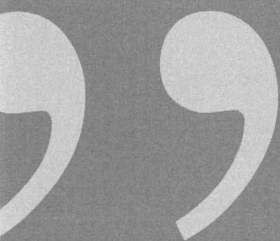


*Visible Language* 39.1



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**Existential Textuality: Engagement in the Form of a  
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EXISTENTIAL TEXTUALITY:  
ENGAGEMENT IN THE FORM OF A LETTERPRESS BOOK  
JOHN CROMBIE'S *SO*

# *John Crombie's So*

Emily McVarish

## *Abstract*

*"Existential Textuality: Engagement in the Form of a Letterpress Book" examines the work of English writer and book artist, John Crombie. In So, his combinatory narrative of cyclical romance, Crombie integrates typographical and literary composition, physical and narrative structure, letterpress and linguistic materiality to address the fundamental givens of existence: mortality and consciousness, freedom and contingency, subjectivity and temporality. The 'book' as both a finite and an interactive format gives rise, in the typographic schema of So, to a view of language, stories and life itself as sets of possibilities and events, the significance of which derives from choice and sequence. The implicated reader of So's multi-linear tale may flirt with notions of authorship, yet in her hands, the codex enacts, typography writes and design tells, as every movement and surface of Crombie's work becomes reflective of the meanings that inhere in the very form of a printed book.*

*From children's puzzle-stories to fragments of Samuel Beckett <sup>1</sup>, the handmade books of Kickshaws press share their imprint's two-faced presentation: "I'm something/I'm nothing." The word "kickshaws," a corruption of the French *quelque chose*, owes its existence to use by the English to describe French culinary frivolities of the seventeenth century, as in, "a 'something' French, not one of the known 'substantial English' dishes." From this first use, the *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the sense in which we take it here: "Something dainty or elegant, but unsubstantial or comparatively valueless; a toy, a trifle..." A denial of substance, despite elaborate appearances, unites the two meanings. Yet the very choice of a word that originates in the untranslatability of another should give us pause. For is not the trace of *quelque chose*—*kék(é) chose*—that lingers in "kickshaws" itself a sort of substance? And are not the matters to which an insistence on this trace leads us—the role of linguistic materiality in the production of meaning, for example—quite substantial, indeed?*

1. Crombie, John. 1987. MAC. Paris: Kickshaws. "Passages from Samuel Beckett's Mercier et Camier that were excluded by the author from his English version, gleaned, translated and printed by John Crombie." (Crombie, John. 2002. *Kickshaws Catalogue 2001-2002*. Paris: Kickshaws, 4.)

One might even draw an analogy between the French emphasis on a dish's outward elaboration—mistrusted and dismissed as inconsequential, or worse, by the English—and the English attachment to the eloquence of a word's form. In this case, the form is phonetic: *quelque chose* preserves its foreign tone and airy elegance in becoming “kickshaws” rather than “something.” And its retention involves us with the shape and shaping of language rather than with its “content:” the ideally disembodied meaning which it is any inscription's traditional duty to deliver. As in the original ambivalence of the English attitude that produced it, within the word “kickshaws” itself, and surely in its selection to identify the productions of John Crombie and Sheila Bourne, an intriguing contradiction exists, a demonstration of substance and complexity in the guise of self-dismissal. *Thus, it is with care that we approach Kickshaws books, each one trying to pass itself off as a trifle while at the same time displaying at its surface the elements of a clever construction.* If this display might be explained as an attempt to amuse, its diversions cannot prevent a quite opposite effect, which is to call our attention to the inner workings of books, of tales, and of language itself. In fact, the self-consciousness of Kickshaws books leads straight to the structures that make them—and any other book, any other narrative, any other meaning—possible. We should not be surprised, then, to find our suspicions of the seriousness<sup>2</sup> of the Kickshaws enterprise confirmed by John Crombie's evident formal and conceptual ambition. The design and production of his books embrace the question of the Book and the nature of textuality. His visually and verbally explicit schemas reveal the very mechanisms of writing. As for his stories, more often than not, they plot the bounds and pull of existence itself. Indeed, this theme enjoys such frequency in Crombie's work that to ignore its role would be to miss a central point.

2. An entirely different discussion could be fruitfully pursued concerning the nature, means and antecedents of Crombie's humor. My focus on gravity in his and Bourne's work is in no way meant to discount the significance of this humor. Indeed, gravity and humor are intimately linked in nearly all Kickshaws books, often in the form of a distinctly absurd(ist) sensibility that might interestingly be linked to a host of post-war writers, from Beckett to Ionesco, Frisch and even Nabokov.

### **Untitled Life**

*In Curtains*,<sup>3</sup> a text describing the fall of night gradually loses its contrast to a dark background and disappears. In *Overcoated*,<sup>4</sup> the silhouette of a coat works its way up from the bottom of the page to obliterate more and more of the text body. These and many other stark sequences trace an allegorical progression toward death in Crombie and Bourne's books. And while theirs remain symbolic passages, the number of Kickshaws works that quite *literally*, if elementally, tell a life story is no less considerable.<sup>5</sup> Often, the draw toward an end is set in motion by the repetitive and progressive action of these books; whether by accumulation or elimination, the entirety of a life's list—of women loved, books read, milestones reached—is exhausted, complete or contained in the sum of their pages. Many titles establish the scope of their subjects immediately: *The Loves of My Life*, *Biobibliographie*, *Womb to Tomb*, *Such Is Life*.... In others, a sense of *range* gains the reader as she realizes that a story begun with some rendition of a birth (a photo of a newborn described, for example) is moving at a narrative pace and on a typo-evolutionary scale that will surely lead to a death before the book is done. Or rather, exactly when the book is done. For what quickly becomes clear to the reader of these stories is the extent to which an analogy has been pushed: between a book (the Book) and an individual existence (Existence).

*The privilege enjoyed historically by books as favored embodiments of lives can be detected in any number of literary and cultural tropes.* Whether a life's quality is displayed by an array of works read (the image of a full bookshelf), its worth attested by the weight of a tome written, or its truth contained in a diary kept, there is, it would seem, always more than a clean symbolic exchange at work. An investment—or displacement—deposits the essence of a life in the (permanent) form of the book, as if, paradoxically, the written—or better, the printed—volume offered the “meaning of life” refuge from the ravages of time, the accidents of fate, etc. And yet in many ways, the analogy between life and a book goes much further than the notion of an ideal surrogate would suggest. Indeed, in the hands of John Crombie, books become an accurate model of mortal consciousness, a means of placing the implications of our *condition* and their impact on experience within the reader's grasp. Crombie may say that his predilection for life stories merely reflects some functional convenience,<sup>6</sup> but its effect is to bring to the fore again and again what a page and a moment have in common in the context of finitude, linearity and an incapacity to be anywhere but the present—the context, that is, that defines our lives. Existential temporality inheres in the codex form. Crombie's books simply make the most of this given by configuring and enacting its principles at every level of narrative, typographical, visual and physical structure.

3. Crombie, John. 1985. *Curtains*. Paris: Kickshaws.

4. Bourne, Sheila and John Crombie. 1982. *Overcoated*. Paris: Kickshaws.

5. At least a dozen such books exist, including:

Bourne, Sheila and John Crombie. 1983. *Untitled Book*. Paris: Kickshaws.

Bourne, Sheila and John Crombie. 1985. *Stitches in Time*. Paris: Kickshaws.

Crombie, John. 1985. *The Loves of My Life*. Paris: Kickshaws.

Crombie, John. 1986. *Biobibliographie*. Paris: Kickshaws.

Crombie, John. 1986. *Womb to Tomb*. Paris: Kickshaws.

Crombie, John. 1989. *True to Type*. Paris: Kickshaws.

Crombie, John. 1990. *De Mère en Terre*. Paris: Kickshaws.

Crombie, John. 1991. *Such Is Life*. Paris: Kickshaws.

Crombie, John. 1994. *One Way or Another*. Paris: Kickshaws.

Crombie, John. 1997. *Four-Letter Word Life*. Paris: Kickshaws.

Crombie, John. 2002. *Errata, or My Mistake*. Paris: Kickshaws.

