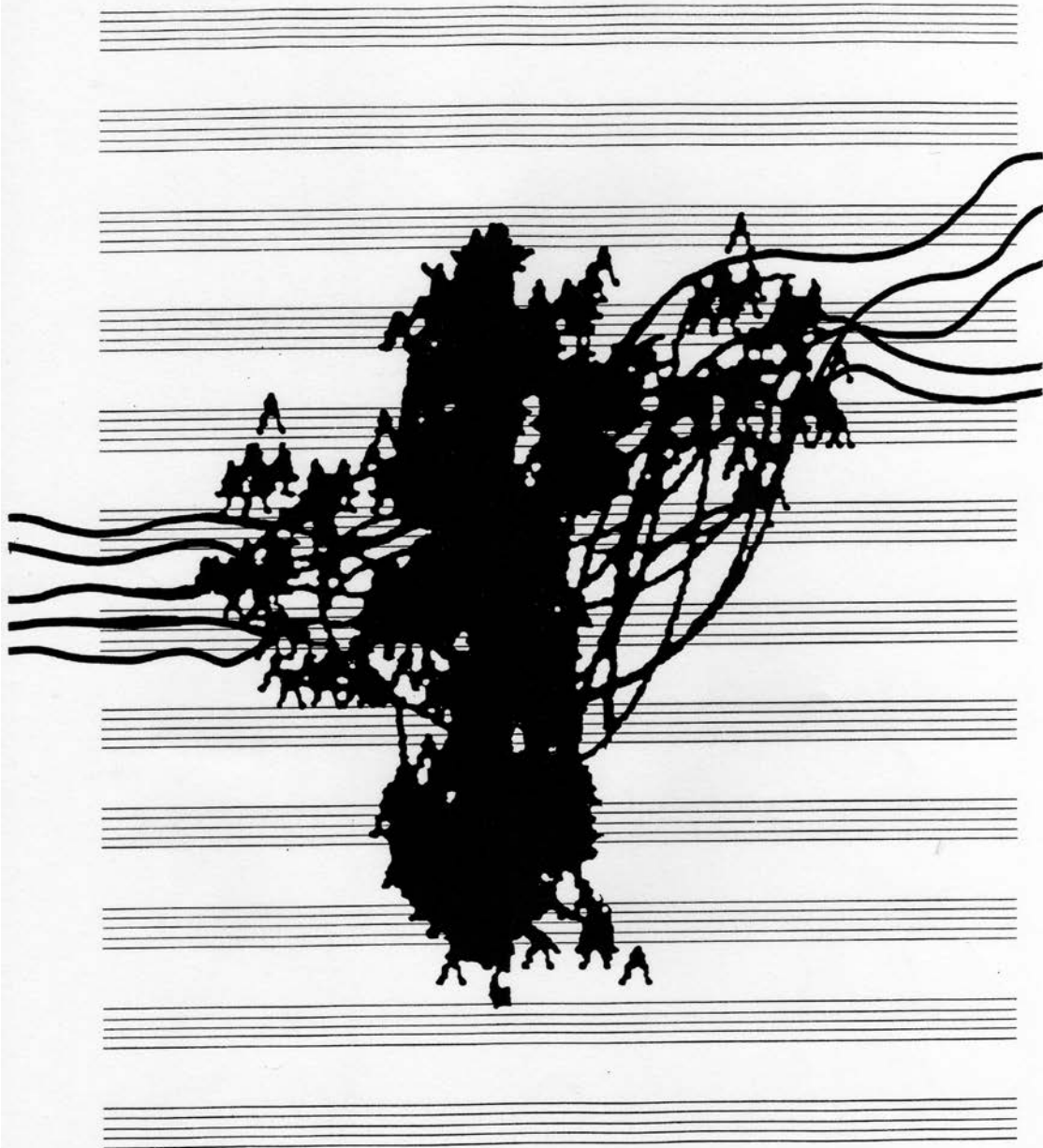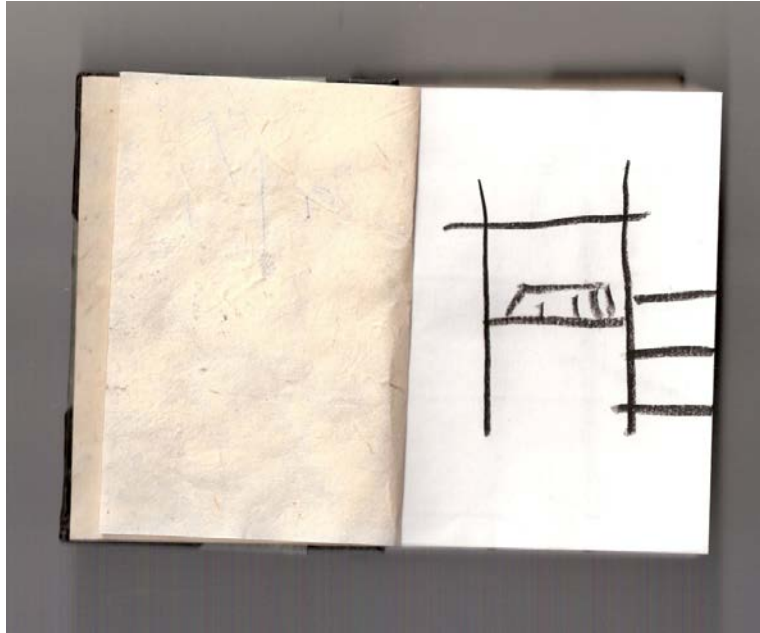
121. Gyorgy Kostritski, Sketchbook
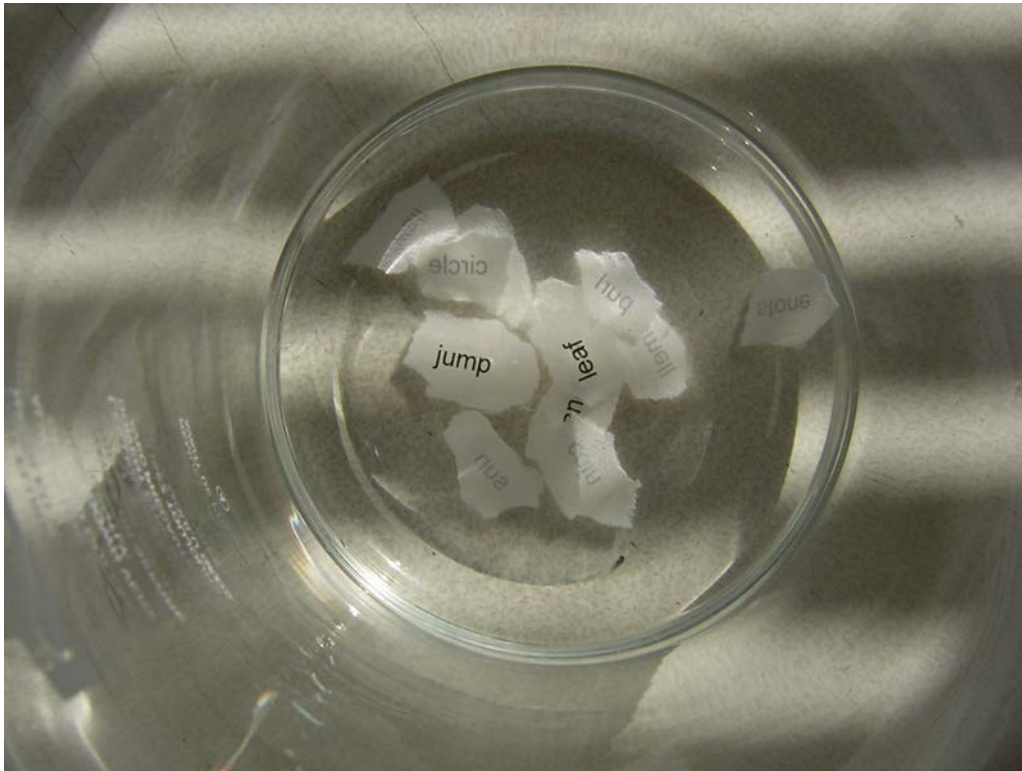
Tribute to Robert Duncan

1) cut out each word below and place them in a glass of water
2) stir

jump	stone	hand	leaf	fish
coin	first	boat	harbor	ring
wall	green	tooth	hill	purl

122. mARK oWEns, cup o' poem for R. Duncan

Note: Language is not a tool, it is something we swim in.

— Donnel Stern,
contemporary psychoanalyst

123. mARK oWEns, cup o' poem 2 for R. Duncan

124.Maria Damon, Open Up and Bleed: for James Osterberg Jr.

125. *Ted Warnell,* CROP CIRC SHFT

126. Bob Grumman, "Frame 1" of The Long Division of Poetry / The Value of the Metaphor

127. Mike Cannell, Relationships

128. Eva O Ettel, mal-dits

129. Satu Kaikkonen, The Needle
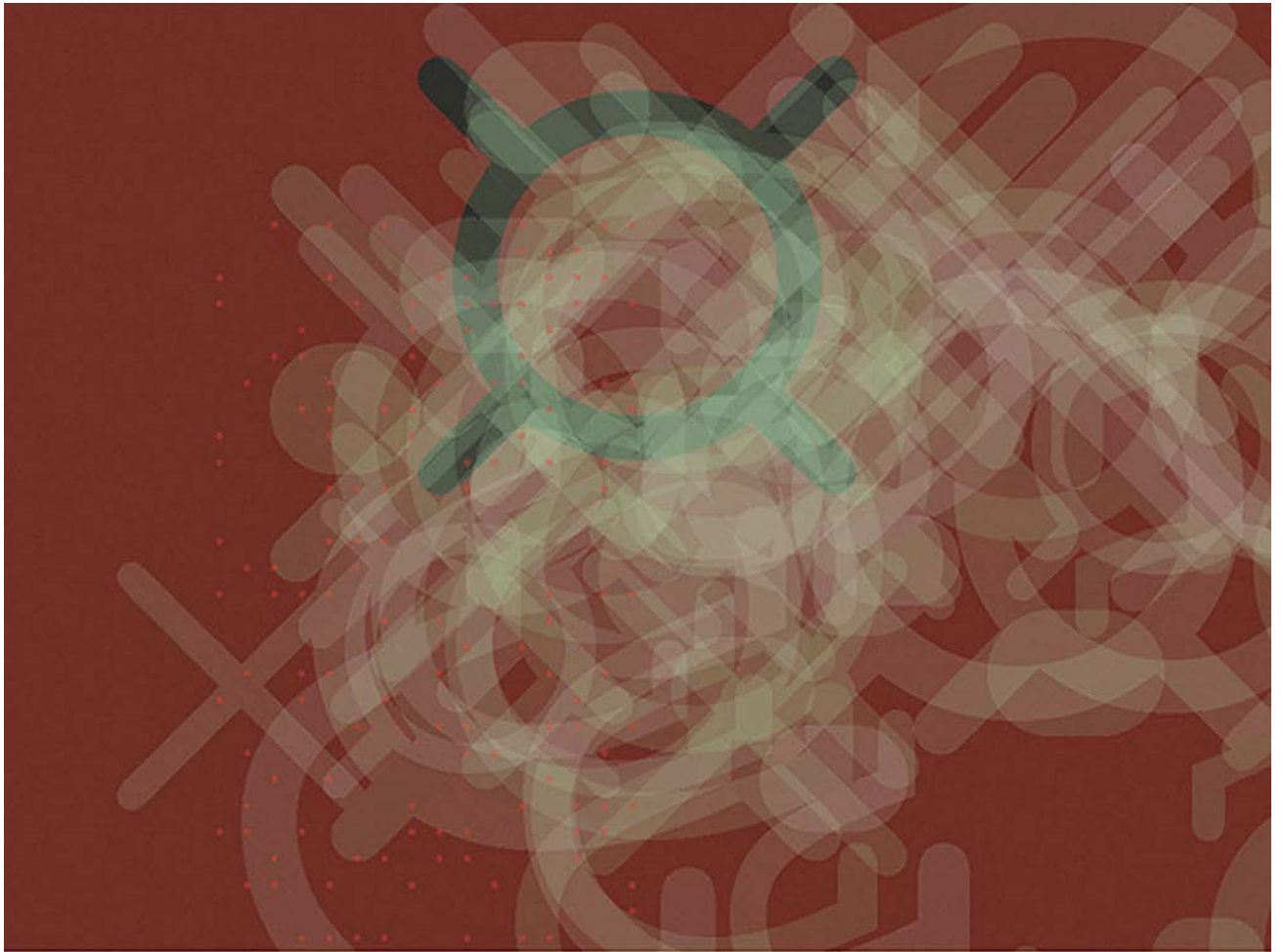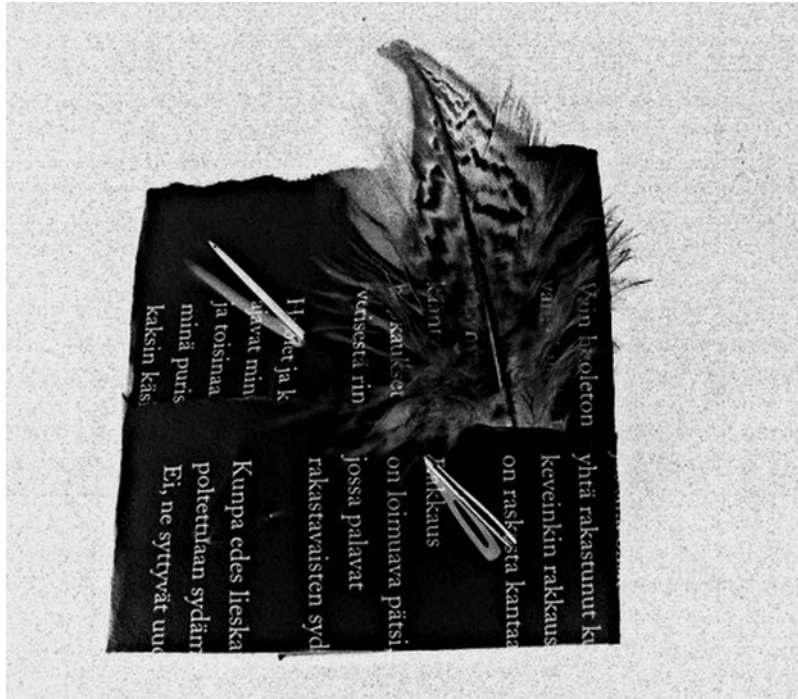
130. Peter Ciccariello, unknowable poem V 2007

131. Gary Barwin, Ode

132. Gary Barwin, Magritte Forest

fable

Apollon quitta* Δελπηεσ
pour se rentre à Ερι τρεια
(Eubée)
:
?

(iLLUSTRATiON)

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* Il prépare son voyage à Απολλονια en Lybie.

any phenomenon,
i.e., any situation
available to [an]
awareness, can be
considered as an 'art
object'.

135. Fabio Doctorovich, Poesía Hipertextual para Armar y/o Realizar, Variación #11

136.Fabio Doctorovich, Cuando el alma es noticia (When the soul is in the news)

137. Karl Kempton, Rune 17: Sound Of One Hand, Jade Cliff Carpet
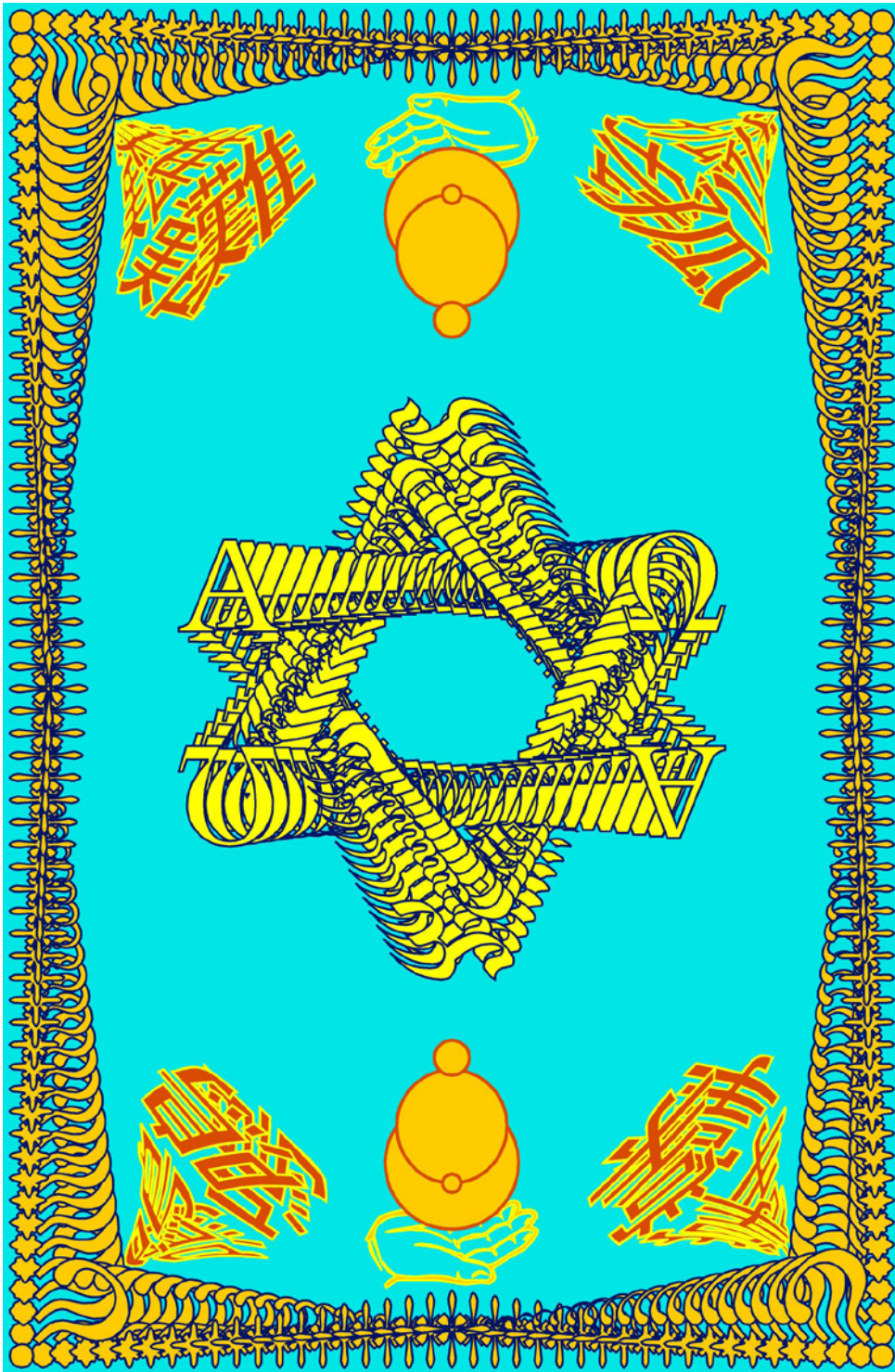
138. Karl Kempton, Rune 17: Turquoise Sky Carpet

139. Kaz Maslanka, Americana Mathematics

140. Marilyn R. Rosenberg, Dockage
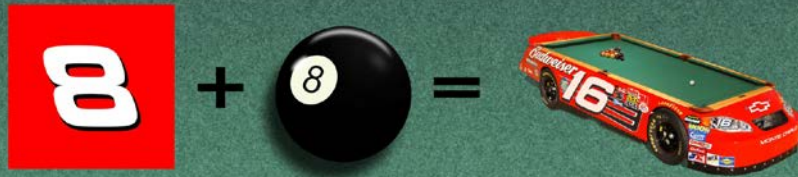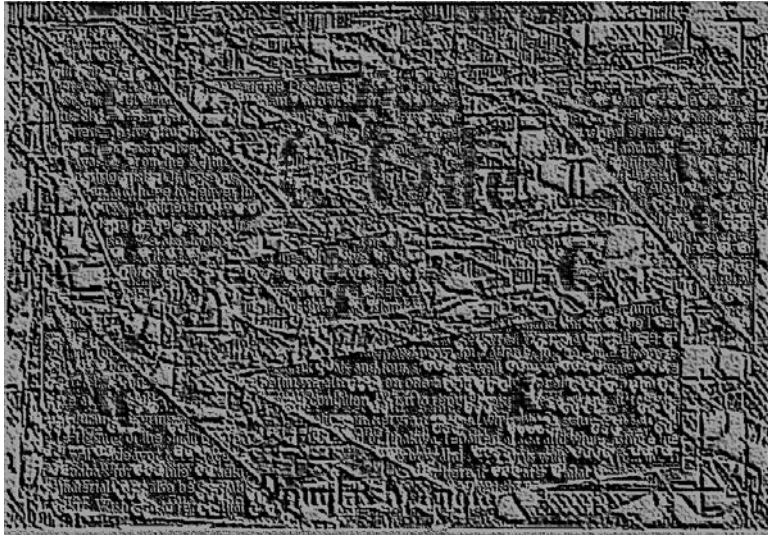
141. Douglas Spangle, alph

Peter Frank

CONCRETE CONQUEST: EVIVA VISIVA!

As a writer who writes primarily about visual art, why do I keep forgetting that writing is a visual activity hardly less than a verbal activity? How can I delight in the graphic expansion of the word when I simply take for granted, rather than incessantly celebrate, that the word is a graphic unit to begin with? And if this is so, if my chosen medium is indeed a retinal one, why have I been despairing of late that its overt efforts to invade and fuse with the realm of visual expression would disappear into the new digital ubiquity rather than find additional potency therein? Where better, after all, for the visual and the verbal to conflate effortlessly, the investigations of nth-generation concrete and visual poets, meta-fictioneers, and hypertextualists of all stripes abetted by myriad programs amplifying their abilities to hybridize word and image?

But, as this collection shows, many emergent as well as established calligraphilographers don't really need their tools enhanced. Analog still serves, the scissors might do what Photoshop might not, and the pen is mightier than the Word. Sure, at the end of the day or the session, you'll record your collagram for posterity with a digital camera, and posterity itself is as likely to rest on the Web page as it does on the printed page. But whether or not the medium of transmission is the medium of record, it need not be the medium of fabrication.

Then again, it can be. The self-declared parole in liberta and its trusted steed the artists' book, galloped all over the last century, declaring freedom, demanding autonomy, and demonstrating alternately, or even at once, heedless vigor and reverence for tradition. Shall we ornately honor antiquity in the exquisitely pulled pages of a livre d'artiste, or shall we print poems with potatoes on packing-paper pages bound with pins? Shall the monograph represent the artist, or shall the paginated object? Whose page is it, anyway? Can artists write or writers paint or draw? If they can, should they?

You know where I'm going with this, probably better than I. After all, if we share any specific ideology, artistic or otherwise, it is that of Intermedia, the interfusion of discrete artistic disciplines. My concern ultimately is not with the computer making Intermedia invisible, but with making it inevitable. The digital realm may be the ultimate intermedium, bringing the intermedial condition to an almost with-a-whimper apotheosis. We won. Now what? Now we're not special anymore, much less revolutionary.

Fine. That's art biz. Ours is a has-been -ism. Get used to it. If our aesthetic is now available to, oh, anyone who logs on, you (okay, I) needn't worry about all the bad new artists now potentialized by digital reach as well as digital tools; look at all the good new ones. And, furthermore, perhaps more importantly, look at the audience! Such an audience can be exposed to great stuff as well as dreck, and to elaborate means as well as Kindergarten scissors. This collection will attract attention for its very exoticism: It exists in hard copy. Bound offset hard copy. It provides the pleasures of page-turning. It provides the pleasures of page layout, in fact, bringing up issues of scale as well

as of composition. But it also brings up issues of visual texture, graphic sensuousness (tactility made explicit in the paper, implicit in the images), neo-Benjaminian aura. The impossibilities of juxtaposition that seem so matter-of-fact onscreen seem a boisterous challenge to the imagination when regarded between the covers of a book.

The computer will not kill the book, but liberate it. By relieving the book of its lexical responsibility, the computer will do for the book what photography did for painting two centuries ago: allow it to become a self-reflexive discipline, an investigation of medium and format and content and history whose resonance deepens and complectifies, spawning experiments and arguments, contradictions and unanticipated pathways to entirely new artistic possibilities. And if that's what is going to happen to the horse, imagine what the computer can do for the rider!

Actually, imagine no further than these pages. Concrete poetry, visual poetry, meta-fiction, hypertextuality, and so many other confabulations of word and form jostle for attention here, together affirming that the hand still moves even as the mind moves, whether over blank pages or through image banks, into dictionaries or out of dictipedias.

Something Wiki this way comes. Embrace it, print it out, scratch it up.

Bill Marsh

VISUAL EDUCATION

What can we learn from visual poetry? What can visual poetry teach us?

These questions, broad as they are, help situate the work collected here within a larger conversation about the role of art in human societies and the promise of poetry as an edifying or educational experience. I want to take the questions seriously and literally. As a writer and a college teacher, I work to draw attention to literary documents as "teachable texts," as sites of inquiry and opportunities for contemplation, reflection, meditation, and investigation; as communicative objects and activities; as products of human labor, imagination, and creativity; as beautiful things to look at, read, interpret, and appreciate. What makes a text teachable, in other words, is also what invigorates, excites, and intrigues the most ardent fans and experienced readers.

The work in this volume—no doubt "teachable" as one register of artistic and literary production at the turn of the 21st century—provides the added pleasure of complicating a literary tradition with which many readers (new students of literature in particular) may not be familiar. In the spring of 2010, I asked my students to read sample pages from *Last Vispo* and then introduced the questions above for class discussion.[1] As one might expect, responses were both varied and provocative. Some liked the work and some didn't. Some dismissed it as "pointless" and inconsequential. Others marveled at the range of material and the complexities of style and approach. Most struggled to find meaning in poems that did not yield to simple interpretations. One frustrated student asked: "How would I know the difference between this stuff and a cartoon, or a magazine ad, or a little kid's doodling? What makes it poetry?" I suggested that the question had perhaps answered itself. That these texts do not resemble conventional poems may be what "makes it poetry" and also what contributes to its cultural value. In any event, we agreed in the end that we had reached a "limit" in literature, a boundary defined by the encroachment of other media, other techniques, and other tools of composition. This limit also helped us understand what we could learn by considering these texts as literary documents.

Educators have long been enamored of the visual as an agent or "aid" to classroom instruction. The 17th-century pedagogue John Amos Comenius, who devoted his life to the art and science of "universal" education, was among the first to make regular use of visual materials in his teaching.[2] In the 19th and 20th centuries, photography, lantern slides, stereography, film, and later TV and video promised a more efficient transfer of knowledge and, in addition, a more entertaining learning experience, as early champions of Visual Education often claimed. In all instances, the visual was touted for its potential to render learning more immediate and knowledge more accessible. With this tradition in mind, I would like to approach the work here as a special kind of "visual education" for postmillennial audiences. To frame the texts in this way is to investigate each entry not only for its aesthetic properties but also for its efficiencies—and potential inefficiencies or counter-efficiencies—in the realm of visual information and knowledge production.

As just one example, Sonja Ahlers's "Magnetic Poetry" (284) builds on the pop media trope of "REMOTE CONTROL" while also commenting on the distancing effects of human reason and, in particular, the kinds of cryptic visual instructions that come packaged with electronic devices (in this case, a portable CD player). Apropos of one argument I am trying to make here, the text also offers a meta-commentary on poetic difficulty as a register of at least one form of social control: "The reAson you hAte poetry / so much / is becAuse / / / you just don't understAnd it." The recurring capital "A" functions, by my reading, not only as an index of "AC power operation" but also as an overt reference to the high mark of educational excellence, a goal for which "hating poetry" serves as the antithetical reminder of

misunderstanding and failed learning. Simultaneously defamiliarizing and reorienting, the poem authorizes us to rethink the rhetoric (and "reason") of instructions by rewiring the core message for a new, and perhaps more intimate, rhetorical purpose.

Each in its own way, the poems in *Last Vispo* teach us that knowledge created or transferred is also knowledge challenged, undermined, skewed, queered, erased, overwritten, redirected, or undone. As literary documents and teachable texts, they instruct us through their intentional troubling of conventions, their merging of aesthetic traditions, their outright assault on the expected and ordinary, and their ready appropriation of other sources, artifacts, and techniques for purposes of critique and comment. Those encountering this work for the first time may not always "get" it (as with much poetry, they "just don't understand it"), but they often see what they don't get. The visual immediacy of visual poetry, in other words, facilitates or actuates the work of learning by slowing down, complicating, or inverting what gets seen (the "vision") in the first act of looking.

It may also be the "difference" (the aberration, the departure from literary norms) that readers new to visual poetry find most intriguing, since the burden of interpretation, while not disappearing, shifts noticeably from the realm of semantic decoding to a new kind of interpretive play more familiar to generations steeped in visual culture. Unable to resolve more predictable questions about literal meaning or textual purpose, new readers nonetheless "get" that categories define and possibly confine, that art often resists and challenges categories and easy definitions, and that this production-as-resistance (and its inverse) may lend a "point" to the seemingly "pointless" exercise of making visual poems. For old-school visual educators, visual media were meant to serve as seamless, transparent conveyors of accepted knowledge. In the new school of visual poetry, that point of conveyance and transfer becomes itself the matrix of interaction and understanding. The comforts and conveniences of visual absorption meet the discomforting and discomfiting effects of media saturation.

Any encounter with this kind of visual "boundary play" challenges us to decouple ourselves from our ordinary life movements and explore the world, and ourselves, as experiential oddballs and outsiders. Or, as Iris Murdoch proposes in her celebrated essay on goodness, good art is "a thing totally opposed to selfish obsession." It "invigorates our best faculties" by inviting "unpossessive contemplation." It offers opportunities for "unselfing" and challenges us "not to escape the world [in fantasy] but to join it." In other words, art challenges us to look at life as a "real situation" and not as a bank of information readied for absorption and easy understanding, as Comenius and his "universalist" adherents would likely have preferred. In that sense, art is the "most educational of all human activities."[3]

To study visual poetry from this perspective—with selfless awareness and an unpossessive willingness to "join" the world—is to discover what visual poetry can teach us. The work of looking, in and of itself, enacts an experiential instance of "visual instruction," even if the learning is an act of unlearning, letting go, not knowing, or recognizing new limits. Each page and each text opens up a situation. And each situation—as reading, as looking, as questioning—opens opportunities for learning and pleasure. The work in *Last Vispo* is thus a lasting testament to the power of art and poetry to edify and educate, to punctuate the real with real learning situations, and to invite the best kind of human interaction. All of this is good and useful work, to be sure.

ENDNOTES:

[1] This experiment in vispo sampling occurred in an introductory literature course at a large, open-enrollment college in Queens, New York. Throughout the term students had been annotating readings with notes, definitions, questions, comments, and criticisms. When I prompted them to annotate the visual poetry selections as they would any other course reading, many had their doubts. I noticed in reviewing their annotations that some avoided the challenge altogether (visual poem: no annotations). Many who did annotate seemed desperate either to "solve" the visual puzzle or dismiss the poet as "crazy" or "on drugs." These metatextual glosses and impromptu (psycho)analyses informed class discussion, as well.

[2] See Comenius, John Amos. *The Great Didactic.* Tr. M. W. Keatinge. New York: Russell & Russell, 1967.

[3] Murdoch, Iris. "The Sovereignty of the Good Over Other Concepts," in *The Sovereignty of the Good.* London: Ark Paperbacks, 1986 [1970].

Charles Alexander

UNFETTER'D

Can a poem not show a letter in flight, becoming a bird? Can a poem not be a photograph of a tree, or two trees, forming, together, the shape of the capital letter "H," the utterance of which performs exhalation, the outgoing breath of life? Can a poem not show the path of Basho's frog, from the open and expansive ground of the universe into the limited round pond—together becoming not only the capital letter "Q" but also including the infinite space outside the markings that define the letter? Can a poem not be composed of boards forming the letter "A" as they are hammered into wood to blockade a window, as though vision and the alphabet exist in a tenuous yet generative relationship? Can a poem not grow language out of a pot of flowers? Can a poem not splay language across the field of the page and invite readers to sing those letters as they discover paths through that field: musical notes within the letter, and duration as a product of the performers' breathing? Can a poem not enact a visual narrative through the multiply sequenced pages of its becoming, that sequence seemingly generated by a throw of the dice that can never abolish chance? Can a poem not dance a two-step, sleep with its partner, and produce offspring of lower-case murmurs? Can a poem not be placed, letter by letter, on a multicolored grid, inviting myriad journeys through its horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines, connecting with other letters and lines as the eyes create their own concerto? Can a poem not be a geometry of angles? Can it not disappear around the corner of our knowing, taking us to the edge of our being? Can a poem not spiral a hole into the earth? Can a poem not float above us, written in the sky to appear for several minutes, before the forces of nature disperse its morphemes forever? Can a poem not be a projection of light against the night sky? Can a poem not connect star to star in a grotto heaven? Can a poem not be written on the human body, folding with curves of flesh, intended to be read in the midst of the narrative of sexual desire? Are bodies themselves not poems? Can a poem not flow with the colors of dream and disappear with the rising sun? Can a poem not take the shape of an altar on which we set the prayer book? Can a poem not appear as Easter wings ready for flight through the heavenly cosmos? Can a poem not be a lane, its words engraved into the surface upon which we walk or drive, the surface upon which we breathe and live? Can a poem not appear as thousands of names upon a wall, crying out the abruptly shortened existence of the persons so named, yet insuring the names a continuity that will last as long as humans may walk the earth's surface? Can a poem not be the leaves of grass blown by wind on a sultry day? Can a poem not be written with brushed water on stone, living but an instant, if that, before evaporation leaves less than a trace? Can a poem not be seen by a clairvoyant as writing on a face, visible only to one viewer, who writes the message down for the rest of us? Can a poem not be the crest of a wave, the crossing of water by letters as they colonize and create empires of ice cream? Can a poem not be edible, the crunch of a "K" erupting in the mouth as utterance's final consumption? Can a poem not be written in sand on a beach by a young lover, creating pools of letters for water to fill? Can a poem not hang in a garden and cast light's shadow as words for plants and flowers to grow among? Can a poem not fill a landscape as a series of sculptures, together becoming the book writ large and public? Can a poem not inscribe a code of letters with letters, lending ears that will H E A R a message of human suffering in the cities that eat us alive every day? Can a poem not be the rain falling? Can a poem not be the horse ready to raise

its hooves and disappear in a blur of fleshy speed? Can a poem not be a signal code to guide us home in the dark night at sea, in the bright day of our living? Can a poem not be a bridge connecting city to city, you to me, self to other, self to one? Can a poem not be a scrawled writing large and colored, a burst of energy engulfing its words as it paints them in the fabric of our vision? Can a poem not be a scroll with names of our loved citizens passing one by one as we turn through and beyond our ability to see and know? Can a poem not shock us with its dark black being, raise us with its glowing trembling serifs and ascenders, impassion us with its red and uncontrollable fire? Can a poem not have an end, any more than the field of our vision has an end? Can a poem not inscribe us, and in so doing take us outside ourselves? Can a poem not be the machine that undoes the machine-like thinking of our tyranny? Can the poem breathe, move, love?

The world of visual poetry has given, and continues to give us, poems that do all these things and more. Let us enjoy these gifts, praise the givers, and walk among the fields of letters. Our A, carried in the bright light of its unfolding, becomes a badge of the imagination. Indeed, A loses its cross, spreads its legs, and becomes wings, taking us with it in flight? Where will we alight? Will we alight? A light, an illumination. Can a poem not be an illumination of angels carrying the word through the sky in sun-warmed colors washed with the waters of our dreams? Do we not stand alert at the vista of a poem as it moves like the wind through fields of wheat? Can a poem not project into the waters and come and go with the tide, eroding over time?

Jim Leftwich

a few thoughts emerging from the unarticulated text

for tom hibbard

visual writing deconstructs the conventional dichotomy of looking and reading. in attending to visual writing, we are compelled to read non-textual components of the composition as semiotic agencies within the field of the writing.

visual writing is gaining more practitioners, which means it is expanding in complexity in proportion to the infusion of diverse subjectivities involved in its production.

collage is a component of visual writing, or at times a tool utilized in its production.

all visual writing is a rejection of, by which i mean an expansion of, regular writing.

a single written word has at least three distinct qualities, those of visuality, sound, and sense. in regular writing, as for example, an article in a newspaper, these qualities are prioritized as follows: 1) sense; 2) sound; and 3) visuality. visual writing rearranges these priorities. in many cases the new priorities are 1) visuality; 2) sense; and 3) sound. but much visual writing is also a form of sound poetry, and the priorities of regular writing are reversed, i.e., 1) visuality; 2) sound; and 3) sense.

meaning is not so much presented as is a series, or an aggregate, of opportunities for the collaborative construction of meanings by the interaction of the reader and the text.

visual writing is about reading, which is to say it's about thinking. it's about changing the way one perceives and thinks about one's perceptions, which is to say it's about changing the way one reads.

visual writing is not new, but it's still new enough to be marginal, which is to say we are not yet fully comfortable as a culture with reading aggregates, or with reading squiggly diagonals, or with reading invisible resonances scattered within a field.

meanings produced by pulsing swarms, or by improvised punctuations along irregular reading routes, are often new enough, or marginal enough, or strange enough to seem to some as though they don't belong in the conventional category of meaning. and perhaps they don't. new ways of reading, in the company of new ways of writing, will produce new categories of meaning.

as more visual writing is produced, and more of it is read, the strategies for reading it will gradually catch up with the strategies involved in writing it, and an exponential expansion of the meanings produced will inevitably occur.

we aren't there yet, but we're working on it.

