

Visible Language has been concerned with research and ideas that help define the unique role and properties of written language. A basic premise of the journal has been that writing/reading form an autonomous system of language expression on its own terms. To this must be added research and ideas that help define the presentation of information within the digital arena. The shift from page to screen is comparable in its significance to the shift from manuscript to print. Developing the knowledge base and conventions for this new media will take time and challenge our ability to move beyond the book and into more fluid, relational and responsive systems of presentation.

Published continuously since 1967, Visible Language maintains its policy of having no formal editorial affiliation with any professional organization — this requires the continuing, active cooperation of key investigators and practitioners in all of the disciplines which impinge on the journal's mission as stated above.

VISIBLE LANGUAGE 33.1

Remembering Dick Higgins (1938-1998)

For over three decades I regarded Dick Higgins as the most variously accomplished of my contemporaries, as he produced indubitably distinguished work as a publisher and book designer, especially with Something Else Press; a scholar, particularly of visual poetry; a writer of poems, stories and plays; a visual artist working in books, prints and paintings. In addition to doing live performance, music composition and films (but not video), he worked in interart areas that have no accepted name. What has been widely acknowledged is his useful critical epithet *Intermedia*, which is generally applicable to all new domains that innovatively draw upon two or more traditional arts (e.g., visual poetry, text-sound, kinetic environments). He was continually updating a resume that ran nearly fifty pages, its length partially reflecting the fact that no one title (such as a departmental professorship or a single achievement) defined his activity.

He produced and distributed lots of work freely, because none of it entered commercial channels. Remarkably little "sold," though much was widely admired. He worked directly with a lot of people, because he never benefitted from an agent. Were anyone to write a biography, which should be done, its principal theme should probably be the possibilities and fate of a distinguished noncommercial, nonacademic career in the late twentieth century.

Richard Kostelanetz

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Throughout this issue,
several of Kostelanetz's
video poems are presented
as sequences. To activate
the poem, flip the images
by going to the first screen
and quickly fanning the
pages to the last screen.
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pages 20, 36 fan from back
to front, while poems
beginning on recto pages
7, 29 fan from front to
back.

Abstract

An historical account of Richard Kostelanetz's significant contributions to visual literature and the development of intermedia/linguistic experimentation unfolds in this article in his own words. Reflections on the history of his intentions, their development, reception and critical thoughts frame this still largely unheralded aspect of expressive visible language. He continues exploring the materiality of language through collaborations that take him into technologies dealing with dimensions beyond the page and even the single screen. Thirty years of work and change are considered.

P.O. Box 444, Prince Street
New York, New York 10012-0008
Visible Language 33.1
Kostelanetz, 006-041

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Thirty Years of Visible Writing: A Memoir

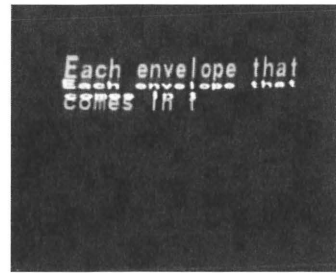
Richard Kostelanetz

The history of most arts is the history of their avant-gardes, of those works and groupings of works which the next generation seizes upon to follow, thus provoking the analogy to the avant-garde of an army (the small group of soldiers that precedes the main body of troops). Dick Higgins, *Horizons* (1984)

In memory of Dick Higgins
(1938-1998)

The thought of producing visible poetry initially came to me while bored watching Antonioni's *Blow-Up* early in July 1967. The next day, I wrote — rather drew — my first visible poem, "Tributes to Henry Ford," using rulers, French curves and stencils found at a neighborhood stationery store; the fact that this five-image (two-letter) poem remains among my most reprinted works both pleases and depresses me. I had already seen some visual poetry, initially during a lecture at London's Institute for Contemporary Art two years before, and again in the then current "concrete" issue of the *Chicago Review*. Even though most of the work collected under that "concrete" label did not appeal to me, because it favored fragmented language over recognizable words, the idea of alternative forms for language struck me then (and now) as poetically suggestive. As I had just completed a book on *The Theatre of Mixed Means* (Dial, 1968; Archae, 1980), a new art genre that fused live performance with arts other than language, the principle of intermedia — or the integration of nonadjacent arts, as distinct from mixed media, such as picture + poem — already appealed to me.

Much of the glorious summer of 1967, just after my twenty-seventh birthday, was spent working with my new art, producing many visible poems that have since appeared again and again — "Disintegration," "Echo," and the "Football Forms," among others. Some of these early poems are explicitly mimetic, my drawing enhancing the legible words in representational ways. My aim here was the creation of a visual form so appropriate to a certain word that the whole picture would have an indelible impact. What is called an *afterimage* would be left in the viewer's mind, primarily because the shape endowed the word with certain resonances that would otherwise be unavailable. Perhaps the richest poem in retrospect is the opening "Manifestoes," which contains four syntactically circular statements, one placed



each

inside the other, because syntactic circles is a form to which I would return (and which few others favor). Though I lacked formal training in visual art, I nonetheless felt obliged to do all the drawing myself. Since my works were poetry, rather than commercial design, nothing was lost in their visibly revealing the idiosyncracies, bad and good, of my amateur hand.

Toward the end of that summer, I discovered the technology of the photostat and began to submit clean, camera-ready copies of my work to periodical editors who had previously published critical essays of mine. Nearly all of them were unresponsive, some even suggesting that I was wasting my time with such poetry. The first editor to accept my visual poems was the late Paul Carroll, a Chicago poet-professor who was then putting together his pioneering anthology, *The Young American Poets* (Follett, 1968), and my appearance there served the crucial professional function of certifying, in my own mind at least, my status as “poet” as well as “critic.”

To celebrate the publication of his anthology, Carroll sponsored a series of “readings” featuring his contributors. Since such visual poems could not be declaimed (without compromising their silent integrity), his invitation prompted me to develop the presentational form I still use — “an illuminated demonstration,” in which a carousel slide projector throws my visual poems up on a screen, while I, as their author, standing behind the audience, declaim a nonsynchronous, voice-over narration that is filled, not with specific explanations but general concepts that the audience may or may not choose to relate to what they see. Thirty years ago, I had only enough slides to fill a single carousel tray; now I can fill several and often project two different sets of images simultaneously. One of my dreams is that someday I’ll be given a gallery installation with several projections, each representing a particular phase of my visual poetry.

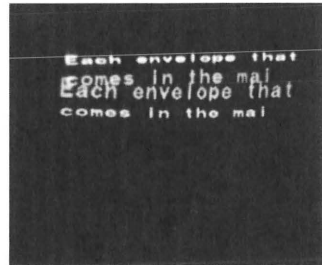
Since a book’s worth of visible poems existed almost from the beginning, I decided with instinctive confidence, early in 1968, to dedicate *Visual Language* to my forward-looking teacher at college, S. Foster Damon (who had four decades before written a pioneering critical book about William Blake), and even announced the dedication that February at Foster’s 75th birthday party. Copies of my collection were submitted to several publishers, some of whom had previously issued books of mine; none of them took it. By 1970 I

reluctantly recognized that commercial publishers in America were not yet hospitable to visual poetry. (This is still true today, alas, even though this sort of poetry by now has been published periodically and exhibited widely.) It was thus inevitable that *Visual Language* should be published under the imprint of Assembling Press, which I had co-founded that summer, with each of the fourteen letters of the title horizontally extended to resemble a line of poetry and thus the whole counting as a sonnet (how literary!). In printing my own book, I had two ulterior motives: to see this work reviewed (it wasn't) and to have enough copies to distribute to friends and anthologists. With people in both those last categories the work had more success — indeed, too much success with the latter, who for years made my work the token visual representative, to the unfortunate exclusion and at times resentment of colleagues doing good work.

II

In recent years, the issue of canon formation has attracted a great deal of attention, [reflecting] approaches [that] mandate modes of thinking which urge distance and skepticism, modes which actively call into question the implicit assumptions of any enterprise or institution, and which actively seek to determine the presence and nature of hierarchies. Alan Nadel, *Invisible Criticism* (1988)

The publication of *Visual Language* also forced me to consider alternative ways of producing visible poetry that would be similarly non-syntactic (in contrast to a rebus). I tried to make my own visual alphabet, which is to say a poem for each letter — a challenge that other visual poets have completed. Some of these were reprinted in my second collection, *I Articulations* (1974). I also compiled collections of synonyms that were then visually enhanced, such as the “Live-Kill” pair (1972). Another new development, begun in 1970, was the handwritten visual poem whose words flow at various irregular angles, such as “The East Village” (1970-71). Here I wanted to get away from the centered space and upright perceptual approach of my earlier work. Since my mind tends to be more inventive with materials than imaginative about events, I chose a familiar subject: the neighborhood in which I then lived. As my theme was the variousness of the individual side streets — each having its own characteristic spatial qualities, its own details and its own sounds — I devoted one page



of language and space to each block. I thought of hiring a professional calligrapher to redo my peculiar handwriting, but her single sample reminded me too much of the rigors of linotype, and that was precisely what I was trying to avoid. Once again, the best solution was letting the work reveal my own hand.

I originally wanted Assembling Press to publish "The East Village" as a single book, on large 11 by 17" pages. However, since twelve images seemed insufficient for a book, even in such a large format, I eventually incorporated the work into the 7 by 10" pages of *I Articulations*. A later, longer handwritten poem, "Portraits from Memory" appeared as an entire 35-page book (1975), in which each page contains a verbal-visual portrait of a woman I might have known. Here, as elsewhere in my work, the titles of individual pieces tend to be rather explicit. I had always thought that my best visual poems should appear in enlarged forms, not only to make them available for gallery exhibitions but also to enhance their retentive (afterimage) capabilities. Back in 1970, I made a large photostat of "Concentric" for a two-person exhibition. In the summer of 1974, I took a silkscreening course which resulted in a few enlarged prints, but since my technical competence remained limited, in the following year I commissioned a printmaker to produce *Word Prints*, a set of seven 26 by 40" prints including "Live-Kill," "Disintegration," "Echo [negative]," "Truth," "Black-White." By 1976, I had gotten into photolinen, with images even larger than the prints, and had them stretched, much like paintings, over wooden bars. First exhibited in New York in 1977, these last works were scheduled to be included in a Guggenheim Museum visual poetry exhibition that was announced for the late 1980s before being postponed into oblivion.

III

But those works which are truly avant-garde are by their very nature apt to be a little strange to most viewers at the time of their origin, even to seem unpopular or elitist because they simply do not fit the establishment's norms. Dick Higgins, *Horizons* (1984)

By the time my third collection of short poems, *Illuminations* (1977), appeared, I felt that my previous ways of making poetry were no longer fertile; the new variations were no better than my earlier work and did not advance beyond it in any discernible way. As my aesthetics incorporate an ethics of transcendence, not only of my

previous work but of myself, I needed to go on to something else. Two new solutions for poetry came to mind in the summer of 1979. The first I call "Strings," which are extended lines of letters composed of overlapping words. To be precise, each new word incorporates at least three or, in one earlier case, two letters of the preceding word without duplicating any word. Typed out, these strings are roughly 100 inches long and they have been published in literary journals with their extended lines broken by hyphens. Here is the beginning of "Stringthree":

Stringfiveteranciderideafencerebrumblendivestablismentertaintegerund. . .

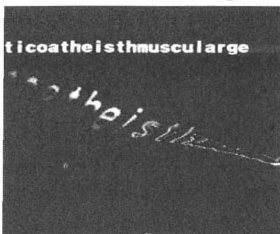
whose opening can be read as:

Stringfi(ve)te(ran)(ci(d)er)(i(de)a)(fen)(cer)eb(rum)(bl(e)n(d)ive)st) . . .

However, remembering my interest in alternatives to the type-written or printed page, I began to think about how else these "Strings" might be published. Since the long word is really one unit that should not be broken apart, I hand-lettered them on continuous adding machine tape and exhibited them in that form.

Early in 1980 I received a modest Visual Arts Planning Grant for Art in Public Spaces from the National Endowment for the Arts. That got me thinking that the best place to "publish" these Strings — to make them available to the public — might be in an extended public space, such as a wide wall or a long hallway, like that at an airport or, better yet, the floor along the edge of a train platform. As I envision the latter, the letters should be brass and they should be embedded in the platform floors with their bottoms positioned away from the train, perhaps two feet in from the edge of the platform; and I calculate that if these letters were 4" high, in a lowercase condensed typeface, the piece would be 200 feet long, which is roughly the length of a New York City subway station. Because these Strings are linguistically difficult, they cannot be fully comprehended in a few minutes. In this respect they differ from most public sculptures or wall murals: they need an audience with time to spare — people waiting for a train. I imagine that travelers will observe the section in front of them, fully aware that, if disturbed by friends or by the oncoming train, the work — with all its variations on the overlapping principle — will be available to them again when they return to the station. I wrote a String in French and others in German and Swedish to see how the same techniques would work in another language, but also because I hoped that sponsors in Paris, Berlin, Montreal or Stockholm might be interested. To





several American cities that have recently held competitions for public art, I have made proposals; none has scored yet. My assumption is that just as it took me years to publish my poems in books, so it will take years for them to appear in public spaces.

IV

*But one thing that is evident, that is inherent in the concept of a pattern poem, is its unsuitability for any sustained argument of emotional persuasion. Its appeal is immediate and involves the recognition of the image. Dick Higgins, *George Herbert's Pattern Poems* (1977)*

Whereas the Strings are not visible poetry in any strict sense but verbal poems whose optimal form of publication is visually unusual, especially for poetry (and like other visual poems cannot be easily declaimed), the other new development in my poetry is somewhat closer to my earlier work. I began by putting individual words in each of the four corners of the rectangular page, attempting to discover how four spatially distant words can make more than the sum of their parts. As before, once I determined my constraint, I did numerous variations. Sometimes, the four words reinforce one another through complementary relationships; other times, one word stands out from the others precisely because it is not a complement — an antonym, say, or perhaps a word that comments critically upon the other three. Sometimes the words cohere in terms of sound, other times in terms of visual qualities, such as length or common neology. In any case, the reader is forced to tilt his or her head, or physically move the body in ways unusual for poetry appreciation; the reader is prompted to read where and how he or she has not read before. Ideally, in pages so dominated not by black but white, the *poetry* arises between the words. These new poems were dedicated to the composer Anton von Webern, because they descend from my love and experience of his style of an aural pointillism informed by linguistic rigor.

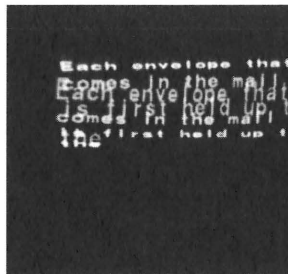
Later I made two more sets of poems in this vein — one set with eight words to each rectangle and then another with sixteen words within each frame; and in these as well, the words within each poem relate to one another in numerous ways. While I feel that four words to a page may be too sparse for poetry, I am not so sure that the more populous poems are necessarily more poetic. The first selection of these four-word poems, a diminutive chapbook entitled

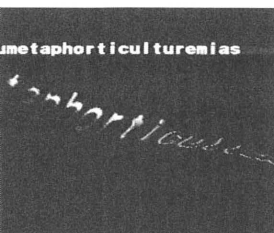
Turfs/Arenas/Fields/Pitches, appeared in 1980. The first selection from all three strains, *Arenas/Fields/Pitches/Turfs*, appeared in 1982; a second selection as *Fields/Pitches/Turfs/Arenas* in 1990. A final collection, eighty pages long, has recently been touring publishers.

V

I want to defend literature. It's a poor man's art. You can think, even when you can't feel comfortable among the cigarred princes and the knockkneed venerables in miniskirts who run our visual arts scene. You can write when you can't afford the fancy fancy materials to make art-canvas, silkscreens, and the right kind of paint. You reach people who can't afford to hang de Koonings, Oldenburgs or Sol LeWitts. Dick Higgins, "Seen, Heard, and Understood" (1972)

Later I put just two non-syntactically connected words adjacent to each other, so that they interact not only in terms of meaning but as simultaneous on the page, which is to say that they make a duet in which, as in music, adjacent notes may assume varying amplitudes. I then placed three discrete words horizontally (though vertical arrays are also feasible); to me these are trios. A further departure involved the forms of the circle (which I had previously used both for "Manifestoes" and for my initial hologram). In these new poems, I set words only around the circle's circumference, all of their bottoms facing the center; and in some of them also cast progressively smaller circles of words parallel to the outer circles. In all these circular poems, there is an abundance of individual words, all relating to one another in various poetic ways, more harmonious than dissonant — all, as in the earlier geometric poems, ideally making more than the sum of their parts. One quality that these last poems share with their rectangular predecessors is that no word is more important to the whole than any other. Later circular poems have continuous letters composed of overlapping words, such as "SEARCHO," which incorporates both "SEARCH" and "CHOSE." A more succinct example is "ITEM," which can also be read as "EMIT" and "MITE." To my mind, these works are *visual poetry*, to cite a category I still find useful (while the language-fragmentation of "concrete" has passed), in that the art very much depends upon how the words are displayed on the page and the poems must thus be read as paintings as are read, not as lines or other units





with beginnings and ends but as visible fields. *Which Witch* (1999) is a chapbook of words that sound alike though spelled differently, with one to three pairs in similar typefaces on the same page, with an afterword explaining why these visual poems represent an inversion of the Chinese process where the same sequence of letters can sound differently.

VI

By "poetry" we must therefore mean always the "art of the word"; so that, when we speak of "visual poetry" we mean to refer absolutely to that type of creation where the verbal element works together actively and indivisibly with the visual element. Gillo Dorfles, "Six Visual Poets" (1990)

Another phase began with a long poem, "Particulars," that was originally published under the pseudonym Jean-Jacques Cory, an elaboration of my grandfather's name. For more than a decade Jean-Jacques published poems only in the form of lists, which was the title of his first book (1974). For his second book, the long poem "Particulars," he found unfamiliar phonemes in familiar words, stretching the parts of each word from one edge of the page to the other, such as: CHO PHO USE

One variation of this strategy was "Partitions" (1981) that appeared on videotape under my own name before it appeared in print. Having already worked with video, I turned to a character-generator, or electronic letter-making machine, whose memory had only eight "pages," enabling me to create sequences that pass through eight separate steps. Thus, the title poem, for instance, becomes:

PARTITIONS/PA/PAR/PART/ART/TIT/IT/PARTITIONS

For the first two sequences, only one word appeared on the screen at a time; for the next two, two words apiece; for the next two, three words apiece and so on, until ten words metamorphose simultaneously and 96 words in sum were poetically enhanced through such discovery of their parts.