*If life is the story, and bound, printed pages are the book, then Untitled Book does not merely compare, but equates and conflates the two entities.* No title or preliminary pages separate this book from its letterpress text. Indeed, the latter commences on the front of the former in the form of a mound of jumbled black letters on a blank background. This mound is repeated on the first (next) page and again, opposite a colophon, on the next. Either the mound serves as a cover illustration, title and first page of the narrative, or the narrative begins with the very appearance of the book and continues within as an expression of initial stasis. In any case, in its fourth iteration, the mound shares the page with a vocalic line whose shape (thin and straight) contrasts with that of the large round heap, even if its verbal content—"ooooobuuuuueeee," etc.—has yet to distinguish itself from the pile of gibberish below. *figure 1* As one turns the pages of *Untitled Book*, these two elements, the line and the mound, maintain the position established for them on the "cover" and "title page," always taking place on the recto opposite a blank. But changes in their composition begin to occur. As its content becomes legible, the straight, set type above acquires justified lines in a growing block, while the blob below gradually diminishes. At some point, it becomes clear that their relationship is not merely one of contrast or inversion, but causality: one borrows a sum from the other and spends it. The nonsense vowels aligned atop the first page are revealed (retrospectively) to have been the cries of a newborn by the text of an announcement that directly presents the otherwise unnarrated event of a birth: "Mr. and Mrs. Grimshaw are delighted to announce the birth of a son Miles." Another hint lies in the decorative typeface that sets this sentence apart from the rest of the justified text. Looking back to the previous page, one's suspicions are confirmed: those elaborate initials, those spindly small caps, used to be part of the mound; their appearance in the composed portion of the page has effectively subtracted them from the uncounted quantity below.

*The story continues, its landmarks shown as much as told by various narrative and typographical devices.* With stylistic evolutions appropriate to the stage they represent, firstperson, present-tense evocations of specific moments of the narrator's childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, marriage, parenthood, divorce and retreat plot the graph of a life. These stages are separated by what Crombie has called "typographical dissolves," <sup>7</sup> strings of random letters that cut short the depiction of a given moment and allow for otherwise unmediated transition to another biographical era. Each time of life is punctuated by

6. "...Ce qui explique sans doute l'importance du syndrome "womb to tomb" comme thématique privilégiée... Schématisant cette trajectoire exemplaire entre toutes qu'est la vie, du berceau...au tombeau, la présence constante de cette suite de rimes à forte résonance... n'est pas à attribuer à une quelconque morbidité de la part du typographe mais plutôt au fait qu'elle s'offre comme prétexte idéal à des exercices narratifs purement typographiques." ("...Which, no doubt, explains the importance of the 'womb to tomb' syndrome as a favorite theme... Tracing the most exemplary of trajectories, that of life from cradle... to grave, the constant presence of this resounding rhyme is not attributable to any morbidity on the part of the typographer, but rather to the fact that it offers an ideal pretext for purely typographical narrative exercises.")

Crombie, John. 1991. "Kickshaws: son parcours (et accidents de)." *Littérales* n° 9. "L'Écrivain et la Fabrication du Livre." Actes du Colloque Organisé par l'Institut d'Étude du Livre, Centre de Recherche Livre et Littérature, Paris X Nanterre, 31.

7. Crombie. "Kickshaws: son parcours (et accidents de)," 48.

ooooobuuueeeewooojiiiiii booooooogooofeee gooooooaaaaa gaaaadaaaa daaaaadeee

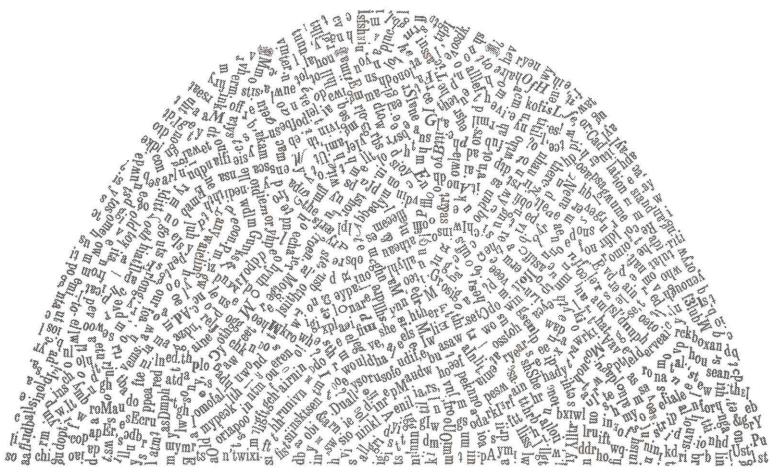


figure 1

Untitled Book

a typographical facsimile announcing some important development: a 21st birthday, a wedding, the birth of a child, a housewarming, a new job, a change of address (divorce), the death of a loved one, etc. Each announcement is made in its own distinctive typeface. But there is another punctuating element in the protagonist's life story that always shows up in the same bold italics: the titles of his various—aborted, rejected—manuscripts. Meanwhile, as the justified lines expand with the maturity and establishment of their subject, the mound of typographical matter diminishes, sacrificing its letters in standard and special styles to every event recounted. And “matter” is, indeed, the word for this mound, as its shapeless shape, primal graphemes and quasi-static repetition from one page to the next imply. But a life's passage, its formative experiences and, most mimetically, its literary productions are exhausting this matter. Just as the narrator spends his life on texts that attempt to make sense of this life, so *Untitled Book* consumes itself in the creation of meaning. This perfect coincidence of existence, writing and the book is marked again at the end of the story. Alone in old age, the protagonist struggles to continue writing despite an ever-decreasing arsenal of vowels (recklessly wasted by the newborn who opened the book with his cries). The name of the work in (sputtering) progress, *The Time of His Life or Capitulations and Recapitulations*, is the last to be offered for this ultimately untitled life. **figure 2** The manuscript comes to a stop; the text falls off; the protagonist dies. The needed “e” can no longer be supplied. “I,” the last remaining vowel has reached the limits of its applicability. The book ends. Life, writing, the stuff of language and the book object form one and the same extent.

*To accomplish this equation in Untitled Book, Crombie and Bourne employ the most basic means of their medium (letterpress) and form (the book).* What distinguishes letterpress from other print media is the degree of its physicality. Handset type must limit its compositions for any given run of the press to the quantity of letters available in a case (a quantity conventionally measured—proportionately represented—by the number of e's cast in the lot). Thus, the authors' image of finitude derives from a real condition of their means of production—so, too, does the image of meaninglessness (the mound). It is the dreaded “pie.” Pie results from the collapse of a set form, an event feared in any letterpress print shop and one that can all too easily happen, since foundry type does not come in words or lines but in individual characters that only lateral pressure can maintain in lines and blocks. <sup>8</sup> Crombie has said that his ideas for books are suggested by his experiences as a printer <sup>9</sup>, and *Untitled Book* would seem to exemplify this phenomenon. But letterpress is not the only

8. The difficulty of creating this pied mound as a printable surface, the minuteness of material involvement entailed, may only be appreciable by fellow letterpress printers. Far from an artifact of Adobe Illustrator, the mound was made of individual pieces of type crammed into the confines of shape cut from plywood and stuck down on doublestick tape for good measure. As each page was printed, type was removed and replaced with non-printing spacing material in order to maintain the pressure needed to hold the type upright.

9. Crombie. “Kickshaws: son parcoures (et accidents de),” 30, 32, 35, etc.

*The Time of His Life, or, Capitulations & Recapitulations*—never at a loss for a title!—with perhaps a glimmer of the old fire when I burned to be done. Pull out the old fireproof if not alas damp-proof trunk and sift through my papers, juvenilia, senilia, sit scribbling away till all hours, no sound save the crepitation of all these crumpled balls of paper, faint mocking chorus of crinkling onionskin, from now on I shall just rip all rubbish to bits. Dim light dying till so dark I'll ruin my optics as Dad was always warning I would, or just lost in visions, visions of my inward optic as I sift this drift this shallow drift of skimmings all grist to my mill—how quill will go dribbling on 'twixt inky digits—till my fist starts aching and bad pain in my brain And my slim pickings shrinking dwindling till by & by nix! Spirit willing—mind willing!—I'll try & finish it scribbling it bit by bit till it's writ i'll finish it still if it kills m

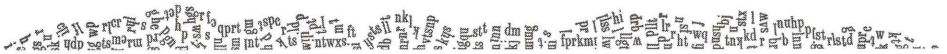


figure 2  
Untitled Book

physical support for the idea of finitude and meaning-making here. The codex is also a finite, physical form. What is more, with the codex come time and sequence, the source of narrative structure and, more fundamentally, of signification through repetition and variation. The design of *Untitled Book* visually reinforces these qualities by the consistency of its page layouts that allow for narrative movement to be apprehended without reading, through the inexorable shift in proportion from the resources to the expenditure of a life. Once established, this movement can be extrapolated, its end anticipated (by the reader if not by the ever-toiling protagonist). What better formula for a consciousness of mortality? And it is the experience of the book that offers this formula. The book, *Untitled Book*, is as textual as its text is physical. Indeed, the two are utterly inseparable. No meaning transcends intact the physical extent of the object in our hands. There is, it seems to say, no livable meaning of life beyond life.