HANDWRITTEN

POEMS:

Donato Mancini, Stephen Vincent, Edward Kulemin, David Baptiste Chirot, C Mehrl Bennett, Hartmut Andryczuk, Marc Bell & Jason McLean, Shayne Ehman, Greg Evason, Jo Cook, David Ostrem, Tim Gaze, Robert Grenier, John M Bennett, Irving Weiss, Richard Kostelanetz, Jesse Glass, Jaap Blonk, Marco Giovenale, Michael Peters, Geof Huth, Sharon Harris, Serkan Isin, Michael Jacobson, Christopher Olson, Sheila Murphy, Eva O Ettel, Sveta Litvak, R Saunders, John Vieira, Alberto Vitacchio, Bill Howe, Helen White

152. Donato Mancini, Was It Eliot's Toilet I Saw

153. Donato Mancini, Blood of a Concrete Poet
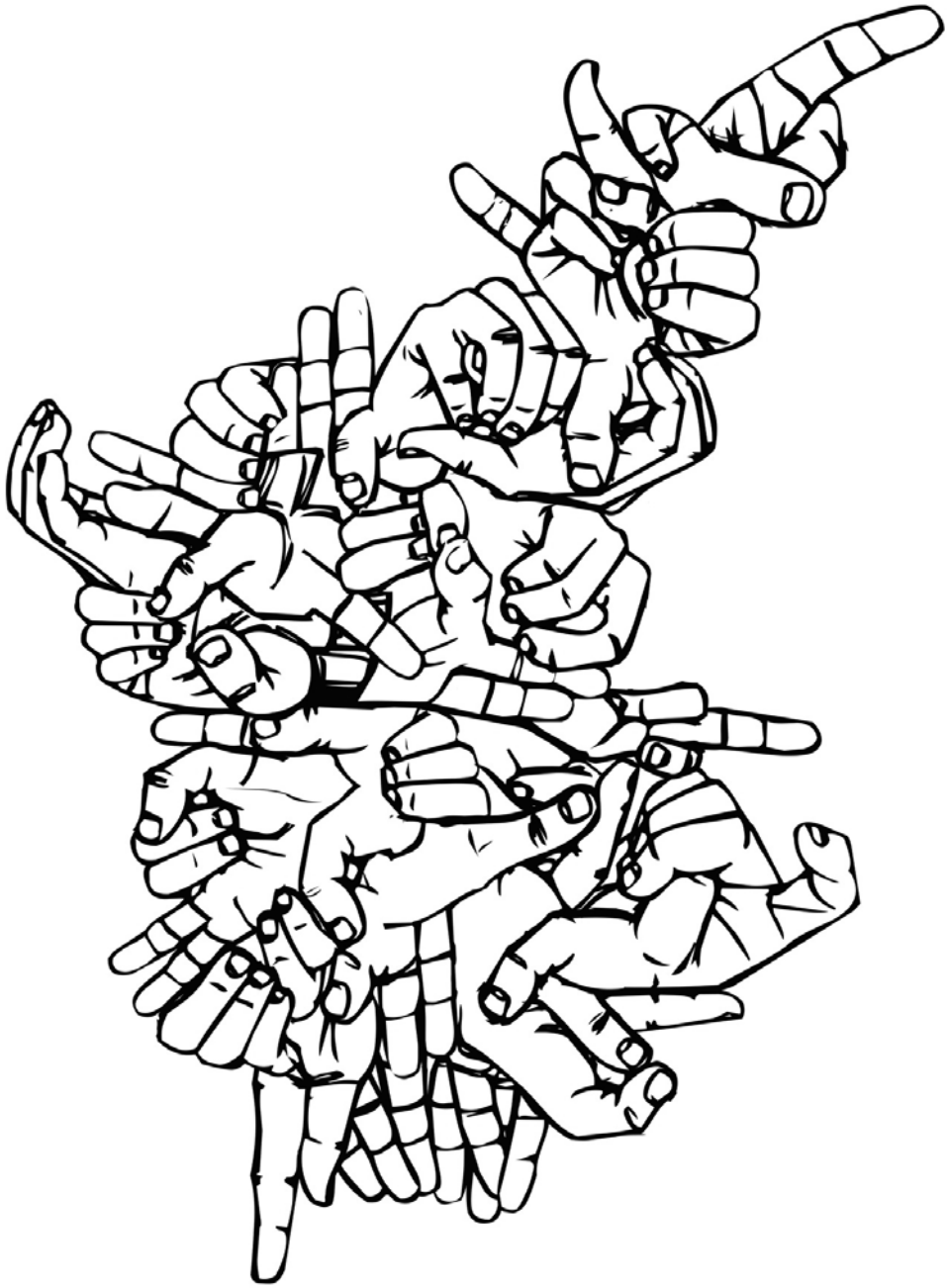
154. Stephen Vincent, Dahlen Reading Dahlen

HAPTIC: Fanny Howe's George Oppen memorial lecture, S.F. State Poetry Center, 12/08/08

155. Stephen Vincent, Fanny Howe George Oppen Lecture

Эдуард Кулемин "Мну ум"

156. Edward Kulemin, I crumple mind

Edward Kulemin "VeLo-LoVe"

157. Edward Kulemin, VeLo-LoVe

158. David Baptiste Chirot, from Les fenetres farouches—Feral Windows

159. David Baptiste Chirot, from Les fenetres farouches—Feral Windows
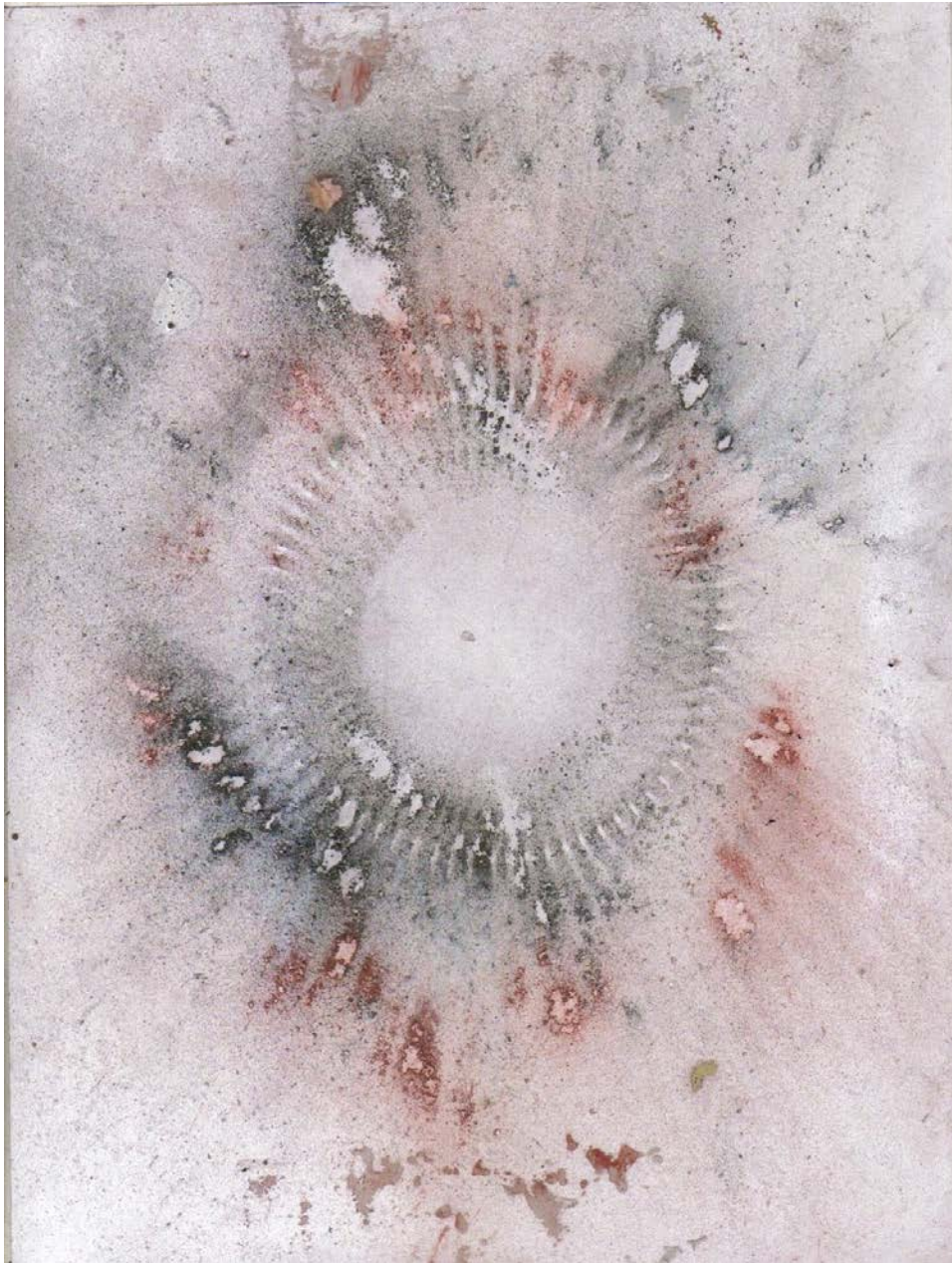
160. David Baptiste Chirot, Death From This Window
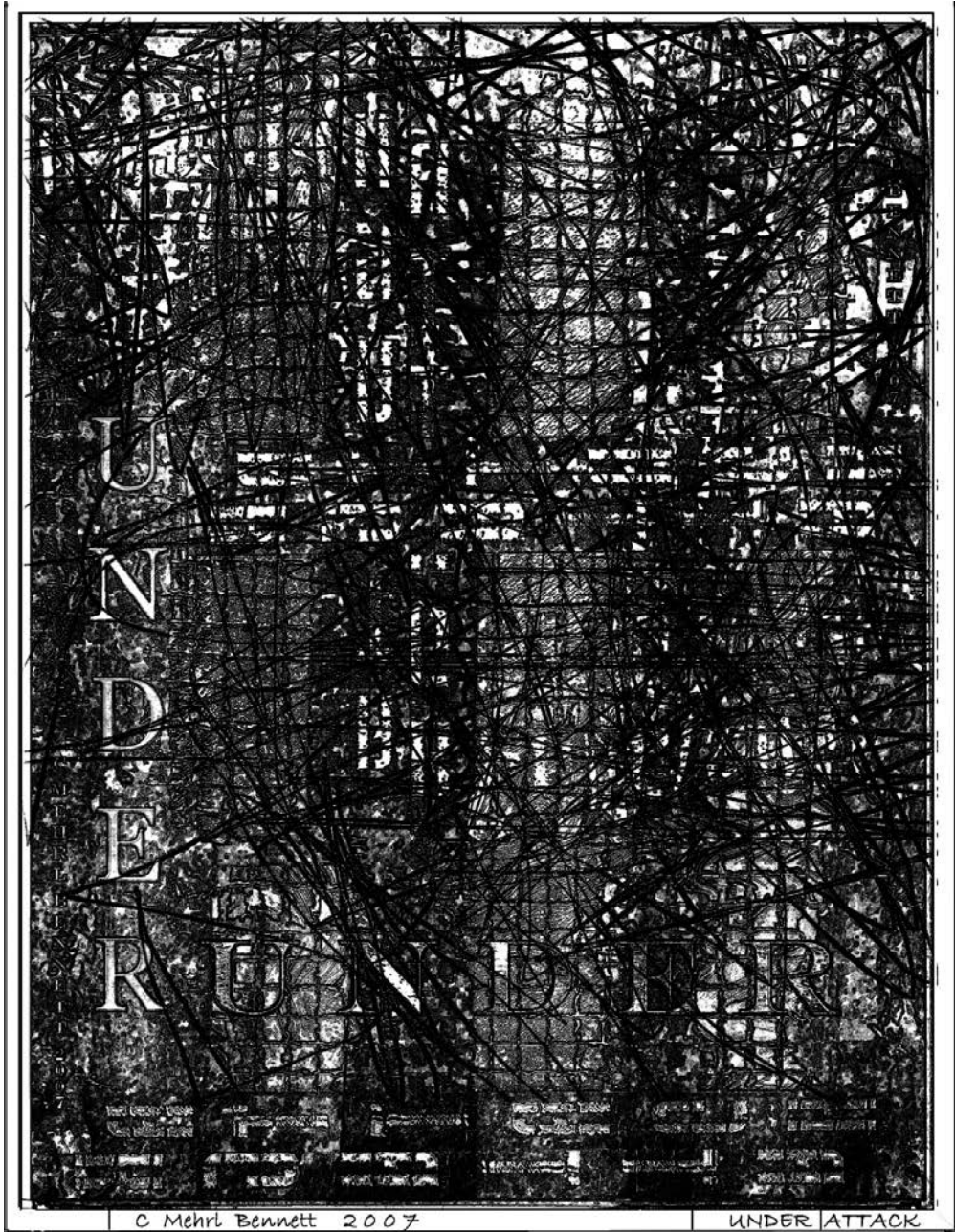
161. C Mehrl Bennett, Under Attack

LIEBER HARTMUT G. – VIELE
INFORMATIONEN AUF EINEM BLATT
MACHEN DEN INHALT NICHT UN.
BEDINGT INTE RESSANTER.
HIER SIEHST DU QUASI E
INE SICH ZU U ERPUPPENDE
FIGUR, EINE INDIANISCHE
LARVE – OH GROSSER G
EIST. ZERST REUE MEI
NE ZWEIFEL UND LASS MI
CH NICHT IN DIE FÄNGE
DER EXZENT RIZITÄT UND
ORGINALITÄT TAPPEN. Et
ZENTRIZITÄT UND ORGINA-
LITÄT SIND NICHTS. GEE
RUFEN DU BI ST IDENTI
FIZIERT UND EIN EITLER
KÜNSTLER. IC H WEIß ES,
DENN AUCH ICH BIN
EITEL. OM H ANI PADME
HUM. INCH ALLAH. DU
ERINNERST DICH? VOKABELKRIEGER
NOCH 3 CH BIS GOTT. DEIN H.A.

162. Hartmut Andryczuk, from my correspondence with Hartmut Geerken

163. Hartmut Andryczuk, Sigsauer a collaboration with Ottfried Zielke

164. Marc Bell & Jason McLean, Stockwell Day is Steppin' Into The Ring (SIIS)
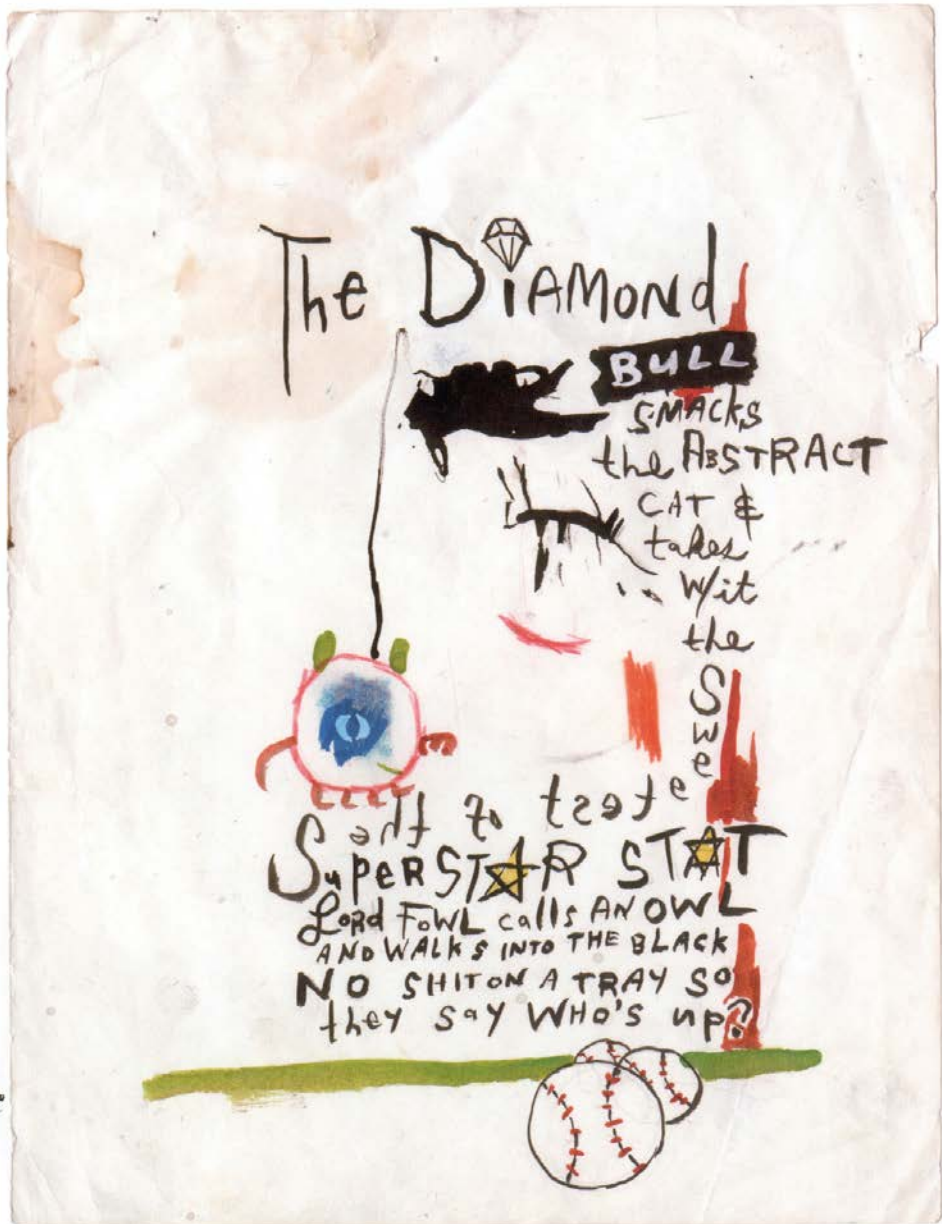
165. Shayne Ehman, Diamond Bullet Shatters Abstract Cataract

166. Greg Evason, The Blind Canoe

167. Jo Cook, Celestogram

168. David Ostrem, See

169. David Ostrem, Glance

170. Tim Gaze, Untitled

171. Tim Gaze, Untitled
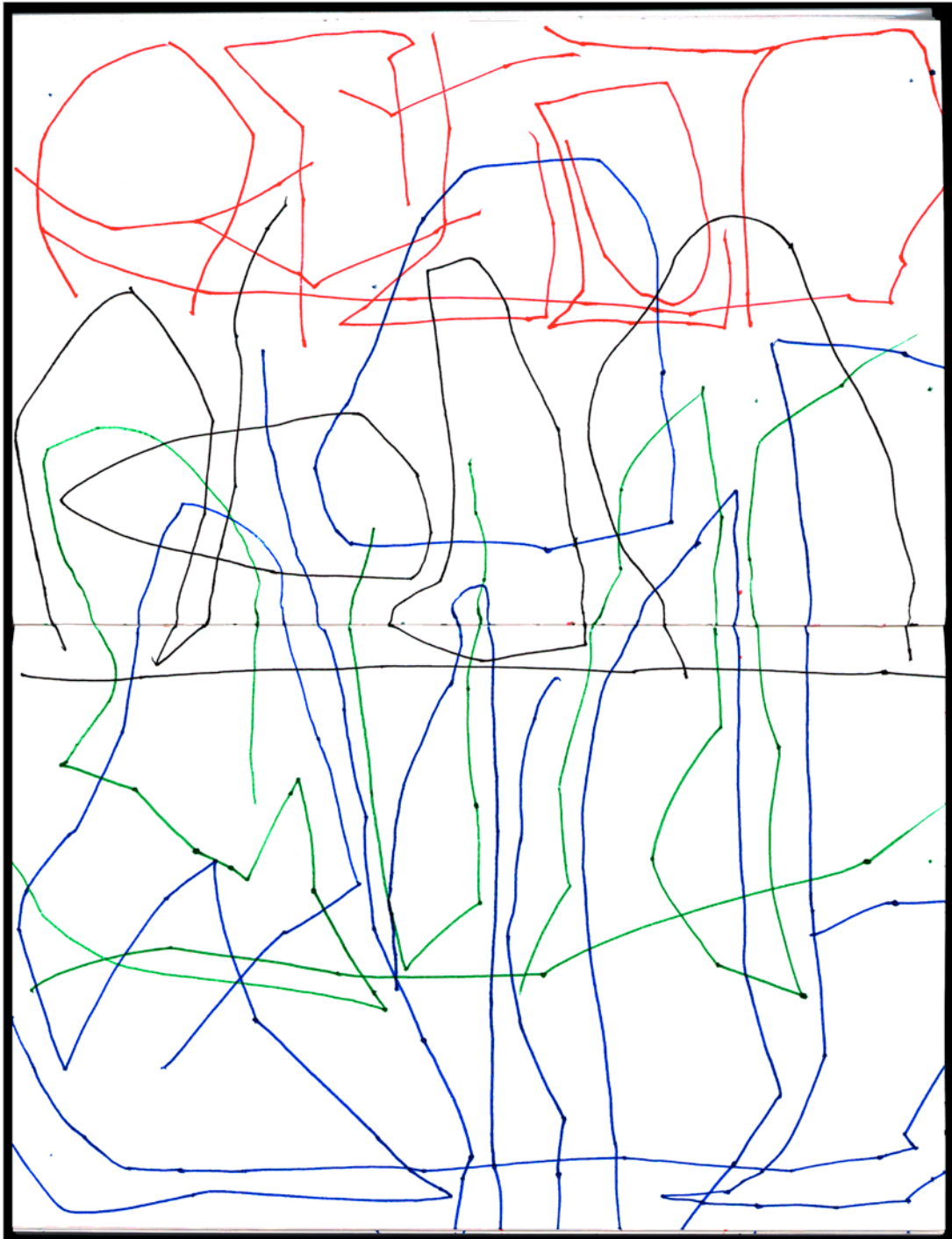
172. Robert Grenier, AFTER/NOON/SUN/SHINE
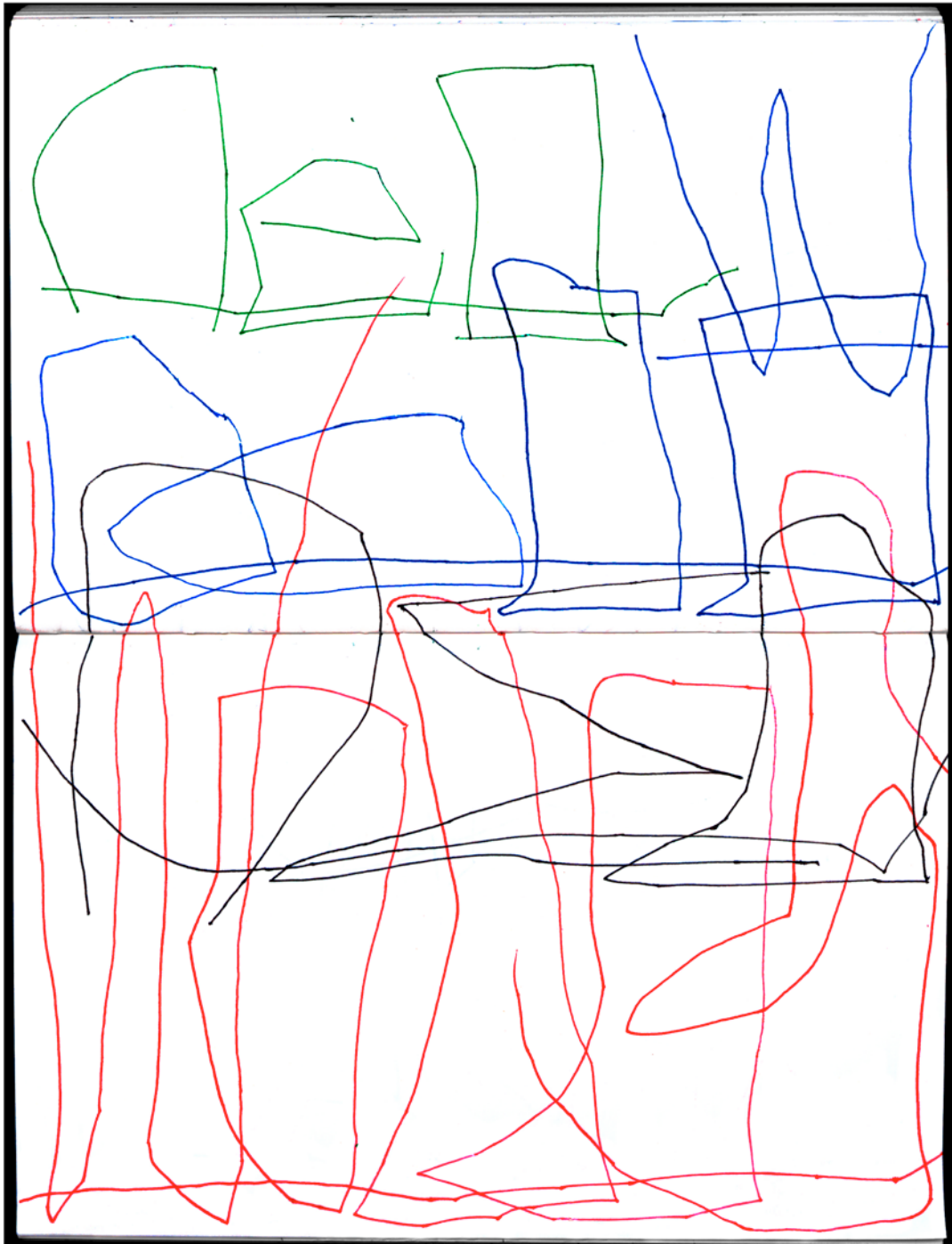
173. Robert Grenier, RED W/OOOD/RED/WOODS

174. John M Bennett, Fortunate
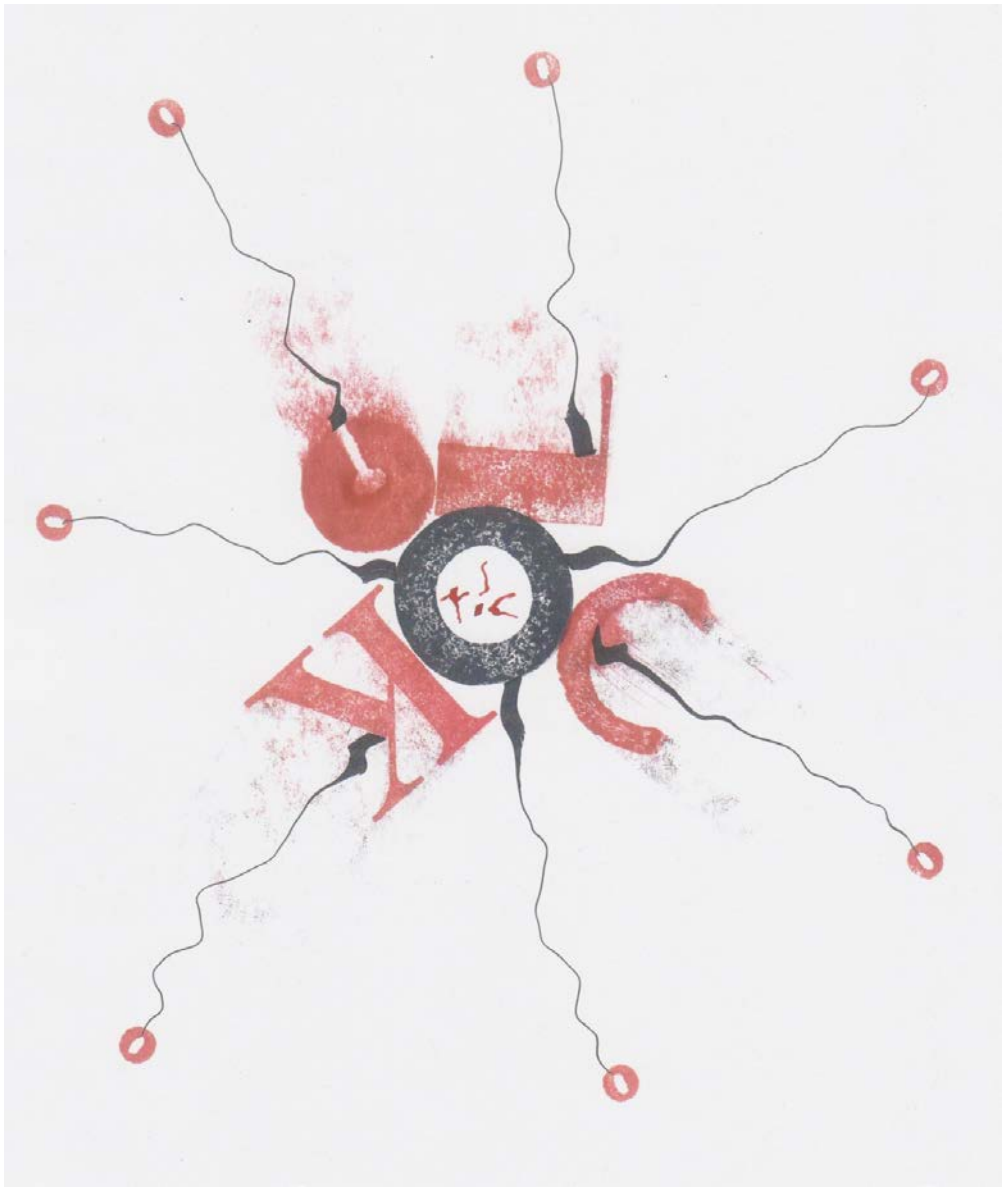
175. John M Bennett, Tic
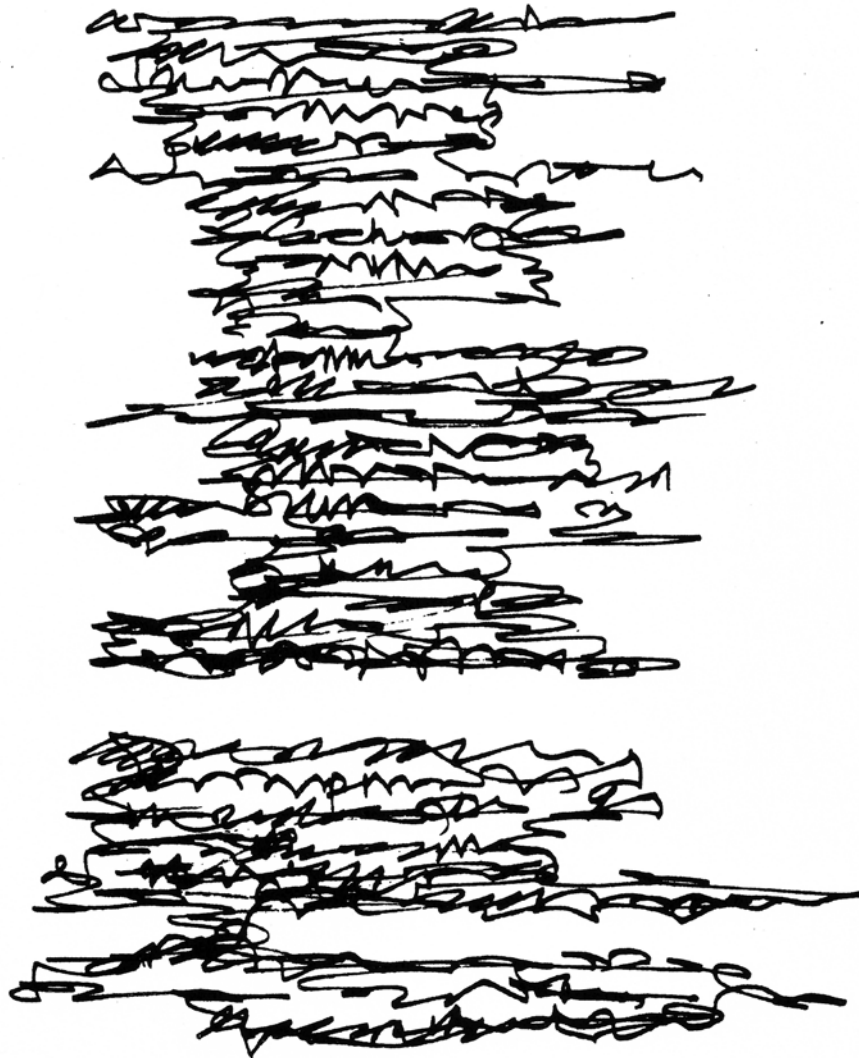
Drawing-Poem: Two Portraits

William Wordsworth (1770-1850), "Intimations of Immortality," Stanza 4; Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), "The Wreck of the Deutschland," Stanza XXXI

176. Irving Weiss, Drawing Poem
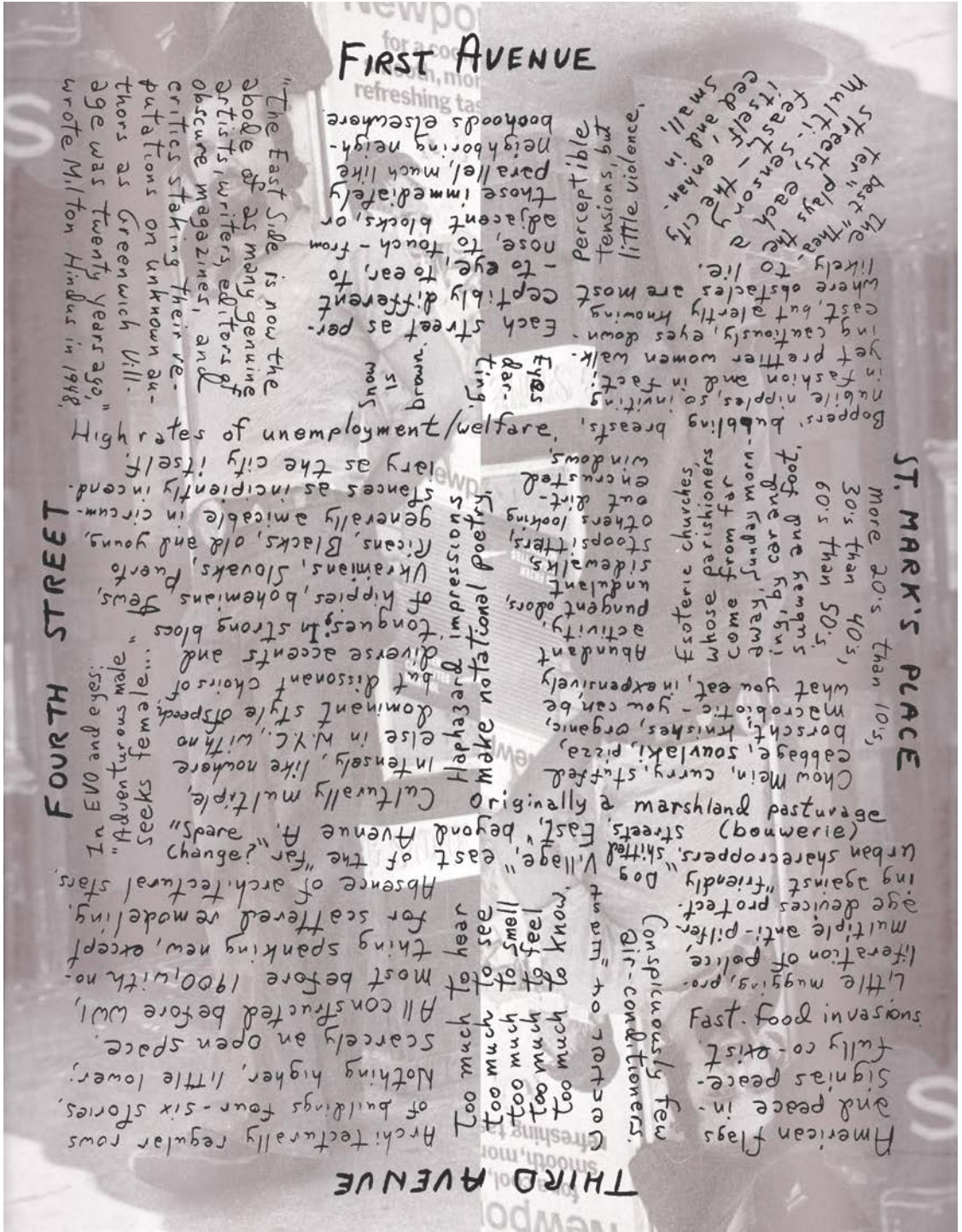
FIRST AVENUE

"The East Side is now the abode of as many genuine artists, writers, editors of obscure magazines, and critics staking their reputations on unknown authors as Greenwich Village was twenty years ago," wrote Milton Hindus in 1948.

Those immediately adjacent blocks; or nose, to touch - from - to eye, to ear, to - ceptibly different. Each street as per-

Perceptible tensions, but little violence,

multi-sensory itself, and ced feast in ter "plays a the each "they're a bit of the city where obstacles are most likely to lie.

ing cautiously, eyes down east, but alertly knowing yet prettier women walk in fashion and in fact; nubile nipples, so inviting; Boppers, bubbling breasts,

High rates of unemployment/welfare,

Newer burglary as the city itself, stances as incipiently incendiary in circumstances generally amicable in circumstances of Ukramians, Slovaks, Puerto Ricans, Blacks, old and young, of hippies, bohemians, Jews, tongues; in strong blocs of diverse accents and but dissonant choirs of dominant style & speech, like nowhere else in N.Y.C. within Intensely, Culturally multiple "Spare Change?" beyond Avenue A, "far" east of the "far East," streets, (bouwerie) Originally a marshland pasturage

Haphazard impressional make notational poetry

brown, shift - ting cryes dar-

encrusted windows, out dirt-others looking stoopsitters, sidewalks, undulant pungent odors, Abundant activity, whose parishioners come from far away for Sunday morn- foot and subway, car and Esoteric churches, what you eat, inexpensively macrobiotic - you can be borscht, knishes, organic, cabbage, souvlaki, pizza, Chow mein, curry, stuffed

In EVO and eyes: "Adventurous male seeks female..." Absence of architectural stars. for scattered remodeling, thing spanking new, except Most before 1900, with no- All constructed before WWI, scarcely an open space. Nothing higher, little lower; of buildings four-six stories, Architecturally regular rows

Too much to total, too much to know, too much to feel, too much to smell, too much to see, too much to hear.