Another variation was "Repartitions" (1990) in which the letters available within extended words are divided into squares that are either four letters by four, or five by five. (Neither smaller nor larger numbers work as well.) Yet another variation, currently in progress, involves additional letters appearing one at a time. Here the idea is that the next letter redirects whatever semantic flow had previously

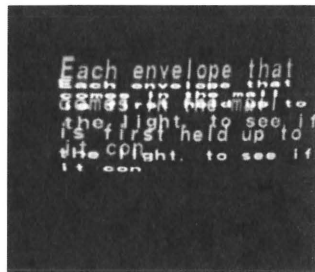
been established. First you see BRA, then BRAN, then BRAND, then BRANDY. Or PI, PIN, PINT, PINTO. One quality I like about these poems is the discoveries come from combining chance with rigor before making choices that generally reflect a desire for wit and surprise, which is another way of defining my poetic style. These last poems also offer me another possibility for live presentations, especially in intimate (coffeeshop) settings, in which I put along a horizontal board a sequence of individual pages with eight-inch high letters (ink-jet printed one to a page), the addition of a new letter (page) resembling a magic-trick in literally changing the prior semantic effect.

I later made Spanglish Repartitions by discovering English words with longer Spanish words. A somewhat similar sequence is "InSerts," in which capital letters are used to reveal unexpected short words within longer ones: CrumBled, PhenoMenOn, Ass-AssINation, GrasShopper, GeogRapHer, TemperAte, etc. As I add nothing to these words other than capitalization, they might be called "Found Poems," to use a category initiated by my Canadian colleague John Robert Colombo; but since capitalization is essentially a visual enhancement, I'll stick with the epithet Visual Poetry.

VII

The question for an audience to ask, when confronted by an exemplative or other non-cognitive work, is not the usual "Who did this and why," but the newer "What is this and how does it work?"
Dick Higgins, "An Exemplativist Manifesto" (1976)

Almost as early as my experiments with words, I began to consider whether I could write poems and stories composed of numerals alone. That hypothesis forced me in turn to think about the fundamental difference between poetry and fiction, even on avant-garde fringes. Whereas the former tends to concentrate both image and effect, fiction creates a world of related activity, which is to say movement from one place to another, or narrative, while nonfiction prose, to introduce yet another term, is generally syntactic sequences of words about an extrinsic subject. At a time when many literary theorists have tried to blur the differences among poetry, fiction and prose, I consider the distinctions important and these definitions applicable in nearly all cases.





Though most of my initial numerical works would be classified as fiction (and then as numerical art, to introduce a term apart from literature), a few were poems, such as "1024," which incorporates both the parts and the factors of that variously divisible number, or "Indivisibles," which is a visually diffuse field of numbers whose common property is that nothing can be divided into any of them (except, of course, themselves and one). In addition, these number-pieces realize an empirical ideal that, though aesthetically heretical, has long interested me — that all the artistic activity (in this case, numerical relations) that one identified in the work could be *verified* by another observer and yet be rich enough to be appreciated again and again.

Numbers: Poems & Stories (1976) reprints several works in a large newsprint format, while *Numbers Two* (1977) collects several more in an envelope. *Exhaustive Parallel Intervals* (1979) is a 160-page novel in which a single complicated structure is exhaustively developed. A principal difficulty in communicating this work, I belatedly discovered, is that audiences must be *numerate* to comprehend and respond to them, much as they must be *literate* to read and respond to modernist poetry and fiction.

VIII

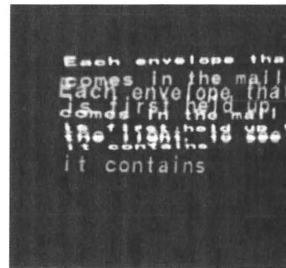
Words need not be the building blocks of fiction, or sentences the glue, or paragraphs the frames, or human beings the "characters"; for realized fiction, no matter how unusual, cannot but create its own subject, its own style, its own "events," its own life. Richard Kostelanetz, "Twenty-Five Fictional Hypotheses" (1969)

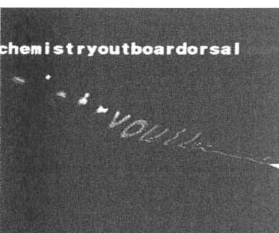
In doing poetry I had already discovered the idea of constraints so severe that they would prevent me from using language in familiar forms. Very much like meter in traditional poetry, the constraints I chose also encouraged puzzle solving and other forms of linguistic playfulness. Early in 1968, I began to think about a similarly severe constraint for writing fiction; and after a few abortive experiments, I hit upon the hypothesis of writing a story with no more than two words to a paragraph. For a subject, I chose the conveniently familiar one of boy meets girl. This plot appears frequently in my fiction, not because I have anything particularly profound to say about heterosexual encounters but because a familiar, transparent subject makes both myself and my readers more aware of the formal issues that really interest me. Once the two-word paragraphs of "One

Night Stood" were drafted, I typed them out, indenting alternate lines; and the following winter I realized that each two-word phrase could take up the entire page of a small-format book, thereby expanding the story into a minimal novel (that was not published until 1977).

In the summer of 1969, I discovered how to make visual fiction, realizing an implication of my much-reprinted "Football Forms" — that images in sequence could tell a story whose temporal rhythm, whose narrative, is based upon the time a typical reader takes to turn the page. That perception informed not only my alphabet novella, *In the Beginning* (1971), but also my initial abstract fictions — those consisting only of lines, lacking words, save for their titles. That summer I also drafted the theoretical statement, "Twenty-Five Fictional Hypotheses," which suggests, among other notions, that anything can be used to tell a story, not only nonsyntactic language but visual materials as well. Of course, I practiced what I preached, creating the sequences that appear in *Short Fictions* (1974). Early on, to repeat, I identified a fundamental difference between poetry and fiction, even on the experimental extremes: Whereas the former tends to concentrate both image and effect, fiction creates a world of related activity.

A further development in my storytelling is the work composed of sequential four-sided symmetrical line-drawings that metamorphose in systemic sequence. Begun in 1974 these "Constructivist Fictions," as I call them to acknowledge a debt particularly to Moholy-Nagy (on whom I edited a book a few years before), quickly became two collections of short stories that were published soon after they were written, *Constructs* (1975) and *Constructs Two* (1978), and two ladder-books each with a single narrative, *Modulations* (1975) and *Extrapolate* (1975). Much later I self-published several other collections in limited photocopied and velobound editions: *Constructs Three* (1991), *Intermix* (1991), *Constructs Four* (1991), *Flipping* (1991), *Constructs Five* (1991), *Fifty Constructivist Stories* (1991) and *Constructs Six* (1991). Constructivism became the subtitle of two similarly squarebooks, *Tabula Rasa* (1978) and *Inexistences* (1978), whose pages beyond the title are blank, implicitly suggesting that they could contain (or do contain invisibly) the same kind of sequences. (Johanna Drucker, apparently unaware of the context established by my constructivist books, insists in her *The Century of Artists' Books* [1996]





that these should be read as “suprematist”! That mistake scarcely exhausts her ignorance evident in her criticism about my work.) A variation on this constructivist theme is *And So Forth* (1979), in which the geometric images, by contrast, are *not* perfect symmetries and their order is *not* fixed. Visual fictions resemble comic strips in having framed elements — panels, so to speak — but in visual fiction the elements are usually entire pages, because the narrative depends upon the reader physically turning the book’s paper, which is quite different from moving his eyes from one panel to another.

In the summer of 1970, I drafted another verbal fiction, “Openings & Closings,” which remains in one crucial respect the most conventional imaginative piece I have ever written — it contains full sentences! Nonetheless, it resembles my other verbal fictions in observing a truncating constraint; for whereas the earlier stories had one or two words to a paragraph, here I decided to suggest, within single sentences, either a story that might follow or one that could have gone before. The isolated sentences were literally either the openings (of hypothetically subsequent stories) or the closings (of hypothetically previous stories). These could be considered incomplete stories, it is true; yet it was my aim to make a single sentence be artistically sufficient (and let readers imagine the rest). As there is no intentional connection between any particular opening and any closing, my visual solution was setting the two kinds of stories alternately in two different styles of type — italics for the openings, roman for the closings, thanks to the IBM Compositor available at the time — with plenty of white space between them; a book of them, in this form, appeared in 1975. Invited, in 1976, to exhibit “Openings & Closings” in a gallery, I typed the sentences out on individual cards — one card to a sentence — again using italics for the openings and roman type for the closings. These cards were then scattered, initially over a display board and later around a gallery’s walls. The experience of sentences visually displayed becoming different from reading those in a book.

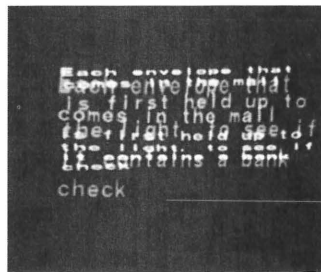
In 1979, I began drafting “Epiphanies” which are likewise only one sentence in length, in this case meant to be a revelatory moment — the epiphany in the James Joycean sense — of an otherwise imaginary story. I would offer them to magazines with the advice to select whichever ones they like best and design them to their taste. The most inventive solution by far appeared in the early 1980s in

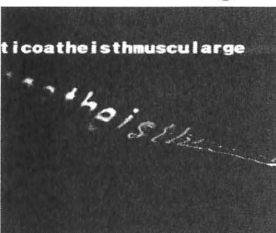
Portland Review, an undergraduate literary magazine, where the designer, who never introduced himself or herself to me, used various typefaces to put several visibly separate stories on a single page. This sort of composition became more feasible with computer-generated typography.

Another visual fiction, *Reincarnations* (1981), draws upon a single 8 x 10" photograph of myself, cut into eighty squares, and then recomposed in various faintly representational ways, each of the sixty-four images implicitly suggesting another version of my reborn facial features. As there is no development within the images, this is less a linear fiction than an episodic one. I cut apart another photograph, this a view of the Brooklyn Bridge whose left side mirrored its right side, to make systemic sequences that were either twenty-one or forty-one images in length. Though some of these sequences, collectively titled "Recall," appeared in literary and art journals, the whole never became the book I initially had in mind.

Later visual fictions depend upon the desktop computer's electronic ability to do rapidly the kinds of variously inventive typography that once took hours with "Letrasets," "Photolettering" and the like. *Minimal Fictions* (1994) contains stories no more than three words in length in various typefaces, in different sizes, in various shapes. With several stories to a page, all visibly separate from one another, this book in sum has nearly five hundred discrete fictions in its eighty pages. In *Openings* (forthcoming), full individual sentences, each the opening of a hypothetical story, assume several extended shapes within individual pages. Technically, each of these stories could be considered a panel, albeit eccentric and various in shape, within a single page, because in these visual fictions the narratives are autonomous, rather than continuous. I've begun working similarly on "1001 Single-Sentence Stories" and "Epiphanies," both of which could become exhaustive book-length collections.

I confront the issue of panels again in *TRAN\$MATIONS* (1998), "Poetry-Film Storyboards" that are initially arrayed as frames on a single page. Here I wanted to write storyboards, as animators call them, or image frames for successive images of words whose semantic would change with the shift of a single letter within the word. Thus, SOLO, SILO, SILT, GILT. However, since I





string diagonal

wanted to suggest the pixilation that animators can generate as one set of lines dissolves into another, I asked the intern designer Eun-Ha Paek to make intermediate images in which the changing letters overlap. Thus, in the first change just noted, the second letter in the intermediate image is the letter I superimposed over the letter O, which is a printed semblance of pixilation. Regardless of whether these actually become films, I thought the text-images could stand as pages in a visual book. (This poem was later published in *Visible Language* 30.3 as a “flip book” running on the edges of the text pages much as some of my video poems are running in this issue.)

IX

Part of the reason that Duchamp's objects are fascinating while Picasso's voice is fading is that the Duchamp pieces are truly between media, between sculpture and something else, while a Picasso is readily classifiable as a painted ornament. Dick Higgins, “Intermedia” (1965)

Late in 1975, I was invited to be a guest artist at the Synapse video studio of Syracuse University. Here I worked not with a single engineer, as I had at WXXI-FM and at subsequent audio studios, but with an institutional staff of young instructors, graduate assistants and undergraduates. With their help, I realized video versions of four fictional or experimental prose texts already available on audiotape: “Excelsior,” “Plateaux,” “Openings & Closings” and “Recyclings.” Not until I returned to a video studio in 1979 did I discover a video technology whose artistic possibilities have scarcely been realized — the character-generator, which is the machine that electronically creates letters appearing on the television screen, most familiarly in the credits at the end of a program.

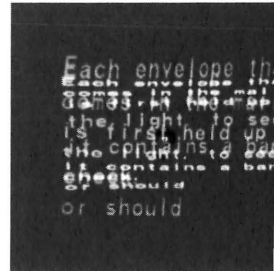
Initially, I worked with experimental prose and fiction, adding a footnote-like explanatory text to my recital of “Declaration of Independence,” and then letters alone for setting my single-sentence “Epiphanies” in various static typographical arrays, white letters against a dark background, mostly one story to an image. Not only did the structure duplicate an idea I had developed earlier in a film composed entirely of words, which thus must be read, quite rapidly, to be “seen,” but also the common joke is that these imageless films and tapes are “all titles, no action.” It could also be said that my format resembled book pages, on the assumption that the standard small television screen resembled the pages of a book (in

contrast to the more enveloping screen of a moviehouse), thus favoring imagery that was intimate and devoid of excessive detail. Finally, I made video poems, first with *Partitions* (1981), discovering, as noted before, short words that are embedded within longer words, in increasingly complicated arrays and later video poems that depended upon words in kinetic relationships.

Two constraints — two negative assumptions — favored from the beginning in my video poetry were that the television set must be used for presenting images other than the solo talking heads that predominate in public transmissions, and then structures other than the sequential collages favored by most “video artists.” In video as in poetry, there was no need to duplicate what others were doing, no matter how opportunistic, in poetry as in video, such aesthetic butt-kissing might be.

The next development in my video poetry began in 1985 with a series of almost annual residencies at the Experimental TV Center in Owego, New York. Here, working with Hank Rudolph and Peer Bode, I had access first to slightly more sophisticated character-generators or electronic letter-making machines. Instead of a single machine, I now have two, with different typefaces, each able (unlike before) to do smaller letters as well as full capitals. These character-generators also have electronic memories that allow me to store a large number of successive images, or pages, that could then be summoned back while the video recording tape is running. Attached to this system is a tape drive that can store on a single “data-cartridge” cassette as many as three hundred separate pages of text, any or all of which can be random-accessed.

The ETC studio offered processing equipment that facilitates such kinetic moves as dividing the screen between two sets of letters or adding color backgrounds that can be electronically changed as we record the visual poems onto video tape. Thanks to rescanning, or the process of transferring an image from a television screen, we can do more radical image-modification. I also use the so-called text programs of an Amiga 500 computer to generate letters that, as they move on screen, make and unmake words. As is my custom in guest residencies, I try to exploit artistic possibilities within technological limitations, rather than enter a studio with detailed schemes to be realized at any cost.



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With these technologies, I made a series of short pieces whose only content is language, some only a few seconds long, others perhaps a minute, and thought of these as *Kinetic Writings* (1988), to quote the title of a twenty-two minute tape collecting the best of them. But I also realized that the bulk of them could be divided into two categories echoing my traditional distinctions — “Video Poems,” which realize a conciseness of image and effect, and “Video Fictions,” which imply movement from one place to another, which is to say narrative. That pair of hour-long one-person tapes, when done, would represent, as far as I can tell, the first of their literary kinds in America. Thanks to the data-cartridge technology, along with the character-generator’s capacity to make letters “crawl” in an evenly paced horizontal line across the screen, I could cast on tape the “strings” I had written several years before. Thus, *Stringtwo*, which has a two-letter overlap, opens with the following:

Stringwomenteroticystitisolatenderotogeniceapplesbiannultimaterminuse. . .

whose opening can be read as: **string(wom)ent(er)ol(tl(cly)stit(is)olate) . . .**

Once these extended strings of letters were entered into the data-cartridge, they could be continuously unwound (and recorded) in several ways: with just a single stream of letters running across the screen, at one of three available speeds, at times with colors changing in either the letters or the background; with an enlargement of the middle letters running as a counterpoint either above or below; with on-screen windows that contain changing fragments of the continuous imagery. Excerpts from these shorter strings were incorporated into a thirty-minute tape titled *Videostrings* (1989). The entire German text became *Stringsieben* (1989, 12’), while *Stringtwo* (1990) alone runs well over thirty-five minutes.

I also used the character-generator and data-cartridge to put on screen the text of *Turfs/Arenas/Fields/Pitches*, whose video version opens with those four words arrayed in the four corners of a single page and contains sixty more poems similarly structured. Attractive though such verbal chords were in theory, they were more problematic in practice, especially on first hearing, and what was difficult with four-word poems became even less feasible with eight-word poems composed to a similar spatial principle (*Grounds/Gridiron/Scrubs/Vocabularies/Tracks/Proscenia/Lists/Theaters*). So it seemed appropriate to put the words of all these poems on screen not in their original geometric forms, but as horizontal lines, for durations roughly corresponding to their appearance on audio-track. (The videotape concludes with arrays of sixteen-word

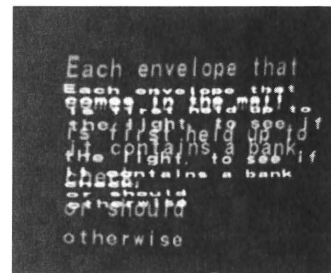
poems, likewise similar in structure, but now silent, because they have not yet been aurally recorded. Since this videotape has three sections, I decided to title it with an opening word from each section: *Turfs/Grounds/Lawns* (1989, 23').

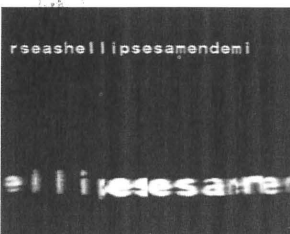
As the soundtrack was processed at the Electronic Music Studio in Stockholm, it was transferred in stereo to the 3/4" master videotape (and copied onto the stereo hifi tracks of VHS tape). Such sound, apart from its picture, is thus best played back not through the single small speaker of a standard television monitor but a stereo system customarily used for records and compact discs. Because the audio track of such videotapes is as important as the pictures, I classify them, unlike the others, as Audio-videotapes, which is an honorific I hope others would find acceptable. (I later used a more complicated video lettering to make visible the text of my audio poem *Onomatopoeia* [1988].) A few years ago I received a query from a woman preparing an master thesis on videotapes produced by published American poets, as distinct on one side from videotapes with literary language and, on the other, from tapes displaying poets as performers. She asked if any other native poets publishing in print had produced their own tapes. She did not know of any others. Nor did I.