### **So: Combinatorial Situations**

*Untitled Book begins abruptly and draws unrelentingly toward a single end. The comparison to death-defined life can easily be made.* But Kickshaws has produced many multi-linear, permutational and otherwise combinatorial books that do not replicate a simple start-to-finish trajectory. Perhaps more than any other aspect of Crombie's work, an enduring pursuit<sup>10</sup> of structures that generate textual (semantic, narrative, or poetic) variations through multi-directional reading distinguishes Kickshaws' output from that of other artists' presses. A book that can be read backwards and forwards, a set of pages that can be interwoven in any order, a reading that shuffles and reshuffles and tends toward endlessness, would hardly seem relevant to the themes thus far exposed. Yet in pulling back the flaps that encase the first of Crombie's original combinatorial texts,<sup>11</sup> the cloverleaf, reconfigurable *Only Connect!*,<sup>12</sup> we come upon this quotation of Raymond Queneau: "Upon this prospect, reader, do not brood./All things—all stories—must some day conclude." This on a book that, by its nearly infinite readability, defies exhaustion! Indeed. For this and subsequent combinatorial works, which date from Crombie's literary encounter with Queneau's theory and practice in the Oulipo, arise from and give rise to a set of conditions that, as we shall see, continue and deepen an analogy of book to existence as defined by mortality. The most appreciable effect of a book whose order—and thus, plot, and thus, meaning—is determined by an active reader is to confront that reader with the question of beginnings and endings.

10. This pursuit would, indeed, seem to be driven by Crombie, as distinct from Crombie/Bourne. In general, the "conception and text" of Kickshaws' books are attributed to Crombie, while Bourne is credited with "graphics" or "illustration." (Exceptionally, in the case of *Untitled Book*, no information is provided as to any division of labor in the book's text and design.) Insofar as the mathematical generation of text that distinguishes combinatorial books must be worked out in its "conception," Crombie is the originator of these works. He is also the one who has written extensively of Kickshaws' interest in combinatorial literature. In any case, many of Kickshaws' combinatorial experiments, like that which will be discussed here, are the work of Crombie alone: with or without graphics beyond typography, he is their sole designer. In all, more than thirty—or, roughly, one half—of Kickshaws' books to date are in some way combinatorial—combinational, permutational, variational, etc.—in their graphic or physical structure and reading possibilities, including many of the most recent titles.

11. Kickshaw's first combinatorial achievements were the design and illustration of Raymond Queneau's *Un Conte à Votre Façon* and Crombie's translation/adaptation and reprinting of Raymond Queneau's *One Hundred Million Million Poems*.

Queneau, Raymond. 1982. *Un Conte à Votre Façon*. Designed by John Crombie. Illustrated by Sheila Bourne. Paris: Kickshaws.

Queneau, Raymond. 1983. *One Hundred Million Million Poems*. Translated and adapted by John Crombie. Paris: Kickshaws.

12. Crombie, John. 1984. *Only Connect!* Paris: Kickshaws.

More insistently, such a book tends to simulate in its reader an experience of freedom as engagement in the face of contingency. This reader's choices link phrases, construct narrative relationships, in short, generate meanings the status of which, given their explicitly contextual and relative origin, eliminate any possibility of a simple belief in essence or transcendence. If we call these choices, the turns and connections made by a given reading, "decisions," we begin to distinguish another aspect of an underlying existential modality. For just as it may be said that there are two deaths in any life—the event that terminates it and the thought of this event which, survived, defines conscious being<sup>13</sup>—so there are two ends to any given narrative moment: the one toward which the whole story moves and the one through which each step in the narrative is taken: a definitive perception, a decisive turn of events, etc. This latter sort of end, in marking the culmination of a stretch of development, gives impetus to the next, it makes narrative advancement possible. A work that implicates the reader's agency in the effect of these decisive moments not only heightens consciousness of their role, but also, again, removes any trace of fate from the text thus created and lends lucidity to a more worldly, even embroiled, view of significance.

*Crombie's complex and engaging<sup>14</sup> romance cycle, So<sup>15</sup> (figure 3) embodies and enacts the implications of this view by all means available and inventible, from the principles and implements of its literary and material production, to its logic and function as a physical object, to the nature and insights of the readings it provokes.* In *So*, ends are beginnings, limits are generative, constraints are liberating, and meaning is both provisional and survivable. By exploiting typography's spatialization, exaggerating pagination's partial views, complicating the codex's continuity and highlighting the structural basis of narrative and signification, *So* dramatizes the interactivity inherent in any book. Somewhere between a book's wholeness and its parts, its fixity and mobility, its finitude and multiplicity, *So* produces, with every reading, a work that takes on and carries through the paradoxes of life and death, time and consciousness, history and agency.

### **The Workshop: Crombie and the Oulipo**

*To understand the processes by which *So* achieves such scope and effect, we might begin by considering it in the context of Crombie's explicit ties to the work of Queneau and his experimental writing group, the Oulipo.<sup>16</sup> "Oulipo" stands for Ouvroir de la Littérature Potentielle—literally, Workshop of Potential Literature.*

13. According to Hegel's definition, "the life of mind is not one that shuns death, and keeps clear of its destruction; it endures death and in death maintains its being." (Hegel, G.W.F. 1967. *The Phenomenology of Mind*. Translated by J.B. Baillie. New York: Harper & Row, 93.) In Heidegger's formulation: "Death is Dasein's ownmost possibility. Being towards this possibility discloses to Dasein its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, in which its very Being is the issue." (Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper Collins, 307.)

14. "Engaging" should be understood in every sense where *So* is concerned. And while, once again, the discussion here will veer toward the Sartrian end of the engagement spectrum, its other, more playful side should not be underestimated.

15. Crombie, John. 1985. *So*. Paris: Kickshaws.

16. Crombie. "Kickshaws: son parcours (et accidents de)," 38.

For histories, founding texts and theories of the Oulipo, see Motte, Warren F. Jr. 1986. *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*. London/Lincoln: Nebraska University Press.

darling Clare	raven hair	kitchen sink
siren wink	kitchen sink	siren wink
kitchen sink	light rein	light rein
siren wink	light rein	light rein
eyes off her, had to keep a tight rein on myself not to make love to her on the spot! My blood was pounding madly, hers too, I	spied a tiny vein pulsing at the base of her throat. There was a storm brewing, the air was alive with static, a bit of loose fluff	light puff
tiny vein	skillich horse	light puff
how a kid had spied her skillich horse straying riderless through the woods, then later she'd been found lying unconscious	in the rank gorse. After he'd rung off I felt quite numbed, before driving over to the hospital I poured myself out a stiff drink	stiff drink
rank gorse	stiff drink	mellow chink
stiff drink	mellow chink	last breath
mellow chink	last breath	tragic death
last breath	tragic death	black lie
tragic death	black lie	quiet cry
black lie	quiet cry	grated teeth
quiet cry	speedy blunk	discreet wraith
day to find she'd done a speedy blunk I was distressed, but hardly surprised. While I had been out she'd thrown a few things	into my battered trunk and just left. What did surprise me was to learn she'd run off with a lifefboy; so anyway her far-evil nose	standard quote
battered trunk	stern fears	standard quote
had nothing to tell. So my worst fears were finally confirmed. It was all over, our affair, before it had properly begun. Blinded	by the bitter tears I was no longer able to blink back, I stumbled away, too stricken by the sense of loss and of the utter sham	passing tram
bitter tears	little brood	passing tram
utter sham	brief interlude	offhand bone
passing tram	offhand bone	stiffed groan
speech returned, in a gibbly offhand tone that fooled neither myself nor her. She named the date, glancing up in alarm at my	barely stifled groan of dismay as I counted the days we still had left together. So (wow) So much then for all my crazy schemes	fragile seams
stiffed groan	short cut	upper lip
crazy schemes	cosy rut	parting quip
fragile seams	faint scent	broken heart
upper lip	slight dent	deep regret
parting quip	sulky ponds	deeper debt
dall clash	nagging doubts	local rag
panic dash	sole reply	hidden stag
phone just as I came in, her sole reply tended to be a shrug. For my own peace of mind I decided to hear nothing, and simply	turned a blind eye to anything a shade fishy, content to enjoy her company for what it was...	blind date
blind eye	deeper sloughs	soul mate
deeper sloughs	solemn vows	softer cut
solemn vows	black cloud	little shut
black cloud	dinky shroud	ocular proof
dinky shroud	frantic race	same roof
frantic race	wry grimace	new missile
wry grimace	buffer zone	perfect flight
between us so as to form a buffer zone of sorts, holding me at bay. Suddenly she tore loose, leaving me grasping my knuckles	—to the naked bone, or all but!—as the doors were all slammed shut. It was a release when finally it came, the sharp whistle	business trip
naked bone	lidy sum	lally grip
in my insurance—quite a lidy sum it turned out to be, too!—to help to hide her over-while she found her feet again. It was for	me some liny crumb of comfort to know she'd be decently provided for. On the way to the airport to catch the one-way flight	lally grip
lidy sum	backward glance	mere bus
in, without a further backward glance, aware only of the weight of my two cases—and of the fact I had forfeited what clearly	was my last chance of finding happiness with any woman...	bubble bath
last chance	business trip	garden path
a pretext—some bogus business trip or other—I popped up to town for a night with her. All too brief alas, I would hardly have	got my lally grip unpacked before it was time to kiss good-bye again. I'd take a taxi from the station; she'd make a dreadful fuss	
lally grip	dreadful fuss	
dreadful fuss	mere bus	
mere bus	bubble bath	
	bubble bath	