Conspicuously few air-conditioners. age devices protect- multiple anti-pilfer- liferation of police. Little muggings, pro- Fast food invasions signals peace- fully co-exist. and peace in- American flags

ST. MARK'S PLACE
more 20's than 10's, 30's than 40's, 60's than 50's,

Dog Village, shifted urban sharecroppers, ing against "friendly"
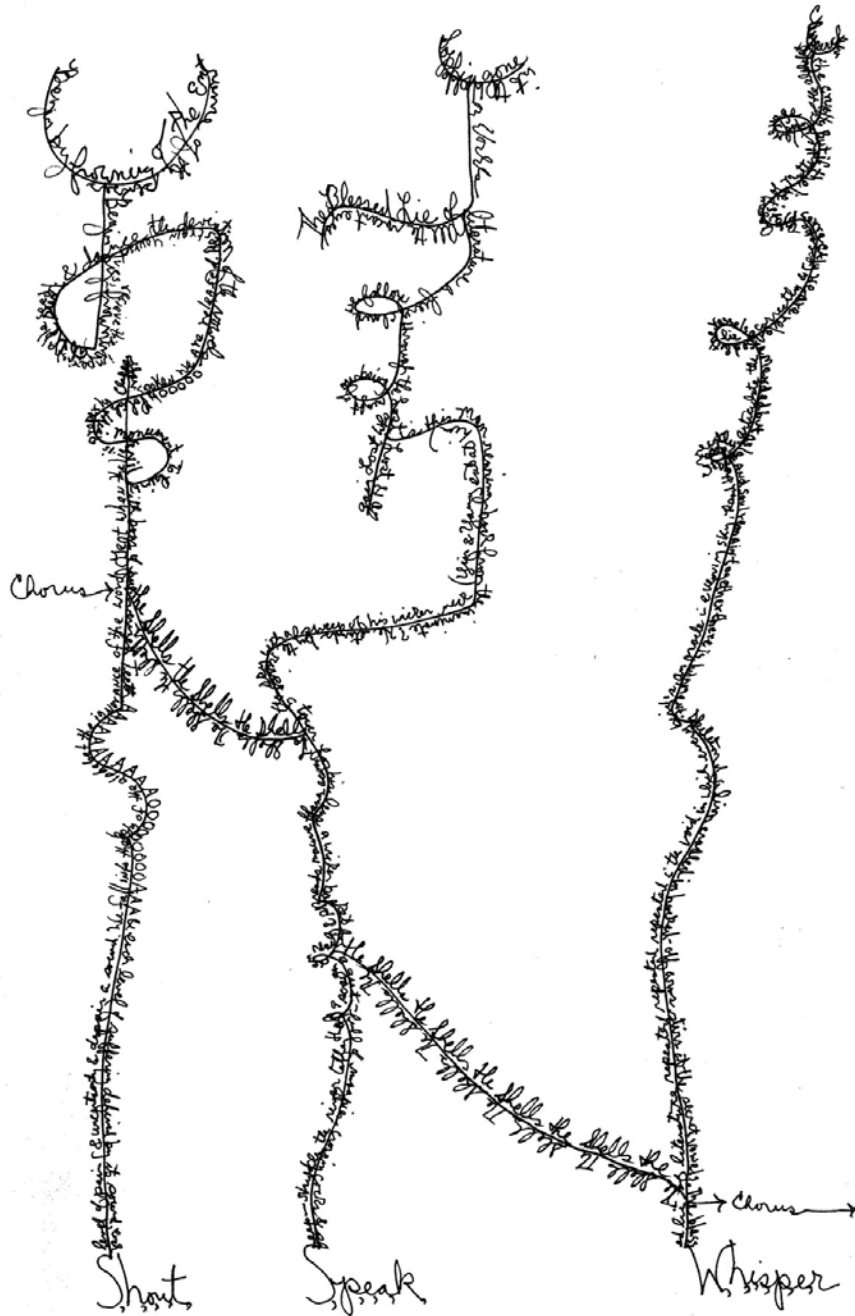
THIRD AVENUE

FOURTH STREET

177. Richard Kostelanetz, from EAST VILLAGE

178. Jesse Glass, Shout Speak Whisper

179. Jaap Blonk, Just a Thought

180. Marco Giovenale, 0589 *from* asemic sibyls

181. Marco Giovenale, RV *from* asemic sibyls
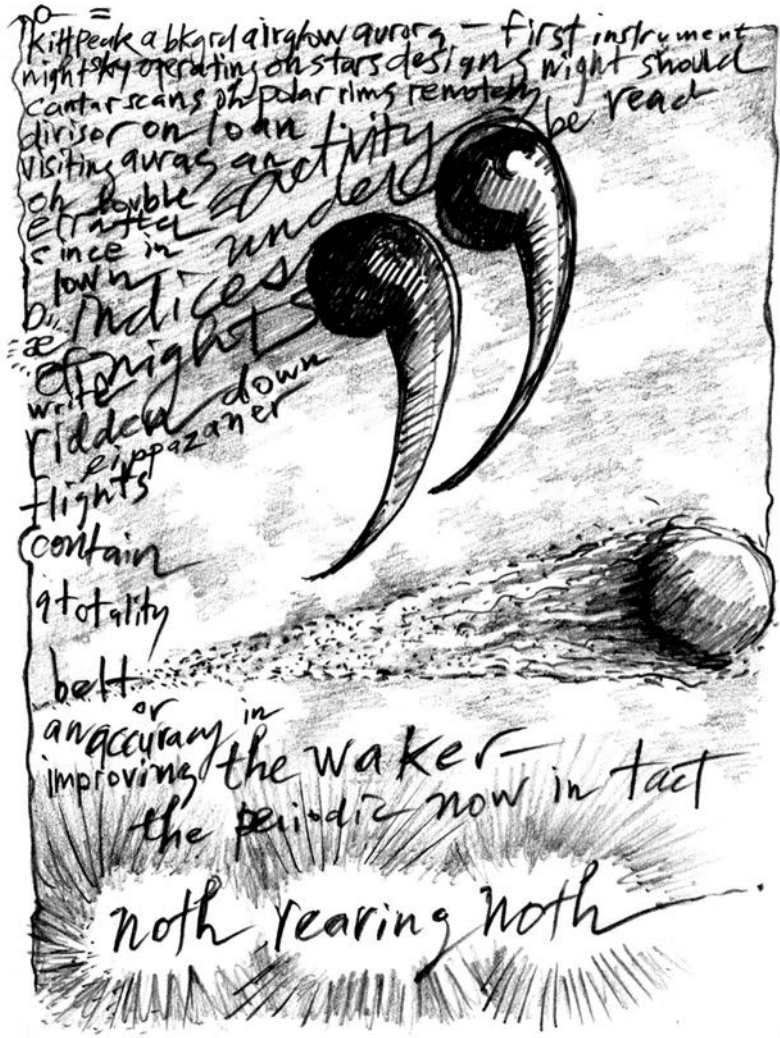
182. Michael Peters, noth rearing *(from Vaast Bin)*

183. Geof Huth, Suspensions Within
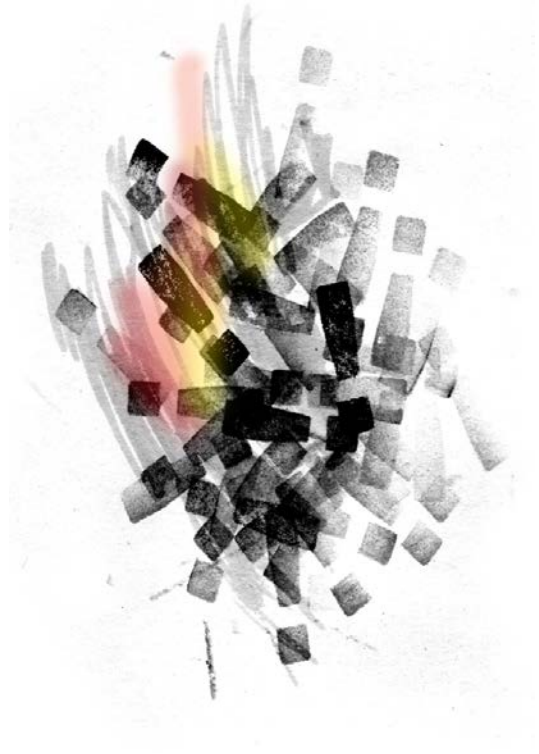
184. *Sharon Harris,* Your Ass Lightly Kicked

185. Serkan Isin, dada korkut alphabet

186. Michael Jacobson, from Action Figures
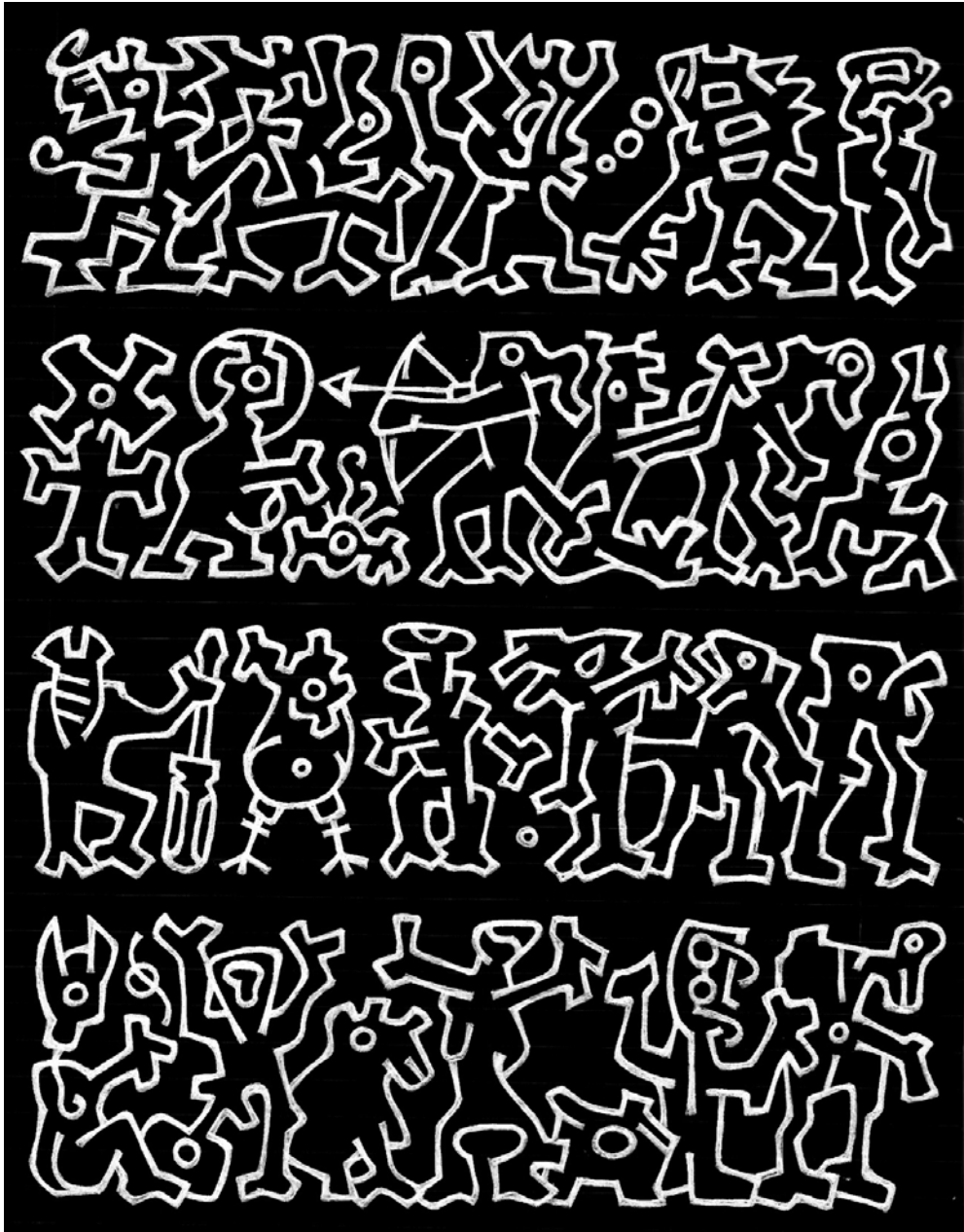
187. Michael Jacobson, from Action Figures

COMMENT · A17

Here comes more America

MARGARET WENTE

Does the world need more America? If you think not, I have bad news. At 7:46 a.m. today, says the U.S. Census, the 300 millionth American will enter the world. According to demographer William Frey he'll be born to Mexican immigrants near Sacramento and his parents will name him José.

Of all the industrialized nations in the world, the U.S. is the one

188. Christopher Olson, Here comes more America

D6

BIOGRAPHY

No wonder he drank

189. Christopher Olson, No wonder he drank

190. Sheila Murphy, Attentionalia

191. Eva O Ettel, Waterford

192. Sveta Litvak, pppp, dolls, o + c, black
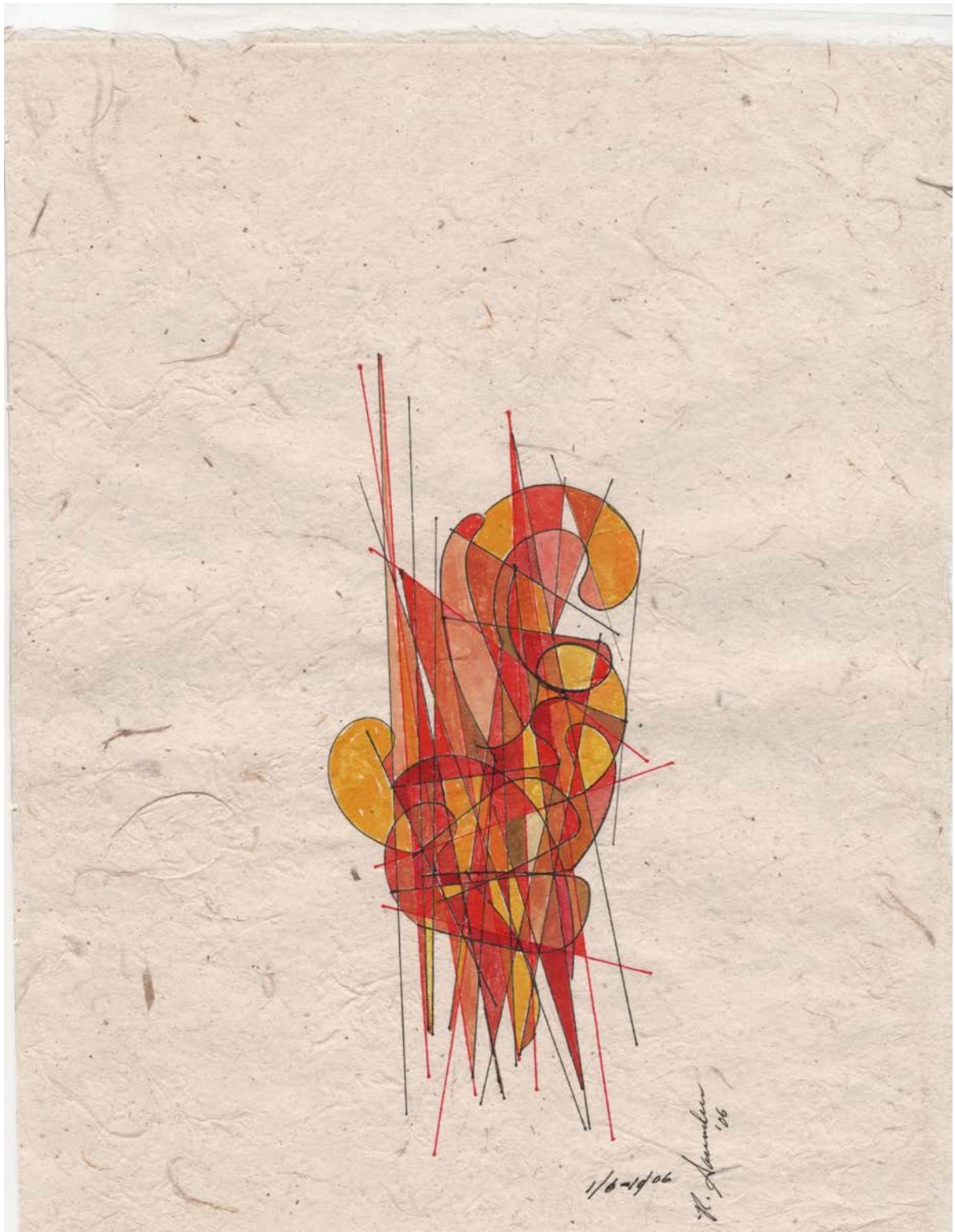
193. R Saunders, 1/6/06

194. *John Vieira*, (S)HE
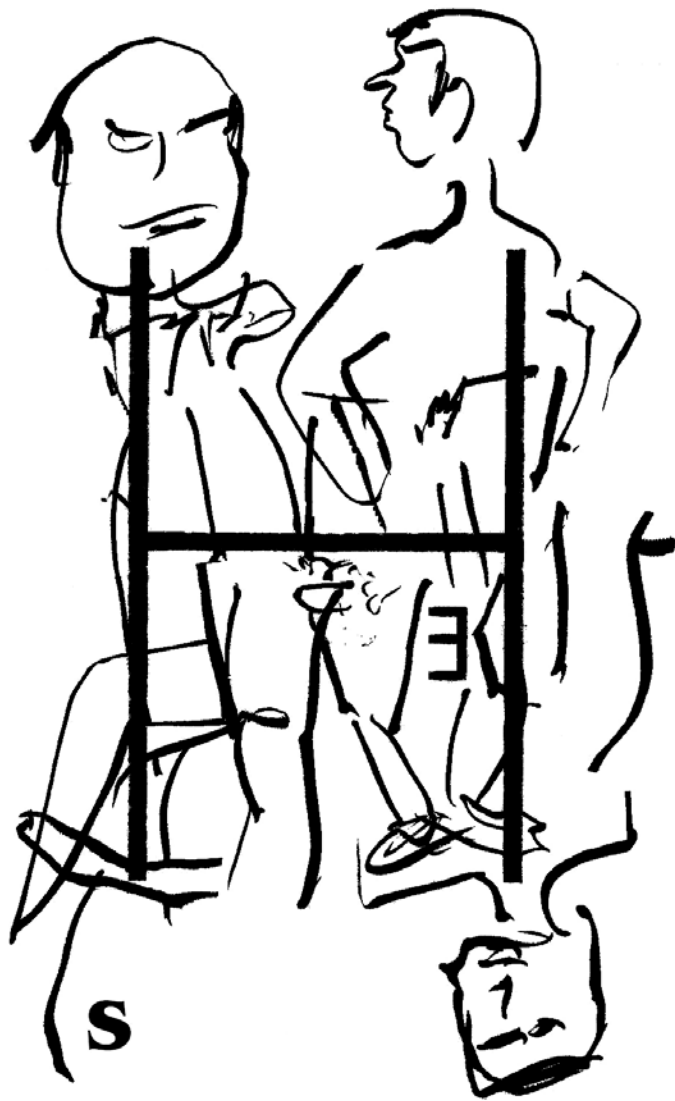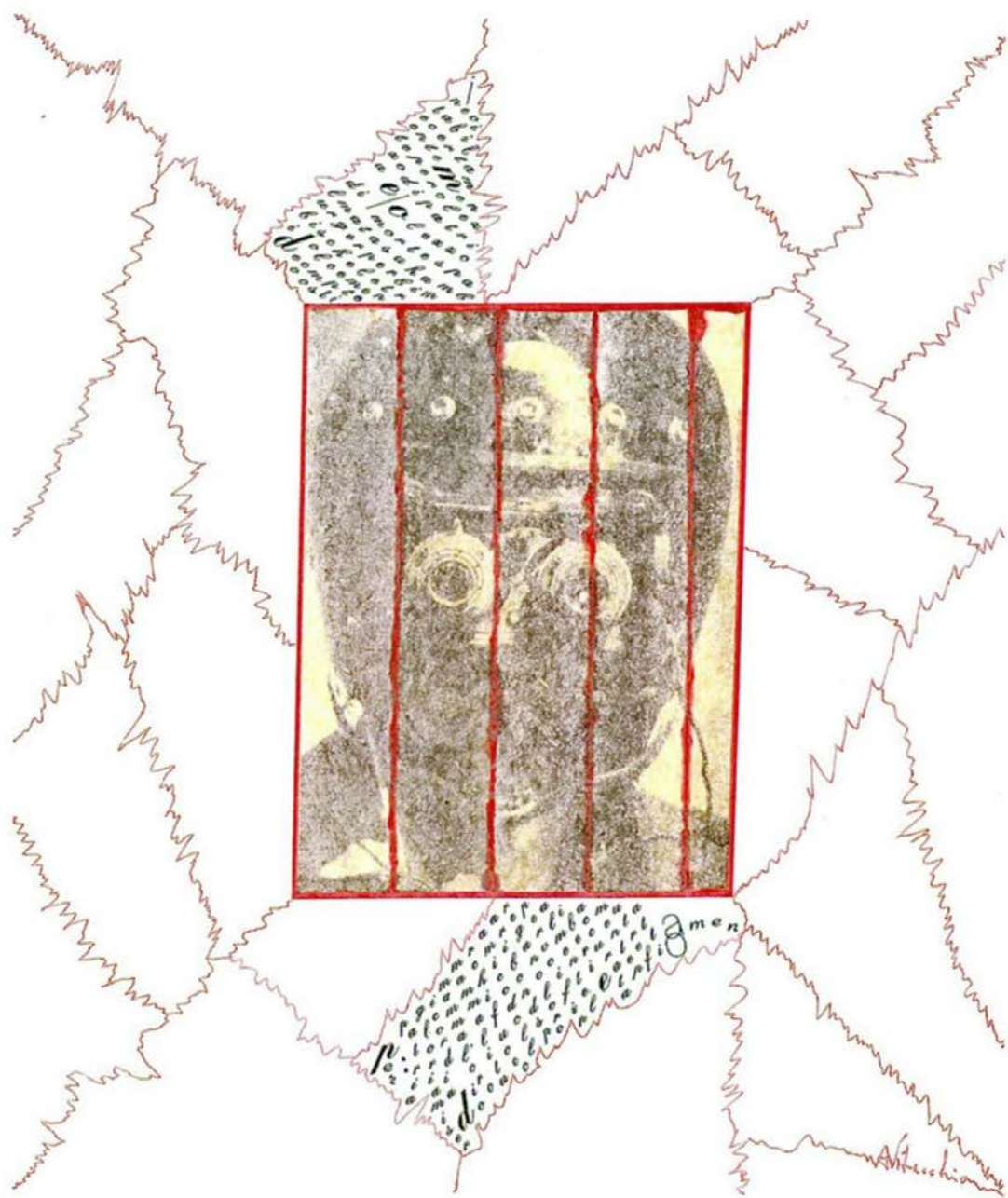
195. Alberto Vitacchio, e o
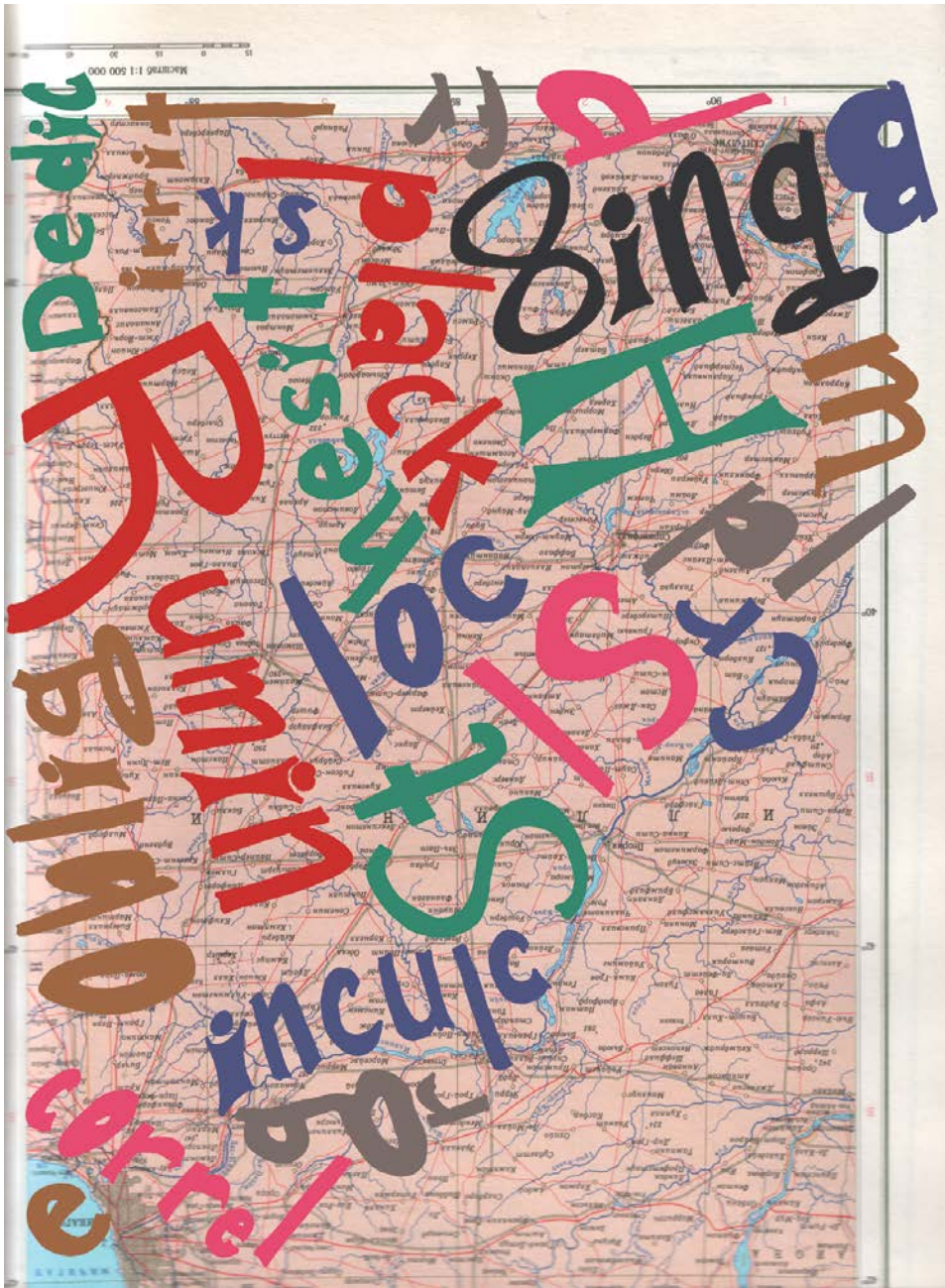
196. Bill Howe, w8ting fork flowres

197. Helen White, Invisible In

ESSAYS:

C Mehrl Bennett, Karl Young, Karl Kempton

C Mehrl Bennett

AN EXAMINATION OF THE FORCES BEHIND VISUAL POETRY IN THE PAST DECADE

The following remarks strive to give a little insight into the creative juices that may have helped generate the visual poetry found in this anthology. There are open ended variations and directions to approaching the contents within and the international community behind it all.

We can examine this topic anthropologically: Letters themselves originated from images. It is a sign of these digital, post-modern times that "asemic writing" is becoming more accepted and popular. Asemic writing doesn't attempt to relay a message of specific "meaning," though there might be a private system of symbols that mean something only to the poet/artist or to some ancient culture, or there might have been a readable text that has undergone "processing" and is no longer readable by way of an established language system. This approach encourages new ways of reading and new ways of thinking, and reaches across language barriers. Any meaning the reader constructs is a correct translation. Tim Gaze has curated a group exhibit of asemic poetry in Australia, is well-known in the field, and makes some interesting remarks in online interviews. In the past decade, we have seen an explosion in the field of visual poetry that can be described as asemic, and Tim Gaze has been actively cultivating that eruption of creativity.

We can examine this topic structurally (archi"text"urally): An arrangement of images is similar to the arrangement of words in a sentence, or a poetical phrase, as is exhibited in the large body of work by Scott Helmes (in his "day" job he is an architect). Words and phrases can be structured vertically & horizontally, "free-form" or "shaped" into an image that supports the content of the poetry. The main elements of a visual poem might be structured in the form of a mathematical equation, as in Bob Grumman's mathemaku. Contemporary haiku forms, geometrical forms, book arts and even the composition of animated video poetry can be examined under the "structural" umbrella.

We can examine this topic in many different contexts: Historical, geographical, social, cultural, environmental, political, economical, emotional, and so on. For example, our post 9/11 culture makes itself known in much of the visual poetry (along with more conventional art forms) created since Sept. 11th, 2001.

Within all these different views, visual poetry is yet just another "Art Form." My position is that all types of artists (musicians, poets, performance, visual, video, book, etc.) ought to be, and often are, encouraged these days to use ALL the art forms as tools. Jackson Pollock's paintings remind one of "scribbling," even though Jackson Pollock never called himself an asemic poet. Today, however, visual artists who consciously use text in their compositions will often classify it as "textual art". Today, browsing through mainstream art magazines, like *Art in America*, we see many examples of the "plastic arts" that use text in their two-dimensional compositions, sculptures, videos, or performances.

Of course, there are still conventional poets and critics who value academia over experimentation. They wish to stick to a semantic classification of visual poetry as art, and not as poetry. I've encountered many critics and academics who, for example, do not accept "word art" or "textual art" as a form of visual poetry. Likewise, many conventional artists (especially photographers) still feel it is crude to include words as part of visual imagery. I speak from my own experience with certain visual poets/critics and with artists who are defensive of their established forms. In regards to the public at large, I've actually spoken to an American citizen who claimed that the public school system never exposed him to the concrete poetry of e.e.cummings! Our education system needs to educate the public's perception of the deluge of graphics and multi-media forced on us by marketing agencies versus art/poetry by writers/artists/visual poets who use the same tools to impart individual visions that communicate internationally with the common denominator of visual poetry.

Computers, digital cameras and video, and user-friendly digital software have made the interlayering of text and images a more viable option over the past decade. Internet email, web sites, online networking groups, and blogs encourage real-time exchange of ideas between visual artists and poets. Before the past decade, the mail-art community worked at a slower pace, but effectively generated a more global sense of connection. As a result of this networking, the plastic arts became visual poetry either by direct collaborations with poets and writers, by osmosis, or by the need to communicate with language. Mail artists would incorporate words by collage, printing, rubber stamps, or calligraphy into their compositions. Writers and poets in these networks incorporated images with the same techniques and also experimented with fonts, typography, photocopy, and book art. Musicians collaborated with poets, artists with writers, and collaborative books, collages and sound files proliferated. Mail art is still strong today; despite the increase in postage, which has turned many of us toward online Internet works. In my own work, which stems from a background in the plastic arts (I have a B.A. in painting and drawing), I've been greatly influenced by the poetry of my spouse, John M. Bennett, whom I met through mail art in the late 1970s. And his poetry began to include more visual aspects after he married me in 1980.

Of great significance is the continuing explosion of variation among individuals and processes, seemingly at all ends of the spectrum. Here are only a few that come to mind: asemic writing or invented languages and alphabets; words/phrases demonstrating multiple meanings via creative compositions; layered or collaged text effects using found objects, cut ups, 3-dimensional letters, stencils, rubbings and creative processing (such as moving the object as it's being scanned or copied); mathematical or equation poetry; contemporary variations on haiku and other conventional structures; and both traditional concrete poets and contemporary visual poets using current computer software as a means to the end.

Visual poetry is inherently "experimental" in nature, and as such, it attempts to avoid predetermined concepts and it strives to be "on the edge". Still, we've seen a lot of visual poetry from the eighties that resembles work done within the last decade. The challenge of being avant garde isn't an easy one. But it's not the most important thing, either. The "individual" is important, and so is the process of enabling that individual self to create. The individual might find his or her creative voice as a result of the feeling of inclusion in the global network which helps to enable his or her "muse." Sometimes creative results happen through collaboration, meaning that the finalized work originates from a "third" newly created voice.

The degree to which we challenge the reader today to "interact" is much higher for works generated in the past decade. For example, it can be challenging for the inexperienced to be confronted with asemic writing, or enriched online video presentations of poetry, or to engage in interactive hypertext media. Today, the witnessing of live performances of experimental poetry at organized events—such as the performances of the Be Blank Consort[1], requires the audience to "experience" the performance in addition to the simple cognitive act of "hearing" the semantic meaning of a text. Yes, visual poetry CAN be performed, though I acknowledge that some visual poets, such as Richard Kostelanetz, create their works solely to be "read/seen" statically on the page.

We have many "democratizing" tools at our disposal today such as multiple "print-on-demand" book sites[2], more user-friendly software and digital cameras that also take videos. The greater prevalence of computer usage

has boosted the synergistic energy force behind mail art and fluxus networks via online tools such as blogging, facebook, video and image sharing sites. Within a supportive online group or mail art community, individuals do not feel "at the mercy" of art galleries, big publication distributors, or other institutional bureaucracies. Instead, a non-commercial atmosphere is nurtured that is ripe for experimentation, collaboration, and visual poetry. Bulat Galyev has stated[3]

> new digital technology is of 'productive' nature. It is able to produce any images and sounds, both real and imaginary ones (i.e., figurative and non-figurative ones). Just as the revolver in America of XIX century appeared to be sort of 'instrument of democracy,' leveling abilities of feeble and strong men, so computers play now similar role, compensating the consequences of 'functional asymmetry' in our renewed 'periodical system of arts.'

Bulat Galyev introduced his new "periodical system of arts" as a device to relate new media to the traditional art forms. Bringing new media to traditional art forms often challenges the audience to participate by actively creating their own interpretations within their own level of involvement in the experience. This was especially evident to me when my spouse John M. Bennett and I attended the 2008 Experimental Writing Conference in Montevideo, Uruguay (organized by Clemente Padin).

Many participants in the Montevideo seminar cast themselves as artist, experimental writer, and visual poet. We witnessed wonderful presentations and performances using music, video, PowerPoint™, theatre, dance, conceptual constructions, three-dimensional constructions, etc. There was even a street parade of the alphabet organized by Josef M. Callejo from Barcelona. The term "textual artist" might need to be strung out to "sound/text/performance/video/etc. artist" in the case of Wilton Acevado. My point is simply put: Visual poetry lives *alongside and often incorporates* multiple forms of experimental poetry and literature that connect with audiences via theatre, song and music, architecture, the plastic arts, video, flash animation, book arts, etc.

This discussion should include a bit about concrete poetry. I will make references to Augusto De Campos, a Brazilian writer who (with his brother Haroldo de Campos) was a founder of the Concrete poetry movement in Brazil. Visual poetry is a natural fusion of poetry and the plastic arts rather then an evolution of concrete poetry. Concrete poetry continues strong as ever, with minimalist tendencies using only type or symbols and spatial aspects of the page. Though today, along with previous reference to "the page," we must include visual poetry flash files, etc., as in the case of computer animated visual poetry, or of the third dimension, as in examples of sculptural typography by K.S. Ernst. We can, however, place "concrete poetry" at one end of a kind of "spectrum" of visual poetry, because deconstruction and/or collage and layering with text and visual material sometimes goes Rococo, and falls to a different end of that spectrum. I acknowledge that there are those who don't wish to include that "rococo" end of the spectrum as a type of visual poetry, but who wish to refer to that end of the spectrum as "art" only. I personally feel that the "semantics" of "visual poetry" needs to be "all inclusive" of "all the arts."

I do not agree that one end of the visual poetry spectrum is necessarily more visual than the other. Although concrete poetry uses type or symbols, this doesn't make it more "semantic" in a literary sense any more than other types of visual poetry with the exception of "asemic" poetry, which I addressed earlier in this essay. In fact, traditional poetry has clear visual elements simply due to the line breaks. Looking at this argument from another direction, traditional poetry and the visual arts have always been aligned as concurrent methods to conjure up an image or atmospheric representation. Shape poems (an often used technique by concrete poets, aka e.e.cummings) represent a literal fusion of the two.

Various "types" of visual poetry are historically related, even as they explode outward via experimentalism, and this is illustrated by the following quote from a 1995 interview with Augusto De Campos:[4]

1. What dimensions of contemporary poetics are directly engaged with concretism?

A. I see Concrete poetry as directly engaged with the practices of vanguard, experimental or—as it should probably more adequately be called— inventive poetry. I think that the task of Concrete poetry, after it appeared in the '50s, was to reestablish contact with the poetry of the vanguards of the

beginning of the century (Futurism, Cubofuturism, Dada et al), which the intervention of two great wars and the proscription of Nazi and Stalinist dictatorships had condemned to marginalization. A similar movement occurred in the 50s in music, with the recuperation of the work of the Vienna Group (Schoenberg, Webern, Berg), the rediscovery of the great individual experimentalists (Ives, Varese, etc.), and the intervention of new vanguard composers, from Boulez to Stockhausen to Cage. In terms of the poets whom Pound termed "masters," "diluters," etc., the practitioners of Concrete poetry situate themselves, or hope to be situated, programmatically, in the category of the "inventors," that is, those who are engaged in the pursuit of new forms.

(Note: I encourage all to reference the "vii" endnote and to read the entire interview on the internet. Per Wikipedia: Augusto de Campos was born in 1931 and is also a translator, music critic, and visual artist.)

The incredible quantity of visual poetry published today both online and in print testifies to the democratizing effect of the tools made available in the last decade. And the quality of the works represented gives testament to a creative "explosion" that the synergy of the different art forms and the spirit of collaboration and networking encourages. These forces have worked together in the last decade so much that visual poetry can no longer be ignored by the mainstream poetry community. That fact was evidenced by a November 2008 issue of "Poetry" magazine which included a portfolio of visual poetry curated and introduced by Geof Huth.[5] And there are other mainstream poetry magazines and e-zines that are beginning to accept a greater fusion of art and writing. Though sometimes it is safer, as my spouse- the poet and visual poet John M. Bennett often advises, to simply avoid the mainstream!

In this limited space one can only touch on the broad spectrum of the different "types" and "approaches" to visual poetry that have blossomed in the international climate that cultivated the works presented in this anthology. But be assured that "genuine creative works"

have surfaced in the visual poetry field of experimental writing/art. To explain in Eisenstein's words:

"The effect of the work of art is based on a simultaneously occurring dual process: the impetuous progressive ascension toward the highest mental stages of consciousness and, at the same time, penetration through the structure of form into the deepest layers of sensuous thought. The polar bifurcation of these two lines of aspiration creates that particular tension of form and content unity that is characteristic of genuine creations. There are no genuine creations without it."