X

Literary shape cannot come from life; it comes only from literary tradition, so ultimately from myth. Northrop Frye, "Myth, Fiction, and Displacement" (1961)

A principal thrust of my artistic activity has been working with language and literary forms in media other than small printed pages. While publishing my poetry in the literary magazines that continue to represent the foundation of our culture, I have, in addition, produced drawings, large graphics, audiotapes, videotapes, films, photographic sequences and even proposals for public art, all containing words and/or literary structures such as narrative (as in photographic sequences). Among my purposes has been the discovery of alternative possibilities for both organizing words and then "publishing" that writing (from publicare, to make public), simply to do in these media what could not be done in print. Behind this last thought is my assumption that media other than the printed page are feasible for Literature. Even though I consider myself less interested in expressing a particu-





lar vision or in exploiting an idiosyncratic “look” than in exploring these media for literary experimentation, the results invariably reflected earlier poetic ideas of mine, if not particular poems. I seem to have, as noted before, characteristic ways of handling language that extend from print into other media.

Since I had no official training in any of these media, most of this work was produced in collaboration with professional technicians — at radio stations, electronic music studios, video production facilities and film schools — mostly during invitational residencies. Rather than arriving with a complete vision and an accompanying list of projects, my customary way of working involves defining first the character of the new medium, then identifying the particular potentialities available at the host installation and finally discovering the tastes and competences of the technicians. Once these factors are understood, I generally favor the most optimal technical possibilities.

Working in 1976 with Barton Weiss at Columbia University’s Oxberry animation stand, I made a film of *Openings & Closings* in which words for the stories appear one at a time, with the openings as black type over a white background and the closings as white type over a black background. Collaborating with Peter Longauer, at the time a Columbia University graduate film student and now a distinguished filmmaker, I animated several Constructivist Fictions (1976- 77) to make continuous movement between the images, creating pixilation unique to film animation through the dissolve mechanism, realizing the narrative line mentioned before of movement from one kind of shape to another not through the turning of pages but as a continual visible flow. Both films “adapt” my fictions, so to speak, but in ways quite different from the standard cinematic practice for realizing literature.

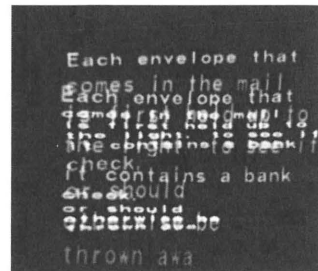
Although I remember clearly the first laser I ever saw, in 1967 at the Bell Laboratories in New Jersey, my recollections of holography are hazier, probably because it little impressed me until a decade later, when I saw a rotating cylindrical (360-degree) white-light transmission hologram. As the three-dimensional image suspended within the cylinder was continually revealing the other side of itself, the impression was not just photographic, like too many other holograms I had seen, but a three-dimensional representation in time that could not be grasped in a single viewing. The cylin-

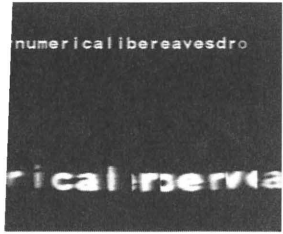
dricial hologram differed as well from a panoramic photograph, where the camera spins-around-an axis, rather than, as in the hologram, focusing-upon-its axis. The second advance in my holographic awe came a few years later, when I saw three-dimensional imagery extend not back from the visible plate, as in most holograms (and three-dimensional photography before them), but forward to points between the plate and the viewer's eye. My third epiphany came from noticing that parts of an image could be hidden from view, forcing the viewer to move, usually from side-to-side, to complete his perception of the whole. I continue to remain impressed by the medium's basic mystery to implant in clear material an image that becomes visible only when illuminated in appropriate ways.

With the first discovery of cylindrical holography in mind, I produced in 1978, during a residency at the Cabin Creek Center in New York City, my first hologram. *On Holography* is a rotating cylinder with five syntactically circular statements that, as the cylinder continually turns to the left, pass endlessly before the viewer's eyes. In each of the statements, the words were about holography and the ends were tied to each other to make a continuous circle:

- A) . . . holos = complete; gram = message; . . .
- B) . . . representation indepth = hologram. . .
- C) . . . the hologram creates a world of incorporeal activity that exists only within.
- D) . . . the illusion not only of depth but of equal focus to all distances are characteristics particular to holography.
- E) . . . by capturing on photosensitive material the amplitude, the wave-length and, most important, the phases of light reflected off an object a hologram reconstructs as a three-dimensional image. . .

In form and in their self-referential subject, these syntactically circular statements about holography echo the four circles of the visual poem-manifesto introducing *Visual Language*. One difference between the circles of this poem and the hologram is that, whereas the language of "Manifestoes" must be read at angles that some of us find less accessible — upside down or sideways — the circular statements of the continuously revolving hologram remains entirely horizontal. Similarly, whereas the printed poem





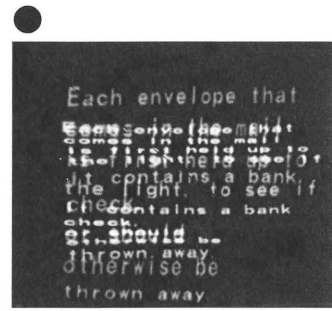
is best read from a location perpendicular to the face of it, the circular poetic hologram lacks fixed perspective, that is, it is equally legible from every side of its stationary base. For the presentation of language, in short, holography offers possibilities unavailable on a flat printed page.

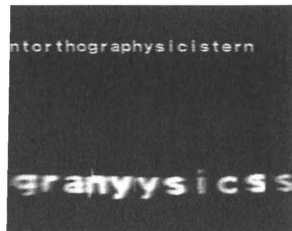
Once *On Holography* was completed, I discovered two problems. The first and most obvious was that I had hardly utilized the medium's capabilities for creating the appearance of depth. Since the words appeared to emerge from behind an invisible door on the right and then pass across the face of the cylinder to disappear behind another invisible door, now on the left. While shorter state-ments, set higher within the hologram, appear to be deeper in space, few would notice a second, more complicated perceptual problem that must be described in fuller detail.

I thought initially of stacking the statements into a single pyramid, with the shortest one on top and the longest one at the bottom, but to fill the cylinder with only a single rotating image struck me as clumsy (and unholographic). If the words at the bottom level of a single pyramid were to move across the viewer's eyes at a legible speed, the upper levels would have been boringly slow. Conversely, to key the motion of words to an upper level would have necessitated making the bottom levels illegibly fast. I decided instead that each line should revolve independently, in the ratios of 1:2:3:4, counting from the bottom up, so that statement #D (twenty words) would be seen twice for every rotation made by #E (twenty-nine words), and then have #C (twelve words) be seen thrice, and #B and #A (each four words) be seen four times during each rotation of the cylinder. (This was realized by having each circle of words filmed individually on a drum to exactly equal lengths. However, the film of #D was step-printed, as they say, to omit alternate frames, and then duplicated to equal the length of #E. The film of #C was step-printed to omit two of every three frames, and then triplicated; the single film of #B and #A was step-printed to omit three of every four frames and then quadruplicated. These four films were then superimposed to make a single continuous film whose images were then anamorphically compressed into vertical slivers that comprise the holographic film that lines the inside surface of the exhibition cylinder. (The imagery on this film becomes apparent only when illuminated from below by an uncoated, single-filament lightbulb.)

While this restructuring of the holographic representation of five statements may have been conceptually clever, the inadvertent result was a remarkably unclever illusion [no, delusion]. Instead of moving at different speeds, the letters in five rows appear to move roughly in unison. (Twenty-nine at the lowest level is roughly equal to two times twenty and three times twelve.) Thus, the viewer initially perceives all five lines as belonging to a single rotating pyramid, all contrary to fact! If the viewer examined the relationships among the lines closely, he or she would realize that a four-word statement could not possibly rotate at the same frontal speed as a twenty-nine-word statement. Likewise, if the viewer made vertical comparisons among the lines, he or she would notice that whenever the word “holos” appeared in the top line, a sequence or cycle, of four different words would appear directly below it in the bottom line. However, few viewers would “read” *On Holography* that meticulously, alas, in part because the tradition of perceptually photographic holograms accustoms them to a more instantaneous kind of looking. Instead, this hologram offers visual-verbal experience that can be appreciated only in time and is, in that respect, perceptually closer to film or, of course, literature.

When *On Holography* was initially exhibited in a crowded group show at New York’s Museum of Holography, I noticed that it could scarcely compete with the pseudo-photographs whose images were quickly recognized, whose ideas were readily grasped. On Holography not only required more patience literally to be “seen,” but it posed perceptual problems that were not immediately apparent. To make its presence more competitive in the gallery, I decided to add a multitrack audiotape accompaniment of five voices reciting the same five lines of words repeatedly and simultaneously at a rate roughly matching the rotational speed of the hologram, so that viewers could hear in five-voice unison the same words they saw simultaneously in five-line unison. If nothing else, they could hear that “hologram = representation in depth” occurred far more often than the longest statement. I figured that perhaps the addition of an aural-verbal element might generate questions about visual-verbal perception.





XI

Literature may have life, reality, experience, nature, imaginative truth, social conditions or what you will for its content; but literature itself is not made out of these things. Poetry can only be made out of other poems; novels out of other novels. Literature shapes itself, and is not shaped externally: the forms of literature can no more exist outside literature than the forms of sonata and fugue and rondo can exist outside music. Northrup Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957)

To produce a second poetic hologram in 1985, I first had to win another residency competition, this sponsored by the Dennis Gabor Laboratory at the Museum of Holography for "artists who have had limited or no experience in making holograms, yet have a strong body of work in a different medium." An invitation in hand, I decided to work more with the medium's awesome capability for generating literal three-dimensional experience. One difference between the Gabor Laboratory and Cabin Creek was that the former had only pure holography, where original images were shot directly with laser light; there was no intermediate transfer onto movie film. Since holography transcends stereography in allowing the viewer to look literally around and behind a foreground image, my first notion was to put words behind other words, thus requiring the viewers to move their bodies up and down, if not from side-to-side, to find back words that would complement the front words; for one of my aims was realizing an unfamiliar kind of *reading* indigenous to holography. (The trade epithet is "laser limbo," which differs only in degree from the physical activity normally associated with reading — turning the page.) I also thought of working with letters whose parts (lines) evolved out of one another, so that as you moved to the left, say, the left-hand vertical line of an "E" would become the right-hand vertical line of an "H" all while the middle horizontal lines would flow into each other.

However, Dan Schweitzer, the same holographer who gave me that vision of words behind words, also showed me how images could be projected forward to rootless points between the viewer's eye and the hologram's plate, and then how the side parts of this forward-image could be made to fall outside the viewing field. In a subsequent conversation, the holographer Scott Lloyd gave me the structure of a two-sided plate, with different images on each side. Necessarily illuminated from behind, this would become a trans-

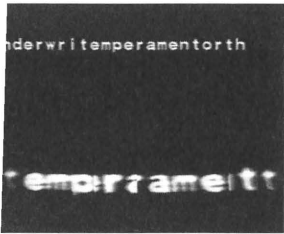
mission hologram, in contrast to a reflection hologram that is illuminated from the front. When the Museum of Holography assigned me to work with Fred Unterseher, the co-author of the standard *Holography Handbook* (1982), we decided to put each set of words on four planes. Here, as in other media work, I was dependent upon professionals to tell me what the machinery could do (or what they could do with the technology).

Once I conceived this last form of two sets of words on four planes apiece, the question became how best to fill it with language. In recent visual poems, I had been using the form of constellations of individual words that relate to one another in various ways; that seemed appropriate here. Which collections of words would be most efficacious? I thought in terms of antitheses such as "love/hate" or "good/evil" or "white/black," but my biases toward visual symmetries found such plus-minus combinations wanting. If one side were more sympathetic than the other, in prejudicial ways, I could have made of this imbalance a hologram in which the imagery on the plus side came forward, while the other (minus-side) retreated.

Though I might later use that out-in form, I chose instead to project both sides forward with an antithesis of equal value: Warm and Cold. Upon those pegs I wrote thirty-five additional pairs of words of roughly equal length: Summer/Winter, Chaud/Froid, Char/Numb, Love/Hate, Devil/Ghoul; Flammable/Frigorific, Eat/Diet, Febrile/Niveous, Mead/Beer, Home/Jail, Incandesce/Glaciare, Pussy/Putty, Calid/Gelid, Head/Feet, Bonfire/Icecube, Punctual/Dilatory, Ecstasy/Stasis, Palm/Pine, Reverberate/Evaporate, Conflagration/Congelation, Erect/Supine, Sultry/Boreal, Knife/Spoon, Sanguinary/Sanguinity, Leap/Dive, Ginger/Yoghurt, Bubbly/Sleepy, Right/Left, Patrimony/Parsimony, Demagogue/Politician, Independence/Subordination. Seethe/Shiver, Scramble/Leisure, Affection/Obedience, Antinomies/Congruences.

While I wanted through words alone to make one side feel warmer/colder than the other, I also wanted to use striking words in unfamiliar relationships. If I were to typeset each pair in a typeface unique to it, each word, in addition to contributing to its field, could be connected to a word in the opposite field, in terms not only of antithetical meaning but similar typeface — not only semantically but visually.





I figured that since the last twenty pairs were verbally the most interesting (and less obvious), they should go to the back planes. The next ten pairs should go on the planes one up from the back, on the third planes forward should go the first five pairs, and on the front planes, as far forward as possible, should go only “warm” and “cold.” Also, each of the two front words would be so large, and so far forward that they would never be entirely visible — parts would fall outside the viewing field. Thus, if the viewer deciphered the letter “A,” he or she would be prompted to move to the left to find the “W” and to the right to find the “R” and “M.” Another preliminary consideration was to make black letters on an illuminated field, which would make a shadowgram (that visually echoed the photograms of my artistic hero Moholy-Nagy).

To realize the sort of forward projection I wanted, it was necessary to make a hologram of a hologram. This technique required locating an “image plane,” which would be the level with the greatest illumination. Confronting the question of where to place the image plane, Fred Unterseher favored the second levels, each with five words; I insisted that the back group receive the clearest focus, as those words required the most illumination for legibility (in part because they had to be visible behind other words), but also because within my structure of verbal values I could allow for the forward planes being increasingly less illuminated (and less legible). One risk of putting images behind one another is losing the back row, but one advantage that words have over abstract imagery is that recognition of a few letters prompts the viewer to find the remainder of the word (and thus move beyond an immediate perception). A second problem involved the thickness of the front letters, which were initially set boldface four inches high with scarce space between them. Since we feared that even with less illumination they would block out the back planes, we decided to rescreen those letters at forty-percent benday dots. However, when that turned out to lack presence, Samuel R. Delany, the literary colleague to whom *Antitheses* is dedicated, proposed increasing their visibility with strips of black tape along the letters’ edges (and then, bless him, he actually sat down and started taping!).

One inadvertent result is that the words on the three front planes have a peculiar visual-verbal status. As holographic imagery differs from photographic and few viewers are accustomed to per-

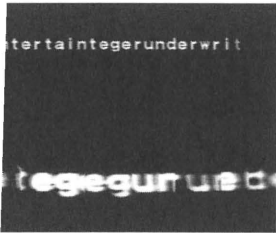
ceiving objects floating unattached in space (illustrating the holographic truth that visualized objects exist only in the eye), these words are not immediately seen. (Indeed, some people discover much faster than others that words are sharing their space, so to speak. A few won't discover them until a guide physically positions their head in an appropriate place.) For each plane forward, the letters lose density, their thick bold lines becoming progressively more vaporous (an effect that must be seen to be believed). My sense is that words which appear partially dematerialized have a status that I have yet to understand. Clearly they require more time to be "read," while they individually lose semantic presence (and thus become more dependent upon others in the field for their communicative value). I also wonder how many will recognize that every word in one field has a typographic mate on this other side, for this cross-referencing over opposite sides of a physical space also transcends photographic/bookish perception.

The two front words, poetically the least interesting, are perceived initially as lines that flash into the visual field as the viewer's eyes move from side-to-side, in the course of such movement discovering yet other letters, no more than two of which are visible at any time. The fear is that viewers accustomed to expecting pseudo-photographs will never examine these mysterious floating lines. Perhaps *Antitheses* has turned out to be as perceptually difficult as its predecessor. Another result of such extreme dimensionality is a holographic image that cannot be still-photographed adequately. Because cameras are designed to focus upon a particular level, especially in such darkness, it would be more effective (but less feasible) to film it through a succession of focus-changes; and because standard cameras have only one eye, rather than the two of most human beings, every picture loses much. Perhaps such nonphotographability (sic) should be considered a sign of holographic integrity.

Within the context of my poetry, I think *Antitheses* the best of the constellations in any medium, partly because in three dimensions, with the spatial experience of language, I can better realize my earlier poetic idea of complementary words within a single visual frame, as well as my general aesthetic of reading in unfamiliar ways and doing with new media what could not be done in print. This complements, even surpasses, not only my visual



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poems but also *On Holography* in revealing the medium's capacities for unusual verbal-visual experience.

XII

I would like to suggest that the use of intermedia is more or less universal throughout the fine arts, since continuity rather than categorization is the hallmark of our new mentality. There are parallels to the Happenings in music, for example in the work of such composers as Philip Corner and John Cage, who explore the intermedia between music and philosophy, or Joe Jones, whose self-playing musical instruments fall into the intermedium between music and sculpture. The constructed poems of Emmett Williams and Robert Fillous certainly constitute an intermedium between poetry and sculpture. Dick Higgins, "Intermedia" (1965)

In 1987, Fred Unterseher and Rebecca Deem invited me to a Hamburg (Germany) installation where they were working. Here we shot a series of image masters with the pulse technology that reduces considerably the set-up time, enabling us to shoot several masters in a few days. However, once I got these masters, I had to deal with the problem of making "transfers," or copies that can be viewed under single-filament (uncoated) light. A holographic master, you see, can be viewed only under laser light; otherwise, it looks like a large sheet of thick cloudy film. Everyone new to holography imagines that copies are made by photographic process, where light passing through a negative produces a positive. While conceptually credible, that assumption is false. What is required is that a hologram be made of a hologram, by situating the master between a laser beam and a photographic plate. Once this arrangement is made and tested, in a procedure taking several days, the door to the lab must be shut until the situation "settles," which is to say that vibrations are eliminated. Once the shot is made, with an extended exposure, the glass plate is then developed, washed, bleached and washed again before being deposited in a "fotoflo." Once removed from the last liquid, the plate is dried, initially with a squeegee and blotting paper, then, say, hung on a line or blown with a hair-dryer. I know, because for a second residency at the Museum of Holography, once my colleague Doris Vila set me up, I did this all myself.