figure 3 So

Founded in 1960, the group sought “new forms and structures which may be used by writers in any way they see fit.”<sup>17</sup> These forms are often mathematically derived and/or the result of some material constraint(s). Some, like the lipogram, overcome a reduction in the linguistic means available to the writer (an elimination—not unlike that which strikes the final pages of Crombie’s *Untitled Book*—of the letter “e,” for example in Georges Perec’s lipogrammatic novel, *La Disparition*); others, in a sense, go further and, adopting certain formal dictates (in particular those that could render a text’s parts interchangeable), create combinatorial works that multiply the possibilities of reading.<sup>18</sup> All such endeavors rely and insist on an apprehension of language as a concrete set of combinable units, a theory of poetic effect and narrative style as the product of calculation, disposition and construction at the most elemental level of linguistic materiality. It is perhaps not surprising, then, to find the word “artisanal” employed by Queneau,<sup>19</sup> to characterize the work of the Oulipo. Much remarked upon by the Oulipo’s members,<sup>20</sup> the root connotation of “work” in their workshop’s name indicates an awareness of the role of craftsmanship in their “research.” *Ouvroir* derives etymologically from the verb *ouvrer*, to work, “in the sense,” as Warren Motte Jr. points out, “of ‘working’ a given material: wood, copper, stone, and so forth.”<sup>21</sup> For the Oulipo, the position adopted by this choice represents a two-fold rejection in the realm of literary production: of chance and inspiration. An answer to the Surrealists’ attraction to the aleatory and unconscious as possible vehicles of transcendence,<sup>22</sup> this sense of *work* posits a conscious and voluntary praxis. More broadly, to the romantic “myth of literary inspiration,” it opposes a model of objectivity and exploration.<sup>23</sup>

### **Production: Literary and Literal**

*Invoked to make explicit a rejection of transcendence behind the valorization of craftsmanship, the terms “voluntary” and “conscious” would seem borrowed from an existentialist’s vocabulary.* Indeed, Sartre himself praised writers who saw themselves as “workmen in a room, like bookbinders or lacemakers,” called for a “literature of production,” and described language as “the matter and the tool of the writer.”<sup>24</sup> These images, in turn, bring us back to John Crombie, the typographer/writer. While Queneau’s interest in (personal computational) craftsmanship may have been temporary,<sup>25</sup> and while for all his fervor, Sartre’s use for the term remains figurative, Crombie’s involvement in craft is literal and pervades every aspect of Kickshaws’ productions. So demonstrates the inversions of content, form and

17. Raymond Queneau, quoted by Noël Arnaud in Motte. *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, XI. Another of Queneau’s explanations reads, “*Quel est le but de nos travaux? Proposer aux écrivains de nouvelles ‘structures,’ de nature mathématique ou bien encore inventer de nouveaux procédés artificiels ou mécaniques, contribuant à l’activité littéraire.*” (“What is the goal or our work? To offer writers new, mathematical structures and to invent new artificial or mechanical procedures which contribute to literary activity.”) Queneau, Raymond. 1965. *Bâtons, Chiffres, et Lettres*. Paris: Gallimard, 321.

18. Giving concrete form to the idea of multiple readings suggests one sense in which the Oulipo explored “potential”: the potential meaning of any literary text. Another sense for the word might be attributable to the invented forms, themselves, ready for use, as Queneau suggests, by would-be writers.

19. Queneau. *Bâtons, Chiffres, et Lettres*, 322.

20. See manifestoes and memoirs collected in Motte. *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*.

21. Motte. *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, 9.

22. Motte. *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, 18.

23. Motte. *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, 10.

24. Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1988. *What Is Literature and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 164-165, 195, 225.

25. The full citation of Queneau’s characterization of the Oulipo’s “recherches” reads, “*Artisanales—mais ceci n’est pas essentiel. Nous regrettons de ne pouvoir disposer de machines: lamento continué de nos réunions.*” (“*Artisanal—but this is not essential. We regret not having machines at our disposition: the continual lamento of our meetings.*”) Queneau. *Bâtons, Chiffres, et Lettres*, 322.

An interesting, one might say historical, split occurs here between the Oulipo and Crombie. For while the Oulipo, which continues its work today, embraced the computers they so presciently awaited, Crombie has almost no use for them. His working relationship to lead type—not to mention other, less conventional, printable supports—and the book form remains an integral part, if not the source, of his work. The mention of his work, here and there, in the category of “precursor” to hypertext points up the apparent anachronism of his sticking to a concrete path. But, as I will argue later, this attachment to the book as a printed object is not without its reasons and consequences—consequences that distinguish his inventions in significant respects from the theory and experiments of hypertext’s early champions.

medium that such a pervasion entails. To begin with, *So* embraces the material principles and limitations of letterpress composition at its basis: the grid of measured units that makes type fit into lines and lines fit into blocks. From this embrace comes the typographical schema of *So*: the long, solid, tightly lettered horizontal lines and vertical stacks that form its paths and shortcuts. Unlike *Untitled Book*, nothing of *So*'s overall composition, its course or even its total quantity can be grasped by perusal of its pages. What is gained by such skimming is rather reinforcement—through repetition—of the image presented by each spread: that of a seemingly skeletal, certainly structural articulation, of perpendicular parts and the unfilled spaces their intersections create. It is only by reading the text word to (dis)connected word that one comes to appreciate how this visual structure supplies timing—duration, pauses and simultaneities—and direction(s) to one's reading. What is perhaps more readily intuited behind this visual structure is a logical extension of letterpress physics and the lexical forms in which it participates. In *So*, the conventional left to right and top to bottom directives of linear reading are polarized, given separate functions and this separation is visualized by contrasting alignments made possible by the underlying matrix of commonly measured letters and the solid, unseen spacing material that comes between them.<sup>26</sup>

26. *So*'s columns and lines also may be seen to schematize the so-called "vertical" and "horizontal" axes of language itself: structural linguistics' paradigmatic and syntagmatic sources of meaning.

27. See Crombie. "Kickshaws: son parcours (et accidents de)," 25-28, 47-53. Here he refers to himself as a "writer-for-hire" (by the typographer—himself—who has come up with a scheme), etc.

28. Crombie. *Kickshaws Catalogue 2001-2002*, 1.

29. Crombie. "Kickshaws: son parcours (et accidents de)," 52.

Crombie has written eloquently of the conceptual resources he has discovered in the course of his letterpress apprenticeship, through the accidental effects and incidental revelations of setting, inking and impressing type. His description of a workman's self-image and his own alternating action between two facets of his authorial role as typographer and writer reveals the depth of the interdependence of literary and print production in his work.<sup>27</sup> Thus, he states, in his introduction to a Kickshaws catalogue, that his texts are "produced 'to order,' for the purpose of working out a concept or exploiting a new format, graphic device, process or technique."<sup>28</sup> Before discussing the stylistic constraints to which *So* adheres, we might look at the more strictly physical restraints imposed upon the text by its "format." These relate to line lengths and the exact positioning of key words within them. They are purely spatial, and, if we are to believe Crombie's account of the book's design,<sup>29</sup> their successful calculation was the result of a compromise (involving wording adjustments, for example) between the character count of a typewriter's maximal line and the length and positions produced by that line when set in type. Writing as a response to, and in dialogue with, material factors goes hand-in-hand for Crombie with writing in the service of a conceptual model. Literary invention bends, in his hands, to whatever stylistic accommodations or jerry riggings are required by the design of the narrative machine. Here, the conceptual

model is that of a cyclical, combinatorial novel, a maze of interlocking romances. The physical system that constructs this model is that of the points and picas, the heights and lengths, of letterpress composition. Writing is engaged in/by factors stemming from both concept and construction. It does not begin or end without them. Indeed, as we shall see, writing continues, utterly implicated, in the visual and mechanical features of the codex itself.