[1] http://www.youtube.com/nicovassilakis
http://www.poemsthatgo.com/gallery/winter2004/jabber/index.htm
http://www.poemsthatgo.com/gallery/winter2004/madsen/statement.html
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSLR0obBsiE&feature=related
Video by Nicolas Carras with poetry by JMB, performed by John M Bennett "Four shorts pieces": http://vimeo.com/1619547

[2] Examples of print on demand experimental poetry websites:
www.stores.lulu.com/lunabisonteprods and www.stores.lulu.com/l_m_young

[3] Quote by Bulat Galeyev is from the Experimental Aesthetics Institute PROMETHEUS (associated with Kazan State Technical University) website, http://prometheus.kai.ru/in2_e.htm
specifically from the "details/conclusion" section of **"Computers and Art: Myths and Reality"**, a paper published in "Leonardo", 1991, Vol.24, No. 4, pp. 453-456.

[4] http://www2.uol.com.br/augustodecampos/yaleeng.htm QUESTIONNAIRE OF THE YALE SYMPOSIUM ON EXPERIMENTAL, VISUAL AND CONCRETE POETRY SINCE THE 1960s (April 5-7, 1995); (Questions formulated by K. David Jackson, Eric Voss & Johanna Drucker. Replies by Augusto de Campos, translated by K.David Jackson)

[5] See/read about the Nov.'08 issue by searching for Geof Huth's name under the poet search function at the Poetry Foundation website: http://poetryfoundation.org/journal/feature.html?id=182397
Keep up with Geof Huth's blog at dbqp.blogspot.com for insightful criticism and to share in Geof's enthusiasm for visual poetry.

[6] *S.M.Eisenstein*, Izbrannye sochineniya (Selected works), Vol.2 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964-1971) p.120.

Karl Young

A SPHERE AND A LINE

Part 1: A Sphere of Reference

Art may best be understood as a sphere of experience. You can find subdivisions such as painting and poetry in it, but there's no reason to see them as inherently separate. Nor is there any reason to imagine the Artistic Sphere should not intersect with other spheres of experience. The interaction of ever-changing segments within the Artistic Sphere has been one of the main dynamic forces in the evolution of art. At times, isolating segments has produced major paradigm shifts in society and new dynamics in the arts. I see a pulsation of combination and selection as a model for a perpetual state of renewal of art in relation to other aspects of life.

In this model, visual poetry is an ad hoc term for joining or reintegrating verbal and visual modes of expression. The name was coined to separate other modes from Concrete Poetry, a genre that created a fad, followed by the most severe backlash against any major mode of poetry in the 20th Century. Part of its temporary success and ultimate failure was the way it isolated itself from larger contexts. Despite its failure, Concrete successfully documented itself and hence is virtually the only widely known form of visual and verbal combination of arts in North America. This has created an unfortunate situation in which people try to revive its limitations while perpetually reinventing other less well known modes. Its failure took its own best works out of serious consideration by a wide audience as well as creating the impression that all visual modes were as trivial and gimmicky as much of its most widely distributed work. My strongest affinities with previous movements oriented toward visual poetry are with

Lettrisme, a French-based movement that was largely *built* on ever expanding contexts and interrelations. It seems likely that visual poetry will remain a small and isolated phenomenon if it does not reach for larger contexts and become as important as any other combination of arts. Theater—on stage and in film—is an example of a combination of arts that has not been fractured in such a way as to disappear for centuries.

At present, with computer technology dependent on a combination of words and images, visual poetry has an opportunity to become a stable frame for interaction of numerous variations as long as it presents itself and holds a full and functional range of contexts, from artistic to social, historical to scientific. If it defines itself as a limited set of isolated tricks, it will probably go through another period of eclipse, as an identified and identifiable mode or genre. Ironically, interactions of verbal and visual modes have never disappeared from large audiences; they've simply been called by other names. The disadvantage of this is that other modes have not drawn on a full range of literary resources. Identification with poetry presents two extreme paradoxes. First, its linguistic dimensions need not be immediately present. They may be latent as scores. They may work like the iconographic writing system of pre-Columbian Central Mexico, meant to be read by people who spoke different languages by functioning through shared icons rather than words. They may work by the application of linguistic principles to images. And so on through myriads of permutations. The second paradox is that mainstream poetry may be the most highly endangered of arts at the present time. It's the lowest paid, the least respected, and the most ignored of the major arts.

It's still going strong when allied with music in song, but may disappear in any other mode if it does not interact with other elements of the Artistic Sphere.

Like many of the methods and aims of visual poetry, problems with its acceptance and even its production, come from changes in the reading of poetry. The process of transcribing oral poetry, developing writing into a cornerstone of society, and creating an environment that includes growing preservation and access to sources, could form a basic narrative line for a history of human culture.

In addition to *increasing* sources and methods, a practice that can enhance experience comes from *isolating* segments of the Sphere. But closing and sealing off such segmentation seems more a form of atavism than progress. In the fourth century A.D., when the main type of literacy we now practice was taking shape, St. Augustine of Hippo observed something that struck him as odd enough to note and to speculate on: St. Ambrose *read silently*. It took a millennium and a half and considerable social and technological change for silent reading to become the norm. There are a lot of advantages to silent reading. Perhaps the most important of them comes from the way it focuses concentration and seems to create a private and at times magical world. I spend most of my reading and even writing time in this silent space, and wouldn't want to be without it. Yet the notion that this is the only kind of reading, or that the cutting off of reading from speech, music, visual patterns, bodily actions, and the whole spectrum of artistic activities, is *necessary*, seems sick and depraved to me. Considering the interaction of images with text as a new and aberrant outgrowth of some absolute law of nature is as perverse as insisting that poetry should *never* be read aloud. That we should have to defend or justify visual poetry or any other interactive art is something about which we should feel outrage or mourning. I am writing this not for visual poets but for others who might look at this collection. If terms like "sick," "depraved," and "outrage" seem harsh, I would like them to consider how mild they are for a group that has been categorically excluded from serious consideration for decades. I can also see how much exclusion has harmed the quality of the work of many of my colleagues, and how much a small jump in attention could be as deleterious as it could be helpful.

I've read Karl Kempton's history of visual poetry done for this book (205-208) a number of times. In the miniscule space allotted him, he did as good a job as anyone is likely to do. Yet it leaves out so much, condenses so much, simplifies so many of the points it touches, and makes such limited use of Karl's erudition, that it saddens me, as it frustrated him, to be so cramped and so limited. I hope my essay fills in a bit of the nature of reading in context. It also illustrates problems with insufficient comment: in my remarks above, Concrete, of necessity, seems dismissed too brusquely; mail art, the phenomenon that kept visual poetry going for decades doesn't get mentioned; and I can't say enough about Lettrisme to make a case for it.

Abundant forms of visual poetry are easy to find, if they're not identified as such. I've seen several examples on mainstream television in the last week. One was in a program on the Nasca lines in the deserts of Peru. Another was on crop circles. Though the first were made over a thousand years ago, the second are still being made today. Both attract more attention than the work of people identified as visual poets. This is in part because they suggest a larger context, even if no one, except the few people who make crop circles, fully understands them.

An episode of the TV show *Mad Men* refers to the system of markings used by hobos during the Great Depression. With its long reach back into European history, it may lead to an aesthetic base, though such signs seem to have been made for purely utilitarian reasons. Living in a city, I regularly see graffiti art without having to search for it. During the 1990s, this seemed one of the most inventive forms of visual poetry being practiced in the United States. Most graffiti is less artistic or useful than hobo signs. Yet some made more sophisticated use of characteristics (such as imitations of radiant light) of electronic media from television to computers, than most of the self-identified visual poetry of the time. Spontaneously changing "programs" (in the art historical sense) to create sequences in a fast-moving environment made the art even more dynamic. Taking design suggestions from the buildings, buses, trains, and other surfaces on which the artists painted would have made muralists of previous ages envy their heirs. Graffiti artists made quick and voluminous use of the internet to show their art. This may have contributed to its decline, since artists around the world began copying each other and destroying their originality. (This should be a cautionary example to those who identify themselves as visual poets and either become

too inbred or too reliant on narrow conceptions of their art.) I've spent decades working in such seemingly esoteric areas as East Asian calligraphy and the iconographic writing system of Central Mexico. In the above examples, I'm simply talking about forms of visual poetry you have to *be trained* to ignore or not see.

Part 2: A Sketch of the Lines

I'd like to illustrate some of the changes in the conception of one element of poetry sometimes seen as a constant feature: the verse line. Partly as an example of transposition and partly for fun, I'll also make some remarks about the relationship between verse lines and lines in what could be separated out as visual art.

Until the mid 19th Century, the definition of poetry was simply an utterance with a highly regulated sound pattern. It didn't have to contain words: we have examples of metrical nonsense syllables going back at least to Aristophanes. The oldest forms of verse we know were oral-formulaic compositions. They had nothing to do with writing, and a "line" referred only to a repeated unit of sound. A poet sang or chanted strings of standardized phrases in metrical patterns. Using sound patterns, he could recite for long periods, guided by the combination of story and what fit metrically. A "line" was something heard but not seen: a linear *sequence* of sounds. In addition to producing pleasant sounds, the pattern allowed poets to improvise. Whether it be epics, from *The Iliad* to *Beowulf,* or songs from the Chinese *Shi Jing* to the Biblical *Psalms* to the Aztec *Cantares*, we find the same method still used in oral-formulaic poetry among non-literate people around the world into the 20th Century. "Lines" were not something scribes indicated on the page. Ever-frugal, they filled as much of the writing surface as they could without marking what we consider line endings. Readers discovered lines by speaking the poem aloud and hearing the pattern. In later periods, the definition of poetry remained so profoundly fixed on regularity of sound that works with other characteristics of poetry were considered prose. Aelfric's 10th Century Anglo-Saxon *Saints Lives* was not considered poetry, because however highly rhythmic and filled with alliteration it was, the patterns weren't regular enough.

Classical Greek and Roman authors usually didn't *write* their poems: they dictated them to scribes. A "line"

continued to be something heard, not seen. The use of lineation on a page slowly came into regular practice after the advent of printing. It became important with the growth of silent reading, and line breaks on the page began to have a function. As books proliferated and silent reading slowly became more common, prose fiction expanded. Although many people read everything from fiction to news aloud, the major distinction it created was between reading silently when alone and aloud for an audience. Typographic standardization gave rise to speed reading, which eliminated sound properties in silent reading. Beginning in the 19th Century and reaching full force by the middle of the 20th, meter ceased being essential to poetry for an ever growing percentage of the audience that remained. Early in the process of abandoning meter, poets maintained the notion that lines had auditory significance, in that they registered *irregular* patterns. Modernists reinvented the purpose of the line by breaking it up to map sonorities not dependent on metrics. Other poets began basing their sonic patterns on hybrids which played off the ghosts of metrics past, while those who listened to jazz continued to pick up real melodic ideas from musical sources, but for most poets the use of broken lines served as decoration or sound patterns not based on anything readers *shared*. By the end of the 20th Century, many poets ceased using verse lines altogether.

At present, those who identify themselves as poets have nothing in common but history. When literary history is no longer taught or learned, and poets insist that all that matters is *what's happening now in my clique*, there's nothing left for an audience. A "line" takes on the character of something phony that someone wants to use to con you.

Fortunately, there are possible places to go from here. If the verse line originated as an invisible sequence of sounds and morphed into a typographical entity which may now disappear, there's no reason why it can't have a life as something that poets draw on and even literally draw. I'm saying this with a wink at a pun, while remembering that the history of art abounds in absurd situations that produced magnificent results.

The ways that images can create new patterns for sound certainly exceed those you'll find in dictionaries of verse forms. The possibilities for words shaping images should be at least as great. The syntax of images in iconographic systems is complex enough in historical examples: how

much more can it grow if the potentials of images and icons expand indefinitely? The lines on the page can take on new significance from their interaction with images. Images? During the period when meter has been disappearing, literary criticism has become more and more obsessed with the poetic "image." In the context of mainstream poetry, the image is supposed to be something that occurs in the reader's mind in response to words read silently. It would be foolish for critics to constantly blabber about images and expect poets not to literally make images. The importance of poetic imagery has increased as verse has lost its sound properties. The possibilities for creating interactions between sound and image seem to have taken a leap into something like hyperspace with increased access to sources which everything from archeology to science make more comprehensible and may make more widely available.

Lines have been used in visual art since the beginning of time. Part of their purpose has been to clarify images. Current neuroscience demonstrates that areas of the brain *specialize* in delineating the boundaries of objects, and that the drawing of lines in art has a deep base in our biology. One of the main purposes of the world's most advanced nuclear particle accelerator in Cern, Switzerland, is to create readable images of the most basic level of physics, which mathematics and language alone can't make comprehensible. The more advanced our science becomes, the more we need all the resources of the combined arts to understand it.

Karl Kempton

VISUAL POETRY: A Brief Overview of Ancestors and Traditions to the Present

An expressed intent of this anthology is introducing visual poetry to a new audience. In the spirit of this purpose, the following overview is addressed to individuals with no or little exposure to the historical streams leading to the contemporary expression named visual poetry. To master an art form, knowing its history is common sense; not knowing, one is condemned to repetition.

After many exchanges over 30 years with leading figures in visual poetry, the following definition is the result. A visual poem may be defined simply as a poem composed or designed to be consciously seen.

The contemporary visual poem is generally composed with assembled and/or disassembled language material. This stuff of language includes word, text, note, code, petroglyph, letter or other phonic character, type, cipher, symbol, pictograph, sentence, number, hieroglyph, rhythm, iconograph, grammar, cluster, stroke, ideogram, density, pattern, diagram, logogram, accent, line, color, measure, etc.

The minimalist poet composes with fissioned language material to create new and free particles, and/or sonic patterns, clusters, densities, and/or textures. Generally, today's minimalist visual poet maintains the post World War Two tradition of Concrete Poetry, begun in Northwest Europe, Brasil, and Japan around 1951. Others in the Northeast United States followed later.

Ideally, the visual poet composes with these freed particles and generally weds or fuses them to one or more art forms. By doing so, by crossing art form boundaries, the visual poet composes in a field of multimedia or borderblur or intermedia with unrestricted horizons.

The contemporary visual poem is a form reinvented by various 20th century avant-garde movements and influenced by abstract, surrealist, minimalist, photo realistic . . . art and photography. It is the contemporary expression of the pre-1900 visual poem handed down through millennia under a host of forms such as acrostics, anagrams, and colored or illuminated text, emblems, labyrinths, pattern and shaped poems, which in turn evolved from other forms back to the earliest ancestor, rock art.

Rock art's symbolic representation associated with image, either adjacent to each other or woven together, has now been dated as far back as 75,000 years in the Blombos Cave, South Africa. Some of the rock art of the Blombos Cave was portable. Perhaps these were part of a long tradition of the charm and amulet that in more recent periods are known to have written on or carved into them

spells, chants, prayers, and mantras in patterns suggesting a repetitive oral chant. Modern humankind was in Bharat (India) by this time.

While nearly all old portable carved and painted works have been lost, use of painted objects has been dated 150,000 years ago, again in South Africa. The recent announcement of tools found at several distinct locations on Crete dating back about 175,000 years or older implies use of symbols that may predate modern mankind. Modern humankind (known at this moment) remained south of the Sahara until about 110,000 years ago. Our pre-modern human ancestors were sea-going and coastal dwelling. There are rock art cupule sites in Bharat dating 700,00 years ago.

Then there are myths about the invention of writing that illuminate a sourcing of patterns and forms from the natural world:

China: 1) Tortoise shells were tossed into fires; the cracks were read as oracles—a suggested foreshadowing of ideograms; 2) after looking at star patterns (particularly those of the lunar zodiac), marks on turtle backs and bird prints, Ts'ang-chieh invented the first ideograms.

Bharat: 1) The goddess Samjna, whose name means image, invented the first alphabets, pictograms, mandalas, and other magical signs; 2) Kali, goddess of life and death, invented Sanskrit from the cracks in human skulls. She is usually rendered wearing a necklace of 56 skulls, each with its own letter. 3) Vac means the word or the exchange of knowledge. She is the mother of all communication, and thus gives intelligence to those who love her. She is the mother of the Vedas. Vac in another form is Saraswati. Vac *is* the word, the word OM. She thereby is and contains the manifested creation.

An aside—A vast and long lost civilization, the Saraswati-Indus Civilization is slowly being recovered. It stretches south of Mumbai to northern Afghanistan. Eastern boundaries remain undefined. Dates of two of its more recognized cities, Harappa and Mohenjodaro, begin around 5,100 years ago. Approximately 3,500 terra-cotta seals found in Harappa, Mohenjodaro, various smaller sites in the Indus Valley and in Western Asia across the Arabian Sea have been dated between 3100 and 1900 BCE. The seals consist of imagery of an as yet to be fully deciphered script. Deeper layers of this civilization have been dated at least 3,000 years older than Harappa and Mohenjodaro suggesting that they were contemporaneous with the Vinca culture. There was no Aryan invasion. The destruction was tectonically induced by the rise of the Himalayas diverting river water eastward into the Ganges.

Sumer: 1) The goddess Nidaba, the scribe of heaven, invented clay tablets and writing; 2) the goddess Belit Sheri was the scribe who recorded the deeds of the dead upon the leaves of the Tree of Life.

Egypt: 1) The goddess Sef Chet played the same role as Belit Sheri and was the goddess of writing; 2) her husband, Toth, he with the ibis head (a bird sacred to the Goddess), was credited later with the invention of writing as well as the calendar.

Old Europe: Among the oldest known script signs or proto-writing symbols are associated with the matricentered Vinca culture. The earliest attempts or finds, dated from the mid 4th millennium (BCE), are connected with religious sculpture and ceramic images of the Goddess. The signs may have derived from naturalistic forms which evolved into stylized marks. Bird footprint patterns were one consideration. Marija Gimbutas and Milton McChesney thought they discovered in the archaeological records of rock art ancestors of the symbols, codes, patterns, and images found in the later European prehistorical and historical art and literary records. They concluded that there was a continuation of extremely ancient traditions from the matricentered Old European symbolic systems. Others continuing this research use the term *Danube Script* to describe this proto-writing or writing set of symbols and date it circa 5000 BCE. A recent article in the February 17, 2010, issue of *Science* seems to support these findings and implies wider and older symbolic use in rock art around the world.

Greece: 1) The Three Fates wrote human's destinies on the three leaves of the past, present, and future; 2) Hermes is later credited, after seeing a flight of cranes (sacred bird of the Goddess), with the invention of the Greek alphabet.

Northern Europe: 1) The runic script was invented by Wotan after looking at ash twigs (the great ash Ydgdrasill, the Tree of Life, was taken over by Wotan from the Triple Goddess, known as the three Norns in Scandinavia, who

administered justice beneath the tree); 2) The druids' alphabet of trees was a calendar, fortune telling device, mathematical system based on pi (22/7, ratio of letters to vowels), and more. (The Keltic term *rune* has many meanings—poem, part of a poem, magic poem, spell, charm, amulet, and song. Today, what is called mythology, cosmology, calendar or day and year count, astronomy, geometry, measuring systems, alphabets, etc., were all interwoven and part of the poetic and symbolic systems that probably can be traced deep into the paleolithic.)

Valley of Mexico (north of Mayan regions): Quetzalcoatl, patron of rational design and intent, invented writing and the calendar. He also is known as god of intelligence and self-reflection.

Scripts evolved from various arrays, patterns and complex symbols into minimal abstract symbols or signs forming alphabets and or ideograms or hieroglyphs. The artistic tendencies of those so inclined extended and expanded standardized forms by brush stroking into beauty a wide variety of calligraphy forms and styles. Some cultures, like the Chinese and later the Japanese, gave birth to hundreds of styles and forms. Others contributed only a few or a handful. Again, worldwide, the roots of many of these characters are found among earliest pictograph and petroglyph rock art. Undoubtedly, they were also carried on portable and wearable objects and perhaps even as body paint and or tattoos.

Forms and patterns were later transferred onto ceramics. Perhaps the earliest currently dated pottery was recently uncovered in China, 18,000 BCE. The area of China, the Jamon culture of Japan (before rising ocean levels formed the Sea of Japan) and Siberia is now considered the birth place of fired pottery. Much later, the Vinca culture used bellows technology raising fired pottery temperatures to 1000 degrees fahrenheit. That led to the first known smelting of ores. The history of metallurgy is too extensive to cover as well as the development and spread of paper beginning in China, 741 CE its secrets revealed to the spreading Islamic culture nourishing the bloom of its calligraphy and eventually into Europe in the 13th Century. Relevant to this discussion is when metal kissed paper in the European printing presses. By altering book making from limited to mass access, it gave rise to the numbers of the literate and the decline in the importance of hand illuminated manuscripts and

calligraphy. Over time, image was reduced from books, until it was compartmentalized as map or other visual aid, or as nonessential illustration. This left the regimented left to right down the page framework. Calligraphy in Europe became so specialized that few people have seen the continuing art, and mistake it for its purely decorative offshoots. Forgotten except by scholars, librarians, and antiquarians were illuminated books and manuscripts containing image and text that were woven together as an integrated whole. Within such historical works one can find where the word was freed from the linear presentation. The freeing of the word or ideogram was not unusual in the various calligraphies found east of Europe throughout the Middle East and Asia.

Many English language composers of visual poetry point to William Blake and the shaped poems of Lewis Caroll as isolated forerunners. Most who see the Concrete Poetry movement as the only important form of visual poetry recognize Mallarmé as its virtual inventor, at the moment when free verse was gaining strength among the lexical poets. They consider Mallarmé's "Un coup de dés" of 1896 as the first example of the modern visual poem. His heir apparent for the next step in its development they consider to be Apollinaire, composer of Calligrammes. Leaving Mallarmé out, Apollinaire becomes a father not a son in the birth of the modern visual poem. For American English, e e cummings seems to be the third or second step followed by the composers of the post World War Two concrete poets.

While this may appear a logical aesthetic lineage for the freeing of the word, the actual modern process of freeing the word began among cubist painters quickly followed by freed words in the collage. Within the same time frame, Marinetti wrote the Futurist Manifesto in which he called for the freeing of the word from the format of free verse. This was the founding moment of the Italian Futurists, a group that significantly influenced the visual poem at that time. The Russian Futurists had an equal impact. By studying Fauvism, Cubism, Collage, Italian Futurism, Russian Futurism, Imagism, Orphism, Vorticism, Constructivism, Dada, De Stijl, Surrealism, Bauhaus, various Japanese avant-garde movements of the 1920s, Lettrism, Kinetic, Concrete Poetry, Fluxus, Pop, Op, Visual Poetry, Correspondence/Mail Art, Russian Transfurism, Minimalism, Conceptualism, and Book Art one can find considerable numbers of works classified

as visual poetry. While incomplete, this is an outline of movements and or groupings to follow the evolution of the visual poem.

American visual poetry between the late 1950s and mid 1970s was dominated and influenced by Concrete Poetry. This group was dominated by the North Atlantic Fluxists. They were allied with the Brasilian Noigandres who were essentially hostile to the calligramme or pictograph composition demanding a purity of the mechanical typographical poem. When a history was presented by the Concrete Movement, many American forerunners were either consciously excluded or forgotten: Mexico born Marius de Zayas, Agnes Meyer, Katharine N. Rhoades, J. B. Kerfoot, Adon Lacroix, Harry Crosby, Wallace Berman, Paul Reps, Kenneth Patchen, and others.

Visual Poetry, as a self-conscious and self-identified genre, deliberately separated itself from American Concrete in the early 1970's and found refuge from the backlash against the perceived triviality of Concrete by joining the international egalitarian Correspondence Art movement. This generated several magazines and hundreds of international exhibitions until the early 1990s. During this twenty year span, visual poets and mail artists interacted on an unprecedented international scale. This period may be as important as the years between 1910 and 1930.

With the demise of the mail art network, American Visual Poetry in general reverted and retrograded into a neo-concrete. A major factor in this was a dogmatic and hegemonic push among some of the language poets in their attempt to dominate and control the poetry scene in general. Although many language poets included elements of visual poetry in their early work, virtually all eliminated these elements in the 1980s. There was a call and demand for less image and more textual content instituting a throw back to a "pure" language based visual poetry, that is to say, Concrete. Moreover, a convoluted nihilistic misrepresentation of Buddhism injected the

notion that the past does not matter, only the present and the future. The creators of calligraphy and other two and three dimensional artists removed themselves from participation in visual poetry having no patience with an art form that dropped seriousness and discipline.

While computers and the internet have allowed for tremendous leaps forward in the composition of visual poetry and enhanced communication among groups and individuals, it also has had a negative aspect. While creating and publishing compositions that take hours instead of days or weeks or months, it has also generated a lack of respect for discipline and seriousness leading to widespread creation of insignificant works. Further, the skills of editing and publishing have been tossed aside. Many of these insignificant works have been published rather than left behind the closed doors of the experimental laboratory filed away as failed attempts. This creates substantial resistance from other artists to join this expression as well as restricting its audience. This follows the law of money: bad chases away good.

To end on a more positive note, as the visual poets around the world expand the availability of their works on the web, I feel confident visual poetry in this country will recover. Works of value equal to what is now found elsewhere and those of value ignored here will come forth composed with the much lost accent of awe. How long will this take? I have no idea.

Oceano, California
Full Moon
March 2010

TYPOGRAPHY

POEMS:

Daniel f. Bradley, Litsa Spathi, Donato Mancini, K. S. Ernst, Fernando Aguiar, Márton Koppány, Troy Lloyd, Gary Barwin, mIEKAL aND, Jim Andrews, Reed Altemus, Derek Beaulieu, Christian Bok, Michael Peters, J. M. Calleja, Judith Copithorne, Johanna Drucker, Amanda Earl, Anatol Knotek, endwar, Chris Joseph, Serge Segay, Cesar Figueirdo, Serkan Isin, Karl Jirgens, Despina Kannaourou, W. Mark Sutherland, Karl Kempton, Roberto Keppler, Paul Lambert, Angela Genusa, e k rzepka, Joel Lipman, damian lopes, Keiichi Nakamura, Clemente Padin, Pete Spence, Aysegul Tozeren, Ted Warnell, Cornelis Vleeskens

212. Daniel f. Bradley, White Witch 11

213. Daniel f. Bradley, White Witch 13
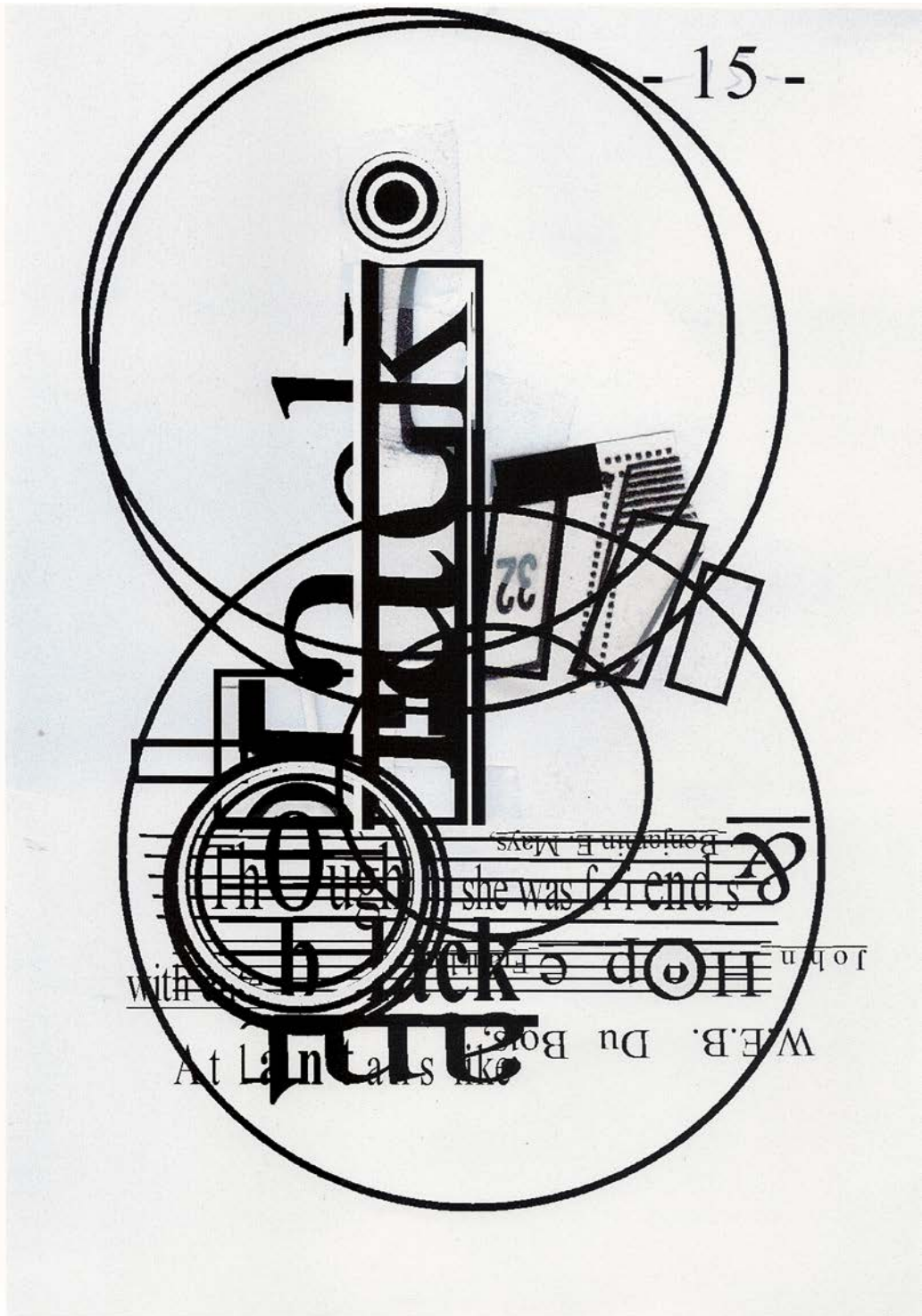
214. *Litsa Spathi,* textual architectures No 15 — was friends
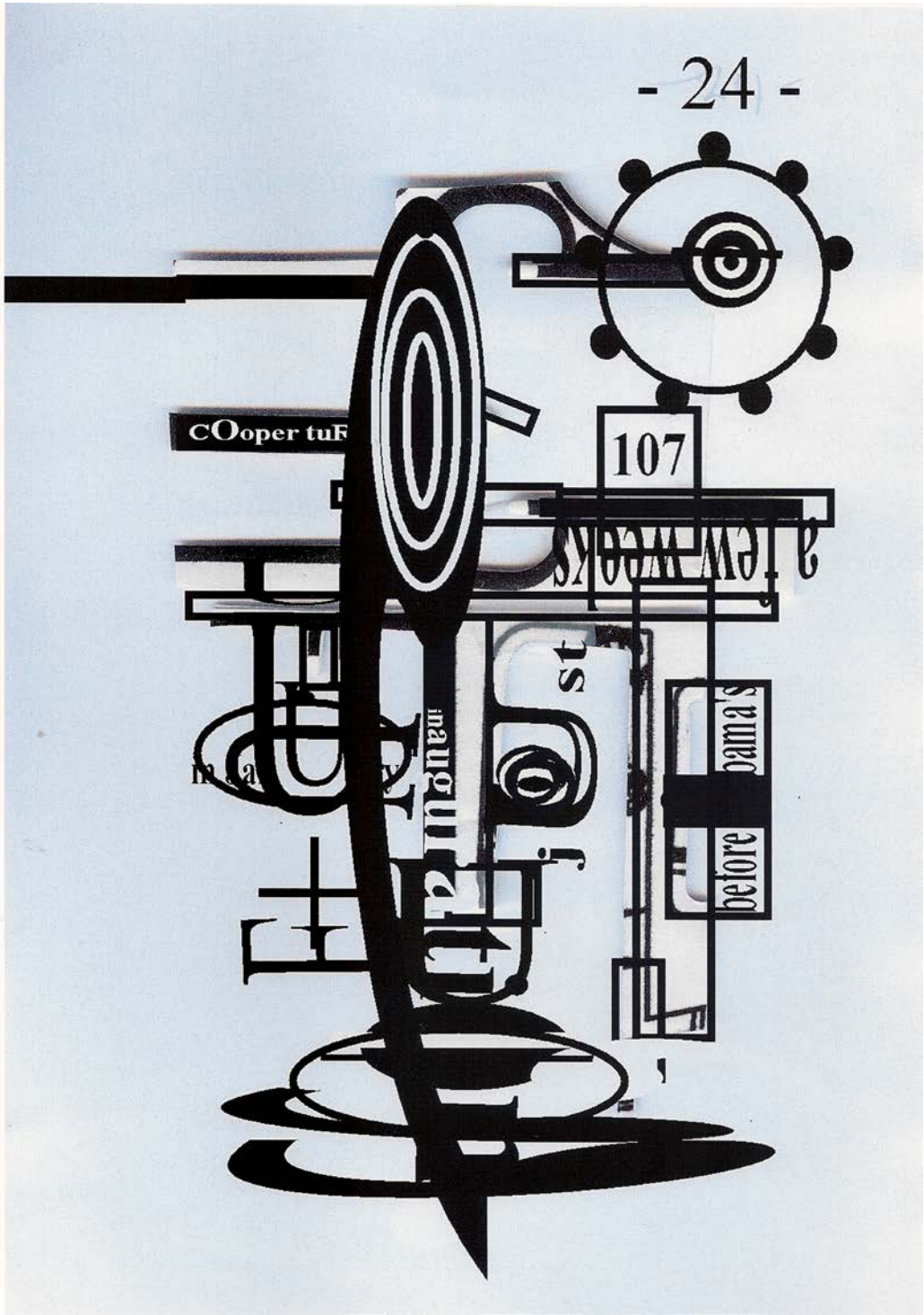
215. Litsa Spathi, textual architectures No 24 — a few weeks