These new holograms deal with withholding parts of words forcing viewers to move to complete their linguistic understanding. For instance, you see a horizontal string of only the letter "A," move

a bit and you see “BR”s, move further and you see “C”s and then “D”s. It becomes apparent that the word represented here is ABRACADABRA. (My Polish colleague Petr Rypson reminds me that the word comes from a Chaldean term that means “perish like the word.” That accounts for its use in sympathetic magic.) Another device has letters appearing in continuously overlapping sequence, from “HO” to “HOG” to “LOG” to “LAP” to “RAG” to “RAP” to “HAP” to “HEP” to “HER,” in sum revealing a multitude of words embedded within HOLOGRAPHER. In another case, the white letters on the black background of “MADAM” slide into the black letters on a white background of “ADAM” over a shifting horizontal divider, creating at one point the letters “MAD” in white on one side of a line that has “AM” on the other. A final work, of the numerical poem “Ambiguity,” has four vertical rows of numerals whose middle parts add from right to left and multiply from left to right, creating on the outer parts pairs of sums that, though they cannot be seen at once, turned out to mirror each other. I call this most recent sequence *Hidden Meanings* (1989) for its various poetic explorations of a certain holographic capability. One way that my holography differs from my video and audio, not to mention printed literature, is that all my holograms can be classified as poetry and prose.

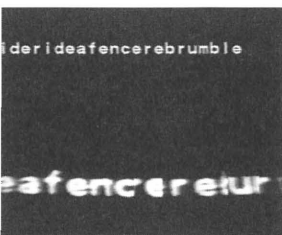
XIII

The water we swim in is our life — and swimming is an art. Any art (from Latin: art — skill) is tested here by how it works in the water. The rest is dross: “gaudyverse” the romantic poets called it. Our world is vast and growing: we always knew it, but now we’re acting upon it, trying to be as complete as each of us uniquely can. We are trying to be altogether together. As the old joke says, the whole of the doughnut is its most valuable part. Dick Higgins, “An Exemplativist Manifesto” (1976)

One fact I should like to note about my creative career is the absence of any early conventional work; there is no juvenalia — no poetry in either traditional or modish forms, no linear fiction, no representational drawings, which is to say, none of the trappings that indicate that I mastered some academic lessons. I began my creative career at an extreme position and have, I think, simply moved only further out. The idea of imitating what is taught in school — or either proving myself or establishing my credibility through the mastery of classroom exercises — has



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never interested me. One reason for this absence is that I came to creative work not from an apprenticeship in poetry and/or fiction and/or visual art, as nearly all creative writers and artists do nowadays, but from the neutral territories of intellectual history and expository prose which, of course, I continue to do as work distinct from my poetry. On the other hand, I think it can be seen that my poetry belongs to a tradition, mostly American, that is concerned with radical inventions within the machinery of poetry — a line that includes Walt Whitman, E. E. Cummings, and Gertrude Stein among the classic Americans; Dick Higgins, Paul Zelevansky, Norman Henry Pritchard II, Bliem Kern, and Harry Polkinhorn among my contemporaries. Indeed, if there is a single ambition for me, it is not to write acknowledged masterpieces or to become a poetry professor, but to be the most inventive poet ever in American literature, forging poetic possibilities that others might choose to develop, perhaps surpassing me in excellence. Even though there are few competitors in such pioneering enterprise, I'm not done yet.

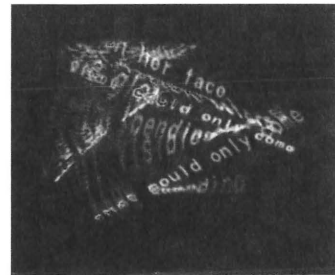
Though superficially diverse, not only in media but styles, my creative works still exhibit certain unifying marks: risk-taking, rigor, clarity, structural explicitness, variousness, empiricism, conceptual audacity, signature, avant-garde ambition, noncommercialism, and high (or late) modernism (rather than "post-modernism"). These qualities might also characterize my critical writing, perhaps because they define my personal temper (and are thus as close as the work can be to being me), as well as my creative concern with innovative structure, which is, to no surprise, a principle theme of my arts criticism and my anthologies. Two goals in mind for both my art and my criticism are that they be more complex and yet more accessible, if only to prove that these aims need not be contradictory.

Just as no one else has produced a body of work like mine, it is doubtful whether anyone else, even a loyal acolyte, has sufficiently various experience to write anything remotely resembling this introduction. I am less interested in being "acceptable" to those who cultivate professional power than popular with those who don't. That accounts for why hundreds of my poems (and my fictions) have appeared in American literary journals. It is not for nothing that poetry such as mine is customarily not included in the textbook anthologies nowadays and why people doing such poetry, even if widely published, are never invited to teach in the M.F.A.

poetry programs. All my creative work also can be seen as the dialectical result of pitting my traditional education and professional experience (with expository writing) against a series of antithetical efforts to transcend conventional forms — to write a poetry of intentionally limited language, to cast words into media other than printed pages, to compose literature with numbers, to multitrack declaimed language, to work in media in which I had no training, etc. Since much of the work involves the mixing of materials, the process of perceiving it customarily combines at least two perceptual modes — the visual with the verbal, the verbal with the aural, the numerical with the visual, the static with the kinetic, etc.; for my work is usually meant to be perceived in more than one traditional way.

It could also be said that I have endeavored, first, to combine my university education in literature and history with a growing interest in music and the visual arts and, second, to test my inventive proclivities against the resistances of several unfamiliar media. This background may explain such idiosyncracies as why my work seems at once so intellectual and so anti-intellectual, or why I am more interested in results than in processes, or why I've never reversed direction by dismissing earlier work as "too radical for me now," or why I find myself so often talking and writing about the work (even drawing upon earlier memoirs, as here), and finally why this essay is as it is.

One might also characterize my art as premeditated, impersonal, experimental and intellectual, although eschewing such traditional symptoms of how intelligence functions in art as abstruse symbolism or allusions to past literature and history. My works are particularly indebted, in different ways, to such precursors as Moholy-Nagy and Theo van Doesburg, in addition to John Cage and Milton Babbitt; and I gladly acknowledge the influence of such earlier cultural movements as constructivism, dada and transcendentalism, in addition to the "intermedia" developments of the past two decades. Given such aesthetic history, it is scarcely surprising that, except for my video art and holograms, I have so far favored black and white as the sole colors indigenous to art, believing that all other hues belong primarily to "illustration."



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XIV

Discovering that history — be it social, political, or literary — belongs to whoever owns the erasers is always a disconcerting lesson, regardless of how frequently one learns it. Alan Nadel, Invisible Criticism (1988)

Though I once said that my creative work made me “a poet,” I now speak of myself as an “artist and writer,” nonetheless wishing that there were in English a single term that combined the two. “Maker” might be more appropriate, its modesty notwithstanding. The variousness of the work confuses not only the art public but also those critics who still expect someone to be just “a poet” or just “a composer” or just “a visual artist,” rather than all of those things, and *much else besides*. The principle problem with person-centered epithets such as “painter” and “writer” is that they become not descriptions but jails, either restricting one’s creative activity or defining one’s creative adventure in terms of one’s initial professional category (e.g., “artist’s books”). As Ad Reinhardt warned, “Art disease is caused by a hardening of the categories.” In truth, anyone realizing a radically different kind of poetry will probably have a radically different kind of poetry career as well. Even so, it should be possible for any of us to make *poems* or *photographs* or *music*, as we wish, and better yet, to have these works regarded, plainly, as “poems” or “photographs” or “music.” Perhaps the sum of my artworks, including poetry, is ultimately about the *discovery of possibilities*, initially in the exploitation of available media, and then in art and, by extension, in oneself as a creative initiator.

XV

Some of us, then, seem, simply, to work in a number of areas because our personal sensibilities lead us to do this. I write, do visual art, compose music, and theorize: all are part of the whole. But neither does it make me one whit better in any of those areas than a poet who only writes haikus, a visual artist who only works with geometric forms, a composer who only does electronic music, or a theoretician who produces no art at all. . . nor, I am arguing, does it necessarily make any one of the areas which I explore suffer, though perhaps I am a better poet than visual artist, or vice versa. Dick Higgins, “On Doing Too Much” (1977)

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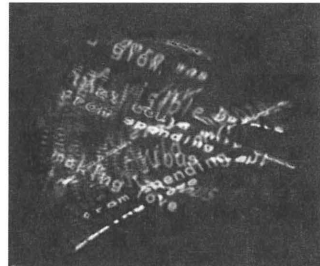
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is an intermedia artist and poet with a long interest in the exploration of the materiality of language. His work ranges from experimental, technologically-based poetry to scholarly history and criticism. His most recent publications include: *Crimes of Culture* (Autonomedia, 1995), *John Cage Explained* (Schirmer, 1996) and *Vocal Shorts: Collected Performance Texts* (Dramatika, 1998).

Abstract

Late twentieth century art (visual) education, in particular urban college art programs, figure in the continuum of questioning authority (authorship, originality and the concrete). This erosion of certainty has pointed faith back to the experiential — consider current debates about “embodied” art experience, for example. While the delicate line between an appealingly non-verbal experience and the disfavored notion of spiritual elevation continues to employ critics, art practice in the classroom can be addressed as the curious fruit of the following (immaterial+material) couplings:

- 1) 60's idealism < > 90's economy
- 2) theoretical writing < > object making
- 3) information < > knowledge
- 4) disposable income < > apprenticeship

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ASCII Classroom

A text dependent investigation of the studio art classroom

Laurel Beth Beckman

Introduction

The synthesized and stylized results from a two year, multi-phase, collaborative effort entitled *Classroom Dynamics*, the ASCII Classroom presents a theoretical and visual text-picture of the process of art education alongside a speculative vision of an ideal classroom. The project performs according to its philosophical basis as it tackles indeterminate entities formerly known to behave in categories. In particular, I parallel two hybrids: word/picture and teacher/student.

What follows is a modest treatise suggesting a reconfiguration of structure through visual and textual language. Text is both my tool and my target, causing some confusion, which I promote. The project includes two “images” — diagrams derived from the *Classroom Dynamics*’s projects — which are produced as ASCII² art (the process of making images out of common keyboard characters). The most accessible form of transmitting “visuals” over the internet, ASCII (art) perfectly “materializes” my aim to collapse image and word, teacher and student, and notably, conventionally appropriate forms for theory and art.

The Battle for Attention I

Late twentieth century (visual) art education, in particular urban college art programs, figure in the continuum of questioning authority. We teachers fancy ourselves as championing the imperative to challenge; but raised arms tell true tales. Just barely perceptible underarm stains attest to the workout our nervous systems get as the recipient of both prongs of a double message. Between the lines of course descriptions and out the sides of our mouths seeps a desire for the status quo. We can’t help it. Status quo in the academy is teacher talks, students listen. If the lesson plan foregrounds alterity and dissent, that’s a good-faith choice that unfortunately implicates the above mentioned seepage. Switch that around — teach conventionally, and hope your students surprise you — and you have a bad-faith option, one that thinks little of yourself, your students, and I dare say, the school.

The image of choice for the successful classroom has been a sea of uplifted arms, high and hungry to respond. Not unlike the swaying antennae of underwater anemone (stuck to a rock and waiting for food). This image, and the model it suggests, has a problem: it doesn’t go anywhere. Serving as an adroit example of the delimitation inherent in the 1 - 2 punch of proposition and resolution, the model also reminds us that urgent questions never get asked, or never politely anyway. It reminds that the sweat under the arms of students, raised and lowered alike, is the sweat of fear: the fear that they just *may* (not) challenge authority.

The more commonly experienced classroom discourse regarding authority looks to imported texts and pictures — their authorship, originality, truth and beauty as safer points of contention. Some of the more interesting and problematic discourse concerns the viability of the concrete. (Using language to debate the relevancy of material is a good one.) This is not your mother's debate about what constitutes reality — this is about whether we need it or not. I suspect that the shift in emphasis from what we see, to what we need, is symptomatic of a wired, tired and insecure commodity culture — simultaneously providing so much and so little. The most cursory look at the multitude of products yielding little real choice, combined with the rabid growth of service-work and self-help industries, reveals a contemporary concern for what we need. The question of what we need now, in art culture, includes such intangibles as the benefits of beauty, the value of relativism and the type of intervention necessary to qualify an appropriated, then manipulated, text/image as newly original.

While we decide what we need, the sister question that recognizes available products, servants and personal limitations is, what will suffice. The case for and against adequacy is primarily a contest between quantity and quality. Numbers first (and the argument against grades) — here, the dull, no frills and down right dowdy status of adequacy presumes a context dependent on linear and quantitative evaluation. This spectrum of adequacy, bracketed by excellence and failure, is easily mapped and without surprise. And though "finding yourself" may still be a goal of higher education, it has surely shriveled next to the goal of finding your spot on that map.

The more glamorous issue of quality takes us to a different notion of adequacy. If we consider quality apart from any external system to rate it, we find an adequacy defined through the experience of the independent beholder. In this light, "good enough for me," transforms from sad resolve (go for the grade) to self-at-the-center affirmation (go for what's relevant for me).

Undervalued and feared as a goal of education, self-satisfaction gets a bad rap. For if faculty are paid to be "Quality Central" — the arbiters and clearing house for what is good — then students must simply mimic or fail. Privileging the ability to recognize, then enhance yourself, is dangerous to every component that keeps teachers in front of classes. The dubiousness of this (QC) protocol is rarely revealed — even in the most progressive of forums, where we would expect any singular truth to be under ritual scrutiny.

The Material and Immaterial, in Light of Each Regular

The erosion of certainty, in general, has pointed faith back to the experiential. In the case of art culture, the current flow of criticism lauding in one way or another an embodied art experience, coupled with the ubiquity of museum educational programs, point to institutions assuming a passive position. That is to say, a great deal of ink these days promotes the possibility that the customer (however unversed) is always right. It remains true, though,

that there are customers and then there are Capital customers, an uppercase "C" for big cash. The most positive *and* negative thing about this moment is that the two may be linked, with educators and critics as facilitators. The delicate line between the appealingly non-verbal (but embodied) art experience and the disfavored spiritual (out of body) experience would seem to need facilitation also, since it too continues to employ teachers and critics. So it follows that actual art practice within the academy can be addressed as the curious fruit of the following (material+immaterial) couplings:

1) 90's economy < > 60's idealism (boomers in post boom)

The remarkable connection between these otherwise strange partners is the scrappy nature of both decades. The (economic) boom and subsequent crash of the eighties left us with rich debris, scraps with potential, like the imperative to invent your own context. Not a little reminiscent of the best of the 60's, it *feels* like power, and thirty+ years later, that may be all we need. Poverty of economic means, evidenced in minuscule supply budgets (the schools and the students), and the national poverty of attention for visual arts are of course depressing, but alternately viewed, give us permission to stop caring about appropriate means, forms and ideas.

2) object making < > theoretical writing

(wherein the thing looks to the word which looks back at the thing)

To state the obvious, ideas expressed in matter and words that insinuate themselves in-to your matter, have been dating for some time. The tension between these partners has been sufficient to keep the relationship interesting. Here also, we find within the product of their union — in this case, student produced image (object)\text work — either horror or delight. Pedagogy's own affection for language has given us several generations of art students, who, if not scared away by such mystification, have been able to see their activities in the larger cultural context they inhabit.

3) knowledge < > information

(what you're looking at)

These two shifty words, equally charged and vacant, sit on a precipice looking out at our most critical concerns. They may be laughing at us arguing about the seat of content, or the importance of tradition and progress, but I think the joke's on us for realizing them as discrete concepts. In a manner similar to the somnambulistic form/content discussion, language here appears to hinder, where really it is language's plasticity of construction and use that offers release from the dilemma to choose a superior method of transmission. What and how we "take" something "seriously" is at stake. I mean it.

4) received wisdom < > discretionary education

(what they get vs. what we want)

The poverty of promising lucrative career paths for artists has fueled a ground swell interest in "graphic design" and "computers," while filling lecture courses with interested but

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unavailable students. Those who do major with us are caught in the changing of the guard. Received wisdom, the unidirectional method of teaching, is still in; but its main man — mastery — is out. This confusing turn of events leaves in its wake a body of students whom you want to know what you know, but not too much. Too much feels like a level of commitment superseding post graduate opportunity. The problem here is not with the death of mastery, rather, that the notion of received wisdom hasn't died with it. The more insidious problem with this picture is our inability to want or trust that students can make their own great way.

Figure 1 on the lefthand page shows an architecture defined by the MW (Mondays and Wednesdays) of our meeting times, the critique board, blackboard (+), window and door openings (...). Inside the ASCII space is my own representation (*, with ! arms)- situated in front of a large teachers desk (D), and that of the students — including an entropic center, insincere affection, dozing happy face, boxed-in desire, colonic factory workings, flights of fancy, hostility and just fleeing the scene.

The Battle for Attention II

Images and words are interchangeable as signs and sights (sites too) of meaning. When classy or lively typography joins the ranks of fine art and inviting women as effective sales devices, designer typefaces challenge how and what we read and artists backpedal with sincerity in response to the overly didactic "Text-Image" work from the 80's, then we know we are reliving the drama, dilemma and contest of meaning brought about some 450 years ago when text and image competed for favor. At the point when calligraphy lost its solely utilitarian function (through the printing and distribution of books), is precisely when its high flourishes (unreadable, I might add) flourished. Its practitioners became artists while jockeying for the position of "best way to know" with painting — itself newly infatuated with the portrayal of what could and could not be seen (speculative nature).

The spirited exchange between the script and the illumination (as seen on the pages of late illuminated manuscripts) is a moment that portends our own. The visual conversation produced by their cohabitation managed to be both competitive and harmonious. An historical survey of the subsequent see-saw of dominance and submission between writing and visual representation helps us to understand the *current* debate surrounding the feared eclipse of tradition by digital media, and why that debate is so foolish. In the broad-based cultural attempt to isolate the mind from the body, the fullness associated with reading, along with its evil twin, the immediacy associated with vision, battle only to be the superior specular experience — the one with the deepest resonance. Unfathomable depths to be sure, but discerning size still draws a crowd.

Following the lead of printing then photography, digital media and its potential are the latest tools for projects of expression and representation. The availability of the means to produce, reproduce, mutate, author and multi-author are a progressive consequence of mechanical

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technology reminiscent of the direct hand technology found in calligraphy and painting. The connection goes unnoticed, however, as the case for (exclusive, fixed) tradition gives voice to the fear of unrecognizable origins. A byte *is* a byte *is* a byte. Without pedigree, the digital byte affords the mutability of literal lines (words into images and vice versa) and strategic boundaries (its own vulnerability the very source of its profundity). This lies in marked contrast to the material artifacts of tradition, their influence a result of an attributed and guarded (reliable) provenance.