### ***The Articulate Object and the Physical Text***

*One could say that So is a book about romance(s). One might also say it is a book about subjective temporality or narrative conventions.* In any case, the phrase “a book about” would ring true. For, indeed, the stories of *So* are inseparable from the book that tells them. As with *Untitled Book*, the text is the book; the book is the text. Here again, there is no cover; there are no preliminaries. *So* begins on its face. <sup>figure 4</sup> If anything, book and text are even further conflated in *So*. The “colophon” is reduced to eighteen words and a copyright notice printed in tiny light-grey type at the bottom left-hand corner of the first spread. The “outside” paper is the same Arches rag—albeit doubled for strength—as that of the inside pages. And there is no repetition of its content within: one is immediately plunged into *So*’s overlapping strains of timely encounters, ecstatic consummations, domestic (d)evolutions and desperate ruptures. Nor is the back cover left out of these strains’ circling. How should the circle be completed if it were? From words to type to page layout and sequence, all aspects of the book participate in the telling of this spiraling history. Yet the structural levels these participants occupy are different, and this difference, this multiplicity allows for extension, extrapolation, reflection and restatement—in sum, a degree of self-reflexivity that invites the apparent tautology: *So* is a book about *So*.

*So* is a soft, simply bound book of thirty-six pages and pleasing proportion. Small and light enough to be comfortably held (9 1/8” x 7 3/8”), it is yet thick enough to suggest volume and wide enough to accommodate the exaggerated length of the vertically isolated lines that stretch, virtually without margin (the inset is about an eighth of an inch) from one edge of its pages to the other. Like *Untitled Book*, it is strictly black and white, purely typographical. No pictorial intervention disturbs the repeated page-image composed by its parallel horizontals and ragged columns. And, to complete this visual austerity, only one type face is used throughout. One

shiver. It swirled up into the air then drifted lazily back to settle on her tingling skin just as a moment before. 'Don't worry  
 She was already almost gone by the time I got there. Just before breathing her last breath her eyes opened and she smiled to  
 So I was on my own once more! I breathed sighs of such sheer relief, I'd actually feel quite faint! Otherwise  
 buds, etc. (Weeks later, I happened upon what must have been a preliminary, botched draft of it in the pocket of her gown, in  
 hurtling down on me, bowling me into the gutter...  
 massively in my pockets. Thereafter I lived in a daze, somehow keeping a stiff upper lip until the day of her departure. All the  
 here on its own, I knew. It was a wrench, though, moving back north. My one deep regret was to say goodbye to all that sun-  
 deeper debt  
 local rag  
 hidden snag  
 So I survived, of course. My lifeline was a young night nurse I got to know, Fifi by name. Thanks  
 off with this lover of hers each afternoon! Oddly enough, now that I had this ocular proof I felt quite calm, almost serene! All  
 even before the train began pulling out. I think I felt it before she did, the drunken lurch as it chugged off at last, carrying her  
 all bedraggled, one might well have doubted it...  
 she called it. I'd give her a buzz on arriving, leaving her time to take her bubble bath before I'd be drawing up, ideally with  
 least desire

figure 4 So: cover

smallish size of the narrow, slightly scripty Françaises Légères produces solid lines with none of the internal spacing that, built-in to another type face or interspersed by another compositor, would highlight individual letters at the expense of linear clarity. This clarity is needed, for in the complex field created by the vast and irregular vertical spacing of these lines and the interference of two-word stacks that occasionally intersect them, *So's* reader clings to the progress of any given line across a page and around its edge to the next spread. As Crombie describes *So* inside its protective mauve wrapper, it is "designed in the form of a maze: a maze composed of ten romances. These run round and round the book, interlinking in a given order to form a complete, closed cycle. Being circular, the maze may be entered at any point...entry points are provided throughout the book by... breaks in the narrative line, signaling the end of one romance, or one section of a romance—beginning, middle—and the start of the next. Rather more abrupt entry may be effected via the vertical streams of rhyming couplets that trickle down each page and interlock with the horizontal storylines..."

### ***Linear Movement, Polar Pivots, Cyclical Survival***

*One begins to conceive of the convolutions that run, twist, stop, start and align themselves behind So's diminutive title.* As for the ten tripartite romances and their "given order," we should not be deceived by the promise of beginnings, middles and ends. For if, as the author suggests in the above-cited instructions, we choose to begin on the front "cover," the segment that opens with the words "So I survived, of course" could alternately, equivocally, represent the first or last stage of our reading. Either way, survival of an end (in that particular strain, quite literal survival of a near-fatal accident, in others, emotional and spiritual survival of the death of love) constitutes the condition of possible beginnings, marking the first day of the rest of our protagonist's life at every amorous juncture. Again and again, Tim (for so he is called, as we learn somewhere in the middle of the maze) is relayed by the demise of one relationship into the origins of the next. Along the way, symbol and symbolized trade places, as death and its survival (life) represent and, in turn, are represented by, the familiar stages of solitude, infatuation, sexual fulfillment, alienation, rupture and the return of/to solitude. As on the cover, this cyclical movement is often inscribed in miniature by the first words of a new phase, in phrases like, "So ultimately I decided I would have to make a fresh start."

Originating either in the deathlike untenability of solitude—"So thereafter I slowly sank deeper and deeper into an abject state of gloom, never going out"—or, adulterously, as a way out of the living death of a marriage gone bad—"In the end, to escape her innuendos..."—, the tale of each, always subsequent, encounter quickly flips its hero to reveal an ever-ready capacity for shining novelty in the form of romantic attraction. And this novelty is never presented simply as refreshment, but always assumes the conviction of an absolute break with history—"I felt something I'd never felt before," he says of his love for Fifi, and "Sonia was like no girl I'd ever met before," just as "Fay was like no girl I'd ever met before." Similarly, new loves seem never to strike without the revelation of a truth: "It was love at first sight," he claims of an anonymous encounter, "I knew that this was it at last;" of Jaqi, he says, "Somehow I just knew she was the one for me;" and of life with Maeve, "our love must last forever." Meanwhile, death and rebirth, falls and redemptions, succeed one another at a quick clip. Again and again, the narrator tells us, "I succumbed to moods of black despair," "I became plagued by fierce twinges of angst, a sense of spinning round and round in a void..." Yet again and again, his survival of these deadly states is experienced as a beginning: "I soon began to revive," he says of his time in Fifi's care; to Kate he declares that she can "redeem this mortal sinner;" and his path to Jaqi is cleared by his readiness to "turn over a new leaf." In most of these accounts, a period of sexual compatibility or domestic comfort elicits another impression of transcendence, a sense of timelessness introduced by a total embrace of the present moment: Tim and Maeve are "able to enjoy one another to the full;" with Sonia, he is "content to indulge this sensual streak she'd brought out in me to the full, to live, for once in my life, from day to day and week to blissful week." Bliss of a calmer sort is brought by settling in to a shared household or daily routine: with Kate, "I began at last to enjoy that quiet domestic bliss I'd all but despaired of ever finding," and with Jaqi, "I felt an inner peace." The incidents and developments that cause these states to lapse into strife and distance provide the stuff of the penultimate stages of the narrator's many involvements. Jealousy, morbidity and absorption elsewhere are the principle causes of disintegration. When rupture comes, it either marks or precipitates a death of the killing kind: "it was all over" with Jaqi, and with Clare, "it was a lost cause." Yet a death of the heart is no more fatal than that death which is a knowledge of death's inevitability, and so, Tim "survives" (the verb occurs more than once), though how long he will be able to maintain the purity of this state now that he is back to the lucid—and thus, depressing—condition of solitude ("on my own again") is the guess that propels the reader onto his next affair. The deaths died and lives revived figuratively in these stories are those of

love, trust, spirit, body, desire for another and desire for life; the slippery part is that at any given moment, one sort of death or rebirth might be standing in for another.