216. Donato Mancini, The Jazzercise Dance of Hope

217. K. S. Ernst, Drop Caps

218. Fernando Aguiar, Hh

219. Márton Koppány, Forecast

220. Troy Lloyd, iBirth
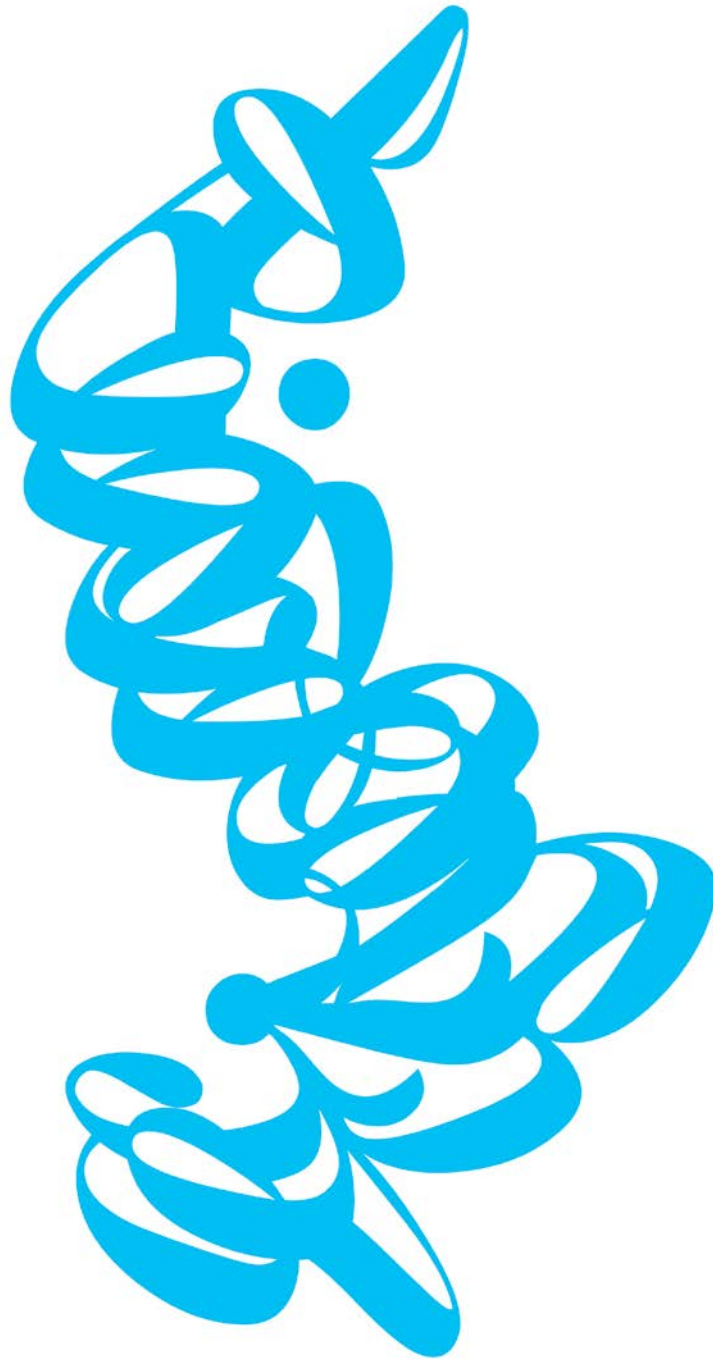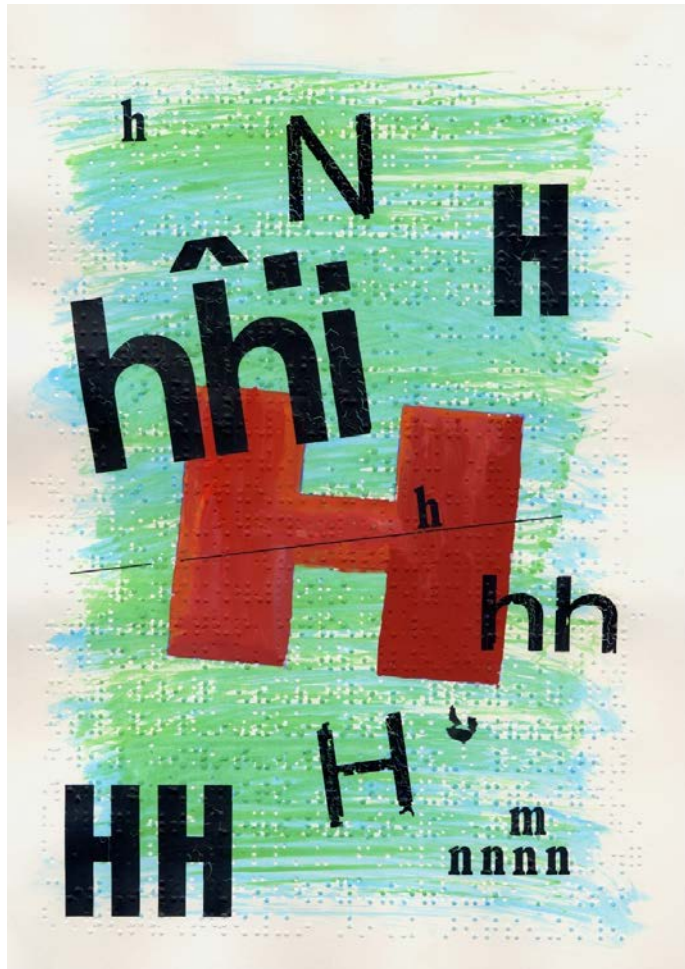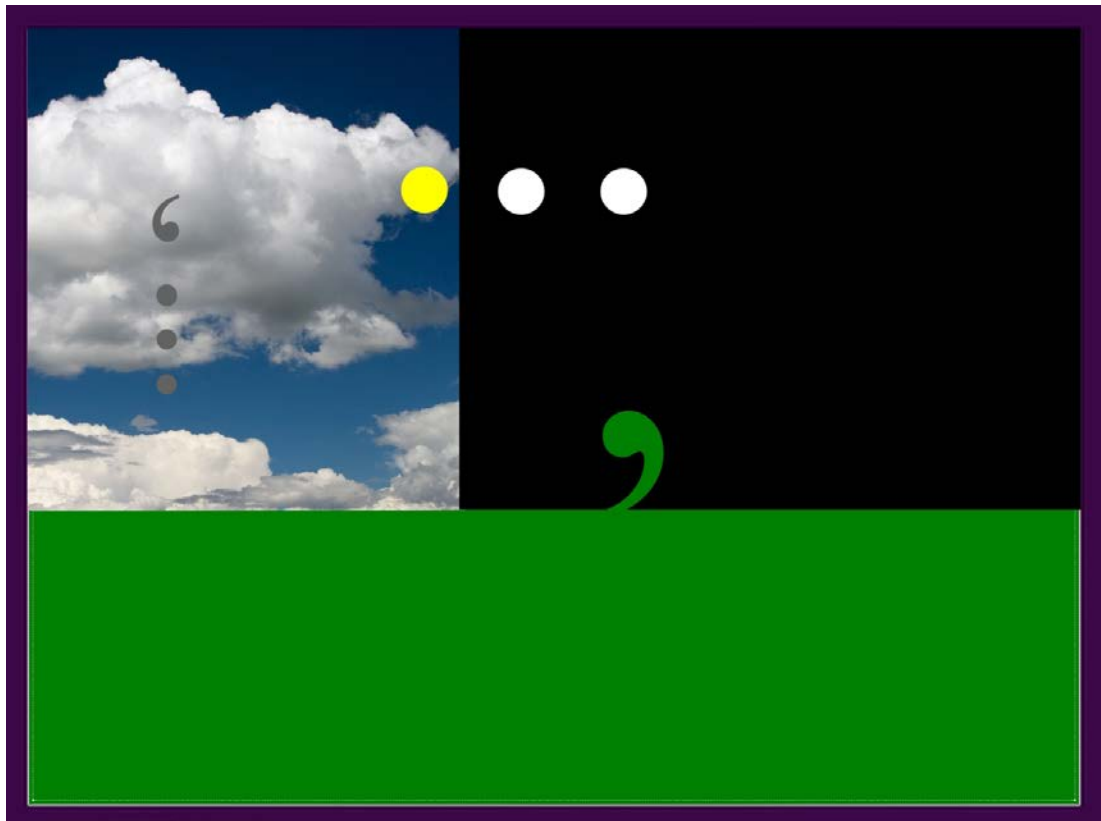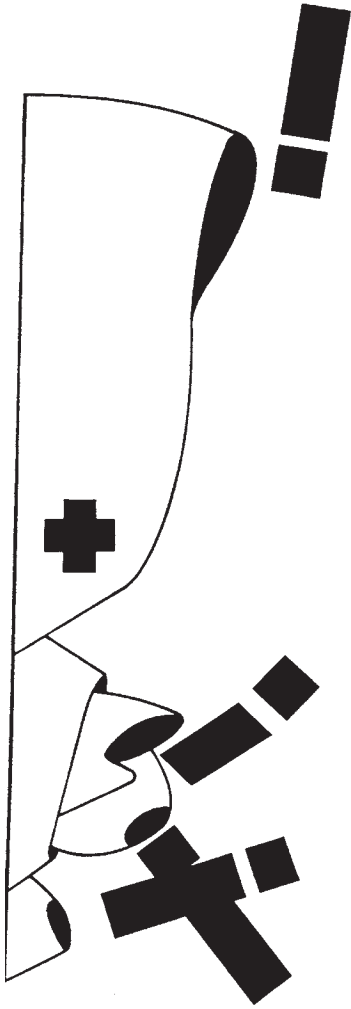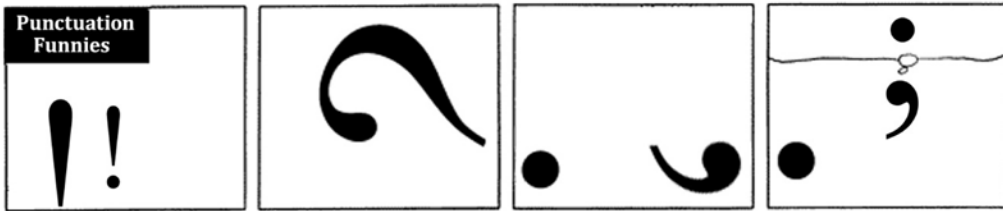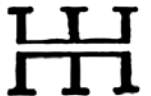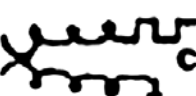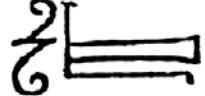
take from me   the great beliefs   because   it is written
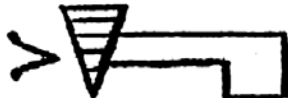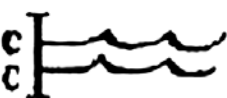
they gathered   again   so you taught us   to have a long life

some things   you are beyond   the time is here   from that moment   be like them

lets all drink together   and   in the morning   say to yourself

seriously   he raised his eyes   for   don't keep it forever

also   as a native   he had them all   lead me

222. mIEKAL aND, from Mikmaq Book of the Dead

223. mIEKAL aND, Incunabula Rohonczi

224. Jim Andrews, from Nio

225. *Reed Altemus,* Growl

226. *Derek Beaulieu*, Untitled (for Natalee & Jeremy)

227. Christian Bök, from Odalisques

228. Christian Bok, from Odalisques

229. Christian Bök, from Odalisques
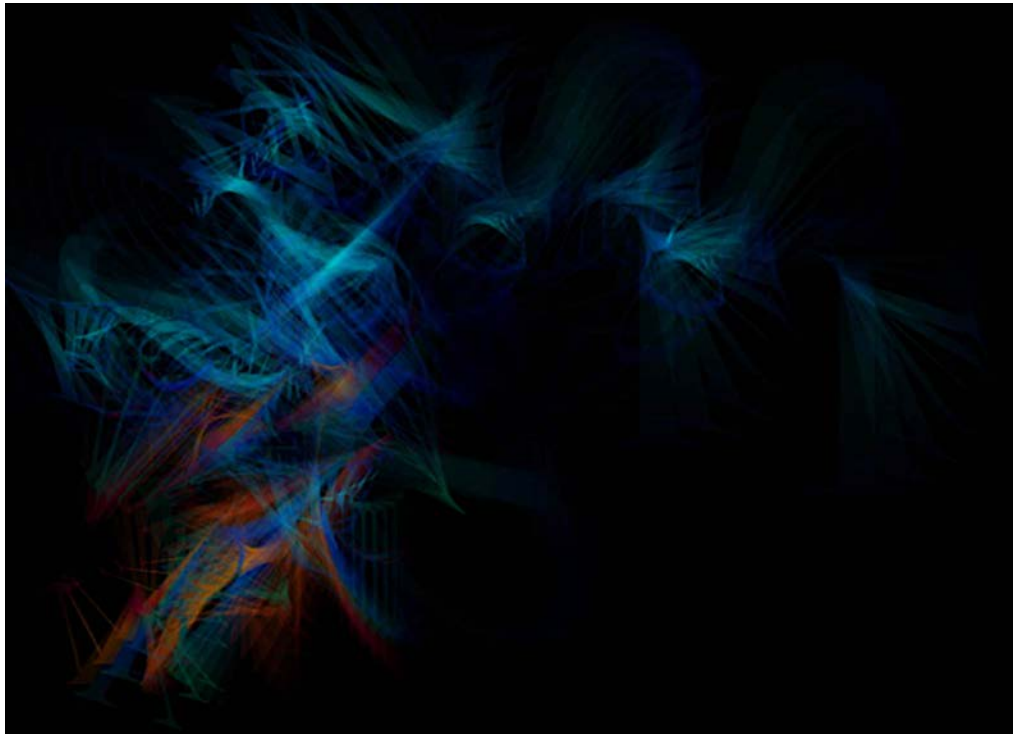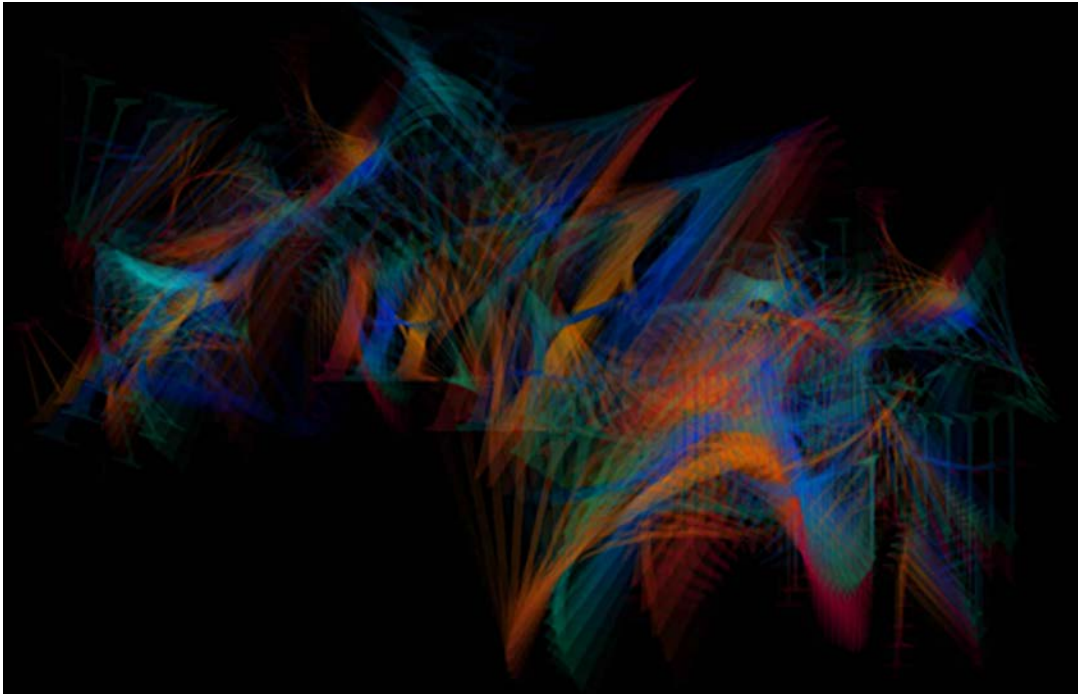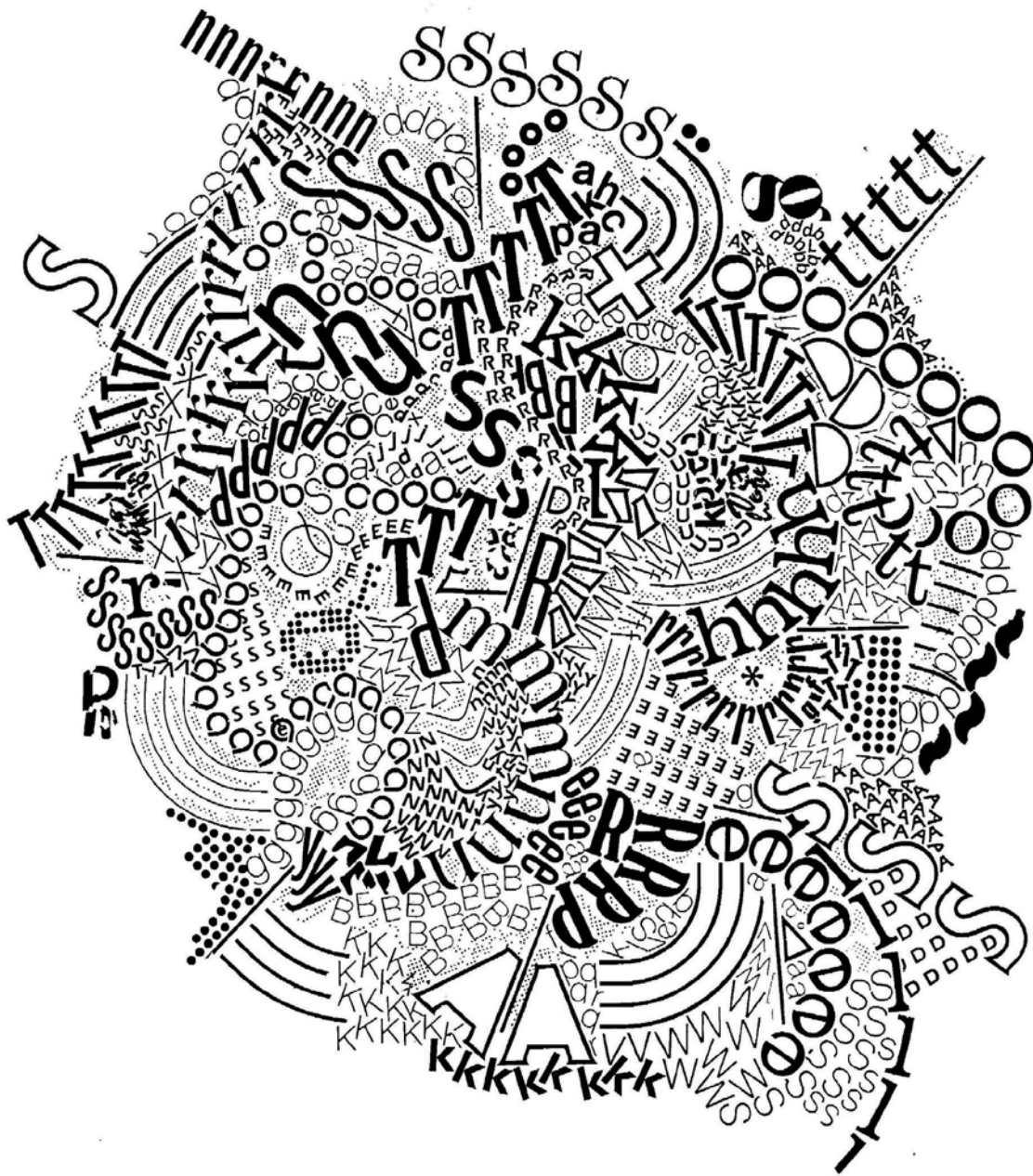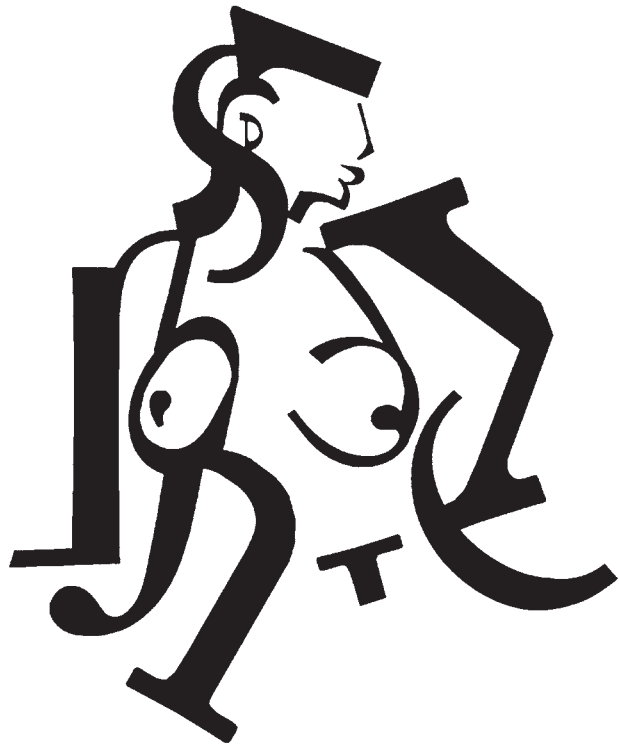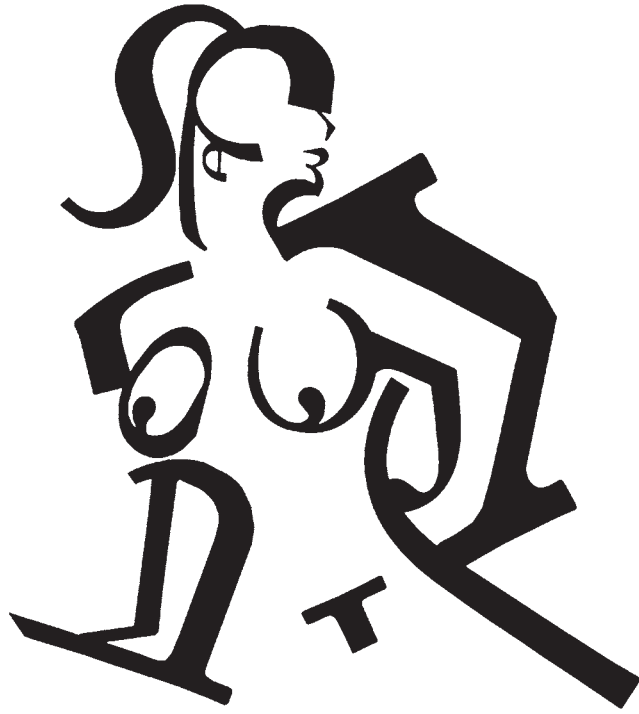
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6

230. Michael Peters, Caesarean

231. *J. M. Calleja*, Dizziness

232. Judith Copithorne, The Letter O
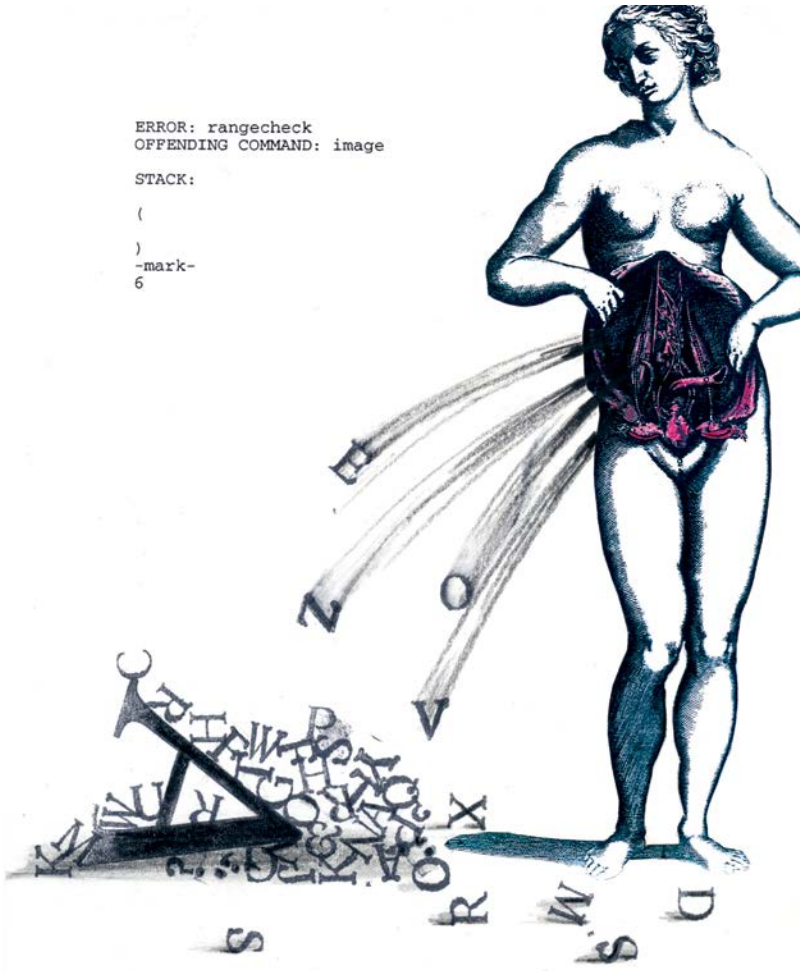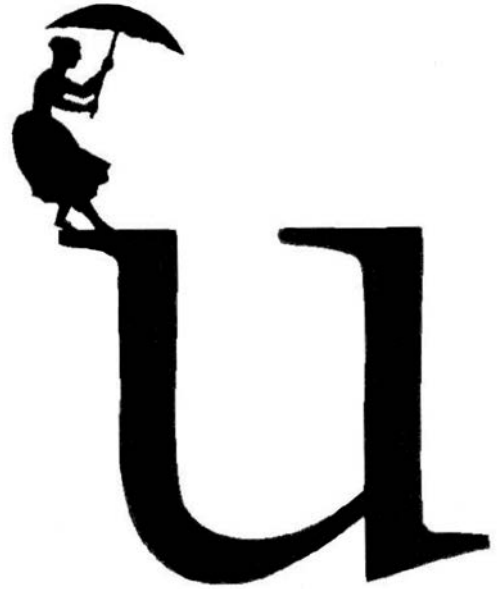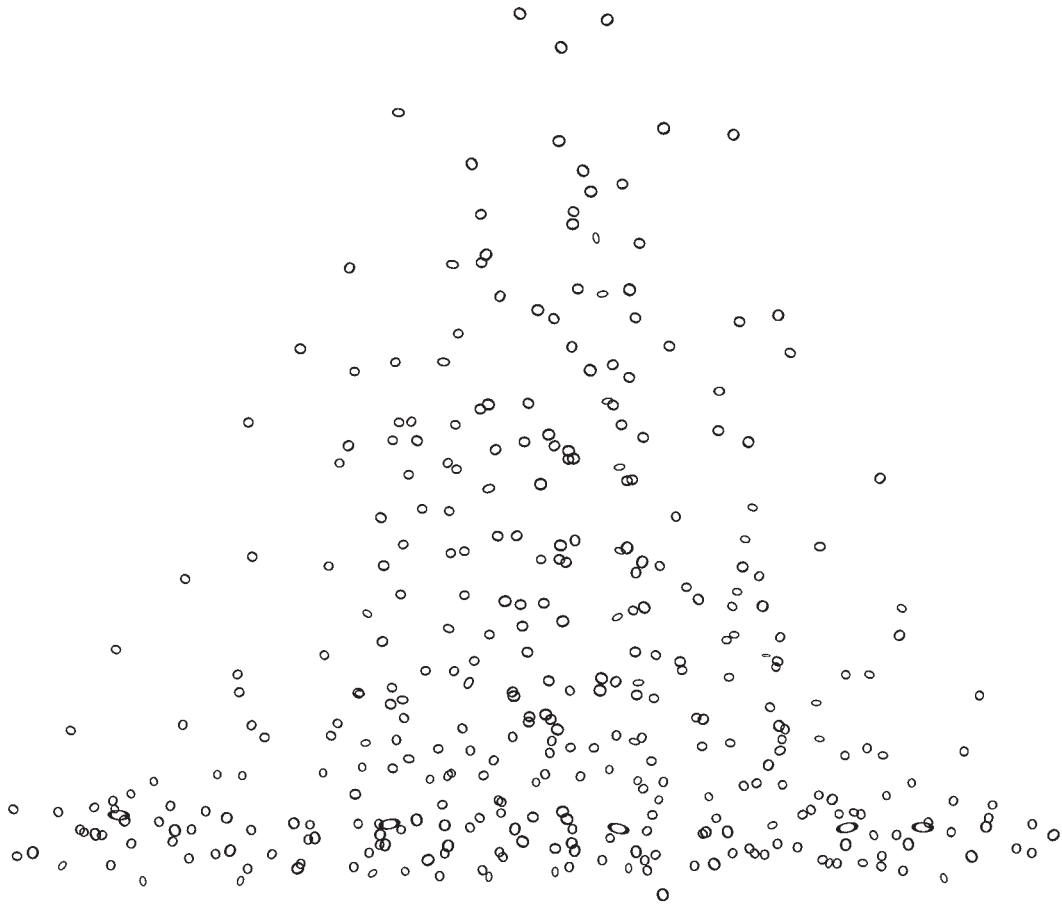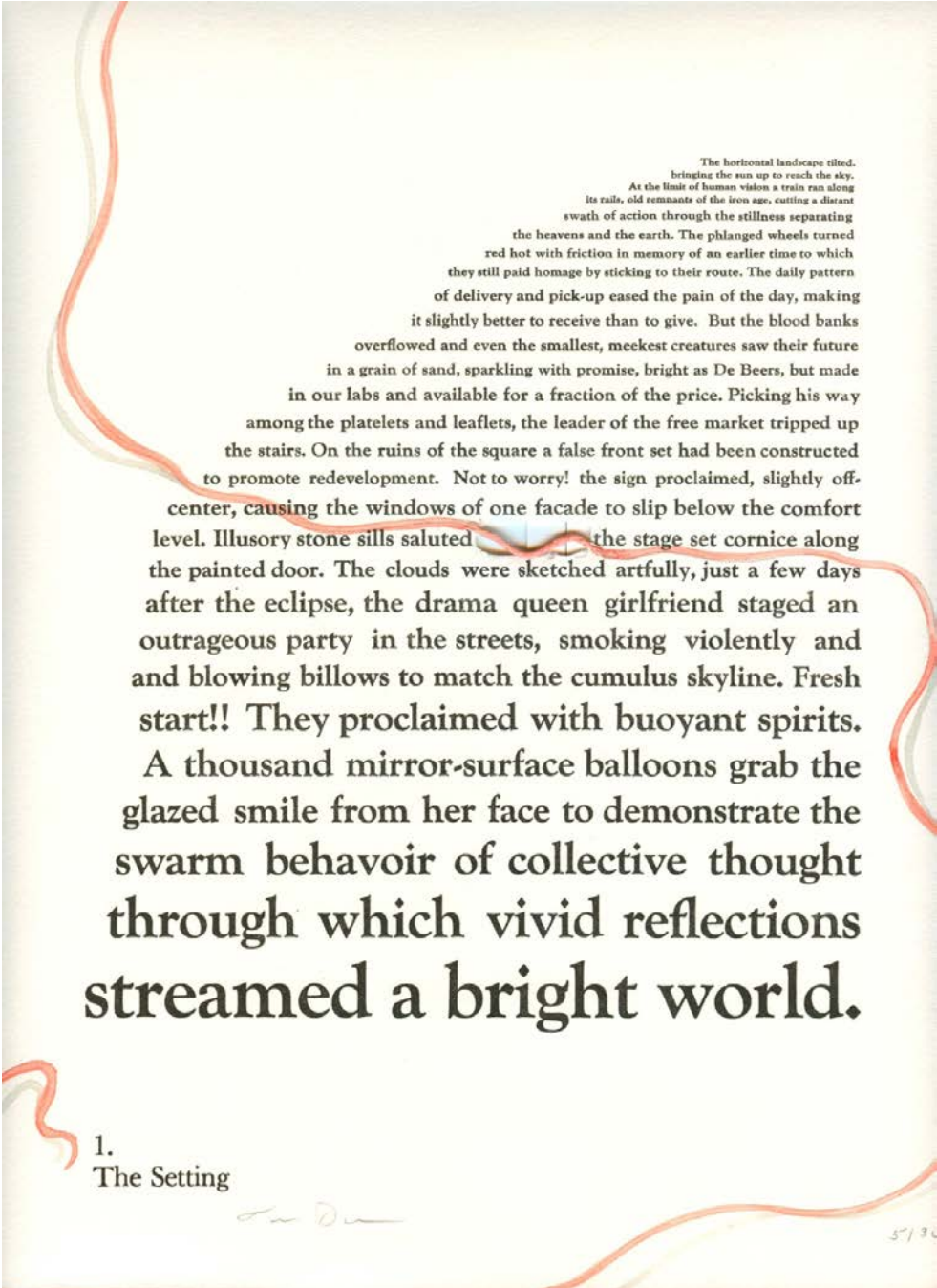
The horizontal landscape tilted,
bringing the sun up to reach the sky.
At the limit of human vision a train ran along
its rails, old remnants of the iron age, cutting a distant
swath of action through the stillness separating
the heavens and the earth. The phlanged wheels turned
red hot with friction in memory of an earlier time to which
they still paid homage by sticking to their route. The daily pattern
of delivery and pick-up eased the pain of the day, making
it slightly better to receive than to give. But the blood banks
overflowed and even the smallest, meekest creatures saw their future
in a grain of sand, sparkling with promise, bright as De Beers, but made
in our labs and available for a fraction of the price. Picking his way
among the platelets and leaflets, the leader of the free market tripped up
the stairs. On the ruins of the square a false front set had been constructed
to promote redevelopment. Not to worry! the sign proclaimed, slightly off-
center, causing the windows of one facade to slip below the comfort
level. Illusory stone sills saluted   the stage set cornice along
the painted door. The clouds were sketched artfully, just a few days
after the eclipse, the drama queen girlfriend staged an
outrageous party in the streets, smoking violently and
and blowing billows to match the cumulus skyline. Fresh
start!! They proclaimed with buoyant spirits.
A thousand mirror-surface balloons grab the
glazed smile from her face to demonstrate the
swarm behavoir of collective thought
through which vivid reflections
streamed a bright world.

1.
The Setting

233. *Johanna Drucker*, Untitled

234. Amanda Earl, Man

235. Amanda Earl, Sun
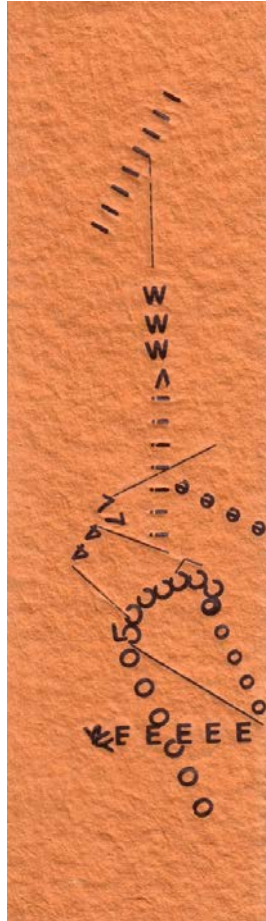
236. Anatol Knotek, Bild26

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238. *Chris Joseph*, Pallas Athena Ascension

239. Serge Segay, from Comma-ism

240. Cesar Figueirdo, Untitled (fluxu)

241. Serkan Isin, hareketler

HÉRACLITE HERACLITUS
HÉRACLITE HERACLITUS
HÉRACLITE HERACLITUS
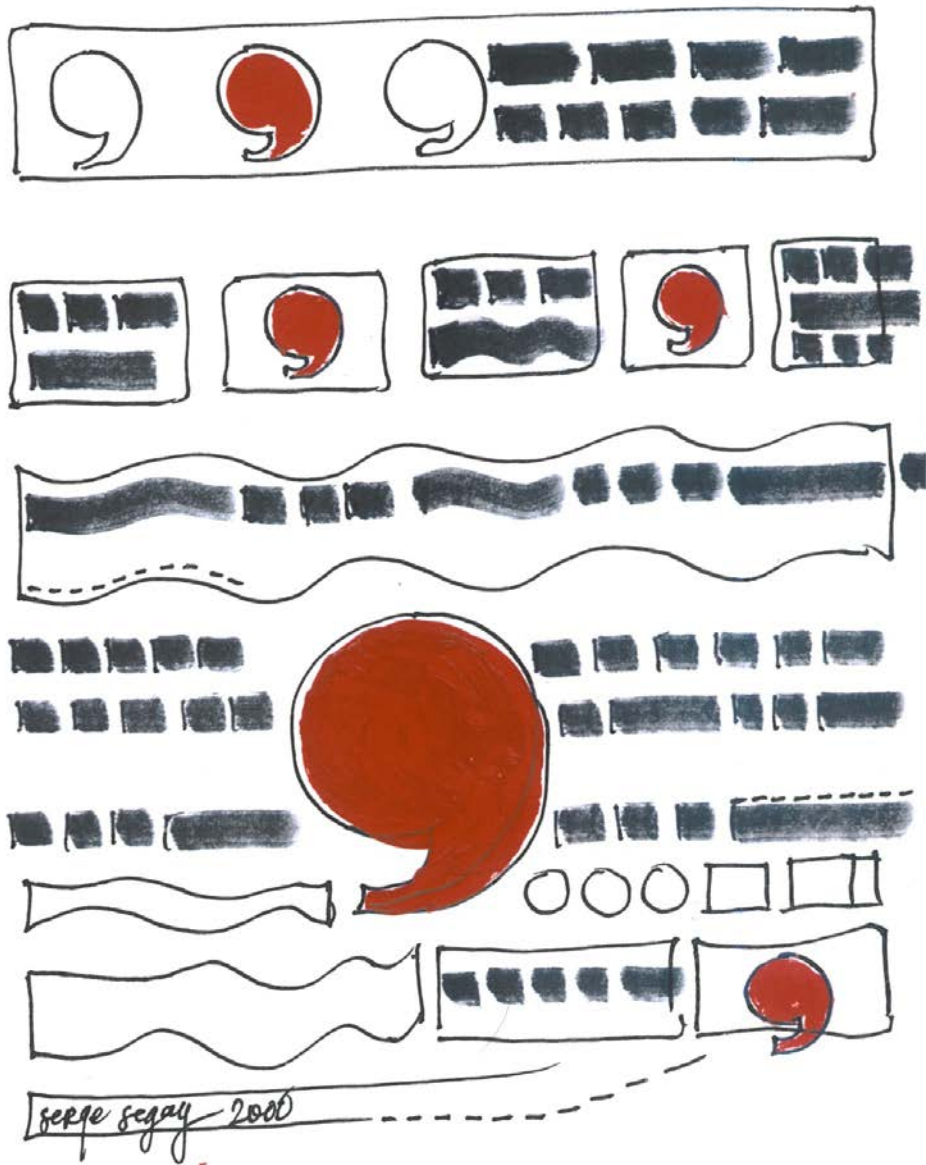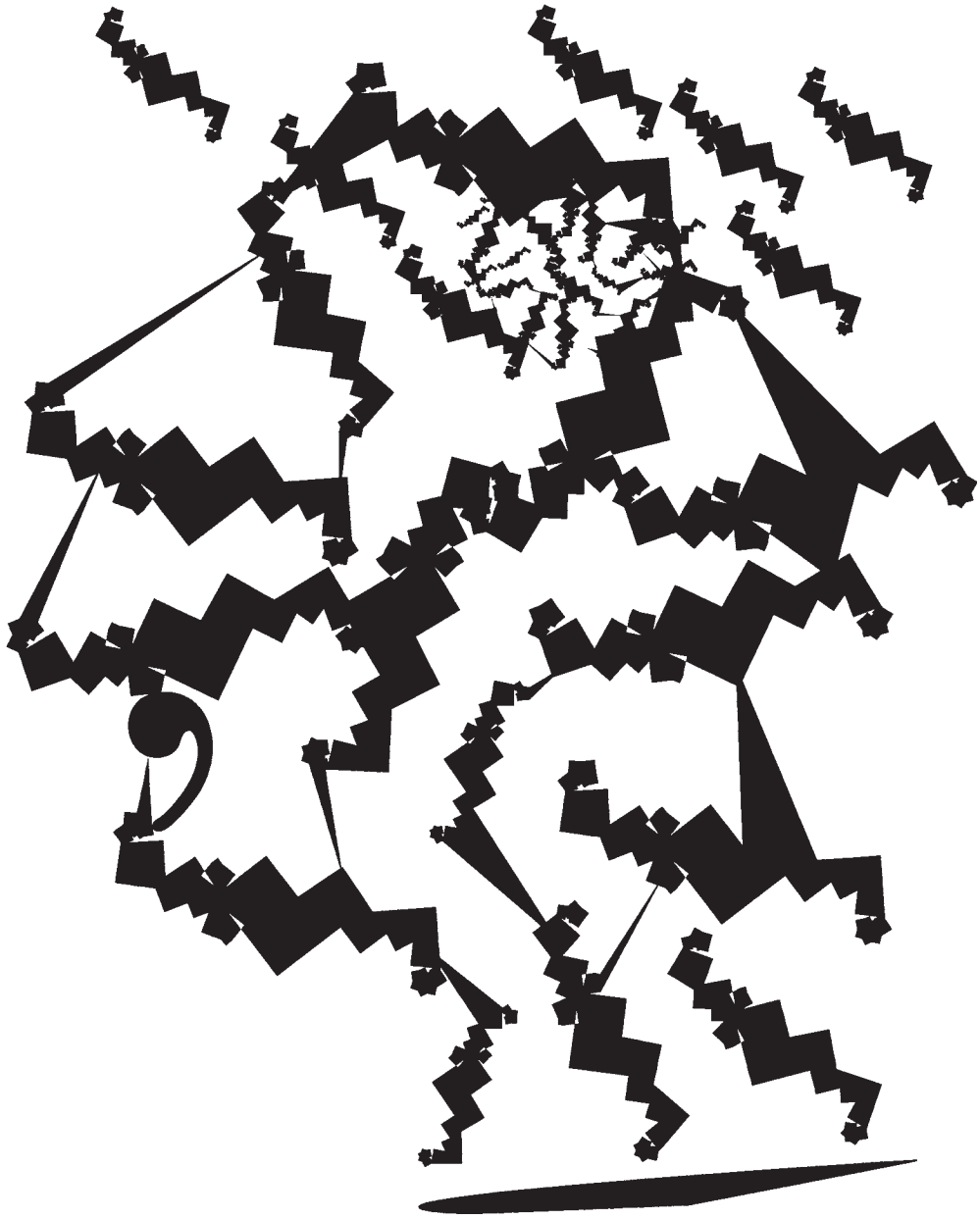
je bois
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HÉRACLITE HERACLITUS
PANTAREIOUDENMENEIPANTAREIOUDENMENEIPANTAREIOUDENMENEI
HÉRACLITE HERACLITUS

ma vie
que je
bois
comme
une
eau-de-vie

texte/image par Karl Jirgens

242. *Karl Jirgens,* Heraclitus

For bp – "No H's were harmed in the production of this poem"
by Karl Jirgens

243. Karl Jirgens, For bp

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245. Despina Kannaourou, Mapping Speech