Many readers will prefer the perceptible and tangible bite of hot metal on paper to the cool and distant bytes glowing on a monitor. But here temperature is only a surface issue; some do, after all, like it hot and some are really cool. Under the skin of this particular preference often lies the restrictive cultural imperative to choose which dimension is best. In this moralistic context, the sureness of material offers, ironically, a kind of chaste purity — possession through touch — but by permission only. Remove that permission and the material *may* become (through its own or someone else's will) just another tart — all dressed up and ready to go (and the argument for/against multiples). Digital processes, promiscuous by comparison to more visible and tactile processes, fall victim to the unfortunate equation made between fluidity and destruction.

Our Tools Ourselves

Now that we can locate grand meaning within the detail, and conversely find personal significance in the big picture, we have officially arrived (again) at the moment when everything truly is everything, which necessarily means that everything must be something. The boundaries between teacher </> student and word </> picture necessarily erode when we see the plain logic, possibility and compassion inherent in that proposition. We all give, receive, color and complete the environment with what we make from it.

Text, its authoritative tendencies coexisting with utility and poetry, is critical to, well, criticality. And criticality is important in the classroom. Critique, credentials, books, journals, readers, evaluation forms and grades, for better or worse, we express our ability to discern officially through speech and text. Small wonder that from contemporary plastic knowledge systems, a national literacy crisis, and students alternately bored, hostile and enamored with power, emerges a ripe moment for the resurgence of an art practice that considers everything as (text) readable and letterforms as concerned with their appearance as high modernism.

The invitation to diagram an ideal classroom, though initially met with the enthusiasm you might expect, proved to be a formidable proposition. Students felt more free or were more willing to explore their real experience rather than articulate a hypothetical one. The resulting print — its production process and the imagery on it — are evidence of a reluctance to commit to an alternative pedagogy or mode of interaction. What the print missed in

commitment and clarity it made up for in actualizing an instance of impaired vision. Lacking previous (academic) opportunities to visualize, then act on their own ideas for education, the students were simply unable to consider other options. The futility was palpable, underscoring the problematic nature of my intention and the reality of our movements within the academy.

Figure 2 continues to describe the classroom in ASCII code, but this time in ideal terms. Our movements are marked and show a fluidity of thinking, doing and being. Rather than being a record of our marks, what you see here reflects more upon verbal re-marks (intra-class exchange). Conversations about an ideal classroom revealed a surprising desire for a center, albeit a charged and changing one. My personal vision of decentrality, a holdover from the eighties, met with a response akin to loss. They envisioned a center with energized nomadic occupants. Less a panopticon than a battery, this center behaves like a solenoid — energy comes in, then goes back out transformed to another task. Our conversations also revealed an emphasis on personal effort (E), the appreciation of life's finer details (~), a desire to both favor and transcend gender associations (XYX) and the tediousness of boundaries. Also seen is the flutter of persistent egos (me me), and the overwhelming desire for an inclusive environment.

Rounding out our semi-circle is the fusion of inquiry and exclamation (?!). Having something to say in the classroom usually takes the form of a question or a statement. A statement invested (obvious belief or importance) becomes an exclamation. Can we exclaim and question our beliefs at the same time!? Can an educational model premised on, and proud of, the impossibility of quantifying art practice (properly identifying all studio art programs fulfill its premise and remain in business? I propose we turn up the heat on our idea of vision as the linking of physical and intellectual phenomena. Once seen as connected, as the union of our material and the immaterial, the otherwise nasty notion of judgment becomes a particular, if fleeting moment of lesser or greater importance, depending upon who is looking.

Endnotes

1 From fall 1995 through fall 1997 five upper division Print <making> classes, totaling seventy five students, and I, produced five collaborative oversize (linoleum block) prints. Four of the projects diagrammed individual responses to the actual, institutional and interpersonal dynamics of our studio art classroom; the fifth print offered a speculative vision of what could be. The projects were the direct product(s) of our time together.

2 ASCII is the acronym for the American Standard Code for Information Interchange.

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Abstract

The ways in which photographs and text alter each other's meanings and recontextualize the viewer/reader's understanding is explored through three photographs by Helen Ford and Dave Morrel, Paul O'Neill and Jenny Holzer. Difference in language, in processing, in reference underscore the conflicting operations of viewing and reading. This conflict or struggle is seen as an inherent quality of cross-disciplinarity and is used to describe a new context for photo-text work situating it "in between" overlapping and diverging formal historical and critical discourses. Colliding the materiality of this struggling with a multiplicity of subjective positions from which it can be negotiated, "Axis..." articulates photographic and text based work as a live and shifting territory that resists being fixed by traditional boundaries of practice and theory.

What lies between the visual and the textual is not a border...we might rather imagine what lies between vision and textuality as so many fault lines, masses exerting pressure on and shifting against one another at a particular location or set of locations in a complex, layered and folded landscape. What counts is how we follow the lines of their intersection, how we pay attention to their circumstances.¹

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In the adjacent quote, Melville and Readings, open out the line between vision and textuality as a space or a place, alive with action and interaction akin to the geographical shiftings of tectonic plates on the earth's surface. This image of a volatile and ceaselessly dynamic landscape provides a rich 'ground' in which to begin to locate a context for image-text work and more specifically in the case of this writing, photo-text work. The richness of this idea is not only due to the way in which they articulate the dynamics of this landscape but also, and perhaps more so, the fact that they transform the relationship between vision and textuality from a border (line) into a land (scape). In doing this they merge historical and traditional (disciplinary) distinctions, forcing the conceptualization of a new discursive arena that does not rely on a singular exclusionary line to identify itself — a line that forms a clear distinction between outside and inside, between here and there, between I and you. Instead, they conceptualize a land(scape) that is itself made up of many interchanging and interacting lines of 'between,' that is to say a land(scape/scope) that turns the notion of 'between' as a gap — that is empty and redundant — into a notion of 'between' as a mesh or weave of intersections — positive, live and most importantly traceable. What this implies is that it is possible to, as they put it "follow the lines of these [their] intersections" — or in the case of photo-text work that it is possible, through apprehension of the dynamics within the work itself, to identify or to become part of the (discursive) 'land' in which the work exists.

In this text I wish to pick up the idea of Melville and Readings 'map,' so to speak, and explore the 'between' of photo-text work. By exploring the inherent dynamics of writing and photographic representation alone and overlapping these characteristics and traditions within descriptive analysis of three photo-text works, I hope to articulate the discursive scape/scope of this kind of work as a space that refuses to sustain the traditional distinctions between image and text or art and literature but instead situates a subject-[ive] [in this] between in such a way that s/he negotiates its surface — from a position or set of positions — "a location or set of locations"² — that is constantly changing and interchanging and so offers different and divergent perspectives, as well as repeatedly new, and yet rupturing, readings.

By describing in detail some photo-text work I hope to articulate the subtleties of these dynamics and the inevitable ruptures they necessitate. And through this to suggest that these subtleties of movement, of formulation but

also of time and in(ter)ference, interference are a positive struggle, that reflects the nature of the discourse. These struggles are not only between the photograph and writing but (to refer back to Melville and Readings) between vision and textuality, between seeing and reading. Our conception or contextualization of images and writing has implications for how we occupy the space of representation, for how we conceive of our subjectivity in relation to others and the world we live in and for how we communicate within the increasing flux that culture is.

In the opening pages of “Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing”³ Helene Cixous describes writing as a “passageway between two shores.” These two shores are the two standing bars of the capital letter H. “This is what writing is,” she says, “I, one language and I another language and between the two, the line that makes them vibrate.” The line between vibrates because it carries the breath/breadth of H. In English, unlike in French, when I speak H at the beginning of a word, I breathe out. I exhale, “there’s breath, she says, lets keep it.” So what is it that writing is to Cixous? Two I’s and a line that joins them, a passage of exhalation between two shores and a step on a ladder. She says “the ladder is writing.” And then, “The ladder is neither immobile nor empty. It is animated. It incorporates the movement it arouses and inscribes.” She says, (My)Her ladder is frequented.” Cixous *speaks* in Her, capital H, text. She speaks to you, to me, the reader, the listener, from a place, a shore, that she calls I. She occupies that place of the writing as Hers and in doing so she lets me/you/us in. She writes Her articulation as writing; speaking to another I, I (you) who reads. She reaches across from I to I with a line that joins us. Her step — the movement from where I was to where I will be — vibrates. But neither I can hold Her. Being frequented, only the line between is a place to be — a step to step onto and off from. “This is what writing is,” she says. And is this what writing is? I say, stepping in.

Cixous opens up writing as a place to be. It’s where I am now, while writing this for you. It’s where you are as you read. What’s more, it’s where you were when I wrote this. Because it’s writing we can both/all be in it simultaneously. Our time is its time. This is a text I am composing; this is a text / am composing for *you*, so we are straddling writing. This intersubjective dynamic of language is central to any exploration of photographic and text-based work because it distinguishes, at the same time as connecting, the presence, the position and the time of writing, (which is not speech but which draws (on) its signs) from the presence, the position and the time of the photograph. When the two come together, juggling space, their axes — the positions from which they orientate themselves — struggle. And that is what I want to articulate.

In this text, you will read writings of the process of reading/viewing some photo-text works that I have chosen, some well known, some not known at all. It is my process of reading/viewing that I am writing. Not to forward it as the only reading or viewing that the work can have, but rather to assert that an I is present when the work acts/performs. I, or you, or someone else, activates the work by receiving it. Even before interpretation, I start where the relationships are internal to the form and because of this the work's work — its performance — relies on my reception of it. Or in other words, this work relies on discourse, one subject speaking to another. As such, it cannot fall back into a visual frame that has as its legacy a construction of I, in the Cartesian subject, as utterly sealed or as Kathleen Kirby puts it "an 'individual' [that] might be pictured as a closed circle."⁴ I will bring out those relationships regarding what the work is as possible ways of refiguring a context or contexts for the photo-text work.

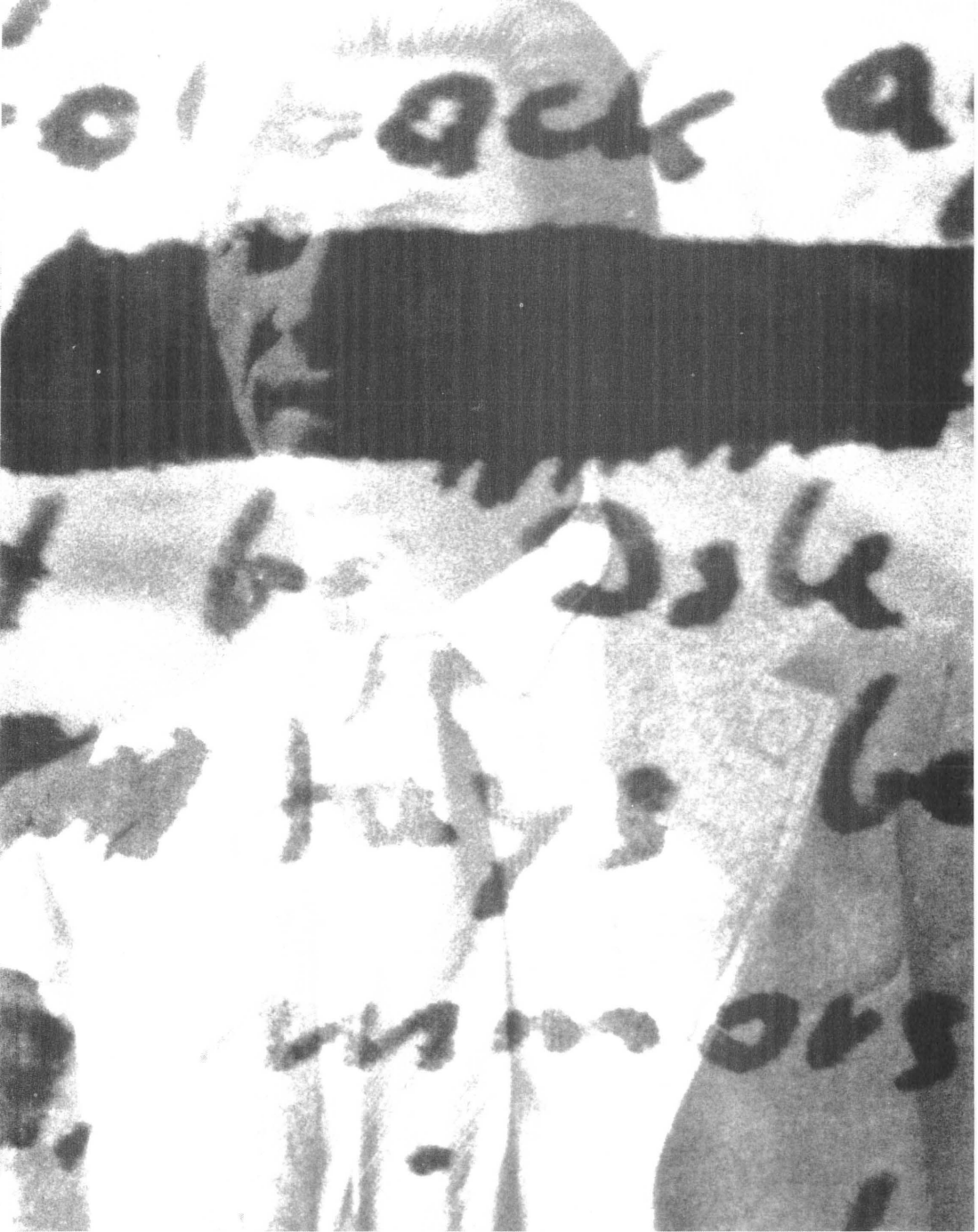
The works that will be discussed make apparent many of the aspects of the photo-text work I am considering in this text and that lead me to consider their structure as a reason to attempt to situate this work within a context characterized by rupture, discontinuity, elision, joining and fluid relationships. That context can be understood within contemporary (linguistic, psychoanalytic, cultural) theory, within theories of the postmodern, but it can also reflect on the histories of the traditional disciplines whose borders it challenges and transgresses and as Jessica Prinz writes, it "*demand[s] a modified notion of literature even as it requires a modified notion of art.*"⁵ It must find its rationale, one that brings the various discursive positions that relate to this work together, in the structure and ideology of the work itself.

Soukoup: Helen Ford and Dave Morrell

This is the image of a man, head and upper body, already cropped. He looks like he is walking, going towards a position to the left of the frame of the photograph. He is looking that way, not at the camera, not at the viewer. He looks as if he might be about to speak, to call someone perhaps. I see him voyeuristically. He doesn't know I am looking at him. The image is grainy, breaking up as if it has been blown-up, as if I was being given a detail of some more expansive picture. He is focused on and his unawareness is focused on.

Imposed across the image is some handwriting. It is also cropped. It extends into a space beyond the photograph which we cannot see/read. That exterior space is both visual and textual containing the rest of the photograph the rest of the writing. But the scale of this writing suggests a space very

Axis — a line about which a body Contextualizing photo-text work



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different from the photograph's space. The writing occupies this image at a distance, not from the image itself but from its own expected space and scale. It has also been blown-up, enlarged. The intimacy of the handwriting — possibly a letter — and the enforced intimacy of the image, is focused in on so much that it becomes intrusive, crude, manipulative. I take all this in — in a second. The rapidity of these complex movements, entirely visual at this stage form an impression, not unlike the literal impression of light upon the surface of the photographic plate again. This is not yet part of my reading of the work, at least not part of any narrative that I might construct from it, but it has registered. I also register resistance in this image, some struggle in the formal relationships. My reception of the work is troubled. And drawn in, I continue. I slow my viewing down and begin to read. The eye has no clear directive in terms of where to go. It wanders, in and out, up, around, over. The writing which is semi-transparent in some places, opaque in others, supplements this viewing in its visual movement across the image. Taken in as one plane it wafts in front of the standing man, like something he is about to walk through. But looked at in detail, the writing sinks into the image, exchanging the grey and grain of the image surface in a traversing that settles in in places, in other places it lifts off the shoulder or the lapel, other times taking a grey from the hairline or the neck and inscribing the forehead with it. It scratches out definition too, blackening the line of the jacket against the muted background — in effect it reads and registers the image surface, toying with contours and textures of light and dark. It rewrites the image visually, telling it again by layering another exposure onto it — it seems to hover. But simultaneously, the gap between the image and the writing fills in like it is water and the substance of the photograph undulates in shifting relationships, pouring around and about itself, liquefying its own presence. When the eye rises to the surface again, it jars against the suddenly solid words.

And reading comes into play. I read, 'pack,' 'be isle,' 'days,' 'rumours.' I make up the rest of the words that are cut off by the photographic frame, 'days' becomes 'days begin,' 'pack' becomes 'to pack again.' I begin to construct a message in the writing. And the man in the photograph becomes the conveyor of that message. Not at that moment. Not at the moment of the snap, but at this moment, the moment where the snap opens up again, in this new formulation, through, literally, this writing. But still the work is not finished. Because in the upper middle distance of the photograph there is a large gash of transparent black. I have seen it all along. I have seen how it shows me the face of the man, how it reverses the contrast of the image and in the meandering of the eye through the text I have even seen that it is of writing, that it erases some part of the imposed text. But at this moment, where the juncture between the hidden text and writing hits another turn —

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that of the image — the viewing, reading and conceptualizing of this work goes into a spin. There is increased visibility because of erasure, but the writing is doubly erased. Erased once through the textual crossing out and again through the substitution of the man's face for the opacity of the mark of erasure. In this sense I cannot read that I cannot read because I can see instead. It is a work that is full of elision and contraction and loss. And what maintains its presence as a readable photograph is the slipperiness of its relationships. In this way as viewer/reader of the work I am finding it in its own elisions, in the substance of its discontinuity.

I have chosen to look particularly at work that uses photographic images. When writing intervenes in the space of the photograph, it not only breaks the continuity and unity of the image plane it also retells, often differently, what the photograph says, while also subverting the play of time in it. How the photograph articulates its presence is ruptured. The writing splits and opens it, if only to cause it to cohere even more.

The frame of an image is where the image stops and starts. It is temporal in that sense as much as it is spatial. Images tend to fill their frames and as Suren Lalvani says, "enframing requires total visibility and surveillance,"⁶ unlike the frame of the page which identifies a putatively empty space, into which writing then goes. The frame of the photograph is both arbitrary and constructed. The viewfinder of the camera finds an appropriate position at which to stage its edit and the cut that the frame then makes is fixed within the possibilities of that mechanism and the photographer's eye. When writing becomes part of this frame and the image that it contains, it disrupts this visual fixture, either through literally breaking the frame or through setting up other delineated spaces that the image must now also respond to. It also can lay other spatial planes onto the apparently singular plane of the photograph. This kind of layering exposes the surface of the image as image as much as it enforces the depth of the photographic illusion.