*Whatever the distribution of metaphoric roles, the movement of these stories remains unchanged.* Each of the ten romances forms a circle, despite the breaks that separate its beginning, middle and end, and despite the protagonist's delusion—and the narrator's rhetoric—of advancement (each stage being reached “at last”). These circles in turn form links in the meta-cycle, each end, as we've seen, lending a starting point to the next ring. The book emphasizes this tension between circular movement (not to mention backslides and gaps), on the one hand, and linear progression, on the other. Within each story, the pull from one pole to another—from beginning to end, bliss to despair, couplehood to solitude—and the ability of prose to trace this pull are demonstrated by the strength of the horizontal lines. Taken out of their conventional vertical proximity to other such lines in a text block,<sup>30</sup> these typographic streaks carry forward the ever-passing diegetic moment of the narrative. Yet these lines are crossed by stacks of key words—rhyming couplets—that are drawn from within them, repeated above and below them and aligned with their counterparts from other storylines. Always composed of an adjective and a noun (“upper lip/parting quip”), these couplets are placed above the storyline if they have already occurred within it and below if they have yet to appear. These echoes and foreshadows become associated with the reiterated phrases similarly selected in other romances by horizontal alignment. Thus, just as the circle within each tale adds a link to the cycle of their sum, so the tension in each story between forward motion and its complication is carried through from one story to another by the page layout's mesh of prose and poetry, of pursuit and pattern. Its weave is loose enough to let us see just how complex is the crossing of temporal threads in a life (not to mention the challenge of loose ends, here caused by the storylines' breaks...).

30. Of the forty-six horizontal positions available, only ten are occupied on any given spread, always leaving space above and below for the stacks of couplets.

### ***Typographical and Narrative Time: Stretches, Stops, Gaps and Overlaps***

*If the typographical page presents an image of cross-reference and implication—of past and future in present, of one love in another—the typography of the book as a whole provides a complementary circularity.* Not only do beginning and end meet around the narrow space of the book's spine, but the lack of visual margins renders the turn of the page a mere blink in the line that wraps around it. “Round and round the book,”

says Crombie, and so it goes. It is an achievement to have over-ridden the frames that present and divide a conventional book's contents, to have replaced page breaks with an intra-textual rhythm of disjunctions and, between these, to have maintained such continuity of focus over and across wide and multiple spreads. (The average line, or segment, of a romance crosses about twelve pages.) But what is remarkable is that this continuity, these stretches do not make for calm but rather flurry, as the page-turn-per-minute rate is greatly increased by only having to take in one line at a time. This rushing sense is reinforced by the breathlessness both of the prose, which often omits commas, and of the narrow type face that maximizes character counts per inch. Solid and quick-paced, stretched and hurried, these lines tell at once *the long and short* of romance. The temporal paradoxes suggested by this combination of extension and compression are further expressed in So's narrative language. The stories' succession of verb tenses, temporal scale and the meaning of singular versus gradual movements find form. And, in various devices of summary and abbreviation, repetition<sup>31</sup> sets its weight against breezy ellipses lest we be gained for a moment by the narrator's illusions of progress.

31. Depending on the proximity of the next storyline, a couplet may be repeated up to ten times.

*The polar pretense of So's romances, their apparent advancement from one emotional extreme to another, for example, has roots at a more basic level of discourse, in the sequencing of verb tenses that suggest decisive moments on the one hand—absolute beginnings, definitive ends, critical actions—and development on the other.* Following the conventions of literary narrative, moments of truth are reached "finally" and are marked by a shift in verb tense. Settled patterns or gradual developments (most commonly occurring, as one might expect, in middle segments) are drawn out by past progressives and "past habit" constructions, often introduced by adverbs of duration: "For weeks after, she would just snap at me... I would retreat... ever earlier each evening." With the appearance of the simple past and the single instance it describes, the habitual or progressive stretch is punctuated. Usually preceded by a specific indication of moment, these punctuations take the form of events: "Then one night, she didn't come home at all. I went berserk..." In their most explicitly decisive form, these verbs recount critical actions: "I decided," "I proposed," etc. But whatever the action, the simple past tense puts a full stop to the indeterminacy of what came before, signals the end of a period or state, and in so doing, defines a new one. There is an implicit conflation of these shifts with the revelation of meaning: insofar as the events they describe are decisive, they mean something about the future. In at least one case, this conflation is explicit: "the money ran out, which meant giving up the cottage." Most emblematically, these shifts to the

simple past reveal the existence of love (“I proposed... she accepted”) and the fact of its end: “Penny smelled the fatal rat... I confessed... the sad truth was that all trust between us was utterly dead.” But does anything so definitive as death ever happen in life? Love affairs, with all their attributable origins and degrees of demise, their prescience and anticipation, regression and denial, turn out to be exemplary of a complex temporal layering of experience, knowledge and change. Indeed, between Penny’s smelling the rat (her husband’s affair with Fay) and his confession, between his confession and their divorce, verbs of duration—“continued,” “kept on,” “grew calmer”—undo the simple past tense’s definitiveness and, interrupted by multiple adverbs of finality—“finally,” “in the end”—expose the alternating nature of consciousness, from conclusion to suspension and back again. Significance and intention may, it seems, be produced or revealed by events only to be unraveled by a subsequent, less punctuated passage.

*Points of decision and their subjective displacement or accumulation along stretches of duration are configured by So’s typographical systems as well.* The very lengths of the storylines embody duration, while their periodic breaks, which necessitate a jump to another starting point on the page, perfectly enact decision. But the constant shifting and recycling of the couplets that run between them offer a different view of time’s passage and events’ impact. Like the shuffling information on a railway bulletin, these stacks announce episodes that have yet to come and briefly retain the notations, once predictive, “now” lapsed, of recent arrivals. Actually, So’s arrival board has a track running right through it: each story’s present, the progress of which dynamically places those vertically sliding features first below, in the future zone, and then above, in the past.<sup>32</sup> These features often make multiple appearances before and after their occurrence in the storyline. There is nothing particularly regular about the placement of the columns up which these flashing highlights climb. Indeed, their number and positions change with every turn of the page, ranging from two to three per spread, occurring at any horizontal point, sometimes lining up against the far side of a page, sometimes straddling its edge with one of each couplet’s words on a recto and the other, just behind, on the verso.

*The couplets’ visual movement, by repetition at intervals, across pages and spreads joins the effect of their approximate alignment in columns—not generally flush,<sup>33</sup> not quite centered—to produce a sense of uncertainty that undercuts their seemingly consistent, even inevitable, shuffling.* This uncertainty

32. *Toward the end of a segment, there are less and less couplets to fill the future zone below a line. Thus, one literally watches as the future of the phase runs out. But there is always a past, at least one reiterative couplet, weighing on the segment’s end.*

33. *The only time they are set flush right or left is when they fall at the very edge of a page.*

makes itself felt in the physical storylines as well: in the changeable distance between them and, more acutely, in the inconsistent relationship between the end point of one segment and the starting point of its successor. For not only might a new strain begin at any distance below or above the position held by the last, but there may be a gap—or overlap—along the implicit (horizontal) line of the story's progress. Taken together, these variously staggered forms lend a visual unpredictability to repetitions that might otherwise suggest necessity or the existence of a larger pattern. Whether the inability to predict—to link the present to a knowable future—and, for that matter, to “postdict”—to draw a straight line from the present to its origins in the past—is to be attributed to the blind and headlong attitude of *So*'s protagonist or experienced by the reader of his exploits, it is at the level of typographical spatialization that we must seek its realization.