Syntaxi

246. W. Mark Sutherland, Syntaxi

248. Roberto Keppler, Menor Maior

250. Angela Genusa, Untitled
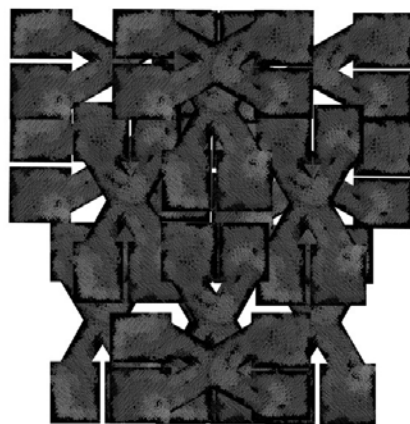
251. e k rzepka, siluren
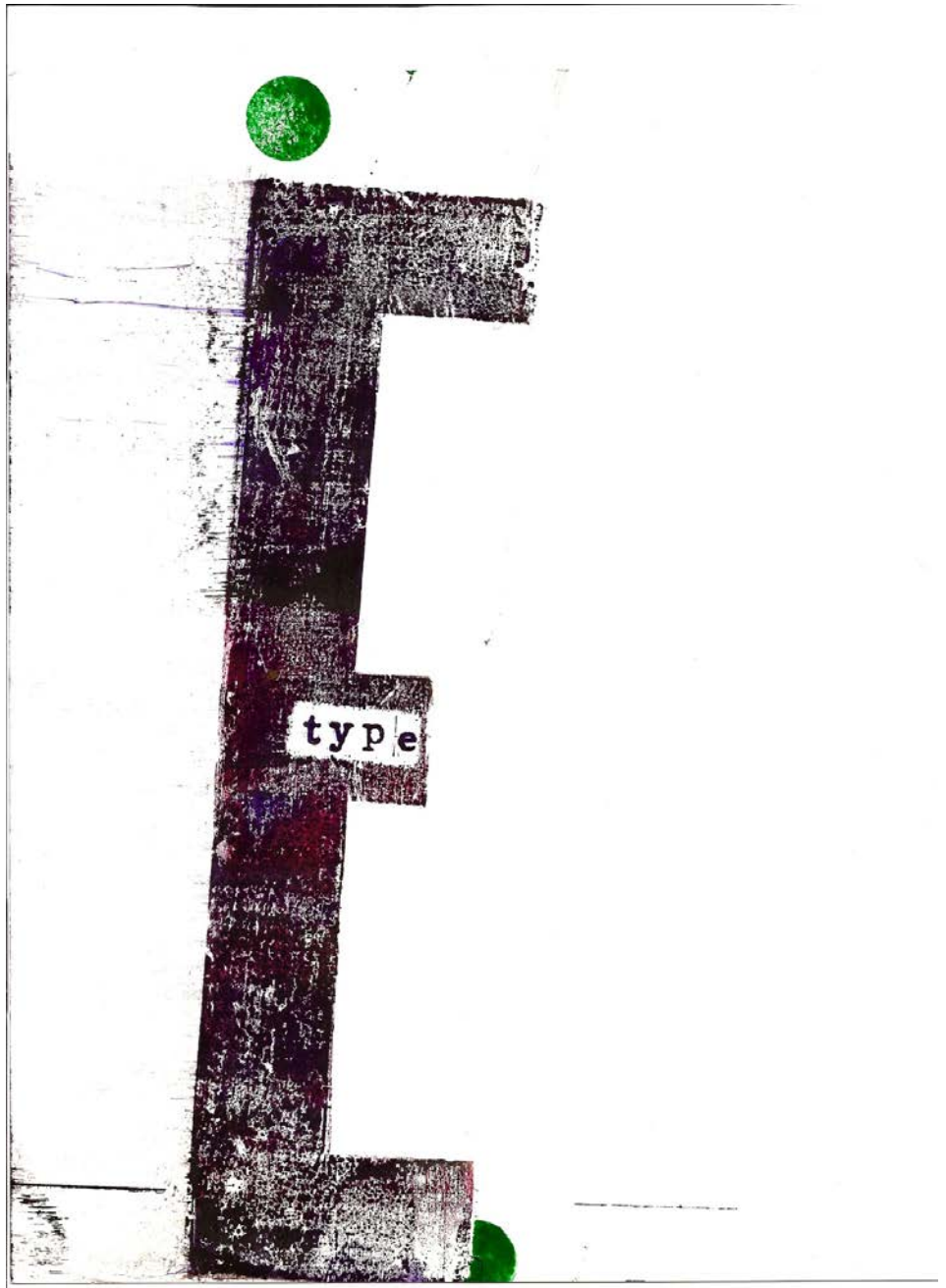
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not art

252. *Joel Lipman*, Ee

253. Joel Lipman, Etype

SAFETY FILM

SAFETY FILM   SAFETY FILM

254. damian lopes, The Gutenblur

255. *Keiichi Nakamura,* Toward Your Heart

256. *Clemente Padin*, Nahuatl 1

257. Clemente Padín, Nahuatl 2

258. *Pete Spence*, Untitled

259. Pete Spence, Untitled

260. Aysegul Tozeren, ekmek / stigmatizasyon / dar kopru bireyligine giris

261. Ted Warnell, Flcssexe A
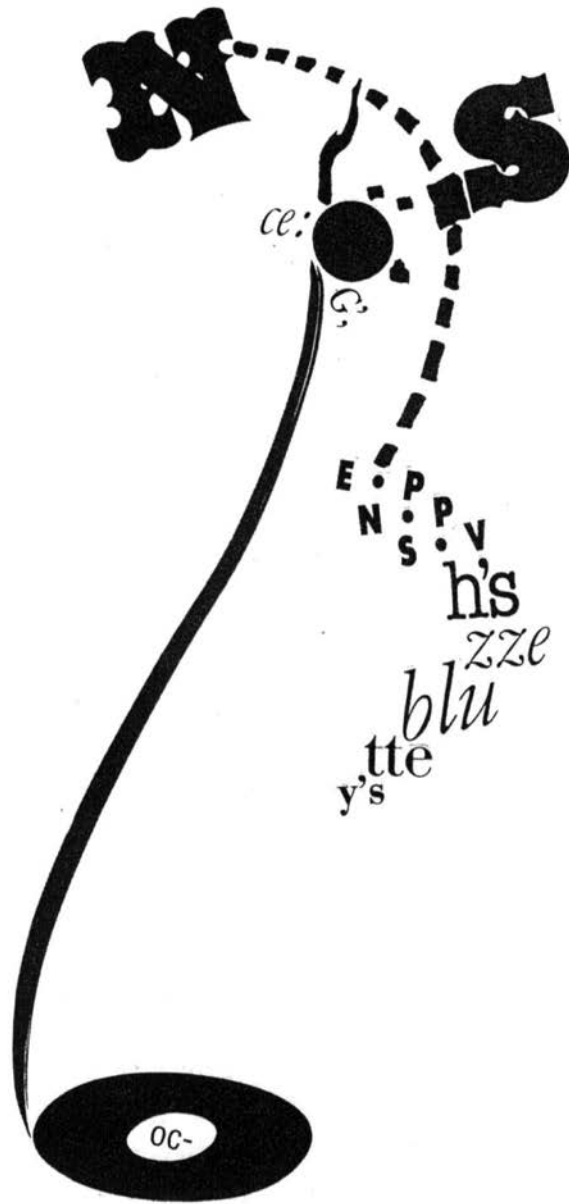
262. *Cornelis Vleeskens,* Untitled
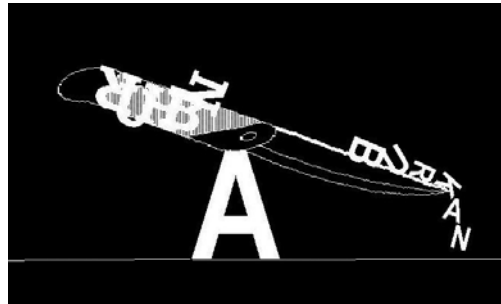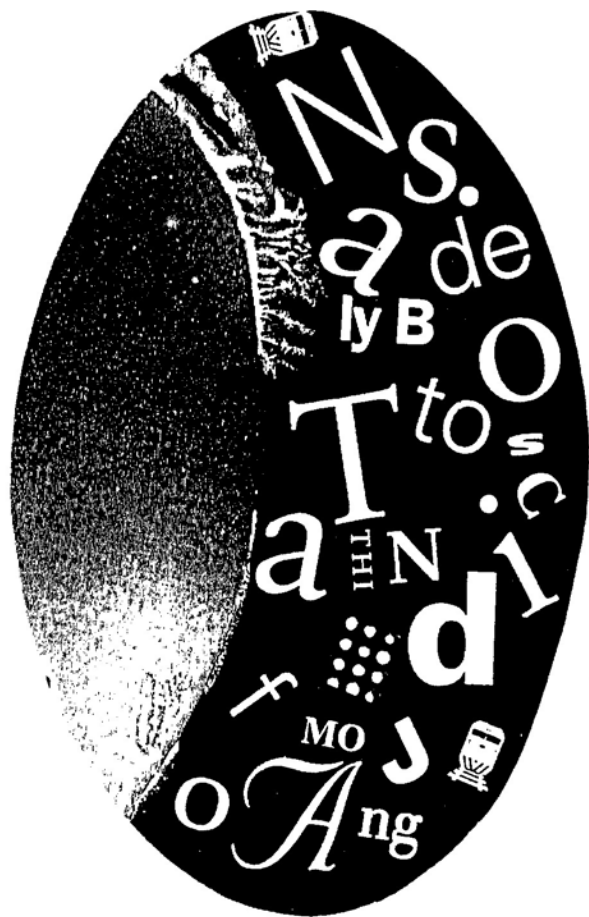
263. *Cornelis Vleeskens,* Untitled

defiant	twitter	first contact	albeit	hypnotic	milieu	portend	supply chain
gourd	trimester	perhaps	fleshy	rebus	flora & fauna		lacunæ
neap tide	synapses	embalm	fiscal crisis	treatise	collapse	Sam Son	protein
follow	Σ	grow or growl	barter	the	empathy	tsunami	refuse
moreover	tabula rasa	the hand	&	esoteric criteria	most likely	approach	impetus
elation	fugue	troche	prolong	indigo	altar boy	canopy	Transit of Venus
trefoil	even if	saline	quantum	analysis	or	ersatz	rainbow
robust	auteur	narrow	cello	א	hurt	turtle	lethargy

264. Mark Young, defiant lethargy

dolomite	a city	carousel	night falls	debris	hedge	foregone	catalog
broken	perhaps	fear	opaque	tripod	kindness	but	thyme
the tiger	truss	letter	&	strike out	quotent	heighten	sigil
handful	the	candle	ironic	codex	sidewalk	hammer	beach
lattice	vignette	plunge	announce	empathy	minimal	quixotic	she smiles
nurture	scent	windmill	∞	neuronic totem	if	stable	repast
portents	foreplay	vestige	aoli	cellular	lately	radial	explosion
carriage	vein	objet d'art	isolate	in the fields	herself		chorus

265. Mark Young, Dolomite Chorus

ESSAYS:

Márton Koppány, Petra Backonja, Maria Damon, Greg Evason

Márton Koppány

RE:

We spent my whole childhood packing and making preparations for leaving the country. (I have had sixteen *Ellipses* up to now.)

I'm back (in a certain sense) to my collage period of the late 70's, which led me out from writing textual poetry in Hungarian. I've been too depressed lately, and needed real sky, water, earth etc. (In a metaphorical sense, of course :-)

Hope you don't mind my swamping you with two more pieces—I'm too animated for the moment not to show them, and I know from experience how quickly this condition changes...

In the 70's I wrote textual poetry, and was deeply influenced by my favorite 20th century Hungarian poets, János Pilinszky, Sándor Weöres and Dezső Tandori. When I understood how isolated I was in (or rather out of) the state-controlled culture, I felt I should reach out and leave my mother tongue behind. That was at the end of the 70s. I got involved in mail art, started making collages and writing extremely minimalistic poems on small cards. My reduced brokenism (my broken French and English) cried for additional tools and means. I tried to communicate with the potentials of the sheet of paper (it can be copied on "itself," put before a background, etc.) and with sequentiality. Color visual poems date back only to 2005, when, all of a sudden, I started seeing color, punctuation mark, etc,. landscapes during a walk. Generally I have a basic image first which just emerges. But most of my visual poems significantly (or completely) change in the process of their elaboration, thanks to the call coming from the unexpected "blemishes" of their digital carriers. It is a dialogue, I hope.

I don't think my original intentions are necessarily important, or a poem should "talk back," but I'd like to confess to you (for the sake of curiosity), that I didn't realize (at least consciously) that my colons and the image of the surfer constituted a division sign.

I'm happy with that extra-meaning, which suggests—at a different level—the same thing I wanted to represent. First of all, I simply wanted to make a comment on your turned commas, which (from my point of view) had also made an insightful comment on my question mark sequence. The BACKWARD moving of the surfer, and the suddenness of his motion are very important to me! As if one could (thanks to a colon), continue backward, and withdraw/delete some meaning, or reach back to some original meaning or to a "state" of meaninglessness—or simply get "home." Plus I know how much you like "the ocean," and I'm also water-crazy.

The steps between the steps, the steps before the steps. My inclinations always directed me toward the (actual, ever-changing) limits of verbal communication. But I don't distrust/need/enjoy words more OR less than the empty spaces between them, the sheet of paper they are written on, the rhythm of the turning of the pages, unknown and forgotten symbols, fragments, natural formations like clouds—each of them and any combination of them may be an invitation. When I feel easy and (once talking of "works") ready to make something, I experience their complete equivalence.

(One more thing: I didn't mention Scylla and Charybdis about the colon because I didn't want to overexplain the piece, but that had been my basic "vision" anyway :-)

The joy (mystery, threat) "and" inaccessibility of directness. (They are not "and," not separated.*)*

Thank you so much for your words! I like your interpretation—and I'm grateful for your attention. Colons "pointing" backwards and division marks can live in peace together.

*

Here I send you another new piece, titled Click Poem. Its only excuse is that it is the way of sending my best wishes for 2007!

Yes, it is supposed to open. To actual images? I'm not sure. :-)

When you try it, each solution points to the good one.

<div align="center">*</div>

The small handwritten symbols are there to indicate the places where missing elements are to be inserted—as we use them when correcting manuscripts or school assignments. But nothing is inserted. The three lower ones should suggest that something is missing from the sky, and the fourth upper one should suggest that something is missing from "blankness" as well. I wonder whether my symbols really mean in "your" culture what they mean in "ours." And I'm a bit scared for the moment because my piece should be simple and clear, and if it is not clear for you, I must have made something wrong! Please let me know what the handwritten symbols mean for you, if anything. Are they somehow misleading?

In the sky blankness should be inserted, and in the blankness the sky as the vees indicate it (do they?) respectively. I'm a bit relieved to hear that you would use the vees as I use them.

Thank you indeed! Yes, exactly, the piece was made because I suddenly realized that the v's, I mean the symbols of insertion, are breathing—they inhale blankness when "staying" in the sky, and inhale sky when staying in blankness.

<div align="center">*</div>

Thank you! I like your version a lot. We are talking, perhaps, of the same thing but this time from a different perspective. I call it "ending" and you call it "continuation."

<div align="center">*</div>

I imagined an "and so on" changing direction unexpectedly, flying away as a whole, disappearing soon beyond the horizon.

<div align="center">*</div>

One of the page numbers—2—is swimming (in flock) across itself and the other pages, toward the "unknown," which is still numbered. As most of my pieces, it is about (perhaps more than one) modulation.

<div align="center">*</div>

Both are about decomposing question marks, and seeing that the answer (period) is implicit in the question, and no question is completely grounded in anything—they also hang in the air, or grow out of it. I'm also attaching a longer sequence from the mid-80s, because that is my real reaction to your work, and I couldn't explain it better in a different way. Hope I'm not a nuisance with my lengthy minimalism.

Petra Backonja

IN CLOUDS AS YET

The image…has no need of scholarship.

The intimacies of word and image are various. From a formal standpoint, no intimacy is more playful than that of Earth and Moon, where the image is the Earth and the text is the Moon.

Another moon—Europa—features *lineae*, lines which, although they are a commentary on the Earth, are read mainly by Jupiter.

Venus has no moon of her own, but is second in brightness to the Earth's moon and amongst her craters is one named for Ma Shouzhen (1592-1628), the Chinese poet and painter of orchids.

There are more species of orchid than of bird. Birds pollinate some of the more wildly colorful orchids, and "The Bird" is a subdued variety of orchid, *Chilloglottis valida*. It grows on Mount Cannibal and is pollinated by pseudo-copulation. It is said to "feel" like a female wasp. In some esoteric traditions butterflies are the liberated petals of flowers, flowering plants are butterflies with roots. Goethe thought color was created by the senses. Colors on the computer are essentially an illusion. All of this is helpful in understanding the idea—and the fact—of visual poetry.

What is visual poetry? It is the visit of one thing upon another.

Or the reverse, as in a bundle of broken mirrors.

Or, an incoherent image fans out into intelligibility. There is incorporated text, and/or a title, or a thought elicited Rorschach-like by the image. The image, the text, title the thought evoked—what's to distinguish anything as a visual poem?

I struggle with that question. It puts me in mind of those butterflies that impersonate punctuation marks—the Comma Butterfly (*Polygonia comma*) and the Question-mark Butterfly (*Polygonia interrogationis*). They remind me to look at a work from many angles (polygonally), although the Comma Butterfly also mimics a dead leaf.

The image of the dead leaf is important with regard to visual poetry. Sometimes our eye (but not our notice) is met by a "dead leaf"—or the leaf turns into something else when we surprise it.

Back to Ma Shouzhen, poet and painter of orchids. She owned a houseboat where on moonlit nights her fellow poet-artists would gather and drift. These "literati," in contrast to the academic painters, were glorious amateurs, and the age was one where the materials and techniques of the writer coincided with the materials and techniques of the artist. Paper, ink, brush, word, image—our own age marks the beginning of a similar coincidence of tool and technique—the computer—for both verbal and visual poets. Even more, the computer is also Ma Shouzhen's houseboat, and visual poetry is a social, as well as an artistic phenomenon.

What visual poetry is, is what any poetry is. But how do I look at a visual poem? How do I read it? What's it about?

Leibniz, the inventor of calculus, said somewhere in the jungle of 200,000 pages that he left to posterity, that *images are confused ideas*. I'm pretty sure the corollary of this statement is that *confusion generates images*, and that the questions I have asked are likely best approached by creating more, not less, confusion.

The Moon Orchid—its flower is a white moth in flight.

<div align="right">

Madison Wisconsin
Spring 2010

</div>

NOTES:

The title of this essay is a line by Thomas Traherne (1637-1674) from his poem "On Leaping Over the Moon."

The epigraph is by Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, translated by M. Jolas, Beacon, 1964, p. xix.

Leibniz's page count approximates the number of butterfly and moth species.

Moon Orchid (*Phalaenopsis aphrodite*)—in Lamarck's system, Phalaena was the moth subcategory for Lepidoptera.

Maria Damon

FLUTTER: THE PAGE AS CAGE OR FIELD

The online listservs devoted to poetries-at-the-fringes– that is, not outsider poetries from the fringes of society, but at the "forward" edges of poetics itself: experimental or "avant" poetries— often break into efforts to define its categories, including that of "visual poetry." No surprise there: some folks are staunch taxonomists, enjoying the intellectual exercise (or is it a compulsion?) of putting things in their places, as it were. By proliferating those places, or coming up with ever more refined categories, they hope to eschew the inevitable charge of reductionism that emerges in these conversations. On the other hand, there are those who fundamentally don't believe in strict taxonomies, to whom this exercise brings out a kind of rigidity that inhibits their sense of what it is they actually do. I am one of those, though I have to admit that I had been making these cross-stitch "tokens" for some years before I fully acknowledged them as part of my poetic practice–and that was because mIEKAL aND encouraged me to consider them visual poems. Many of us dwell in this contradiction: categorization enables us in certain ways, legitimating our work and giving us community; and at the same time if it is insisted on as an exclusionary practice ("This may be visual poetry, but that certainly isn't."), that's really not so much fun. The category, like most, is enabling until it is not, or is superseded by, a new perspective and new terminology, into which it is absorbed by another set of delineations. A dialectic, perhaps, or if that's not a sufficiently organic description, an entomological (etymological) metamorphosis in which any observation, like a protective sheath, is eventually outgrown.

This is true of all poetries, and for "poetry" itself as a category. It has no strict boundaries. The material of poetry itself, language, is founded on a desperate need to posit certainty in the experience of uncertainty, the possibility of fulfillment in the face of the experience of need. The experience of desire simply can't be assuaged by the "things" we find with which to satisfy it, nor can individual words in all their myriad arrangements fully articulate what we so urgently need to convey.

(So far I have said/written nothing.)

The page as cage or field: As a cross-stitcher, I use the grid of Aida linen as my page, and it is cage *and* field. A gridded constraint, it shares with lattices, trellises, chicken wire and other fences and even barbed wire a linear frame on which other things are grown, impaled, torn, ornamentally draped or twined, and within which things are confined, and so forth. The threads of the base material cross each other squarely, and I superimpose crosses on them, on a diagonal, in contrasting color. Cross upon cross, crosshatch on gridlock, conflict upon conflict, stabbed through. Thus the cage. Field? A rough white expanse of potential. Open, though bounded. Anything can happen in this small square area of freedom.

My work shares with others in this anthology the figure of the grid or linear backdrop (Backonja's windows/ cages (20, 80), Mark Young's chessboards (262-263), the map of Sutherland's "Syntaxi" (244), Stamatakis' window (86), and so forth); likewise it shares with other pieces here the defamiliarized (reaching perhaps an apex in Michael Basinski's fever-dream/acid-trip concoctions ((97, 308, 309))) and often either highly formalized or abjectly scribbled alphabetic figures that practically define the genre (letters treated as sculptural or aesthetic objects);

also, like almost every other piece here, it provides either implicit or explicit metacommentary on the practice of reading and/or writing, calling these processes, and hence the very phenomenon of cognition, into question; and finally, it shares with many others a marked visual repetition/rhythm—in my case, the same stitch repeated hundreds of times, varying only in color and arrangement.

What characterizes my work is its simplicity and reliance on artisanal, hobbyist and highly gendered work: the ornamental embroidery executed mostly by women—housewives and girls apprenticing to be housewives. For centuries, the simple technique of counted cross-stitch (cross-stitching by counting threads, rather than by drawing the design on cloth) was part of every girl's "professionalizing" process and it started early, with samplers stitched at age 6 and older; once ornamental stitching became mechanized in the nineteenth century, the practice of hand-stitching was relegated to orphanages (as purely disciplinary work) and to relatively leisured housewives who no longer made their own cloth, but decorated household objects such as bell pulls, tea cozies, dishcloths and pillowcases, as well as more ambitious projects like chair seats, curtains, tablecloths. This "skill," basic and humble, but also ornamental and marked by leisure, inserts itself nicely into the experimental world and even digital world (programming in the world of "pixels," threads and webs also relies on a grid). These letters, both stately and florid, are given a twist through flamboyant coloring, and work simplicity against complexity.

Is this letter-stitching a literary practice because it is informed by my private (and professional) knowledge of literary tradition and theory? Is it a poetic practice because I was encouraged to think of it as such? Yeat's well-known "Adam's Curse" places a poet, the male speaker of the poem, in dialogue with a woman on the subject of work, of human labor, introduced as "poetry":

> I said, "A line will take us hours maybe;
> Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
> Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.
> Better go down upon your marrow-bones
> And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
> Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;
> For to articulate sweet sounds together
> Is to work harder than all these, and yet

> Be thought an idler by the noisy set
> Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
> The martyrs call the world."
>   And thereupon
> That beautiful mild woman for whose sake
> There's many a one shall find out all heartache
> On finding that her voice is sweet and low
> Replied, "To be born woman is to know —
> Although they do not talk of it at school —
> That we must labour to be beautiful."

While the poet emphasizes the sonic aspects of poetry and the woman clearly stresses the visual aspects of beauty, the former also distances himself and the "poet's labor" from the hard manual labor done by anonymous workers as well as from professional intellectual and businessmen. He sees himself as more of a "martyr" than these others, more spiritual. Where does the woman, a gentle and mild woman of leisure (presumably also thought an "idler" though she labors over her looks), fit in? He seems to imply a kinship between the two while misunderstanding the continuum between a woman's work and that of day laborers. His phrase "stitching and unstitching" refers to a single line (etymologically, stichos=line, while "stitch" emerges from "stab, stick, pierce with a sharp pointed instrument"; one stitches/pierces a stich/line with a stitch/ornamental textile unit) of verse, but could as well refer to a letter stitched in a sampler, or a word stitched in mild bas-relief onto a linen backdrop in a textile visual poem. *Lines* owe an etymologically debt to *linen* rooted in the flaxplant's contribution to our lettered lines through paper, through thread and through the word itself, drawing a *fil*iation (threadedness, wiredness) that is also an af*fili*ation (kinship). Visual poets are wired to make meaning through shape, color, sound and symbolism of language's scriptic aspects.

As for the specifics of the piece included here (122), as is my practice, I sent the object to its dedicatee, with this explanation, probably too prolix for its recipient, but more appropriate for an academic readership:

> *Open Up and Bleed: for James Osterberg*
>
> *In this token, for the inimitable Iggy Pop, I've used super-bright colors in accord with the flamboyance of its dedicatee. Also I've used silver metallic thread for two reasons: one, because one of his famous accessories*

was a silver lamé glove; two, because the rays of upward-shooting silver in the piece are meant as complements to the downward pouring red. The shiny red, of course, represents the blood that Iggy literally shed during performances ("open up and bleed"), and also the "blood, sweat and tears" of the legendary energy he gave to each performance, bringing to each gig a mythic sense of performance and ritual sacrifice and celebration. The red blood goes into the earth as an embodied, gravitational force; the silver, on the other hand, is a sort of ejaculate or spiritual energy evanescing skyward: heaven and earth in little space, the gyrating human body. Breath too, as silver is ephemeral and breath is the substance of song and the animal/angel voice. Iggy's performances embody the yearning of a libidinized spirituality, id melded with superego, acting-out virtually indistinguishable from sublimation, masochism from mysticism, the human body trying to go beyond itself.

The word that is spelled out by the distorted, elaborate lettering—some of which is also outlined in silver (hard to see in pixilated reproduction, but clear in the original)—is "OBSESS," starting with the O in the center (O-mind, Stoogese for the trance-state induced by their music, simultaneously void and full; also, the blue "TV Eye," the storm-center of spectacularized sexual desire) and swirling in a spiral around that center: BSESS, with the final S doubled like the double-O ("stOOge") for extra hallucinatory effect. There is an acknowledgment that some degree of obsessiveness is necessary for artistic achievement, but that, like much of what is spectacular about Iggy's career, is a double-edged broken bottleneck. That is why I've left the needle in the piece: to signify that at any moment, its artistic use can be chosen over its destructive use, and the piece is never fully finished. I was touched by

Iggy's explanation, on his Tom Snyder 1980s interview, of the difference between Apollonian and the Dionysian modalities of art-making: I had always understood that difference as order-v-chaos, or discipline-v-energy, or form-v-content, but he explained the two modes as embodying different relationships to temporality: his Dionysianism is an event, a performance characterized by plasticity, movement, orgiastic and ritual activity; its Apollonian analogue would be a sculpture, a rigid, finalized, signed end-product from which the artist could then walk away. Leaving the needle means that Iggy's life is his performance, it's a process, not a product. The piece is never finished, and simultaneously it's always complete just the way it is. The title "open up and bleed," ostensibly a salacious command to lose one's virginity (whatever that may be), is more properly an exhortation to the self to continue to perform, to "give it up," to pick up the art-making needle every day. Needles were among the earliest tools (26,000 BC), predating, for example, pottery etc.; the joining-together of animal skins needles made possible was crucial for the development of further civilization. Iggy is both primitive and prescient, idiot and genius. Moreover, writers like myself can't help but be struck by the kinship of needles and pens (pins…), the tools of inscription, scarification, symbol-making.

Moreover, after the fact I discover the telegraphic "SOS" bisecting the piece on the diagonal; It echoes "Search and Destroy"'s plea that "somebody gotta save my soul," but also answers it: Art making is a spiritual and self-saving, soulful practice.

Here is a token to acknowledge what I feel I've been given—vitality, life force, fun, depth, intensity, presence—by Iggy Pop's art.

Greg Evason

from BOTTLES OF STRANGLED LIQUID

No? Yes, no. Okay, bird. Slow down. Pinch. Nowhere slut to purpose in glue that is heaven's remarkable nose. She eats her party hats. He called their visual poems "games for children." It is hard not to see that. That is, it's hard to take so-called "visual poetry" seriously. What is visual poetry's great insight into the human or any other condition? Visual poetry shows us what isn't there. Normally. What isn't. There. There normally. Shows us what isn't there normally. Visual poetry (I almost wrote LSD) shows us what isn't there normally. To compose a visual poem one must enter an altered state of awareness. And to appreciate a visual poem the reader/viewer must be prepared to enter the expanded awareness that the poet entered in order to compose his visual poems. Most, if not all, visual poems are about the alphabet. In fact, it is as if the alphabet itself is the drug that is ingested. And once ingested it begins to show the consumer of it what it's actually all about. That is, there are more and more levels of being when it comes to the alphabet itself. Herein may lie the clue as to what benefit it might have in other realms of experience. For example, it has been asked of visual poets how can a society be run on visual poetry? That is, what significance does a visual poem have in the bigger picture of things? Here it is: Visual poetry shows us that there are more and more levels of being, not just of the alphabet, which is an essential tool of society, but of society and its individuals in general. That is, there is always more to anything. This is a truth which we all need to be constantly reminded of. That is, society may be functioning in one way but what visual poetry tells us is there are probably in fact an infinite number of ways a society could be organized for the betterment of not only mankind but of all aspects of the Creation. As such, visual poets will be popping up all over the place with new variations on this theme of infinite variations and far from being merely games for children the visual poet is potentially the most serious adult imaginable. His/her call is for infinite revolution. That is, there is no fixed point of view possible despite the overwhelming amount of evidence that seems to suggest things are the way they are because that's the way they are. In fact, things are the way they are because we've made them that way. The visual poet is asking, "Have we considered it this (other) way?" Each visual poet begins with a blank slate, an empty page, while being at the same time more or less aware of the history of visual poetry as well as more or less of the history of the world both histories being of couse not really knowable in a 100% definitive way, but there is enough information at the beginning with which to work toward the composition of a visual poem. And so, the subject matter of any visual poem is going to be primarily the alphabet, any alphabet. And this alphabet, being really the backbone/background of any society, is being used more or less consciously as a metaphor for society itself. And so, the visual poet puts before himself/herself a given alphabet which is representing society itself. And the visual poet asks himself/herself, what happens if I do this? Or that? And so on. And so he improvises on the theme of the alphabet until he/she feels the experiment is complete and an adequately new and unique vision or version of "the visual poem" (or society) has been created and presented. To repeat, the visual poem being a version of the potential of the alphabet is a metaphor for a version of the potential of society at large.

COLLAGE

POEMS:

Scott Helmes, Serge Segay, Petra Backonja, Gustave Morin, Miroljub Todorovic, Nancy Burr, Andrew Abbott, Alberto Vitacchio, Sonja Ahlers, Luc Fierens, Márton Koppány, Marilyn R. Rosenberg, Marcia Arrieta, Andrew Topel, Klaus Peter Dencker, Dmitry Babenko, Carla Bertola, Keiichi Nakamura, Jurgen Olbrich, Karl Young, Roberto Keppler, Kaz Maslanka, Alexander Jorgensen, Carol Stetser, Michael Basinski, Hugo Pontes, Guy R Beining, Stephen Nelson, Bob Grumman, Thomas Lowe Taylor, e.g. vajda, Ficus Strangulensis, J. M. Calleja, Spencer Selby, Nick Piombino

a haiku poem for 3 voices   18 Feb 05   [signature]

276. *Scott Helmes,* Haiku
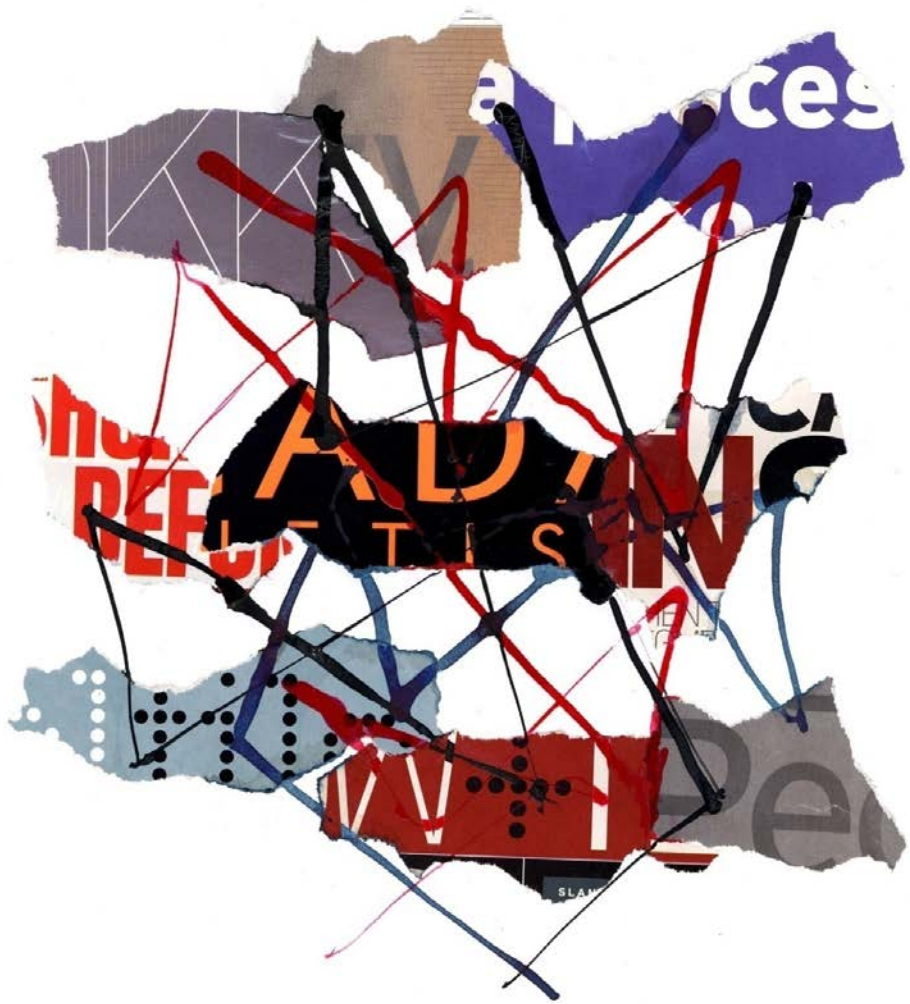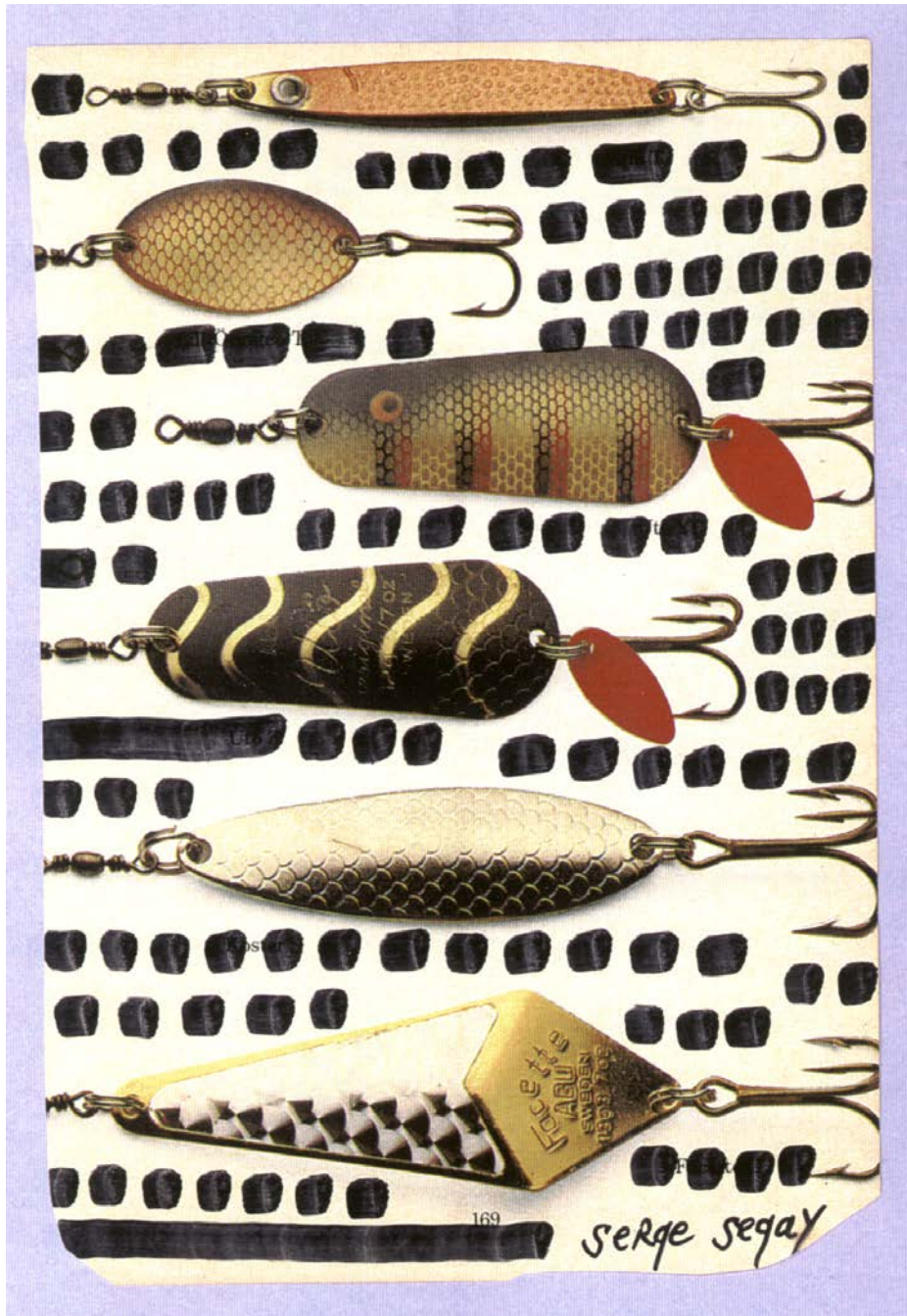
277. Serge Segay, Fishermen's Hooks for Eyes