Whatever way these interventions take place, they effect a change on the conceptual frame of the image and of the writing. In the last photo-text work and the next one, it is writing that is intervening on the photographic space and subject. In this sense the writing changes the reading of the photograph (as well as changing the relationship the reader has to that work). It changes it because it forces the viewer to read and also because in that reading other associations and connotations are set up. In the sense in which Barthes uses the terms in his essay "Rhetoric of the Image,"⁷ the denotative quality of the

photograph remains unchanged but the connotative quality of it is rewritten through the explicit presence of the text.

Writing occupies or treats the image space in a variety of ways. Often, as in the first photo/text work discussed, it becomes embedded in the photograph itself. Reiterating the image, while at the same time mutating its presence. But frequently writing serves to stand apart from the photograph, calling into a discursive space that is in fact a space of language. This is not to suggest that the photograph does not already operate within a discursive space, it is rather to emphasize the way in which photographic representations are determined both before and after their 'creation' by a number of subjective positions outside, but in relation to, the frame of the image event.⁸ This occurs most obviously when we find the photo-text supplementing the figure with a sign that directly addresses the space or the viewer/reader outside the frame of the image. These signs are known as 'shifters.'⁹ The shifters are signs which require the presence of their referent for meaning, such as the pronouns 'I,' 'you,' 'he,' 'she' etc., but also words such as 'here' or 'there.' Without an inherent referent themselves, they function only as a reality of discourse. When writing in the photograph uses the shifters, it re-joins the historically detached observer to the articulations of the image itself. Once placed in the photograph, that photograph reiterates a direct engagement with its reader and consequently situates itself within a specific aspect of social discourse — the activity of time and language that posits the speaking/reading subject in relation to other subjects. A conception of the work and of representation is constructed, as relational. Intersubjective.

However despite its location within discursive space, by itself the photograph cannot address the viewer. It can remind, invoke, show but not address. Because it has no empty signs, it has no pronominal function, it is an anti-shifter. It can neither say 'I' nor 'you.' It can only include me, as a discursive part of its presence, through reflection, through recognition of 'my face' or 'your face' or 'that place where we were,' that is through entering into the domain of spoken and shared discourse, of anecdotal evidence. Considering the photograph as evidence then, calls on the viewer to relate to the photographic representation as residue or trace of something that has already taken place. In this sense the position of the viewer, the 'I' that now regards the image from this space and time, collides with the position of the eye of the camera lens. However, photographic subjects always regard their viewer, anticipating in the instance of being 'shot' the discursive and open space to which their gaze will be directed. And in the action of the shutter's blink, the camera lens detaches the gaze of its subjects (in 'reality') from that of the photographer's. Halting the exchange of 'views,' by catching light onto photosensitive film, the space behind the lens

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(that is the space where the photographer assumed the position of 'I') is emptied out or voided and so makes way for the reciprocal viewing taken up by any 'I/eye' that then sees the photograph. This sets the viewer up in a discursive relationship to the image, urging the referent of the 'I/eye' that views to identify that which returns his/her gaze. This can only be done through a discursive exchange that names and locates the subject of the photograph, that de-scribes what has already been in-scribed.

The case of the self-portrait may be an exception, yet even then recognition is mediated. As Peggy Phelan describes it, this recognition (from the perspective of psychoanalysis) is a process that involves the viewer imitating "the image one imagines the other sees."¹⁰ And she goes on to say that this "imitative reproduction of the self-image always involves a detour through the eye of the other."¹¹ This location of the subject's self-recognition within, and through, the agency of the other, reiterates the intersubjective dynamic within which photographic re-presentation operates. Placing the shifters into this exchange then, activates a multiplicity of possible subjective positions, addressing, by turn(s) both the viewer and the figure within the photograph itself.

Yet added to this, what differentiates the photograph from other forms of visual representation is what Rosalind Krauss refers to as the photo's 'indexicality.' In her essay "Notes on the Index Part 1,"¹² Krauss describes the photograph as being an 'indexical' sign, 'indexical' referring to signs that, "establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents"¹³ and she cites examples of indexes as physical traces such as footprints, medical symptoms, shadows and the actual referents of linguistic shifters. In this sense there is a physicality of connection between sign and referent, (similar to that of the 'shifters') which articulates the presence — by virtue of a kind of emptiness — of the photograph, not only within a discursive and intersubjective dynamic but within the physicality of its surface.

Consequently, the way in which the photograph acts as an agent for the past creates a space which records in a way that is not (de) pictive — in that it forms a 'trace' rather than a 'picture' of its subject. In this sense although the photograph can be read within contexts of visual codification, its presence as signifier placing it within discourse outside its own frame, it also works against this, forcing reading inward and back toward the signified, the conceptual resonance of the image itself. In this way, it fights against what could be called its 'representativity,' by subsuming representation into the absolute presence of its surface yet at the same time allowing image(s) (a 'real') to form on that surface that were once 'real-ly' elsewhere. As a result, even with the sophistication of photographic techniques and imaging, I still

read this space as some kind of real. So when writing enters into this space it becomes a kind of event inside (inlaid into) the photographic 'real.' It becomes writing firstly. Evident as if it had been written on the eye itself. Like a chair, or a road, or a half-turned face, it evokes a materiality that confounds time as much as it coerces space. In the photograph then, this writing slips into the lived world, not merely as representative code, telling about the world through its medium, but also as trace and action, as a mode of scoring/scarring that precedes and outlives its own articulable meaning.

But at the same time, writing still exposes the illusion of photographic 'reality,' by exposing the surface (of what is represented) as surface. So I, as viewer and subject, am caught in the paradoxical spin of these multiple presences. And this discursive position prefaces the photograph's originary connection, dis- and re-connecting it to (my) actual present. It also invokes linguistic slippage, always prefacing and inscribing presence with traces and connotations. Consequently, these paradoxical aspects of photography and writing open up a context for this work and its relationship to representation and subjectivity, that is characterized by multiplicity, discontinuity and rupture, and constantly interchanging subjective positions.

Collaborative work by Paul O'Neill, with a group of survivors of sexual abuse

This work frames itself and elides framing in both the photographic space and the space of the page. However the page is also photographed and the writing on it, which is a personal letter, is as much a facsimile or record of its condition as a letter, as it is a device for placing the letter into and onto the photograph. This work is full of layers of concealment and disruption. The conceptual structure of the work is that of revealing, but the formal structure requires a multiplicity of overlay, of obfuscation, in order to rewrite and to speak the image in this new way. In this piece I see first of all a black and white, (landscape) photograph of a group of people sitting on the grass. It looks sunny. There is a man leaning forward on one arm surrounded by four children. All except one of these children looks out of the image towards the viewing space beyond. The group looks happy, settled into a pleasant summer afternoon picnic. This is the first photograph. Overlaying this image is another photograph of a handwritten letter, written on lined paper and signed. Both the text and the lines of the page remain visible across the photograph as well as existing in their own textual space above and below the image itself. The letter moves between a transparency across the image to an opacity and stronger visibility of its original page space above and below it. In this way it suggests a plane that is both behind and in front of the image.

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This image then is sealed between these layers. It also appears to have been slid in to the writing's space, like a plate in a camera is slid in to catch the imprint of the light, and like this plate the first photograph catches the screen of the text and registers its presence on its surface. At the same time the presence of the first photograph pushes through the transparency of the text and the people within the image look out through this writing, visually attempting to hold their own space and the viewer's gaze, despite the blind of writing that is inscribed onto them. There is a struggle in this. This struggle is reiterated in the content of the work. The apparent struggle and resistance in the work is again a feature of how it constructs and articulates itself as dynamic.

The eye views first, then it reads. Viewing has a capacity to deceive the eye, the brain, into a belief in instantaneous reception. Viewing does involve a 'reading' process, in that it does take time, but it is after it has registered the whole, in a second, in another snap shot. This viewing sees first a family group sitting contented on the grass in summer. Then it moves around the group, it isolates the man, the little girl on the right who smiles out at the camera, it notices the two boys, their puzzled expressions, the bow of the little girl's ribbon who has her back turned, maybe even the man's fist, the boy's fiddling, the girl's shoe. Once satisfied in this registration, the eye returns to the writing, which it has seen but has slipped through. It runs up to the top of the page. Notices the page, complies then with a convention of reading, moves to the top left hand corner. Reads the words "Dear Prick..."

Immediately my perception of the work changes. Rupture slices the unity of visual illusion and its inevitable connotations. A gap is created. The 'original' photograph recedes behind the text. It becomes part of a perceptual memory. It still looks the same but now I see it differently. I read on. "I've chosen that name for you as I feel it is very fitting, if you think about it that's all you ever were to me. I spent years trying to..." I skip the image. And read on from where the image stops. "I sometimes dream of tearing your prick off and raming [sic] it up your ass and down your throat but to be honest most of my life is spent peacefully I hardly ever think of you at all. May God help you. Joyce."

I see it differently now. The eye returns to the image, taking into account the writing that coats it. This time the eye settles on some of the words there, doesn't slip through, tries to read what is there. I find more of the letter. I find Joyce in the photograph. I find the subject of her letter. I am back again with the image. A different image now. Its hidden meaning displayed across it in writing. And where the writing crosses the image I am forced to locate this 'text' with the figures it inscribes in the photograph — from a distance and in detail. The work not only rewrites the denotative reading I take from the

Dear Prick,
 I've chosen that name for you as I feel
 it is very fitting, if you think about it that is all
 you ever were to me I spent years trying to
 convince myself that you were nice to me, that you
 truly loved me and I, you, I was young brainwashed
 and foolish. I've grown up now and you're still
 a prick. I've learned to love and be loved, I
 have real friends, a tender loving family, I've
 learned to trust, to give and take and further more
 I've learned all this can be done without abuse no
 hatred, no malice, no cruelty. This is very odd
 after all I taught me to turn to you for
 you in open my legs with my wide with my
 then my little hands so hard without crying how
 wrap my little hands around a big
 prick me to put that big prick down my
 without noting how to shove my hand
 mouth top he screaming with a huge
 went to my how to answer to
 Stupid little girl for big his
 Haven't found a use for any of these
 taught so well I thank God you were not my
 only teacher. I sometimes dream of tearing your
 prick off with my bear hands and raving it
 up your ass and down your throat, but to
 be honest most of my life is spent peacefully
 I hardly ever think of you at all. May
 God help you

J. Lee



© 1995 Paul O'Neill, courtesy of Paul O'Neill

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image, but it also writes, for the first time, the implicit silence that a photograph holds. In this sense it is an act of writing that is subversive, not only because in itself it writes experience long held in silence, but also because it (de)faces the apparently innocuous surface of the image.

As a letter written by hand, the materiality of this writing redresses — through its subversion — as it addresses, old wounds with new ones, literally scarring a representation of the past with what it does. Daring in this case to touch and mark a 'face' held in the illusion of photographic truth, with a hand(writing) whose turn it is to sign, rather than be signed and re-signed (resigned) in the persistence of the photograph's indexicality. "Joyce" breaks the dependency and the anonymity of the photographic 'deixis,' that is, of the way in which the photograph situates her. She writes 'her here and now' onto the image's 'there,' articulating the gap between 'here' and 'there,' between 'him' and 'her' (and in publication between 'you' and 'I') with a correspondence that returns [her] to the scene of [her] mar(k)ing and fills the space where she [herself] was blanked into silence — replaced by a representation that acts like a mark of erasure (a wound that doubles as a shield) — with [her] story and [her] name, a presence that locates Joyce in and beyond the intransigent seizure of the photographic shutter.

Consequently the power of the photographic representation is destabilized and opened up to a struggle of relationships — between the implicit and the said — between the touched and the untouched — between writing and photography. And the work is done now. I stop reading even though I haven't read the entire letter. It is redundant once the image has been articulated. The writing that crosses the surface of the image plane remains largely visual. Read and read as text but not read in full. It sustains the meaning of the piece overall, acting as a visor through which the figures in the photograph must attempt to look. It breaks their benign gaze, even before I know why. And it connects the writing that I read with the image that I have seen and see again. In doing this the work is dis/re-located within a contextual space that is not wholly visual. My relationship with the viewing of the work, is as a reader. I enter into it through the reading of the letter. I become part of that correspondence — as a witness perhaps — however witness not to a scene but to a sign(ing). As such the discourse of (Joyce's) relationships is what I engage with in the work. Joints and articulations. I move along the ladder of writing. I break through Kirby's "closed circle" and unlike the Cartesian space she describes where the closed circle around the individual "ensures its clear division from its location" and where

"outside lies a vacuum,"¹⁴ I enter into a space of the work that is full of variance and contiguity. A world, as John Roberts describes it, "that is not a seamless unity but that [it] is made in and through language and as such not just subject to interpretation but to rupture and change."¹⁵

The visual tradition that preceded the invention of photography was dominated by the invention of Renaissance perspective in the arts and Descartes ideas of 'subjective rationality' in philosophy. Recently much writing analyzes this tradition, both elucidating and questioning the hegemony of this particular "scopic regime," as Martin Jay describes it.¹⁶ What these writings reveal is that the particular ideals of Cartesian perspectivalism, combined with a scientific world view that relied on an increasing belief in observation and in the truth of empirical scientific evidence, produced a cultural epistemology that posited sight as the most important of the senses. Vision became an epistemological ground, serving to construct and rationalize cultural understandings of knowledge and subjectivity well into the nineteenth century. The emergence of psychoanalysis, "the talking cure," the invention of photography and in the twentieth century the increased interest in "the determinative role of language in all the human sciences"¹⁷ — have all been argued to have effected a shift away from the dominant role of vision culturally. This shift from modernist ideals of unity, authenticity and disciplinarity to postmodern readings that situate a linguistic and semiotic analysis of culture and identity at the core of much contemporary discourse, required what Martin Jay has called the "denigration" of vision.¹⁸ This 'cutting down' of the omnipotent status of vision involved the material and temporal deconstruction of Cartesian space and ideology, through its re-incorporation into the body and the insertion of what Norman Bryson describes as a "screen of signs"¹⁹ into the transparent window frame of Cartesian perspective.

Cartesian perspectivalism itself was characterized by the belief in the transcendence of materiality through the objectivity of pure visual form and the construction of the 'individual' subject, manifested in an absolute, untouched essence, that remained unaffected by history or culture. This conception of vision as primary was supported through perspective drawing and painting by a centralizing of the position of the viewing subject. The point to which all the lines of depth in perspective recede is on a level with the 'eye' of the viewer. This "vanishing point," as it is known, forms the apex of a viewing triangle that is a mirror image of the supposed optical triangle of the viewing eye. Consequently, all the space, optical and pictorial that fills the plane of the image is determined by the position of the viewing subject. This position

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is fixed, isolated and passive. It stands apart from reality, while at the same time maintaining full control over it due to its position at the center of this 'optical consciousness.' This consciousness, this singular eye, is also a disincarnated eye — apart from the body and other senses. It is not a living, active or empowered eye; it is merely witness to what is seen. Its consciousness can only receive reality, it cannot act upon it.

It was the re-incorporation of this singular and detached viewing eye back into the body — the shift away from what Norman Bryson describes as the 'Medusan Gaze' toward the 'temporal glance'²⁰ — and the recognition of the construction of that body within the world and consequently within and through language, that leads me to conflate the 'eye' of vision with the 'I' of language. In postmodern theories of writing and language we see the same shift towards materiality and temporality. The ideas of contemporary linguistics lay a ground for this conception of interrelating but distinct entities, for notions of presence that are not motivated by the desire for on the one hand transcendence and on the other hand immanent and self-reflexive corporeality. Instead it becomes possible to conceptualize the presence of eye/I and by consequence, all other inde(l)ixical positions as dynamic and contingent, characterized much more by a sense of fluid deferral — residual and accretive — than by fixed and static unities. Consequently "the eternal moment of disclosed presence"²¹ as Bryson describes it, that characterized Cartesian thinking becomes a presence populated in the first place with absences and later with virtualities or potentialities.

In all of the work that I am discussing this 'presence' is intervened on or scored into by a writing that is literally of the body. In its scoring or inscribing of a surface, its tracing of physical presence — its literal indexicality — handwriting becomes a record of a physical and temporal action that marks and implicates the body in and as the discourse of the work. It also reinforces the material quality of writing as mark and as trace (score and scar). This materiality, central to contemporary linguistic and semiotic theory²² — the opacity of writing and its endless referentiality on the level of the sign — arises from the idea of writing as a play of difference,²³ where the signifier refers not only to the signified but also to the absence of all other signifieds, that is to the presence of what is not there but deferred. In this sense the unity of the sign is preceded by multiplicity²⁴ and in work that places writing into/onto the photographic plane, this multiplicity inf(lects) the singularity and unity of the photograph's surface. In *Sauf le Nom*²⁵ Derrida describes this persistent slippage of language by saying:

“there is only the edge in language... that is reference and at the edge of language in the same and double movement, withdrawing and overflowing. But as the moment and the force, as the movements of the injunction take place over the edge they draw their energy from already having taken place.”

This is the same slippage, the same deferral of *absolute* presence, of absolute visibility that can be identified in the photo-text work. This conception of writing and actual writing, introduced into the visual/photographic frame — through overlay, inscription, trace, indentation, scoring, scarring and signing — reveals the contingency of the photographic illusion. An illusion contingent on the silencing capacity of seizure, on the snapping-shut of time in the photographic eye. In these works that eye is opened, its lids pried apart by the temporal movement of the nib. It invokes Freud’s mystic writing pad, the making visible of the unconscious as symptomatic trace²⁶ — tracing up/back from a time and a place unknown residues of what was once experienced. But this is also a writing that comes to know, through a physical touching and negotiation of a surface. Like Luce Irigaray’s call for a feminine touching within psychoanalysis, that breaks the wall of representations and configurations that surround the female subject,²⁷ this writing interferes with the seal of the photograph’s skin — touches its untouchable time, employing a proximity that replaces and recalls, again conflating the distant eye of viewing with writing’s I, seeing by touching, knowing by retracing where knowing left its marks.