### ***Across and Down: Condensation and Modularity***

*In stark contrast to this visual effect of randomness, the verbal and narrative meaning produced by the couplets' stacking comes of accelerated perceptions and highlighted connections.* Indeed, the promise of knowledge to be gained along each string of beaded episodes-in-miniature would seem to cancel the mystery of their typographical configuration. The couplet columns present multivalent linking zones on various scales that further dissolve any distinction between definitive points and lines of development. For if the selection of a two-word feature to represent a stretch of story would seem to imply that it sums up this stretch, the alignment of this feature with others recasts it as just another point along a (vertical) path. This path, this linking—of content within stories and from one story to another—further complicates *So*'s construct of progress and subjective temporality and, in so doing, calls attention to two major operating principles of the book as a whole: condensation and modularity. In his introduction, printed on *So*'s wrapper, Crombie characterizes his “microcouplets” as “poetic insofar as rhyming couplets reduced to a single adjective and noun are perhaps a concentrate... of most poetry.” To take their poetic characterization one step further, we might note that these concentrates constitute metonymies of the tale they tell, bits standing in for whole scenes. Sometimes these metonymies describe concrete, even minute, details: “empty flat/famished cat,” “damp soles/little moles.” But they may also be pulled from general designations: “fresh start/broken heart,” “sore distress/squalid mess.” Either way, their narrative effect is to sum up, and in this capacity they participate in a broad range of abbreviating strategies employed in *So*. Read

consecutively, the first and last rhymes of each segment of a given romance would give us an ultra-concise version of its arcs from solitude to coupling, settlement to dysfunction, rupture to solitude. Culled, for example, from the story of Jaqi, they read, “sheer relief/new leaf... radiant glow/status quo,” “long lease/inner peace... smaller shreds/single beds,” “clean break/big mistake... backward glance/last chance.” Thus, alongside more conventional narrative formulae (“one thing led to another”), and punctuative ellipses (...), the couplets carry out a tactic of omission founded in *So*'s basic system of breaks and resumptions between beginnings, middles, ends (... and beginnings). As the work's title and the first word of its every segment, “so” deserves note here. It functions as “introductory particle” in what the *Oxford English Dictionary* calls an “elliptic” usage. A horizontal reading of the couplets, then, demonstrates the book's primary mode, itself the exaggeration of a fundamental principle of narrative locomotion: suppression of the vast majority of material in favor of encapsulations that will allow for crystallization of meaning and advancement of plot. For clearly, advancement is the goal, since though we might think of the couplets as miniatures, they do not so much offer a distant view as the sort of acceleration toward conclusions that characterizes depressed (or simply philosophical) lucidity.<sup>34</sup>

*Such, then, is the effect of reading So's couplets 'across' a story. The more obvious direction to be taken, however, given their arrangement in columns, would be 'down'.* This is the reading that gives us a simultaneity of past, present and future at any given moment of the narrative, thus, as noted above, complicating *So*'s model of temporal consciousness—if not the protagonist's, then at least that of his observer, the reader. (And this complication goes further, into the temporally ambiguous areas where the past of one story merges with the future of another...) Yet the couplets' rhyming and stacking do more, for by their very nature as poetic units and connectors between narrative strains, they make us aware of a modular principle at work in *So*, and this modularity in turn implies—and in some cases makes explicit—another critical element of *So*'s construction: interchangeability. Operative on every plane of the book, its narratives and their language (not to mention the system of common measures which rules typographic composition), modularity makes possible not only the variable order of *So*'s ten romances, but also the interchangeability of their constituent parts (beginnings, middles and ends). Here, as in more detailed and concrete instances, the first consequence of interchangeability is the light in which it casts the narrative claims of uniqueness, novelty and originality so necessary to the existence of passion. The irony of this discrepancy—

34. *This principle of condensation and acceleration works at every level of So and may even be seen to be a force that affects the ten stories taken as a whole and in their "given order." While the "first" romances are only slightly clipped at the start by the space they share with the aftermath of their predecessor and otherwise enjoy full-length beginnings, middles and ends, some toward the center of the maze are, in a sense, cut short from within, precipitated into demise by the overlapping appearance of illicit affairs. This abbreviation of independent evolution culminates in the "last" of the ten loves—the only one whose object is not given a name—the whole history of which occurs in one section (the middle) and in one night's coupling, the section before having been wholly taken up with the conclusion of a previous involvement and the last section being merely the discovery that the relationship is already over, the*

between the narrator's conviction and the contrary evidence of its presentation—and the absurdity that results from its accumulation are underlined by the system of couplets, but these, it turns out, are merely guides to a much larger set of recombinable narrative modules.

*Through ample repetition, the couplets imprint their phrasing on the reader's memory.* It is thus thanks to them that, despite the pace both of page-turns and fast-motion narrative style, we first become aware of an echoing effect from one story to another in *So*. Examples of echoing couplets abound and the attentive reader may find resurgence at any point. These discoveries are aided by the stacking mechanism itself that is capable of placing a key phrase from one story just above its echo in another. Thus, "last breath" comes before "last goodbye" in the vertical chain, linking an actual death in one tale to the death of love in another. Slightly, if at all, modified, these phrases form such (virtual) pairs as "violent yern/violent gush," "jaunty stride/jaunty pace," "eerie hush/eerie quiet," etc. No matter how unusual the word choice contributing to a couplet's distinction, ("jaunty" in the above example or "vamping" which occurs twice to describe piano playing), there is no guarantee that it will not reveal its true generic nature by appearing in another. And the couplets are merely indicative, for this generic quality extends beyond them to the stretches of storyline that separate them. From the most minute details and seemingly specific incidents to the largest chunk of narrative trajectory, parts of *So's* romances are reused. Electric storms and the static they produce appear in four different stories, for example, thrice literally and once metaphorically. Crumpled notes, gritted teeth, fluttering eyelashes, a radiant glow in the eyes of a lover after sex... these and a multitude of other details find their way into *So's* stories more than once. Between their scale of modularity and that, much larger, of the beginnings, middles and ends, a whole range of reusable tropes and major events could be listed: travel as a way to revive (oneself or desire), marriage (six proposals recorded), settling down (into a villa at the end of a mews, a house by the park, a cottage on the moors, a bungalow by a lake, a cottage by the canal, a house by the river), etc. One effect of these echoes might be to posit association, displacement and repetition as the laws by which desire operates. Yet their implications go deeper. Just as the couplets' rhymes are only perceptible in their stacks and are otherwise buried in the line of the narrative's present—thus lending a hidden resonance to the prose stretches between them—so the repetition of words, phrases, images, actions and stages from one story to another forms other layers of refrain. And the more the reader "progresses," the more these layers surface. It may be difficult, given *So's*

convoluted sequence, to retrace one's steps and check on a suspected echo, and the protagonist's apparently faulty memory<sup>35</sup> may not help, yet the conviction mounts that one has read this or that phrase/passage/story before. Initially, this conviction serves to further disorient the reader—like the shape of a hedge one swears one has already passed in a maze—but ultimately, it leads to a grasp at a higher level: the perhaps melancholy perception that in love and life, events are never singular or unprecedented, that the range of their possibility is not infinite, but rather that all experiences derive from a fixed human repertoire.

### **The Type Case of Language**

*This notion of a repertoire describes the combinatorial view of linguistic possibility set forth by So, as well.* The reapplication of words and phrases both within and beyond the couplets suggests an understanding of language as a kit of parts, a concrete system ultimately relying on a material basis, the signifying potential of which lies in the disposition of its units. What qualifies words for inclusion in the columns of couplets is, firstly, their functional status as nouns and adjectives and, secondly, the phonic endings that make for their rhymes. A forcing of word choice (the hallmark of "bad" verse) is willfully pursued in such pairs as "ocular proof/same roof" or "straitened circs/grimy works," drawing our attention to the material nature of the constraints that make poetry possible.<sup>36</sup> In studying the slippages of meaning that occur between the first and next use of a key word, one perceives another aspect of linguistic materiality. If the word "static" means, literally, the passage of electric current between two bodies in one instance and, metaphorically, emotional shocks caused by tense contact when repeated in another, we learn that a word's only consistency lies in its material form, its potential to mean arising not from within but rather from contextual stimulation/determination. Through its inclusion in a representative couplet, "static" passes from narrative event (that of touching) to narrative metonymy (standing in for the sexual encounter to which this touch will lead). Through its subsequent use elsewhere to evoke the ready-to-explode atmosphere of a marriage, "static" leaps into a metaphoric role. And this passage, this leap, is visible in So thanks to its elliptical brevity and repetitive tendencies. All narrative clutter having been cleared, a selection of events and words remain to be used and, through use, invested with symbolic value. The fact that these events, these words, are recycled seems almost inevitable, since the whole exercise points to the concrete, and thus finite, basis upon which signification slips and slides.<sup>37</sup> The view of language we are thus

35. So faulty is this memory—of incidents and loves "past"—that traces of it are all but absent from the narration. And this absence, in its most troubling instances, is enough to make the reader doubt the very identity—continuity—of the first-person from one story to another.

36. That narrative direction may have been forced by the need to make a rhyme is a conclusion one might just as easily reach, given some of the absurd turns taken by So's storylines, the pivot being a neatly fitted couplet such as, "exotic plants/maiden aunts..."

37. In his "Brief History of the *Oulipo*," Jean Lescuré notes that the group's intention was to "fix the attention of the observer on the singular object that is literary language" by demonstrating that "(literary language) doesn't manipulate notions... it handles verbal objects... sonorous objects." (Matte. *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, 36.) Crombie's affinity with the *Oulipo* proves, in this regard, to be profound.

afforded is one of a limited number of elemental units in a potentially unlimited number of combinations, with meanings—and means of meaning (concrete, figurative, etc.)—that change accordingly.