278. Petra Backonja, Forget Language
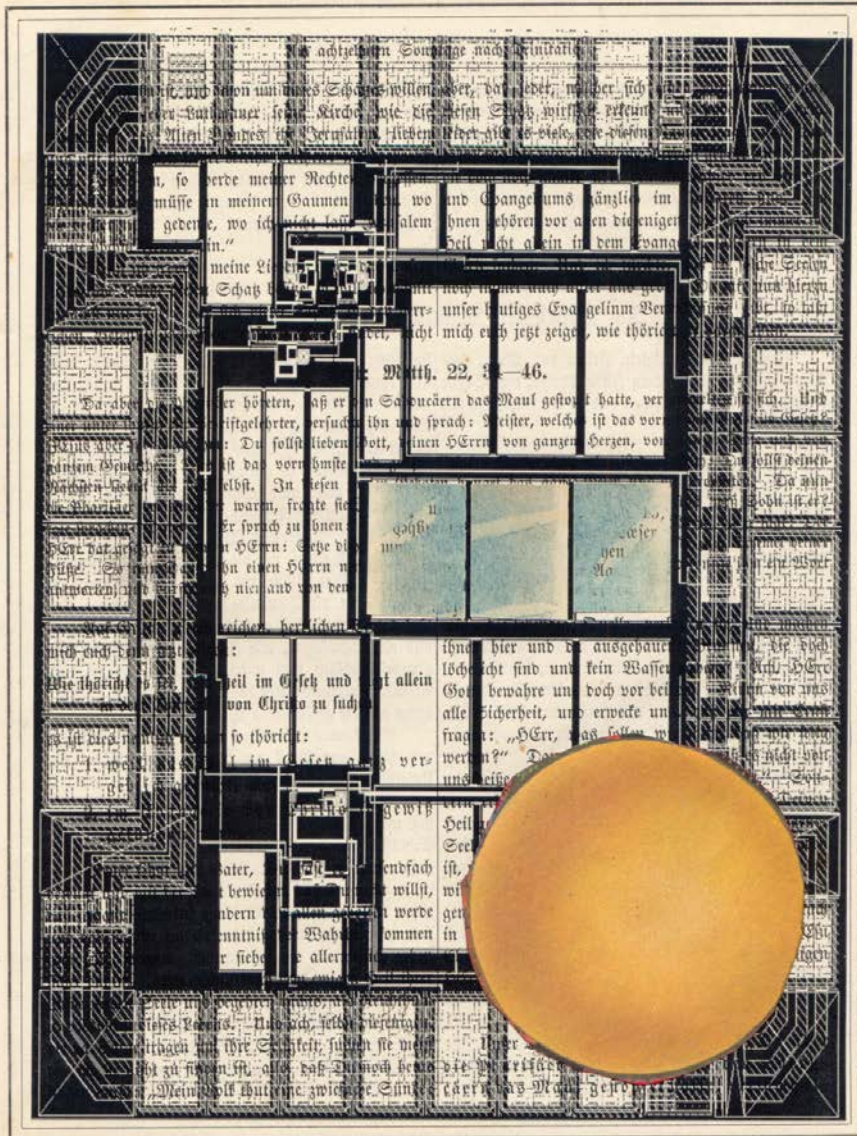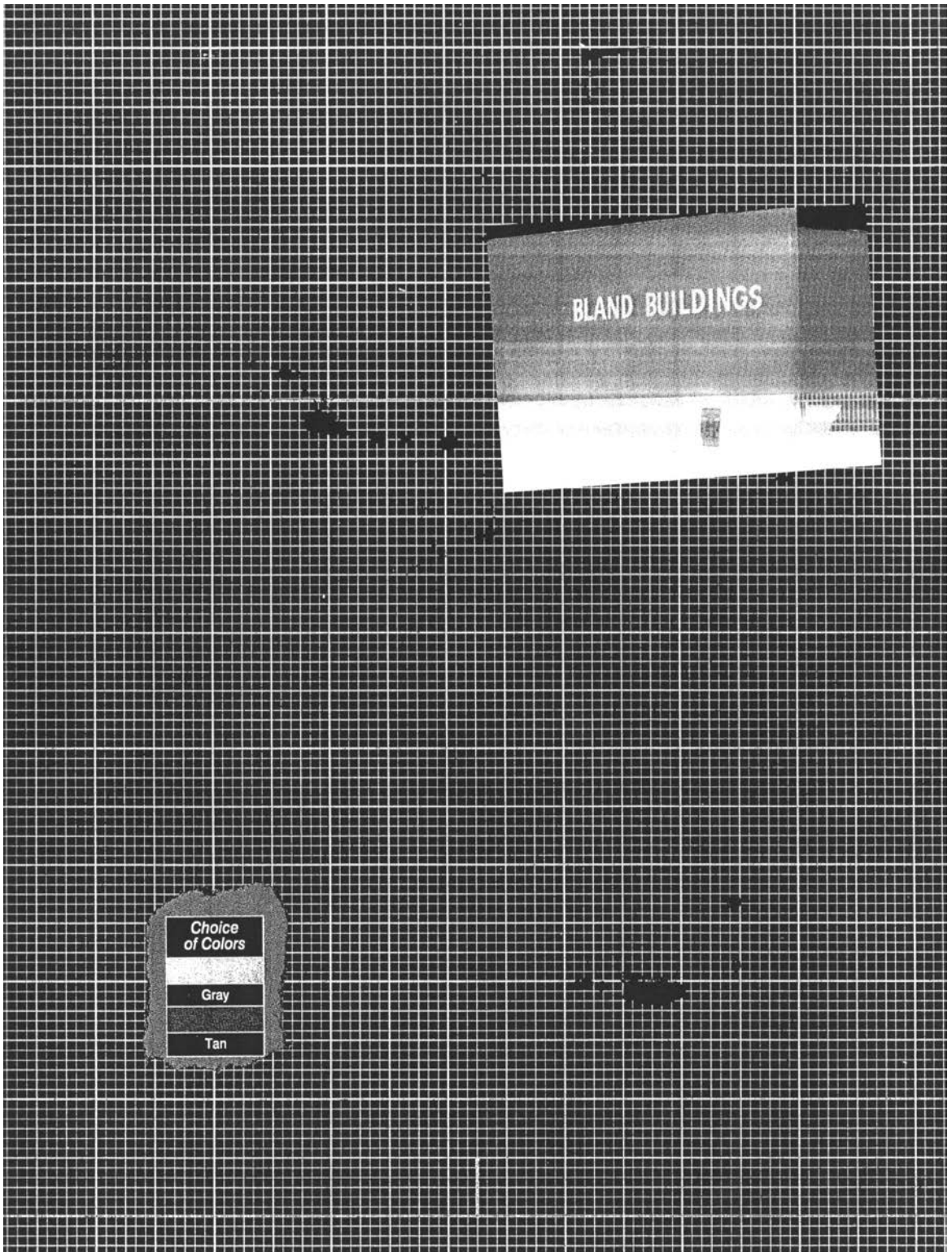
279. Gustave Morin, Bland Buildings
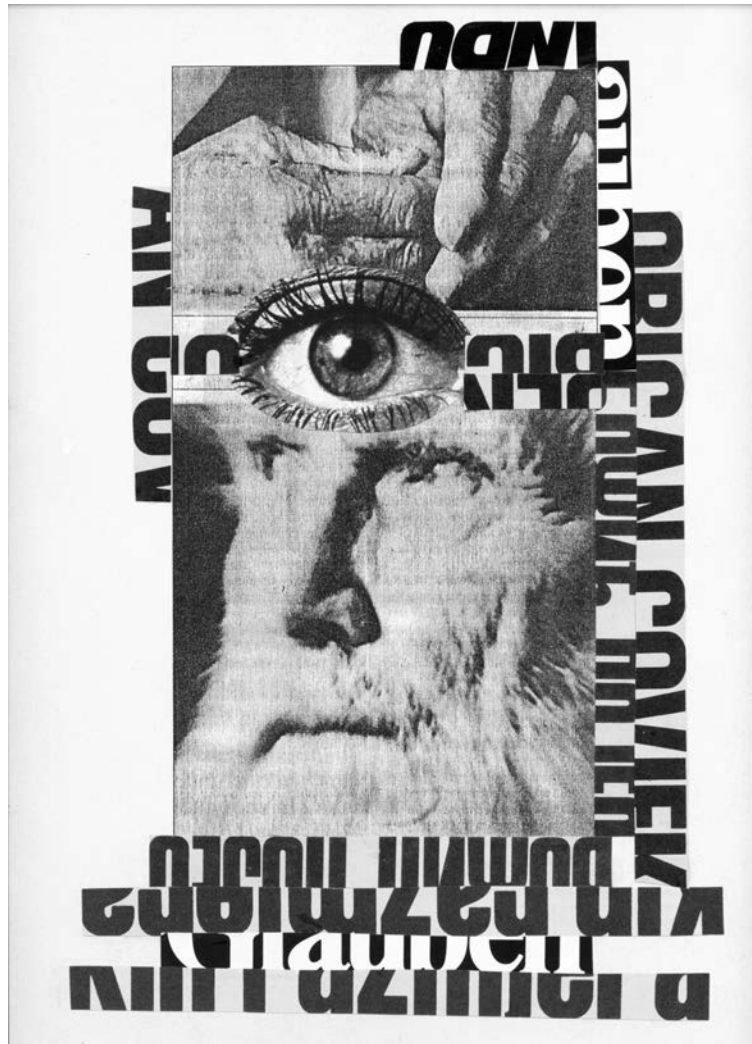
280. Miroljub Todorovic, Hands Which Wrote Cantos
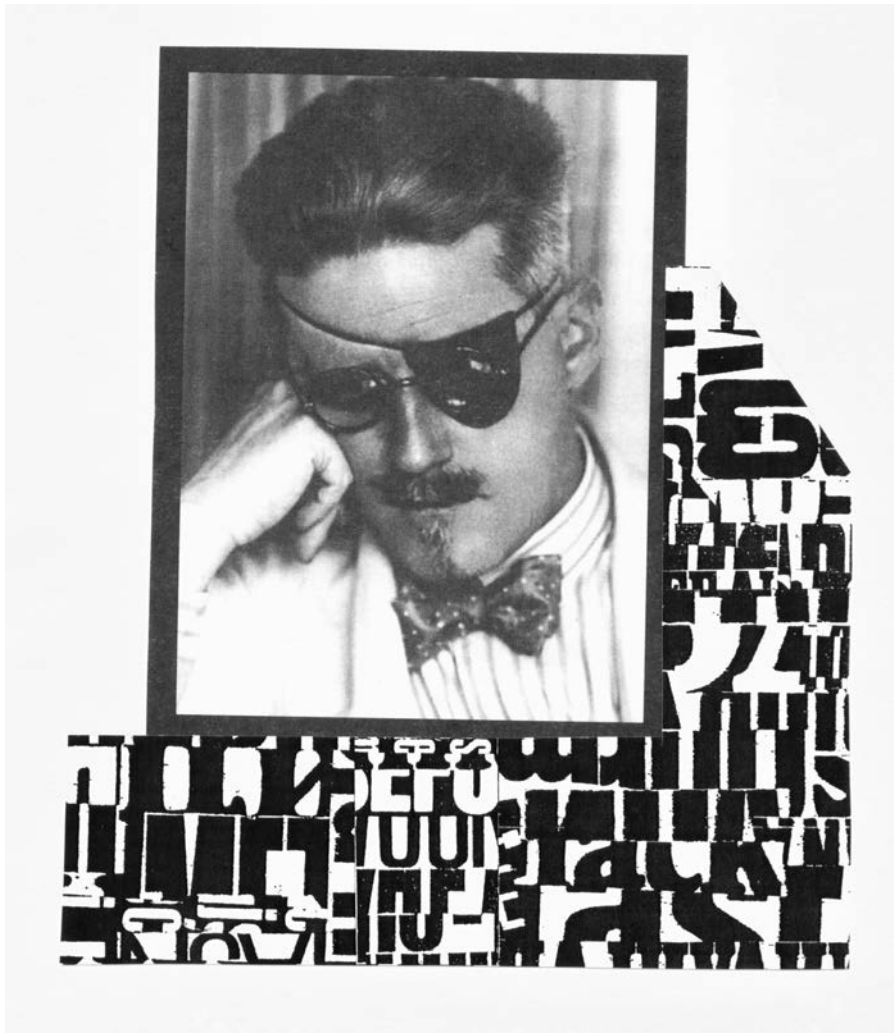
281. Miroljub Todorovic, He Too Thinks About Signalis
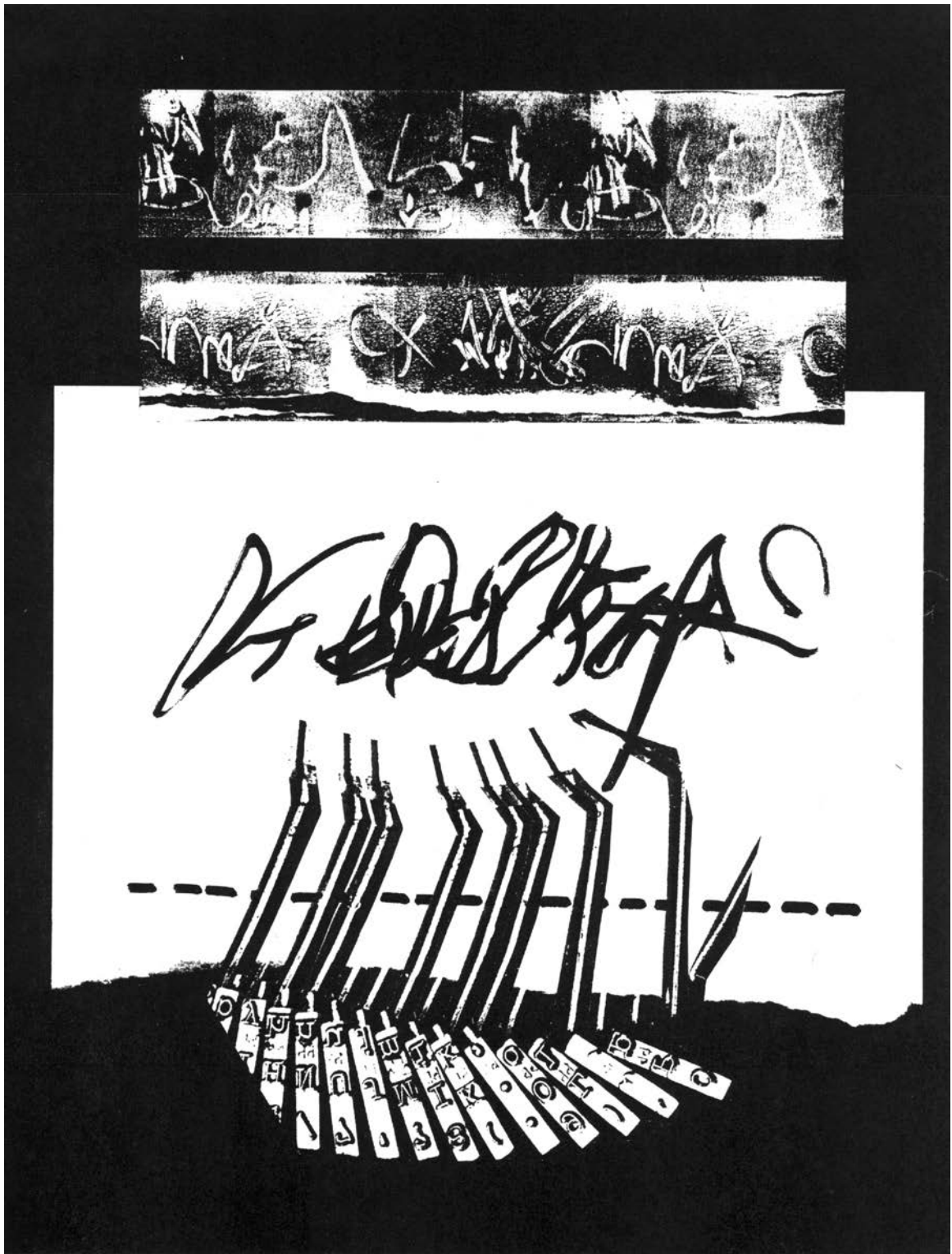
282. Nancy Burr, Untitled

283. Nancy Burr, Untitled
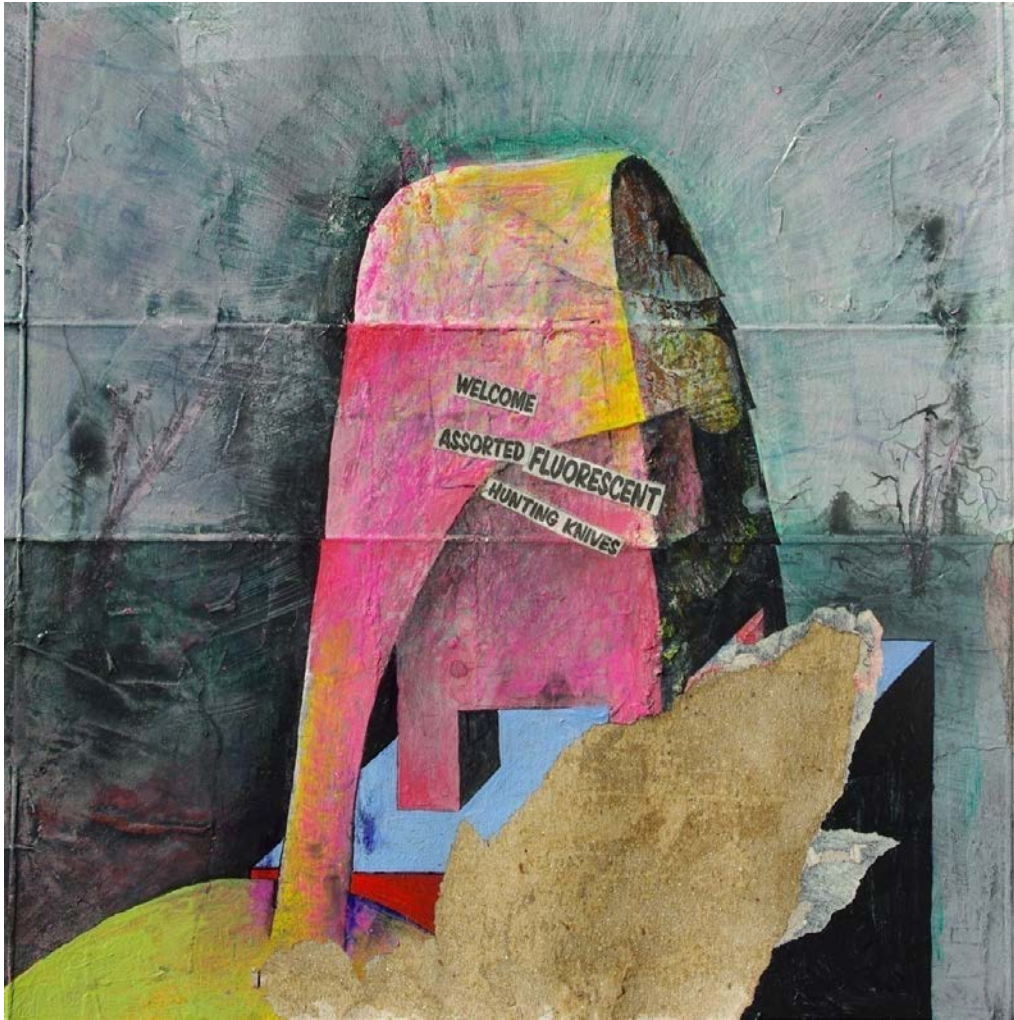
284. Andrew Abbott, Fluorescent Hunting Knives

285. *Alberto Vitacchio*, E y

AC power operation
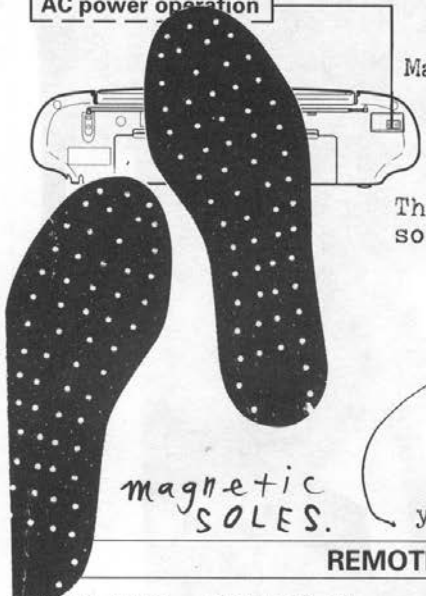
Take out the cord and connect it.

Magnetic Poetry **INPUT**

The reAson you hAte poetry so much

is becAuse

120V AC, 60Hz

NOTE:
When the AC is connected to the unit, the installed batteries will be automatically disconnected.

magnetic SOLES.

you just don't understAnd it

REMOTE CONTROL

The CD, TUNER and VOLUME functions can be performed using the RB-Z78 or RB-Z77 remote control.

This control it's remote & it's distant.

Battery Installation

LEARNING EXPERIENCE.
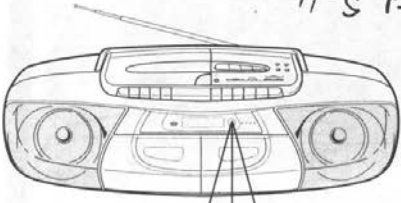
ries oh b

Within approx. 7meters

15° 15°

RB-Z78

-E4-   *so are you.*

Fluorescent lights and neon signs
~~ing in the amplifier.~~ Unwanted

Electric

oh God please help me burn
down this overhead lighting
it is so bad &
so bright & it
is burning

my eyes.

e

bangs.

I spit on your grave

I spit on your grave.

287. Sonja Ahlers, Electric

288. Luc Fierens, from gunpowpoems

289. Luc Fierens, from gunpowpoems

290. Márton Koppány, Bonsai No. 3

291. *Marilyn R. Rosenberg,* Muse Hiding

Within the artwork, the following text appears:

philosophical discourse, lit-
erally and figuratively
engaged with the meaning

292. Marcia Arrieta, Philosophical Discourse
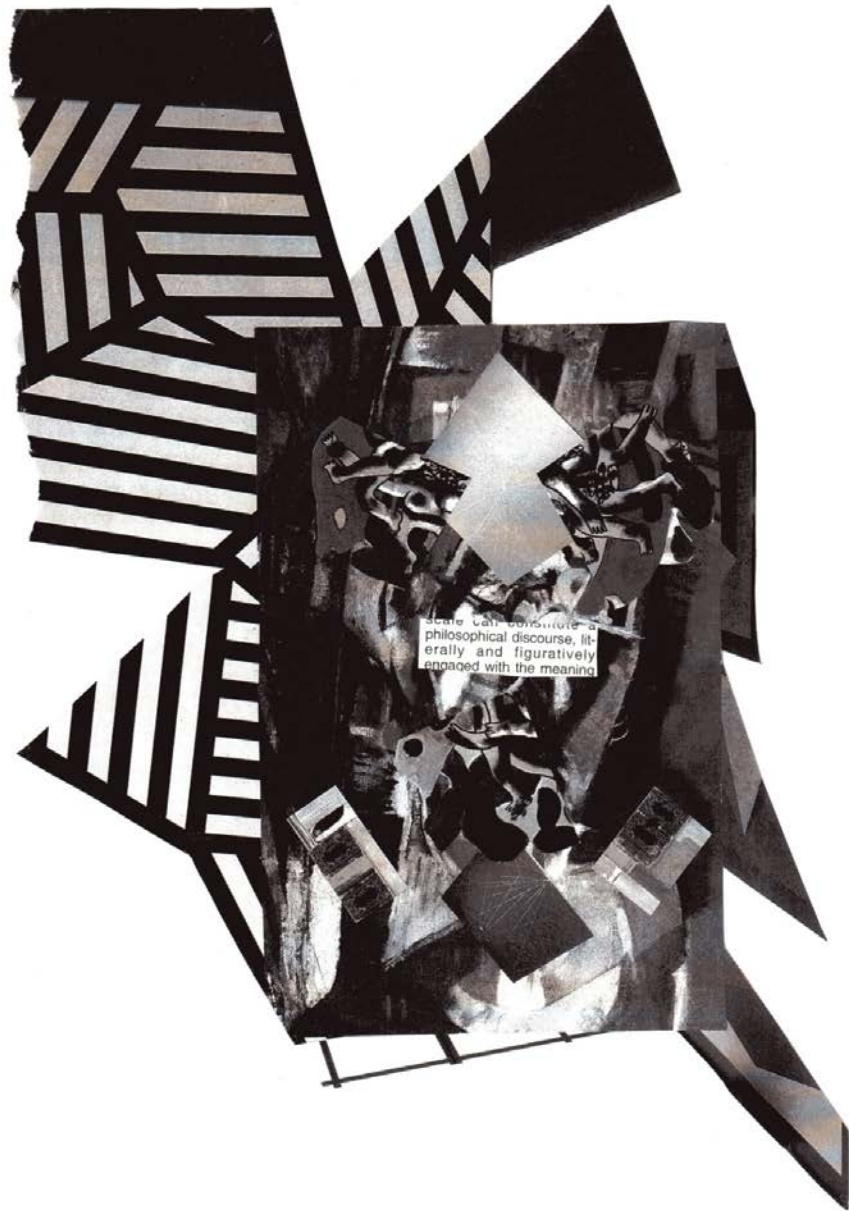
293. *Andrew Topel,* From Ink

294. Klaus Peter Dencker, A
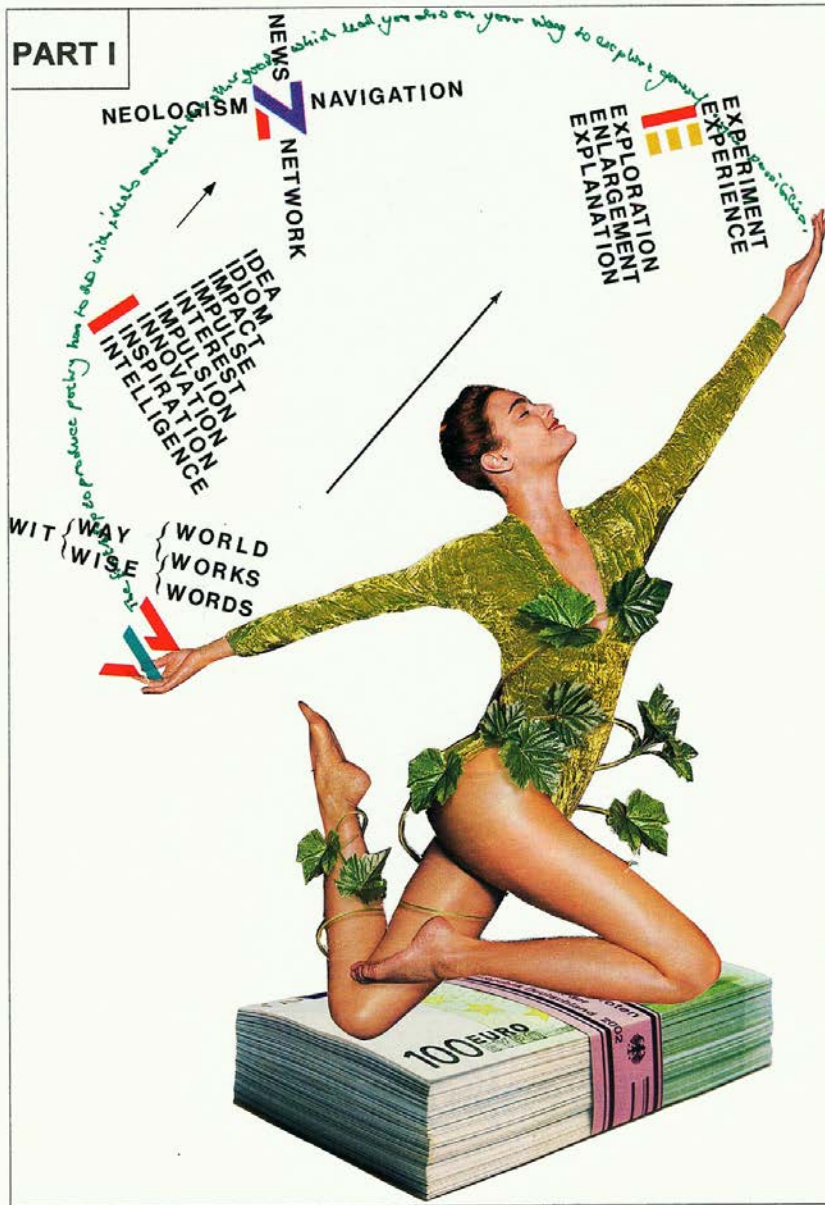
295. *Klaus Peter Dencker, B 1*

296. Dmitry Babenko, The Surf

297. Dmitry Babenko, pages from the book Secret Anatomy
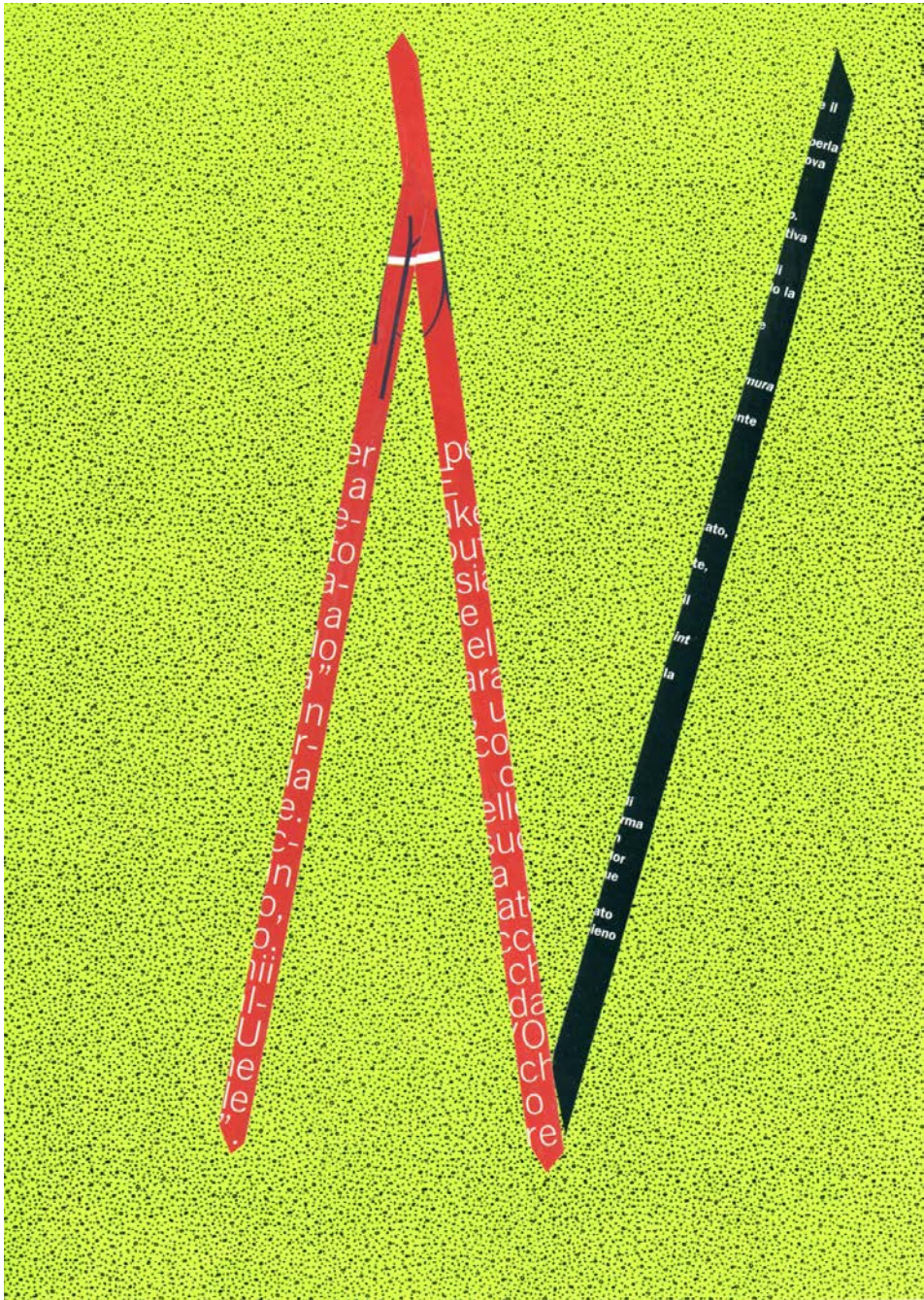
298. Carla Bertola, Down-up

299. *Carla Bertola*, is in us

300. *Keïichi Nakamura,* 0 or

301. Juergen O. Olbrich, from the series Postcard-corrections (since 1977)

302. Karl Young, from One Hundred Sunrises One Thousand Sunsets;
A Journal Written from Digital Camera Notes — Divided Circle, 2006

303. Karl Young, from One Hundred Sunrises One Thousand Sunsets;
A Journal Written from Digital Camera Notes — Moon Plates, 2006