The ‘land’ within which this work is articulated then, is a ‘land’ acting between the persistence of visibility and the resistance of language — a fluid scape, ‘*between and overflowing*’²⁸ — a place of discourse, a place that reads, that sees, that breathes, that contains and emits, that attempts to know, that writes. A place of multiplicities, paying “attention to [their] circumstances.”²⁹

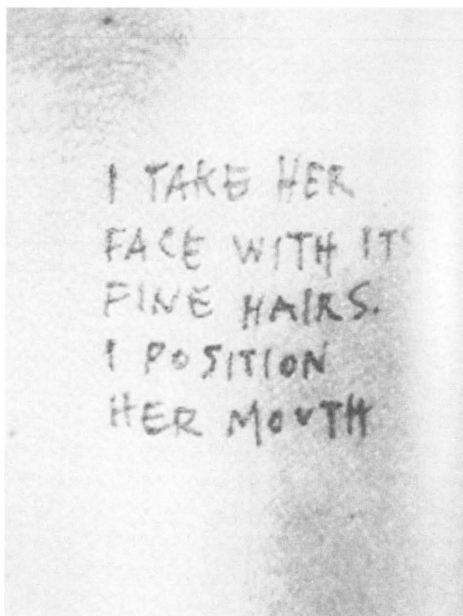
Jenny Holzer’s Lustmord series — specifically;

“I take her face with its fine hairs. I position her mouth.”

The photograph that I see is of writing. My immediate perceptual experience tells me that writing is there and to read the photograph I must engage with a textual reading also. Unlike most photo-text works where the image tends to dominate the text, in these works although the eye acknowledges the image frame and event, it is quickly brought to a textual engagement that surpasses the fact of the writing as both occupying an image frame and being imaged in itself through this. And so I read. “I TAKE HER/FACE WITH ITS/FINE HAIRS./ I POSITION/ HER MOUTH.” This is the first reading which takes in the sentences. Hears them. Places them into the mind’s recognition. Registers them. The

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first reading does little more than this. And so a second reading begins to verify the text, to perhaps begin to negotiate its meaning beyond the deciphering of a code. This time the reading is slower. I purposely trace the letters with my eyes, attempting to find their location not only in a larger semantic, but also (although unconsciously) in the image space itself. This time I find two sentences. And I distinguish them. Each one carrying its own resonance. This time also because I have taken more time, because I have slowed down the reading, because I have located a gap between one sentence and another, I have also entered into a visual reception of the text — by registering the space in which the text is situated. By finding the full stop among all these capital letters I have been drawn to recognizing the line endings of the sentences. I can see now that the space in which this writing exists is a vertical space, the orientation of the portrait. And the writing which is now a figure, doesn't fill that space but lies in it through its inscription onto the image ground, which I now see is the surface of skin.



Only now does the writing occupy the space of the photograph. And once this happens its meta-presence as a transparent code condenses, solidifies, transforms into the recorded presence of marks on skin — tangible scrapings that write words only after they have scored a surface. This is a simple transformation, but it effects a radical change on these oblique and uncontextualized sentences. Figure and ground are components of any viewing experience. “To perceive is first of all to perceive a figure against a ground”³⁰ and in this work the figure and ground multiply and invert themselves. Once I recognize that the ground for the image is skin, I immediately situate that skin within a body. I also then notice the color of the writing, its texture, the quality of its material. In some cases it is red and viscous. It is on a body’s skin, it is about a body; is it of a body also? Is it blood? Without having an answer yes or no, the interference, the interference, is there. The event described in the writing takes on new connotations. The photograph fills in its own absent continuity. Together the writing and the image push into a space that neither of them can occupy alone. The text itself draws us in with its partiality, with its intimacy — and the photographed text is itself the record of an event — the event of texting, of writing. Because writing has taken place, it has a material signification. Because writing has taken place not only has something been said, but something has also been done.

But it is its use of the body as site of inscription and means of inscription — without face, without identity — that increases the resonance of what has been done. The pronouns that make intimate and humanize the subject of the photo also refuse any identification. Their presence contains an emptiness that my subjectivity (as referent) can enter into. This begins to break down the anonymity of the writing and the image. I read the text again and find its ‘I’ is no longer a distant, potential ‘I’ (eye), the ‘I’ is now also that of the writer’s, that is the one who has inscribed the body. And having located this ‘I’ within an event more discursive than rhetorical, having therefore filled the empty sign of the pronoun, I turn to similarly fill the ‘her’ of the text. I read ‘her face,’ ‘her mouth,’ so I see ‘her skin,’ ‘her body.’ But the body is not identifiable, its subjectivity is inscribed (literally and discursively) by the pronouns on its surface. The pronominal exchange cannot be stabilized.

So, I fill her ‘I’ too, taking the presence of ‘her’ writing, its present tense, to position ‘me,’ not only in relation to ‘her,’ but as ‘her’ also. Then ‘her face,’ not the ‘her’ that is ‘I,’ but another ‘her,’ elsewhere, yet still here, is taken. I take ‘her face’ — just like the snapshot takes, I capture, I have ‘her face’ now, here with me, with its fine hairs. But what I have is not

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what I see. This, that skin, written on by 'her,' not 'me.' 'Her skin,' 'her own skin'? 'She' positions 'her' mouth. Ready. But 'her mouth' is elsewhere, 'her face' is not here. Yet still, 'I take her face,' 'with its fine hairs,' 'I position her mouth'?

The possible subjective positions multiply and interchange and yet no-one is present, except I and the photograph. So we struggle, shifting in and out of position, agency and subjectivity. And because the photograph presents us with its subject — its skin, the past already there — it fills all the gaps the shifters make. Always surfacing and re-surfacing presence with its absolute skin, it repairs the scars of writing, joining with fine pores, only to find those pores punctured again by (H)air. The breadth and breath of H, writing's line, body's sensor, breaking, repairing and growing — still fixes nothing. It is inter- and anti-disciplinarity. Struggling as form and context.

The discursive place within which photo-text work can be located is not a new place, it is rather — to return to Melville and Readings quote — a place that is reforming and refiguring sites that were once borders as 'betweens' that are full of resonant and potential presence. It is a place that is inherent in the actual materiality and form of the work itself. And the theories that are invoked to describe and articulate this place are not new either. They are, however, being opened up and re-used, re-situated, in order to enter into what Julia Kristeva would describe as the work's 'unknowability.' Exploring this quality of the work and its discursive place, I think I can see that it is occurring "at the place where it escapes definition"³¹ and repairing its between with yet another ground, another discourse. And as both a feature of a land(scape) and a position within that land(scape), I can see the multifaceted quality of discourse and representation, in the constant pre-facing, de-facing, sur-facing and simple facing, of its own light sensitive 'face.' And I can read the reiteration of subjectivity, in the hyphen that connects this 'face' to that which describes the action of relationship 'I' can have to it.

In the photo-text work this hyphen, this axis, joins as it ruptures — dry to wet, Cartesian rationality to the incorporated visual, the transparency of language to its materiality and temporality, narrative to dialogue, the unified and instantaneous image to its dissemination in time by writing, the observer to the participant. And through a line between shores exerting pressure and about which a body, "I (eye), one language, to I (eye), another language."³²

End notes

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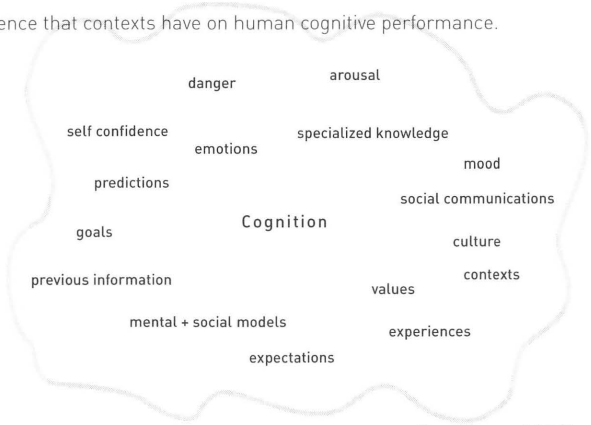
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- 20 Bryson, Norman. 1983. *Vision in Painting*. (Quoted by Jay in *Downcast Eyes*.)
- 21 Bryson, *Vision in Painting*, The Logic of the Gaze.
- 22 These ideas are discussed particularly in the work of the French post-structuralists, so central to Martin Jay's book *Downcast Eyes*, on the 'denigration of vision.' [See previous reference to Bryson, *Vision in Painting*.]
- 23 Derrida, Jacques. 1978. *Writing and Difference*. London: Routledge, 202-203. Also in the translators introduction xvi, see reference under 'Derrida's terms.'
- 24 Krauss, Rosalind. 1993. *The Optical Unconscious*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- 25 Derrida, Jacques. 1995. *Sauf le Nom*. Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press.
- 26 For a further discussion of writing and the unconscious in contemporary video work, see Lowry, Joanna. 1998. "Intimate Distance, Art in a Confessional Culture." *Contemporary Visual Arts Magazine*, 18:34-37.
- 27 Irigary, Luce. 1985. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 192-193.
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- 29 Melville, *Vision and Textuality*.
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Abstract

There is an Aristotelic tradition in cognitive psychology, information design and artificial intelligence, to understand human information processing as a mechanism, that is, as a complicated system, ultimately explainable on the basis of the understanding of every one of its multiple components and their interactions. Instead of looking at human information processing as a complicated system, I propose to look at it as a complex system, distinguishing for this paper the complicated from the complex; the first being composed by a high number of discrete parts with many interconnections — as in a computer circuit — the second being an integrated system where everything affects everything — as in the relation between two people. Since I have chosen as my theme the contextualization of cognition with other human factors, I will be dealing with the complex, and I will therefore not attempt to enumerate parts and connections; I will instead concentrate on certain insights about field interactions that I hope will reposition our understanding of mental processes, moving it from an analysis of logical steps to the exploration of the influence that contexts have on human cognitive performance.



Cognition and All the Rest

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Cognition and all the rest

The human capacity for effective and efficient action is affected by many factors. Discussing constancy in color perception, Maturana and Varela argue that in the perception of color we cannot find a direct correspondence between the color consistency of the objects we see and the light waves reflected from them. They claim that it is not easy to explain how we see colors, but that we must stop thinking that the color of the objects we see is determined by the features of the light we receive from them. Rather, they suggest that the experience of a color corresponds to a specific pattern of states of activity in the nervous system that can be triggered by a number of different light perturbations (1992, 22. Also see 252, 253, 254).

Following this model, I would suggest that the cognitive function of people is not "distorted" by circumstances; rather, that human cognitive performance is context-dependent and multidimensional, and that to really understand human cognition it is not possible to approach it as a self-contained system. Human cognition should be approached as an integrated structure, where cognitive processes vary from situation to situation, depending on situational differences that relate to a broad variety of categories which overflow traditional definitions of cognition. These factors affect cognitive performance not necessarily in negative ways; experience permits people to develop efficient strategies to deal with new situations, responding to them by taking short-cuts and leaps of faith, in high-speed information-processing acts commonly called intuitive jumps. These "intuitive jumps" are connected with the goal-seeking character of our interaction with the environment and bring to the fore the role that guessing plays in cognitive performance.

Guessing as a cognitive strategy Guessing is a very efficient way to strategize an action on the basis of existing information; guessing is connected to meaning in information already possessed. Bateson suggests that meaning may be regarded as an approximate synonym of pattern, redundancy, information and restraint. He suggests that any aggregate of events or objects contains redundancy or pattern. If we divide the aggregate into two parts, the observer that sees only one part "can guess, with better than random success" what is in the other part. Bateson suggests that what is in one part contains information, or has meaning, or redundancy about what is in the other part. In cybernetic terms "the information available on one side will restrain (i.e., reduce the probability of) wrong guessing" (Bateson, 1985, 131).

Guessing is then based on information possessed, on redundancy and on the resulting predictability, and it is as much a proof of human economy of action in the realm of cognitive strategies as the reading of instructions.

The importance of guessing and its shortcomings have been frequently noted. Designers of interactive machines such as ticket vending machines, know that people tend to begin their approaches to using machines by guessing, rather than by reading the instructions. If guessing does not work, then they tend to fall into the intuitively less efficient task of reading the written information.

Interesting insights emerge when we connect guessing with self-confidence. Fischhoff, Slovic and Lichtenstein (1977, cited by Piattelli-Palmarini, 1994, 116-119), report that the more subjects are familiar with a field, the more they are at risk of being overconfident about their knowledge. Their studies indicate that discrepancy between correctness of response and overconfidence increases as the respondent is more knowledgeable. Those who know less have a reduced level of overconfidence. On the other hand, when people possess greater knowledge about an issue, their level of overconfidence increases to a far greater degree. Thus, people with no experience of vending machines are more likely to read the instructions than people with experience. The more people are familiar with a given kind of machine, the less they are likely to read the instructions: they will try their guesses, even if they prove wrong, insistently pressing the wrong button until it breaks or inserting coins in the ticket dispensing slots of machines in parking lots. This has made parking lot operators many times add ad-hoc hand-written signs indicating to users that they should not insert coins but should pay upon exiting. It doesn't necessarily follow that people are obtuse. When police in Alberta found out that ninety-seven percent of child restraint seats were not installed properly in private cars, it became evident that it was not the users who were at fault, but the manufacturers, who put in the market a product whose use and instructions for use people could not understand. Given that guessing operates on the basis of broad generalizations and bypasses written information, it is not surprising that in many cases instructions for the use of machines cannot undo the wrong messages implied by the machines themselves.

Vending machines are not the worst example of the dangers of excessive self-confidence. Several air disasters have been the result of overconfidence — they tend to happen to experienced pilots and to those trained in the air-forces. Extensive, specialized knowledge, under certain conditions, gives these people the feeling that their perceptions and estimations are more than the instruments. This leads them to disregard instrumental

information on altitude, orientation or spatial upside-down rotation, sometimes resulting in crashes.

Designing interfaces for interactive machines, from ticket dispensers to fighter plane control panels, cannot be exclusively based on a knowledge of cognitive processes modeled on artificial intelligence: it needs to consider interactions between people and machines as inscribed in goal-seeking activities, embedded in moods, emotions, social communications and value systems. To understand a machine in a lab in order to get a ticket (to please the experimenter and to prove one's level of skill), is different from trying to understand a machine in a railway station fast enough so as not to miss the train. Different still is to try to operate a machine properly when one is being shot at. Baddeley (1972) reports that "the [cognitive] performance of a soldier in combat is another source of evidence of the effects of danger" (Baddeley, 1972, 539-540). The probability that a soldier will use his rifle effectively in the heat of battle is considerably less than in training. Walker and Burkhardt (1965) report that, after the battle of Gettysburg in the American Civil War, over two-hundred of the muzzle-loading rifles were found to have been loaded five or more times without being fired, and one had been loaded twenty-one times without being fired once. Inadequate training was blamed, but other war reports suggest that even with fully trained troops performance in action is much worse than performance in training (Egbert et al., 1957, 1958).

For the purpose of psychological research it has been possible to produce simulated danger situations which impair performance. In one experiment, an emergency was simulated in a flight, using service men as subjects. After an engine shut off, they were told that the landing gear was faulty and that they had to ready themselves for an eventual crash landing at sea. They were then required to fill out two forms: one about the disposal of their belongings and the other about emergency procedures, to convince the insurers that all precautions had been taken. As well, the forms had been poorly designed to increase the possibility for errors. The results, as expected, showed that the subjects performed worse than the control group that filled out the forms on the ground (Berkun et al, 1962).

Many experiments have been conducted where it was found that dangerous situations tended to reduce efficiency. Discussing these experiments in a very detached and cool way, Baddeley suggests that "although these studies show that it is possible to simulate danger successfully, the problems raised by this type of experiment on both moral and practical grounds are considerable, and this does not seem to be a very promising line of development" (Baddeley, 1972, 539-540).

Cognition, Emotion and Other Inescapable Dimensions of Human Experience

Without exclusively looking at strong emotions like stress or terror, it is clear that previous experiences, fear, beliefs, arousal level, moods, expectations, purposes, models of behavior, familiarity, adaptability, intelligence and temperament, play roles in cognitive performance, overflowing measures and predictability exclusively based on an abstract concept of logical thinking.

Typically, cognitive performance is affected by overconfidence, illusory correlations, misestimation of probability, immediate contexts (things that have just happened, or that have just come to our attention) and ease of representation. "The easier it is for us to imagine an event or situation and the more the occurrence impresses us emotionally, the more likely we are to be affected by it for subsequent cognitive tasks" (Piattelli-Palmarini, 1994, 128). These considerations call for caution when seeking a basis for design criteria in traditional, lab-based experimental psychology: it is quite difficult to estimate the cognitive proficiency of an individual in a given task, in a real situation, on the basis of lab tests.

Cognition and emotion Danger reduces human performance efficiency, except in the case of experienced subjects. Part of the reason for this reduction of efficiency seems to be owed to a narrowing of attention (Baddeley, 1972, 537). Experiments with deep sea divers used as subjects to study the impact of nitrogen narcosis (an intoxication that occurs when air is breathed at high pressure) on cognitive performance have shown discrepancies between open sea and pressure chamber simulation results. This suggests that fear plays a decisive role in cognitive performance, generating attention-narrowing, irrespective of levels of nitrogen in the body. Stress apparently generates arousal, and this tends to narrow the field of attention, affecting cognitive performance. Arousal fosters an increase of efficiency in centrally located fields, while peripheral attention diminishes. This is the case with rage and the obsessive repetition of the wrong action, such as inserting coins in the ticket dispensing slot and failing to scan efficiently the whole face of a machine, for instance. This leads to a constant increase of rage, paralleled by a constant narrowing of the field of attention, resulting sometimes in kicking the machine as a final cognitive-magical response. Baddeley suggests that an increase in arousal will focus the subject's attention narrowly on that aspect of the situation that the subject believes to be of greatest importance. If this happens to be the center of the problem faced, then the efficiency of the action will be increased. If not, the subject's performance will deteriorate until the task is abandoned (543). Existing research indicates that people tend to suppress fear when approaching dangerous situations if they are experienced in those situations, possibly as a way of securing a high level of cognitive performance. It is not that they don't suffer fear, but they have learned

to suppress it. This has important implications for the design of instructions: teaching how to prepare deep sea diving equipment for use is one thing, learning how to rescue one's equipment from the bottom of a deep pool, turning on the air in the acqualung and putting on all the equipment without surfacing is quite another. The first measures cognitive skills; the second measures emotional self control (544-545). This brings back the issue of the complex and the complicated: instructions can be complicated, based on sequential steps that must be performed with accuracy. But the design of instructions many times, rather than being complicated becomes complex, because human beings, and not computer driven optical character recognizers, have to use them. People require fuzziness in instruction systems, so that different thinking styles can operate with them. Cognitive performance is context-dependent and many contexts take part in any communication event. E-mail addressing systems are different: if one replaces an "i" for a "y," the system cannot solve the problem. People use fuzziness as a way to solve those problems, dealing efficiently with the vague and the ambiguous.

This problem is faced by designers working on instructions for emergency procedures, such as those for passenger aircrafts. If danger hampers human cognitive performance, and more so for the person without experience in a given situation (such as is the case for airline passengers), then the level of actual cognitive ability to be expected has to be quite low. This is the reason why many years ago, Paul Mijksenaar, a well known Dutch information designer, when asked to redesign emergency instructions for the opening of a door in a Fokker aircraft, recommended to have the door mechanism redesigned. Given the obscure door opening mechanism it was not possible to make the instructions clear to an untrained user in a stressful situation.

Of course, instructions are not always embedded in situations that make the problem complex; many times it remains only complicated. I used these examples to highlight the complexity of the cognitive field, which to a greater or to a lesser extent always overflows the complicated.

Actually, not only difficult situations like danger affect cognitive performance: happiness also does. According to Robert Sinclair and Melvin Mark (1992) "positive mood states lead to less systematic information processing than do neutral states, while negative states lead to more systematic processing" (169). "...Subjects in a positive mood appear to process information in a way that can be characterized as less systematic, more heuristic, more superficial and less careful" (166). They argue that this difference might result from the double notion of "mood maintenance and mood repair." That is, if one is happy, one will normally wish to focus attention on enjoying the feeling and

Cognition, Emotion and Other Inescapable Dimensions of Human Experience

on maintaining the feeling, and would therefore be reluctant to engage in a demanding cognitive task. A happy person will likely fear that this task: a) might distract from the enjoyment of the feeling, and b) might lead to information that could negatively affect the feeling. Conversely, a depressed subject might favor the distracting effect of demanding cognitive activities and might hope that these activities could contribute to repairing their mood.

Happy moods seem to foster positive attitudes: optimism and the consequent disposition to believe as good that which appears to be so without mistrust. Happy subjects, however, tend to perform as critically as sad subjects when they perceive that the cognitive task does not threaten their present mood. Sinclair and Mark's basic tenet is that "mood state influences processing strategy, which in turn leads to effects on judgment and action" (170).

Heuristic and systematic approaches to information processing appear to be prompted by subject mood, but not exclusively: the relation between the subject and the topic (relevance) plays an active role. Relevance, and potential rewards, increase the motivation to use systematic approaches, while confidence in the source of a message fosters acceptance and heuristic strategies (Chaiken, 1980).

Emotion and Cognitive Processing Strategy

Relevance of Content to Subject Mood of Subject	High	Low
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy • More positive • More confident of self and others • Categorizes broadly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic • Emphasis of attention to context
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sad • More negative • More rigid • Less confident of self and others • Makes more distinctions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More systematic • Scrutinizing context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somewhat less systematic • Attention to context

Emotion and Experience

Experience Danger Level	High	Low
Dangerous Situation or Stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal cognitive performance on the basis of emotional self control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced cognitive performance • Arousal • Narrow focus of attention
Non-dangerous Situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High cognitive performance • Risk of excessive self confidence leading to wrong guessing • Increased risk in a happy subject (Even more if the event is irrelevant) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal cognitive performance • Low risk of wrong guessing • Scrutinizing of information is high (More so for unhappy subject)

Emotion and Judgement

Relevance Emotion	Situation Relevant to Emotional Source	Situation Not-relevant to Emotional Source
Emotions with clear Attribution of Source	Judgment Affected	Judgment Not Affected
Generic Moods, without Conscious Source	Judgment Affected	Judgment Affected

Cognition, Emotion and Other Inescapable Dimensions of Human Experience

It should not be concluded that it is better to be depressed when good cognitive performance is required. People in good moods are often more motivated and have "higher expectations about their ability to achieve positive outcomes... While negative moods may lead to more systematic processing, they may also lead to less risk taking and to less creative and more pragmatic thinking. People in negative states may not be able to afford the risk of a more expansive creative strategy (Sinclair and Mark, 188). Schwarz and Bless converge on this position, indicating that "while early research on this issue emphasized the disruptive nature of affective states" (e.g., Easterbrook, 1959), the accumulated evidence suggests a considerably more complicated picture. Apparently, "feeling good and feeling bad may both facilitate and impair cognitive performance, depending on the nature of the task" (1991, 55).

The influence of emotions on judgment varies depending on whether the motive of the emotion is conscious or not. To put it more precisely, specific emotions do not tend to bias judgment as much as moods do (Schwarz and Bless, 1991, 58; Johnson and Tversky, 1983). Individuals interviewed on sunny days tend to be more satisfied with their lives than subjects interviewed on rainy days. Schwarz and Bless, however, report that the influence of the weather was eliminated in an experiment when the interviewer, who pretended to call from out of town, asked about the weather at the beginning of the interview (1991, 57). According to Clore and Parrott, the effects of mood on judgment often depend on a perception that the affective experience accompanying a mood state is occasioned by the aspect to be judged (1991-121). This is to say that there is a dimension of attribution that plays a role here. If we feel down, but have no perception of the cause of our feelings, negative perceptions about everything will likely occur. If we, instead, can localize the source of our feelings, these will not bias our judgments of things not connected with the source of our grief.

Cognition and persuasion The distinction between the cognitive performance of happy and depressed subjects has an interesting connection with some aspects of persuasion theory. It has been suggested that, generally, "subjects who are low in need for cognition, who scrutinize messages less and engage in less effortful processing, do not discriminate between strong and weak arguments in persuasive appeals, while subjects who are high on need for cognition, who scrutinize more and engage in more effortful processing, do discriminate between strong and weak arguments" (Sinclair and Mark, 171; see also Petty and Cacioppo, 1986).

There is an additional argument worth mentioning here, defined in the literature as "mood as information." Happy subjects are happy with themselves

and they are more lax in their judgment because they trust it. That is, a happy subject believes to have good judgment, believes to have made good decisions in life and has therefore confidence in his/her choices. It may very well be that unhappy subjects do not totally trust their own judgment and therefore tend to scrutinize more for that reason. Given their self-confidence, happy subjects tend to categorize broadly and their judgments tend to be more affected by stereotypes than is the case for subjects in other moods (Sinclair and Mark, 186).

Apparently, happy subjects tend to evaluate a persuasive message more on the basis of the source and other contextual elements, while sad subjects tend to concentrate more on the content. In a heuristic approach “recipients may rely on (typically) more accessible information such as the source’s identity or other non-content cues in deciding to accept a message’s conclusion” (Chaiken, 1980, 752).

Cognitive response to persuasive messages is not exclusively connected to situational moods; it can also relate to temperaments. “People who enjoy thinking tend to focus on the perceived quality of the arguments when they process a persuasive message, but people who do not enjoy thinking tend to rely on simple cues in the persuasion context” (Petty, Gleicher and Baker, 1991, 194).

Priming, or the power of immediate contexts, is important when considering ephemeral circumstances affecting persuasion. If one wants to ask one’s employer for a raise, or convince a potential client to buy a product, or persuade a voter to support a given side of a conflict — how could one create the perfect conditions under which to make the appeal? One would want to have the target of one’s influence attempt in a good mood (Mackie and Worth, 1991, 201).

In addition to priming, the number of arguments used and their quality affect the power of persuasive messages, albeit to different extents depending on other factors already discussed. If a persuasive message varies the number of arguments and employs only cogent arguments, we find that both naive and scrutinizing subjects will show an increase in agreement with the message when the number of arguments is higher.

Varying the quality of arguments allows a distinction of public reactions based on relevance: argument quality can affect agreement only if people think critically about, scrutinize and evaluate the information presented. The number of arguments in a message serves as a peripheral cue under low

cognitive involvement, but the quality of the arguments presented is carefully evaluated only under high involvement (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984, 78). High involvement tends to appear when subjects are unhappy, when they enjoy thinking or when they are happy, but the message appears as relevant or as potentially contributing to maintaining their feeling.

No prediction can be made with certainty exclusively on the basis of these factors. "A general framework for understanding attitude change must consider that in some situations people are avid seekers and manipulators of information, whereas at other times people are best described as 'cognitive misers' who eschew any difficult information-processing activity" (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984, 79).

Methods of study

Cognitive psychology experiments provide an insufficient base for the understanding of social behavior or even human behavior in situations different from those of a psychological experiment. As it has already been mentioned in relation to the pressure tank situation, emotional states affect people's skills and cognitive performance. Michael Argyle argues that cognitive social psychology has become one of the dominant approaches to social psychology, but that its focus is set on internal cognitive processes, decisions and attributions, and not on social behavior, interaction or real-life judgments. It deals always with one person, not with two. In extreme cases cognitive social psychology "sees social behavior and judgments as a kind of rational problem solving, performed by computer-like processes in the head" (Argyle, 1991, 161). It is this kind of bias that has turned many designers to anthropology as a complementary source of information and methodological models for research relevant to the practice of design. While psychology has traditionally taken an approach directed at identifying the specific processes that explain specific aspects of human performance, anthropology has followed the observational-descriptive model fostered initially by Margaret Mead and the structural interpretations proposed by Levi-Strauss, developing also an increasing consciousness of the inescapable presence of the observer in the observed (Mead, cited by Bateson, 1985, 159). Anthropology looks at actual situations of social interaction, applying analytical routines to categorize and describe the observation of those situations. Anthropologists do not engage in the search for explanations of the reasons why subjects undertake a given activity: they concentrate on understanding the patterns that connect individual observations of events (Bateson, 1972, 1985, 130-134, 449; Wilden, 1987, 188, 230, 298).

For designers, generally, the purpose of collecting information about a given situation is to understand it so as to create objects, information or environments that will facilitate the realization of desired and desirable activities. As designers we do not concern ourselves with the physiological or psychological reasons that cause an existing behavior: we concern ourselves with noting that a given behavior exists and with the possibilities to affect that behavior by facilitating it or discouraging it through design, according to a value system that defines the desirable. This can apply to two distinct terrains: task-oriented and judgment-oriented cognitive performance. The first falls into what we commonly call "information design," the second is in the terrain of persuasive communications; albeit that we recognize that all information design includes elements of persuasion and all persuasion design includes information. It is a matter of emphasis that distinguishes them, not of mutual exclusion (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, introduction).

It can be suggested that cognitive performance is affected in somewhat predictable directions by many factors, that these factors pertain to different categories and that the action-oriented character of design (as different from psychology or anthropology, which concentrate on knowledge construction, not on intervention) forces us to deal with complex systems; and to act always on the basis of insufficient information. Nevertheless, informed actions are more likely to obtain desired effects and to avoid undesirable ones.

Every design intervention creates a disturbance in the environment in which it occurs. I propose that we, as information designers, should look at existing knowledge in the sciences of observation, but should develop fast and further the existing knowledge of effective intervention. This is not to be exclusively task-oriented, exclusively centered on the design brief, but also critical of the cultural impact that every public action inevitably has. This takes us to the need to explore in other occasions the generally unknown terrain of the interaction between cognitive performance and culture (Frascara, 1999).

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Acknowledgements

This paper was originally delivered at the Vision+4 conference in Pittsburgh in the summer of 1998.

I want to thank my wife, Karen Yurkovich, for the discussions we had about this article and other related issues, for her careful readings of the drafts and for her suggestions. My gratitude also goes to Dr. Robert Sinclair, of the Psychology Department at the University of Alberta, for having brought to my attention the possibility for a systematic approach to the subject of this paper. To Gerry Derksen, Genevieve Freeman and Stan Ruecker, Master of Design students in my department, for the generosity of their research assistance.

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teaches visual communication design at the University of Alberta. He has been president of ICOGRADA and working group convener for the ISO on symbols for public information. He is the author of many articles and several books, most recently *User-Centered Graphic Design: Mass Communication and Social Change* (Taylor & Francis, 1997). His research focus is visual communications as related to safety and social problems.

Book Reviews

Design Culture

An Anthology of Writing from the AIGA Journal of Graphic Design

Steven Heller and Marie Finamore, editors. New York: Allworth Press, 1997

ISBN 1-80559-71-4

304 pages. softbound, \$19.95

As the title implies, this is a broad cross-section of designers and interested others writing about design as it is practiced and experienced at the end of the twentieth century. The editors have gathered articles from the AIGA Journal under the following themes: borrowed designs, understanding media, identity and icon, arts and crafts, modern and other isms, design 101, future shocks, facts and artifacts, love-money-power and public works. Steve Heller has done more perhaps than anyone to popularize 'what is design.' He has an eye for the ideas and issues and does not shy away from controversy. In large part, the articles represent musings informed by the real life design experience of their authors. It is a book of reflections on a cultural practice. Not "starchy," but down to earth, the reader may be surprised by the diversity of voices and positions.

Graphic Design Sources

Kenneth V. Hiebert

New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998

ISBN 0-300-07461-1

214 pages, softbound, illustrated: 140 full color and 440 one color, \$45.00

This is a beautiful book. The author, a designer and teacher, has spent an integrated lifetime in design. In *Graphic Design Sources*, Hiebert shows how he structures the learning experience for students with brief textual discussion and many sequential visualizations of process. He is a master of visual aesthetics, but the work he shows is more than a formal tour de force. The creative process he shares includes thought and analysis from sometimes surprising sources. The book is organized around "Drawing from ...": nature, transformational programs, music, personal experience mapping, statistical data, the built environment and vernacular expression. The control of visual syntax along with sensitivity to space and scale are hallmarks of his work and the student work shown in this book. A deep commitment to design and teaching are revealed in this fine book.

Designing books practice and theory

Jost Hochuli and Robin Kinross

London: Hyphen Books, 1996

ISBN 0-9072759-08-1

168 pager, hardbound, illustrated in two colors, \$40.00

Designing books, a collaboration between Jost Hochuli, a fine book designer in the modernist tradition, and Robin Kinross, a typographic historian and typographic traditionalist, is a welcome addition to any typophile's bookshelf. It is a wonderfully designed (Hochuli) and produced book, worthy of repeated browsing. In fact it is better for visual study than for its text. This is not to say that the text is in any way poorly written or the typography unfriendly to the eye — it is more a testament to the plan for the book and its visual execution. Let me explain.

The book is illustrated with spreads, title pages, covers, dust jackets, etc. from numerous books that demonstrate the principles that Hochuli wants to communicate. These illustrations are usually presented in a constant 1:3 relationship between the original and its reproduction; the sizes are fairly consistent making comparison between images easier. This controlled relationship also provides an underlying rhythm for the book. The reproduction of the book elements are further controlled by presenting them as if they were "plans," flat images of a dimensional object, which of course a book in use truly is. These "plans" are precisely delineated by a red (the second color) rule. In this way, red performs a technical function and also, on occasion becomes the color for graphic emphasis internal to an illustration. The typography is also carefully controlled from both an authorial (technical detail on the illustrations, references to and identification of individuals named, etc.) and a typographic design (size, spatial position, etc.) standpoint. The design of this book is balanced, attractive and varied, with great attention to detail — all without calling undue attention to itself.

An early description of the organization of the book indicates that it is in three parts, with the first two parts exploring basic theory and practice in book design and the third part showing examples. The book really doesn't do quite what it says it will in that there is little theory as I understand it (no reference to optics, legibility studies or deep investigation of reader intentions), but many

prescriptive statements that are then demonstrated by illustrations. The tone is a bit preachy. In defense of Hochuli, who is a wonderful typographer, I have witnessed many visually adept individuals be unable to articulate in words the visual and tactile principles on which they carefully operate. Here a demonstration of the process in action would better serve us all.

The six categories of book that form another level of organization for this book and that the author attributes to Hans Peter Willberg, are poorly conceived. These categories — linear reading, information, consultation, selective reading, typography that differentiates and typography that follows units of meaning — jump from the reader's activity to that of typographic function to points between. (Reader-centered categories, for example, have been explored by Umberto Eco.) The author demonstrates thirteen exemplars which seem to have only a tentative connection to the categories he supports. Analysis of reading activity and how to support the reader's goal is of paramount importance to book design.

The text lacks depth and resonance. No where does the author eloquently mention the function of negative space which is so dynamically and variously used in the illustrations. Nor does he really develop the important idea of scale change in book design. These are significant formal dimensions of the materials the book designer manipulates. He does spend some time with symmetry and asymmetry, but he dismisses the changing meanings that have been associated with the presence or absence of symmetry because they have changed over time. Apparently the changing context of use and acts of cultural interpretation are inconsequential.

The last section of the book that looks specifically at Hochuli's book design is a visual treat. He is not dogmatic, despite his prescriptive tone in the earlier sections. There is a fine sense for the material presented and a visual control that is light but definite. *Designing books* is for the already "saved." The examples of book design are excellent, but from the standpoint of teaching typography, what is needed is less a series of general prescriptions and more a record of process — of making and adjusting and making again until the typography really sings. Despite my critical comments, I am pleased to add this book to my collection as an exemplar of the idea of 'designing books.'

Reviewer Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl, editor of *Visible Language*

Dimensional Typography

Case Studies on the Shape of Letters in Virtual Environments

J. Abbott Miller

Princeton: Kiosk Report (Princeton Architectural Press), 1996

ISBN 1-56898-089-2

60 pages, softbound, illustrated in various colors, \$11.95

Letter play is a compulsion for many — whether type designer or not. This small treatise looks at some dimensional fantasies and frights. The operations on which the movement from two to three dimensions depends are: extrusion, tubing, sewing, molecular construction, modular construction and bloating. The book consists largely of demonstrations of letterforms generated through these operations with a brief opening text that casually surveys some historic origins. I suspect the first letterforms were considered “things.” The immersive and visual/dimensional world of the computer may return us to the “thingness” of letterforms. This small book will become a collector’s item.

A History of Communication Study

A Biographical Approach

Everett M. Rogers

New York: The Free Press, 1997

ISBN 0-684-84001-4

576 pages, softbound, \$18.95

Anyone interested in an overview of a hundred-year development of communication study would do well to consult this book. As the title implies, it is a look at the major contributors whose interdisciplinary ranks include anthropologists, philosophers, economists, engineers, sociologists, psychologists, media specialists, political scientists and others. The bibliography is extensive.

Typographis Polyglotta

A Comparative Study in Multilingual Typesetting

George Sadek and Maxim Zhukov

New York: The Cooper Union, 1991

40 pages, softbound, \$11.95

This is a fascinating and useful study for any designer engaged in global, i.e., multilingual communication. Using a standard text in English as the control, a translation of this text is set in twenty-one other languages. The goal is to try to visually match the English (Latin alphabet) setting even though subsequent settings might be in other language/writing systems such as Arabic or Chinese. The book is organized by using a spread for each language with a description of the language's origin, sound and letterform development on the verso and the sample setting of the standard text on the recto. The authors carefully point out that the translations may vary in character — they may be more or less idiomatic — they may be more or less terse. However a comparison of the set lengths can be used at least as a guide. A matrix of type area comparisons is presented for quick reference. English was used as the baseline setting for matrix comparison purposes since the investigation originated in the United States. The book flags some typographic issues in multilingual settings at its conclusion.

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