304. Roberto Keppler, Trabalho Com Linguagens

305. Kaz Maslanka, Beginners Mind

306. Alexander Jorgensen, Marketing Mythologies (with Hints of Magic Realism)

307. Alexander Jorgensen, Xiao Mi Feng (Little Bee)

308. Carol Stetser, from Mappaemundi

309. Carol Stetser, from Anatomy

310. Michael Basinski, FEURDJ
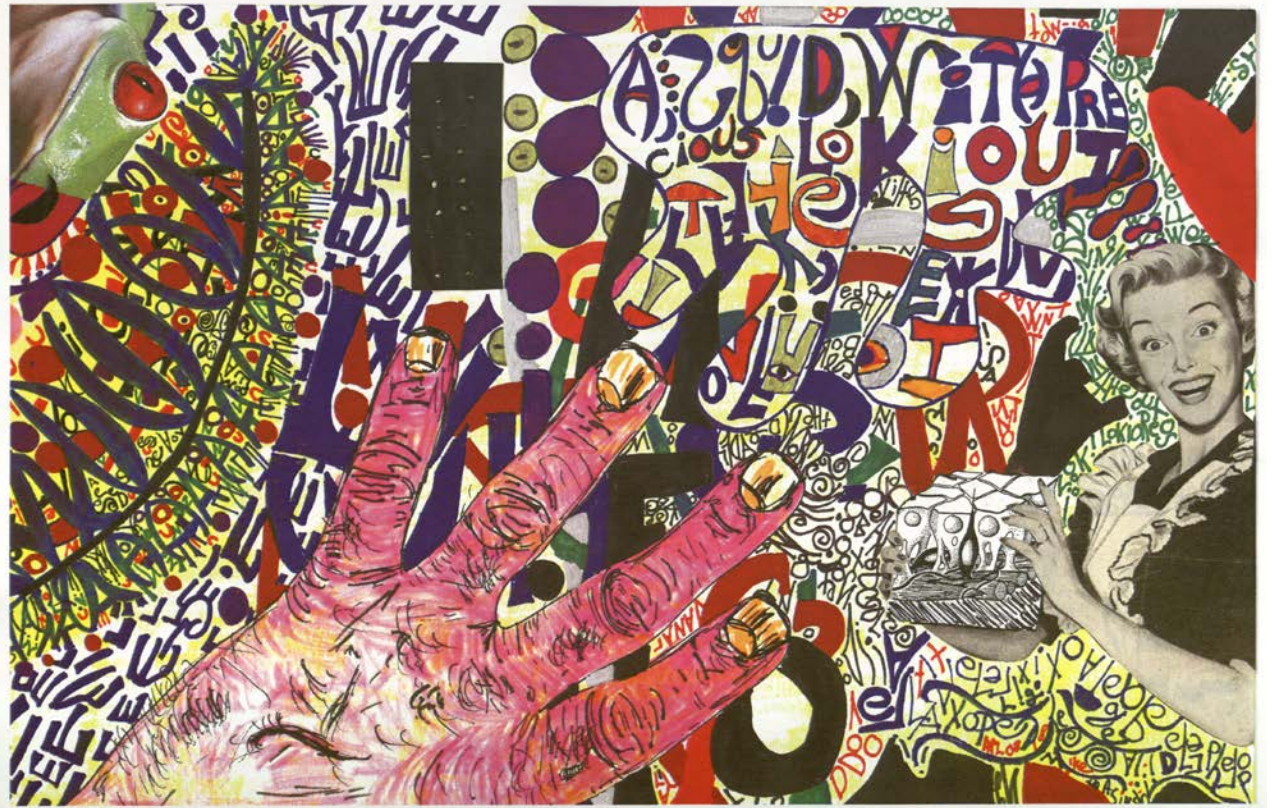
311. Michael Basinski, FECHEFACHE
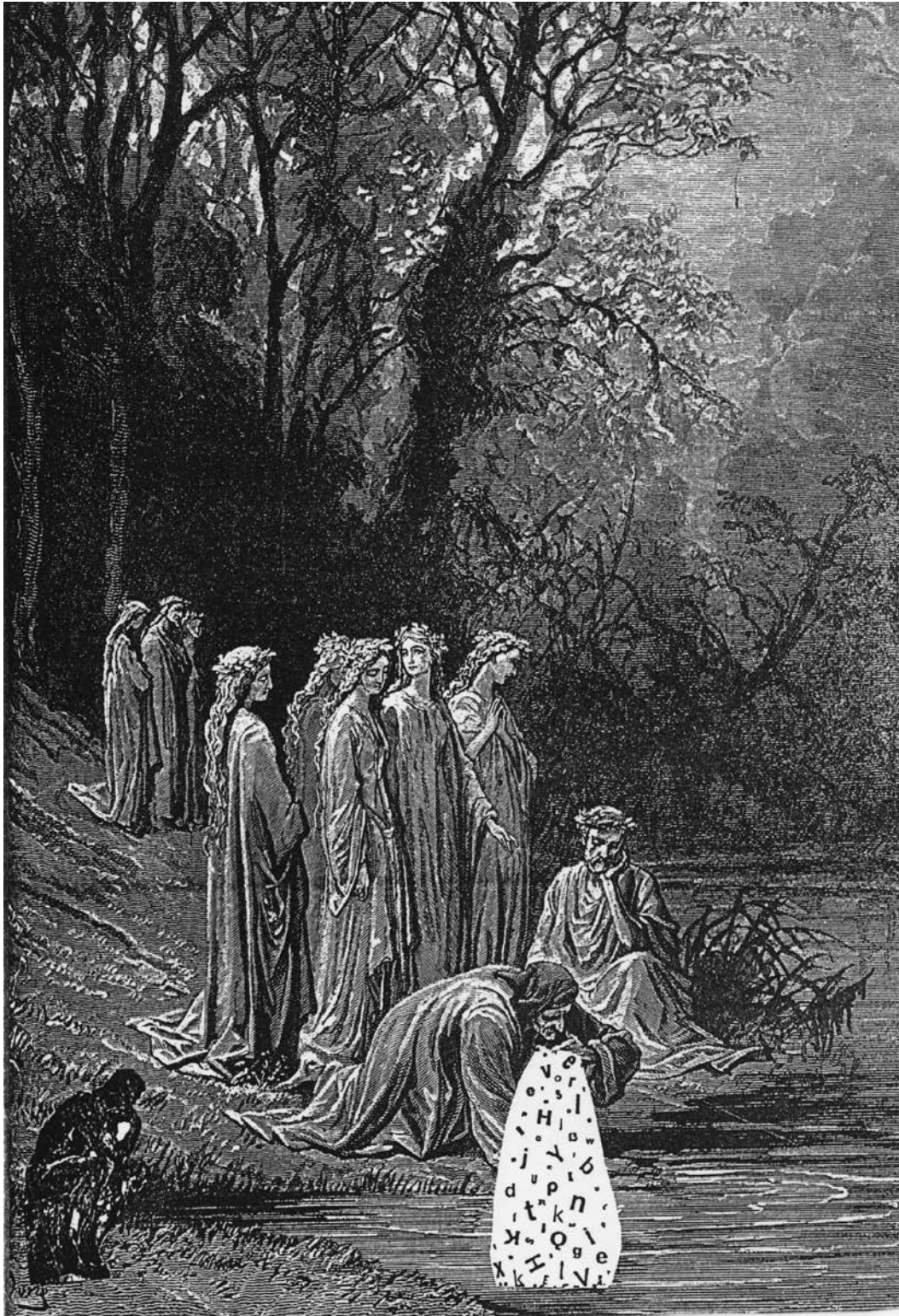
312. Hugo Pontes, Nel Mezzo del Camin

313. Hugo Pontes, Vã Filosofia

BEING

interchangeable parts merge

(2)

BEINING #1

314. Guy R Beining, interchangeable parts merge

freezing

briefness

315. *Guy R Beining*, freezing briefness

316. Stephen Nelson, Walk with Me

317. Bob Grumman, Mathemaku for Narmer
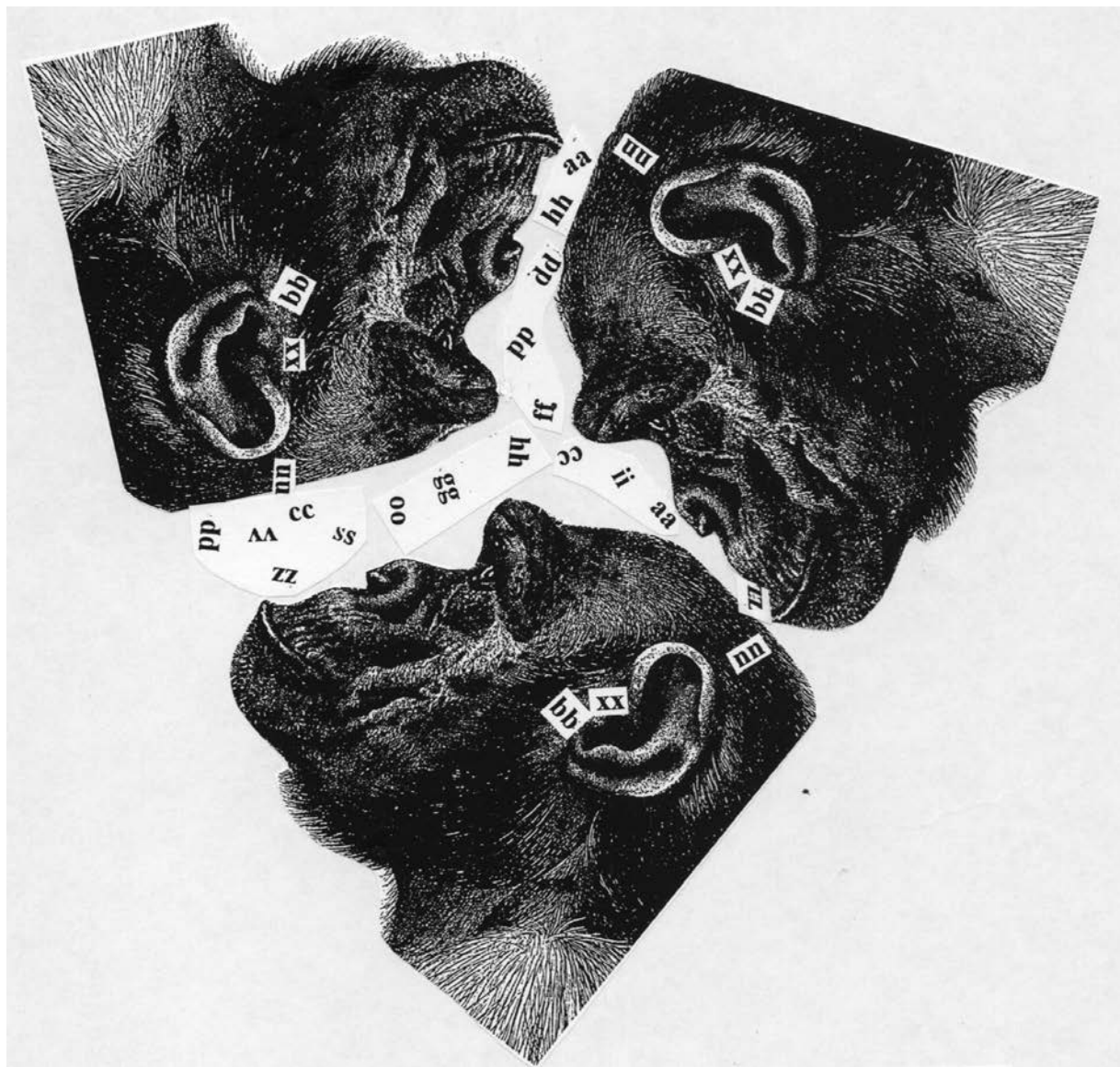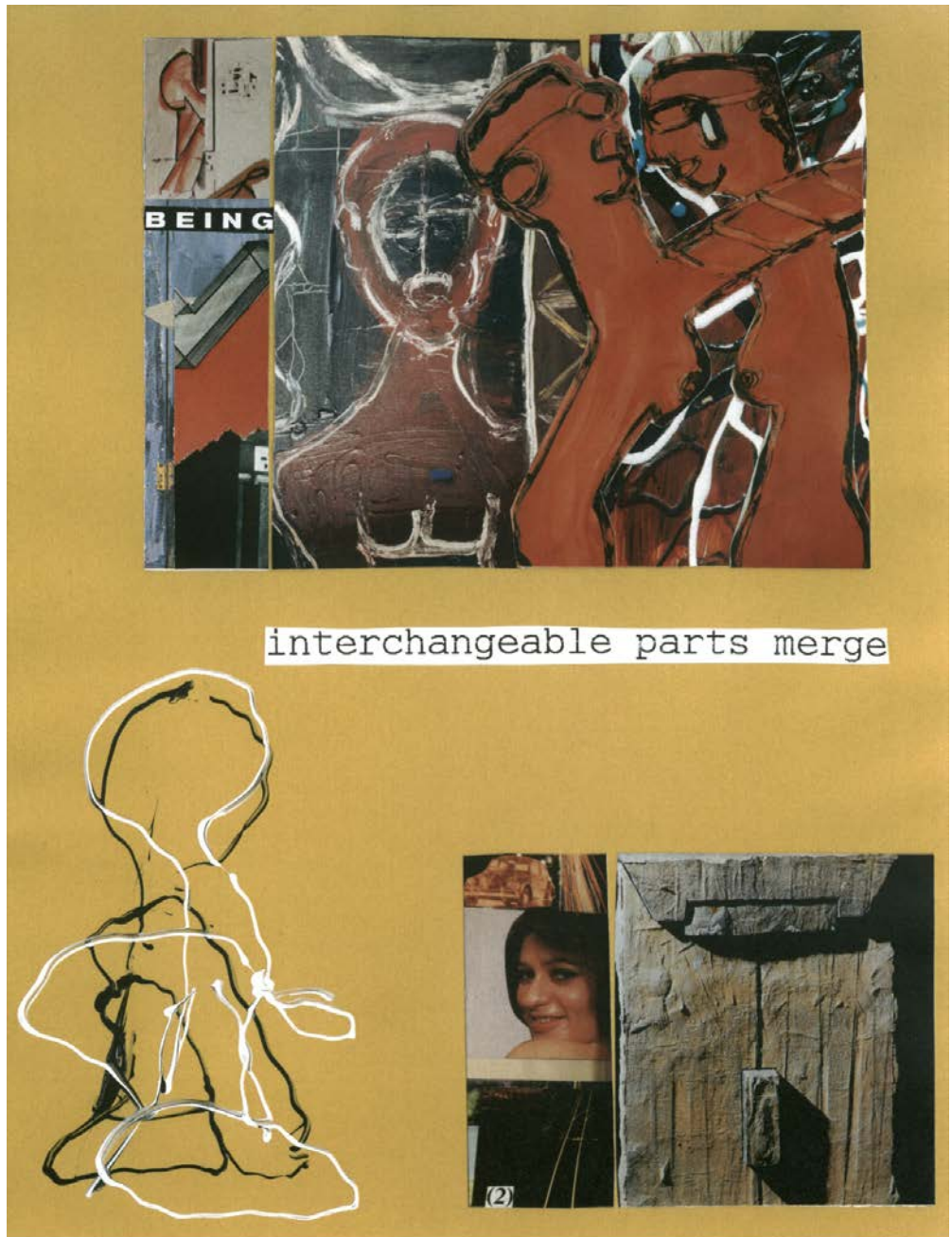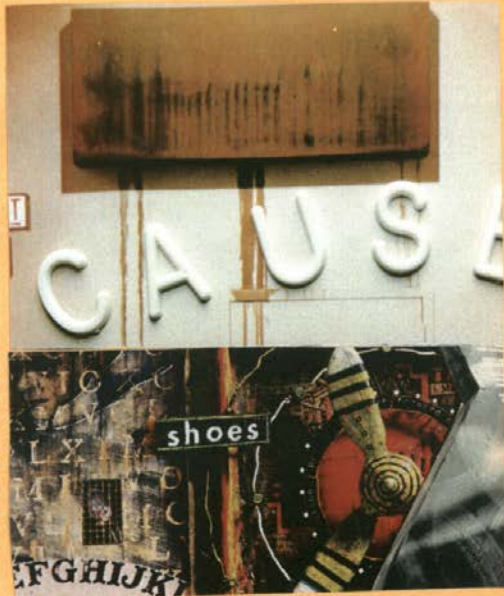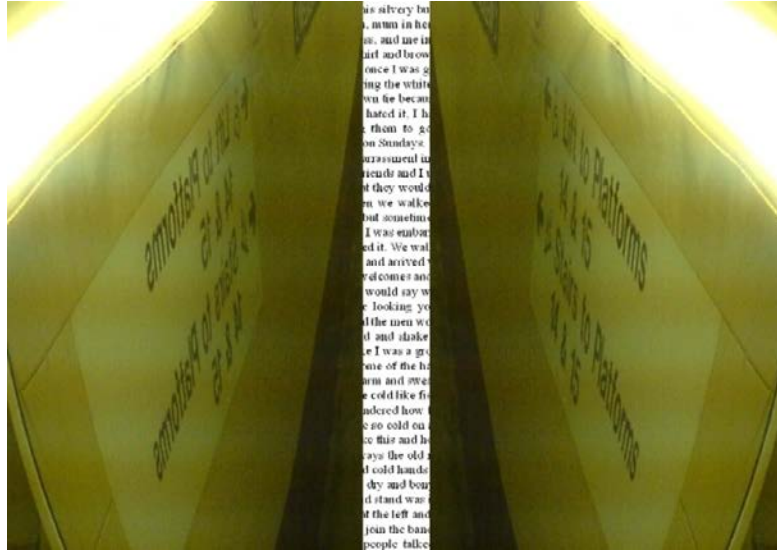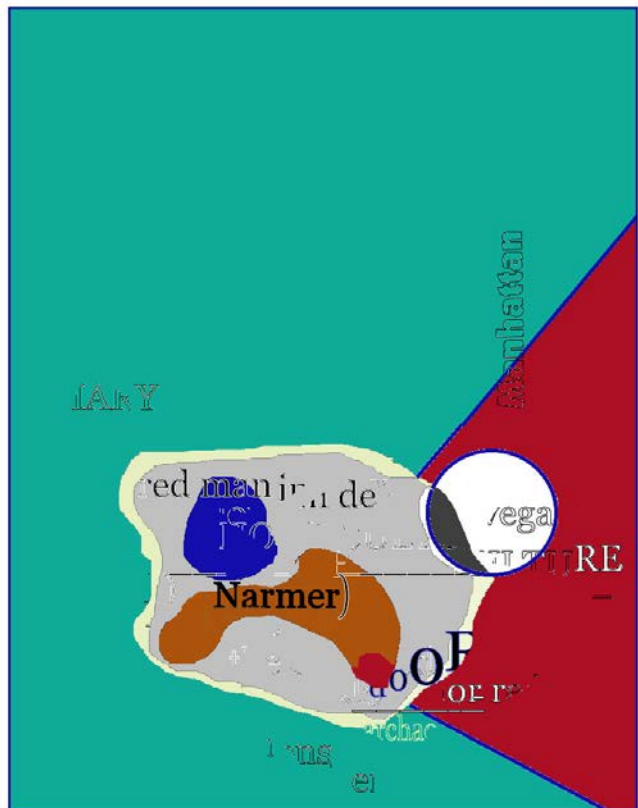
318. Thomas Lowe Taylor, Untitled

319. e.g. vajda, Super Happy Fun

321. Ficus Strangulensis, Terrazo
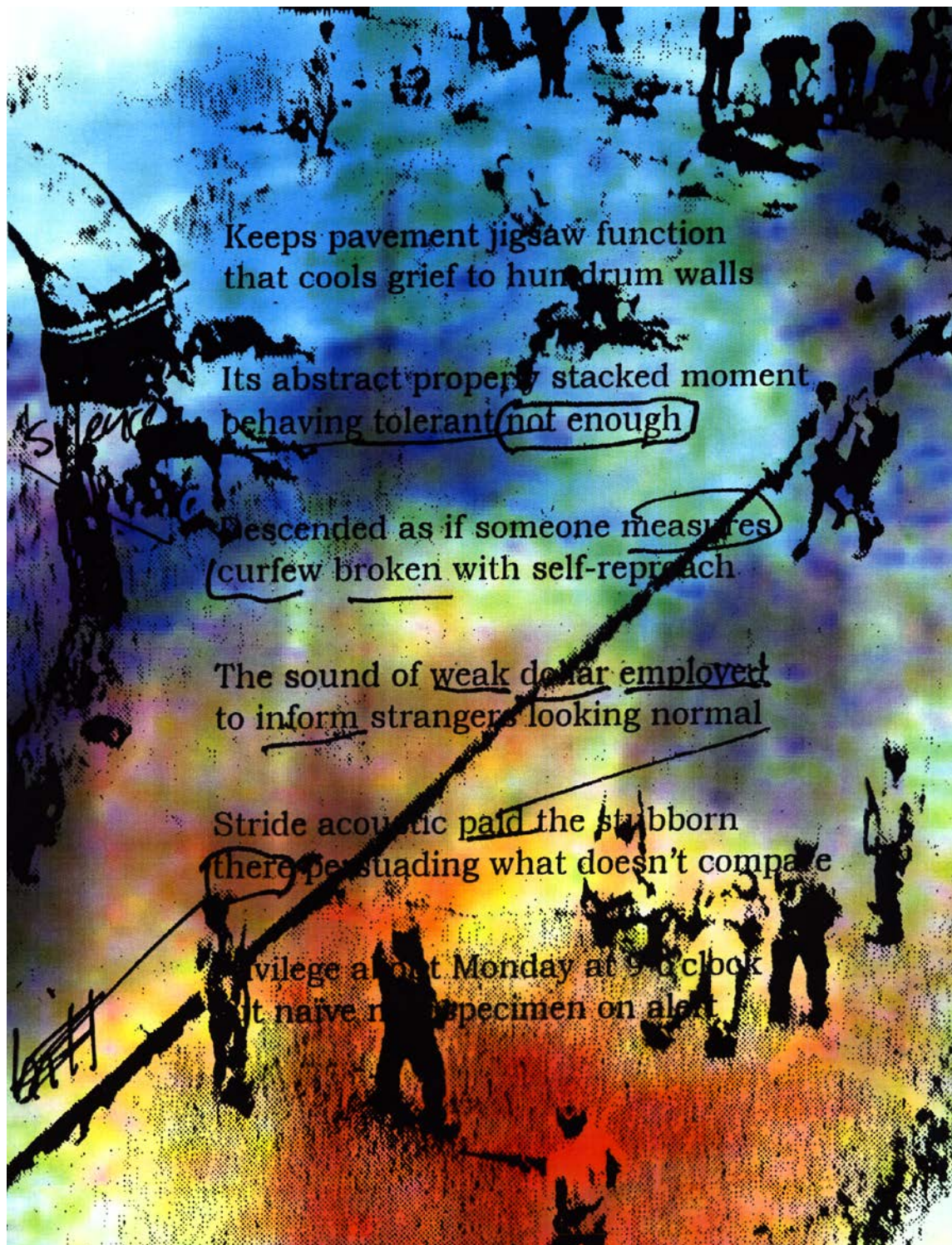
Keeps pavement jigsaw function
that cools grief to humdrum walls

Its abstract property stacked moment
behaving tolerant not enough

Descended as if someone measures
curfew broken with self-reproach

The sound of weak dollar employed
to inform strangers looking normal

Stride acoustic paid the stubborn
there persuading what doesn't compare

vilege about Monday at 9 o'clock
t naive new specimen on alert

322. Spencer Selby, Employed

323. Nick Piombino, from Freefall

Marilyn R. Rosenberg

WOMAN'S WORK, SOME HINTS AT VIOLENCE AND A FEW SHADOWS

If the work's creator says it is, and if the editors accept it, then it is visual poetry, and I agree. This is my thought process while I am doing a close reading of the women's pages; surely these are my own interpretations. The titles may give me insight into some of the creator's intentions. Of course titles can also be just a sorting method. Untitled works are part of the mystery. I only know that the titles/labels on my own works are great for filing, for definition and, mostly, are part of the work itself. Which works are made by hand or machine or are found and are out of context and altered? I shall try to guess; does it matter? Some works are layered, dense while others are direct, up front. What does this mean? Some poems are very full, pressing the pages' edges; while others allow for more space, and air, with empty areas. Why? Some works are hot with color or contrast or subject matter while others are cold, some are dark and dense. Does this affect the content? The hard edge ones, exacting, with crisp, sharp edges are of course so different from those full of rough marks. There are different degrees of abstraction or realism, expressionistic content, and/or mystery. Some are parts of this and that, combinations. Some words and letters are easy to find, exposed, but many others are hidden in the shadows. Others with marks resembling language, are these code or English, or another language I don't know? So therefore, some are readable, some are not, but all are visual language. Sometimes the photos are art objects themselves aside from being records of information and poetry. There are photos of obvious real objects in many works, and these objects may only be props to hold the real message. Yes, but in many works, the objects are often a major collage element, altered or not, and often out of context. What I mention next might seem obvious or obscure, or not what the creator intended at all, but the search continues to be fascinating, although I answer only a few of my own questions. Elaborating in detail, about each woman's work would be wonderful, but that's not possible here; so following are only a few notes on what I found.

"Drop Caps" (217) may be the open red mouth and the white teeth, one missing, vowels of O and U; "Viole(n)t" (104) has a red N sticking out of the VIOLET body, and both poems use color boldly, to match the content. K.S. Ernst takes advantage of objects used in the three dimensional world of advertising and sign making; they are sectional sculptures with shadows. The works can be any size. The contents are surely a woman's statement about violence.

Derya Vural (103)... I don't know the language, so what do I see? The stretch of the letter A is held with tacks stretching it to the point of being torn apart. Strong color, contrast, and strong energy: does the red want to be seen

as blood? Is it only paint and pencil marks on dough or some form of sculpture material on the wood? As I follow the arrows, I can only see the painful A amidst points, many words and letters. It seems to be telling me about violence against the first letter of the alphabet, a seriously hurting A.

"Open Up and Bleed for James" (124) is embroidery. Maria Damon's poem converts the traditional young women's "sampler," with the cross-stitch, as she crosses an old skill over to meet another use. The physical size of the works is self telling, as the needle reminds us, and the needle too is part of the poem. A work that may both be about possible self violence and a call of SOS, and the needling of James.

"The Needle" (129) and the feather, in black and white with realistic gray tone holds a scrap of cloth with writing. I wish I knew what it says. Is the feather for writing or as decoration? But I don't know if it is all violence or about sewing all together. This work is by Satu Kaikkonen.

"I spit on your grave," the protagonist seems to hate neon, as well as the fluorescent "Electric" (287) lights, bang, burning. She double spits on the cat's large shadow. Scary hand lettering and typewriter gray hot words are with clear cool black images by Sonja Ahlers.

"Holding" (81) is the shadow, the poem, a hand sort of holding the title word, or the shadow is a face with the mouth screaming the word. The hand has a red thread around it that does not show in the shadow. Is the red thread trying to hold back the hand from telling what? This work is by Helen White. She often uses the red thread in her works, not only here. Hers is also "invisible ink," and the figure is ghostlike rather than a shadow. Around the figure are all of the various instructions, comments bombarding it, ready to encircle and tie it up, like the red string might or with red tape. The figure of the woman is only a ghost of herself. But often like a shadow, the ghost is there but disappears.

Without language, but with marks that imply thought with light and shadow in the middle ground, waiting, is "Attentionalia" (190), the archaeological architectural asemic poetry of Sheila Murphy.

The hand would have, 50 years ago, drawn some of these works with the help of drafting instruments, to possibly the same ends, maybe. Answering an advertisement listed under the MEN- HELP WANTED, decades ago, I got the jobs since I had the skill and as a woman, must work for less pay. These advertising departments of retail chains, and small magazines had few women in their stables. But we crept in. I used press type and sometimes still do. Before the computer was used there was, of course, wood and lead type as well; all these are remembered when I see the abstract concrete poems of Amanda Earl's "Sun" and "Man" (234, 235). These poems remind me of those strong old methods, the computer matches those skills. Here the words and the letters are the image. They are strong shadows of the past.

Litsa Spathi's works (214, 215) have clarity, sharpness and the dense black of ink. The found type and text, collage implies subtle shadows and are a true merge of content and means. An excerpt from one work—"she was friends," with the "end" type emphasized larger. Words and phrases out of context have new meanings obviously. Yes, the shadows are telling, there for us to know more is hidden below the obvious collage.

Suzan Sari has sharp black computer like images that are tight against the white ground, "As Bad As Making Someone Give Up A Decided Suicide" (44). A sharper and cleaner three dimensional image hints at the title but is not clearly related; here the poem has both abstract objects and black and white letters, intermingled and merged, not really always readable, it is an architectural text unit But the letter, twice Y, stands out. Shadow is implied within the sharp image and violence is stated, of course, in the hot title.

Cutoff lines and image, and the message is not in my language, but it is a shadow trail of thought in Eva O Ettel's "Waterford" (191). She has an actual male shadow in "mal-dits" (128).

Words, letters and marks are texture, in some places. Words are partly behind or are in the grid, the fence, the window, the screen, the veil, seeing through or not, in a number of diverse works.

Matina L. Stamatakis' "Cross-hatches" (88) holds a few printed words, now new, in an old newspaper found behind an older cross hatched, partly painted, peeling

window, the news mostly unreadable in the shadows. Is it protection against the violent weather, or is it hiding what is inside? What do the old papers say, and does it matter?

Blurred words may be shadows themselves, behind the ridged squares and rectangles of the grid, behind implied windows, in Petra Backonja's "Forget Language" (278). The yellow-gold globe is in front, round and aglow.

C. Mehrl Bennett (161) has words so woven into their grid "under attack," they are the shadows trapped, disappearing letters, being violently, slowly consumed and often unreadable.

Jo Cook's "Templates & Text" (83) shows a subtle form of violence, containment, as the guided verbs and adverbs, capitalized nouns march beside geometric forms, often jumping over the line. This is like the aerial view of a small contained city. Held and trapped by their lines and grids in "Celestogram" (167), words and marks merge with their environment, using them as guides, as internal and external armature.

The grid is contained at the edges, the color is strong and intense as the words "Mon Amour" (129) violently vibrate in Satu Kaikkonen's work.

Despina Kannaourou (244, 245) has a work with letters and shapes caressed in parts of a grid like structure, but the image there implies they are silent sounds pushing to get out of the throat of the image.

Carol Stetser's "from Anatomy" (309) tells a complex story also about sound pushing to get out of the throat. The figure is in front of layers of information, and all are found words and images, out of context with new meanings related to information from the tiny cell to the enormous universe of star constellations.

Geof Huth

OBSESSION AND THE VISUAL POET

The visual poet is a creature of habit, and the habit is visual poetry.

I think of a visual poet as a constant fidgeter, someone who must always be doing something with those hands at the end of those arms. But the visual poet is a person of the mind, a person of imagination. It is just that the poet's imagination materializes through physical actions, through the contortions of hands upon a page or a keyboard, with a camera or a mouse. But the visual poet's imagination remains what it always has been: an interest in the material form of language that we call text, an interest in the letters and words that appear before our eyes.

John M. Bennett (174, 175) once spent a day at my dining room table working on visual poems. His process was manual and manic: Take a sheet of paper, use a rubberstamp to stamp a few letters onto the page, take a calligraphic pen and draw letters or words or curlicued faux diacritics onto the page, hand the page to me or C Mehrl Bennett (161). The day produced some work of real beauty, and much of that had to do with the fact that John had developed an obsession with certain forms of marking letters on a page, and he had learned those deeply.

The poet derek beaulieu's (48, 49) obsessions take various forms, employ various methods that require manual dexterity, but a major obsession of his is with press-on type (such as Letraset). One night recently he emailed me a copy of a Letraset poem he had created that was 13.5 by 52 inches in size. That enormous size is a culmination of an obsession, but the piece itself, the beautiful way in which derek moves swirls and fields of like letters together to form visual distinctions within what could be nothing

more than blots of text, shows the value of that obsession, the value of muscle memory, the value of training the eye.

Obsession is a process that guides many visual poets, quite a few of whom are known to produce many hundreds of works every year as they process through their various and similar obsessions with text. Obsession, in some form, is a defining characteristic of the visual poet, the personality trait that pushes the visual poet to create even in the face of a world with only a modest interest in the form. Obsession is what allows the visual poet to become skilled.

Yet visual poets do not resemble each other in all ways. The visual poetry of Christian Bök (227-229) is about absolute control and working within inhuman limitations, and so his visual poems exhibit those same patterns of obsession. In Christian's series of odalisques he took the 21 shapes that together can form every letter of the alphabet (these include the central stem of many letters, the tail of the Q and the R, and the ear, the link, and the loop of the lower-case g), and he created a series of visual poetic drawings that resembled naked lounging women. He created these when he and I, and a number of other people, were together in Finland, and his process was insistently serious. He sat in his room for hours and worked on the pieces, creating a number of these letter drawings in a short time. His results prove his obsession: The drawings are clearly women, elegantly constructed, and variously arranged, yet within these odalisques he repeats certain tropes. An artifact of his obsession is that he is sometimes backed into a corner of possibility and must fight his way out from there.

On the other side of the coin rests David Baptiste Chirot (158, 159, 160), who works at the dirty, almost uncontrolled edge of visual poetry, though his work truly

exhibits enormous control. His primary methods are two in number: 1) frottage, and 2) clay impressions printing. With frottage, he wanders the city of Milwaukee at night with sheets of paper in search of raised metal text on monuments and signs, and he rubs a lumber crayon over the page and the text until the text appears on the sheet that way he wants it, the way he needs it. With clay impression prints, he forms a lump of clay into a human form, impresses shapes (including text) into the soft clay, inks the surface of the clay, and presses it against a page to produce the image of a human figure encrusted with text. Both these methods are messy, producing works that seem inexact but which are exact in their impression and expression.

It takes years to make a single visual poem, years of practice to be able to move fractions of type around on a screen to produce the recognizable form of a woman, years in order to make a visual poem while roaming a midnight demi-monde. And that is the value of obsession. It teaches the visual poet the craft of visual poetry, whatever craft it is that the poet has chosen to employ.

Sometimes, the chosen craft of the poet might seem almost minor or off-course, but the visual poet will then surprise the reader into understanding the need for that way of making. The conceptual visual poet endwar (96, 237) works constantly at the craft of minimalism. His apparent goal is to produce the tiniest possible poem that can cause excitement in a human mind. And he does this by playing with small similarities between words (puns) and the resemblance of letters and words to objects in the real world (visual puns). His process is exceedingly slow. His process is to learn as much as he can about the words we use, and visual language in particular, and to find the surprises that hide within and between the visible and audible forms of words.

Tim Gaze's (43, 170, 171) process is to reduce written language to the beauty and expressiveness of its visual form, knowing that to do that he must drain the denotation out of that language, and to do that he must create new writing systems that none of us can read. Gaze's poetry is a poetry of ink flowing across paper, the poetry of the calligraphic form and the beauty of the letterform as, itself, alone, an expressive aspect of writing. He imagines a wordless and eloquent poetry, and then he creates it.

In visual poetry, there are many kinds of beauty—both verbal and visual. Robert Grenier's (172, 173) scrawled poems are a kind of wild but controlled beauty. He works within but right up against the four edges of a rectangle of paper, but within those confines his words wander crookedly. Over and over again, hundreds and hundreds of times, Grenier has produced four-word poems, with each word written in a different color and in jagged twists and turns, and each written over the others, so that the resulting poem is a jumble of words that the reader can read only with difficulty. And, once read, there are only four words, hardly enough for a poem, so the reader must create the connections and meaning for the poem.

Bob Grumman's (126, 317) obsession and beauty has been the examination of mathematical processes (visually represented) upon a verbo-visual landscape. For decades now and almost as his exclusive means of creating visual poetry, Bob has created mathemaku, visual poems usually in the form of long-division problems that have been worked out. The reader's job is to figure out how certain abstract concepts, visual images, and concrete and descriptive phrases actually work together to form cohesive meaning. And, as the years progress, these poems have become more complex visually and verbally, to the point that that visible structure of the long-division problem has almost disappeared from view, has become subsumed by the visual richness around it, yet the poem remains a long-division problem. The obsession demands it, and the obsession ensures it.

Obsession connotes continuation over time and tenacity, and that is why obsession fits visual poets. When they find methods they find productive, they reuse them for years. What these visual poets have created is a signature style based on an obsession that has stabilized and become purified over time. Because of these clarified obsessions, it is easy to identify a visual poem by Petra Backonja, Michael Basinski, Guy R. Beining, Klaus Peter Dencker, Maria Damon, K.S. Ernst, Luc Fierens, Scott Helmes, Michael Jacobson, Alexander Jorgensen, Karl Kempton, Carlos M. Luis, Donato Mancini, Sheila Murphy, Michael Peters, Spencer Selby, Pete Spence, Stephen Vincent, Ted Warnell, Mark Young, and many other visual poets upon first sight (see index). (Obsession requires the list, requires the arrangement of that list.)

Some visual poets, however, are not tied to method so much as to concept. Satu Kaikkonen's (34, 129) obsession is with language, which makes her the quintessential visual poet, and which is why she also creates traditional kinds of poems made up of nothing but words. Her obsession with visual poetry, however, isn't focused on one process at all. Actually, she tends to use one method for only a short time before she dispenses with it and moves on to something else, because her obsession is with seeing how written language can be created in expressive visual forms and how those forms can be distorted. Her methods are those of the hand and the machine, about absolute simplicity and great complexity, about black and white and about color, about the readable word and the word created only to be a visual construct. She is a manufacturer of textual meaning, even if that meaning is sometimes ineffable.

Márton Koppány (97, 219, 290) creates tight little visual poems that are designed to have quite specific meaning, but which are often cryptic. His work examines the ways in which language works and fails to work, how words lead us sometimes to silence and misunderstanding and sometimes to revelation. He creates visual landscapes of words and near-words, because his primary field of endeavor is the concept, rather than the physical reality, of the word, yet that visual reality is always a perfected and beautiful whole. His hundreds of conceptual visual poems are sometimes only barely textual, yet they entice the reader to crack the code, to open and eat the egg.

A particular poet's particular obsession might be entirely personal as well. Marilyn R. Rosenberg (140, 241) is a visual artist who works as a visual poet, so she creates colorful and well designed visual landscapes haunted deeply and completely by words. But they are also haunted by mice and eggs, the two central and obsessive symbols of her work. The mice represent secret and constant visitors, which might infest one's house or imagination without one knowing it or ever being able to catch sight of them. The eggs represent possibility, growth, transformation, and these personal symbols repeated across decades of work function essentially as text. A mouse in a painting is not so much a mouse as what a mouse represents to Marilyn, thus expanding the realm of the textual to include images.

Carol Stetser's (308, 309) visual poetry is concerned with xerographic distortion and stratigraphic collage. Xerographic manipulation of found texts provides her the opportunity to create new works out of the old, and she replicates this process when she collages various source texts into one work. Carol's collage work is stratigraphic in that she layers additional texts and images atop a foundational text. This base text could be a page from a dictionary or some ancient text the reader is not expected to know how to read, but these base texts represent knowledge and meaning and other broad concepts. The texts added to those layers extend and enrich the meaning of the piece, just as layers of material culture retrieved from the site of an ancient human settlement reveal something about a lost people. The secret of Carol's visual poems is that the words don't necessarily function as words; they usually function merely as concepts, and the poem is created out of an understanding of how the concepts present in the poem work together conceptually rather than verbally.

The visual poet's obsession is with written language, of course, and usually that obsession is focused on transforming that language. The work of Cecil Touchon (56, 57) is focused on the monumental letter, the letter as some giant object of mystery and veneration. Cecil takes individual found letters, cuts them into shapes that almost completely disguise their birth as letters, and gathers them into groupings of dramatic power. Language, in Cecil's cutting and pasting hands, is transmuted into abstractions beyond meaning, thus demonstrating how systems of meaning always give way and tumble to the ground.

Helen White (81, 197) transforms text in an entirely different way, by leaving them comprehensible but moving them into new contexts, often human contexts. Her obsession is of the text as human object. Her pieces often include human bodies and interactions with texts, some evidence of the physical human presence. She understands the power of text as a human creation but also how the text is so completely human that it takes on human characteristics, that it has significance only in human contexts.

Visual poetry is, simply, an obsession with textual meaning and the impossibility of that meaning, an obsession with discovering at what point syntactic and semantic meaning disappears and discovering what we gain from whatever remains. The visual poet is a person at play, but the most serious type of play, one that does not allow any respite. So it is that the visual poet bends over the page, over the screen, over some object worked on and worked over so

that it can be finished and another can begin to be. So it is that the visual poet continues to produce visual poems usually in large quantities—because there's something wrong with the written word, and something right with it. The written word is both lovely in its own right and an impossible code incapable of fully representing its intended meaning. It appears before us without the facial cues or intonation, without changes in volume or body movements of verbal communications, and we try to make sense of that language outside of its natural, human, blood and breath context. Visual poetry returns those cues to the written word, but in wildly different ways, creating a new means of writing and reading.

In the end, these visual poems, worked on with intensity and passion, created with fingers and thoughts, are nothing but textual objects of contemplation. We are asked to sit before them quietly, to dispense with considerations of the obsessions that created them, and to imagine what they mean. We are asked to accept into our consciousness these visual lozenges of concretized meaning and meaninglessness.

INDEX OF POETS:

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