*Like the significance of events, the consequences of actions and the force of circumstances in So's ten romances, the units of language—letters, words, phrases—assume meaning by configuration.* The link between *sequence*—by which narrative is constructed—and *syntax*—on which semantics depend—finds expression early on in *So's* "given order" when, under the maternal care of Nurse Fifi, the protagonist recuperates from his near fatal run-in with a tram. Falling at the far righthand edge of a page, the word "slowly" is followed, on the verso, by "painfully, painfully slowly." Suspecting a copy error (no intentional prose could be so repetitive), one flips back to the fore-edge of the previous page, carefully (slowly!) reading around the page break to take in the full phrase: "slowly, painfully, painfully slowly, I continued under the spell of her dusky charms to recover some zest for life." The repetition of words, we find, not being exact in its order or punctuation, does not create a repetition of meaning. A mere reversal of order, along with the subtraction of a comma, produces quite a different denotation in the second adverbial phrase, slowness itself having become the source of the pain. The placement of these phrases at the very edge of a page, forcing a re-reading of their wrapping sequence, is what produces our awareness of this sequence itself as the bearer of meaning. This sort of meaning one might qualify as *contingent* (upon order, punctuation, etc.) rather than essential. This is the contingency that Crombie evokes when he says that typographical determination makes text lose its "necessary character."<sup>38</sup> And his is the anti-transcendent stance that the Oulipo's members declared in their rejection of "inspiration."<sup>39</sup>

38. Crombie, "Kickshaws: son parcours (et accidents de)," 27.

39. Lescurie, "Brief History of the Oulipo" in Motte, *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, 34.

### ***Self-reflexivity vs. Subjectivity: the Author and Reader of So***

*These terms, contingency and transcendence, return us to the existential givens that dictate—and are expressed by—every aspect of So's composition.* Not only the language, not only the narrative possibilities but the design of the book itself proposes a version of creation, meaning and action as (re)configuration. What must be emphasized in this regard is the extent to which *So* constrains its visual repertoire. An appreciation of *So* in relation to the standards that have come to be associated with artists' books in general may be illuminating here. One

expects uniformity of design in a standard book, but where artists' books are concerned, transformations—of color, typeface or size, etc.—and the introduction of new elements of composition (including images) from one page to the next can be a structural means of creating meaning. Not here. Use of the same face, in the same categorical alignments (vertical and horizontal), points to the highly restricted palette from which the book as a whole derives its impact. This restriction results in a wholeness that meets our conception of the integrity of a life—that Life which, it seems, is the ultimate subject of every Kickshaws book. Integration of all elements in the effectiveness of the whole also constitutes a defining quality of artists' books, one that *So* fully realizes. A third distinctive feature, self-reflexivity, is achieved in *So*, as in so many other artists' books, by a conscious play of these elements, a sort of compositional dialogue that occurs from one structural level to another.

*Mirrors of effect, winks of recognition, reveal themselves throughout the book.* "I decided I would have to make a fresh start" states the first sentence of the section chosen by the reader after a break in the storyline demanding a *fresh start* in the narrative. Elsewhere, Jaqi's suggestion that she and Tim "make a clean break" occurs exactly at the page break, the edge falling between "make a" and "clean break." "Short cut" first appears as a means devised by the protagonist to get home earlier and enjoy domestic pleasures with Fay. In fact, this "short cut" becomes his access to a very different story (the affair Fay is having behind his back). And so it does for the reader. Drafted into couplet duty, rising, repeated, through the typographical ranks, "short cut" provides the reader just that: a quick by-way to the story of Sonia. Jealous Peggy accuses her husband of having (had) "a string of loving wives;" "loving wives" falls in line with the couplets above and below which, linking Peggy to Maeve, Kate, Jaqi et al (not to mention, Fay with whom Tim is soon to have an affair), effectively string these "wives" together. Her suspicions confirmed, Peggy drifts in "a dizzy maze" not unlike the one through which the reader seeks her way across and around the book. The list of such puns goes on, lengthened by various combinations of word choice and typography, cliché and pagination, literary trope and overall book structure. And these knowing nudges from one compositional rung to another, this meta-combination, has the effect of periodically calling the reader's attention to a single intelligence at work (or play) on every level of the book in hand.

*Thus, text and book, type and page, scheme and plot to create a tension in the reader's experience of them.* On the one hand, they allow access to ironic meta-readings of the sort just described. On the other, they seek to replicate in the reader's apprehension of the text the subjective limitations and absurd movements of this text's narrator/protagonist. Indications of a subjective

point of view are not restricted to the implicit moment of narration—the present-tense statements of thought, knowledge and enunciation that mark the stories' telling: "I think," "I shall never know," "I must say," etc. These markers and the limited, present tense vision they construct, invade the stories themselves, implicating the reader in the moment recounted. Incursions of subjectivity collapse the distance between telling and told, erase the closure that separates past from present, displace the time/place of enunciation from the present of narration to the "present" of the actions described by such tell-tale deictics as "now" ("the slight friction always between us now distressed me"), "soon" ("I soon found"), "here" ("My bruised heart could never heal here") and "this" ("This girl was"). Temporal slides of point of view also effect the narration's framing of information by insertions of (past) uncertainty—"What was she staring at?" "How long could it last? How would it end?"—and conviction—"Clearly." Even more concise conflation of the narrator and the protagonist's subjectivity occur in occasional exclamation points that directly represent the character's reaction to events at the time of their occurrence.

*The book's structure extends this immersive effect by mimesis.* At each break between segments and tales, the reader must make a decision about which strain to pick up, which thread to follow. <sup>figure 5</sup> The protagonist's bewilderment before the vagaries of his involvements, his fatigue in the face of "fresh starts" and "new leaves" is reproduced in the reader by this system of breaks and calls to action (choice)—so, too, is the limited knowledge of where these choices will lead. For though Crombie warns on the book's wrapper that "fine judgment will need to be exercised in order to make the right connection," he concedes that this judgment must be made "on the basis solely of the first few words visible on the same page." In any book, page breaks divide the present (the page one is "on") from the past (the spread that has been buried by the current page's turn), and the future (the page that lies, invisible, on the other side of the present). But in *So*, these divisions play a critical role, since they restrict the reader's field of perception (to whatever length a line extends before the page edge is reached) at a time when a decision must be made, the repercussions of which will effect not only the direction of the immediate narrative, but the order of every choice that succeeds it. One could, it may be argued, attempt to cheat by looking to the information contained on the next page before coming back to confirm a selection, but such forward and backward movement actually proves quite difficult to maintain in the force-field of lines and columns that animates each of *So's* pages. Thus, it is with certain angst that the reader contemplates the gap and

grimy works  
 empty space  
 mental case  
 morbid moods  
 into a series of quite bitter feuds that inevitably ended in tears or worse. Clearly we were making ourselves ill with all these  
 constant tiffs  
 fearsome cliffs  
 mellow fall  
 urban sprawl  
 sensual ease  
 shopping sprees  
 least wishes  
 rustle up all sorts of lousy dishes out of next to nothing. The fact is, I still hoped to marry the girl, still cherished the same old  
 smaller shreds  
 our double by two single beds, banishing mine and me with it to the loft. That only made things worse...  
 balmy days  
 mellow haze  
 purple prose  
 languid pose  
 throaty moans  
 I explored her, pleasure zones and all, learned to love her more, and better... There was something so easy, so gracious in the  
 electric shock  
 my swelling, swollen cock... Afterwards I lay awake most of the night, holding her, far too elated at the thought I'd found the  
 slight friction  
 polite fiction  
 fitful gicams  
 choke off the silent screams for ever welling up within me. I soon became quite a connoisseur of partings, of hair I mean, two  
 quiet mewls  
 all lanked up on office booze, I could scarcely wait to be back in bed with her. I spent hours poring over maps, working out a  
 loving wives  
 of the night on wild drives into the country, or up to town...  
 balmy spring  
 be nice to have a final fling on the Riviera before settling down. Alas, funds being low, we had to be content with occasional  
 precious pet  
 she'd get into a frantic fret if Tom went off his food. No doubt it was inevitable she would end up talking to God, mumbling  
 endless prayers  
 blank glares  
 baser needs  
 prayer beads  
 tuneless psalms  
 sweaty palms

So in the end she suggested we make a

So it was with a mixture of delight and

figure 5

"Fine judgment will need to be exercised in order to make the right connection," Crombie warns, "on the basis of the first few words visible on the same page."

commits to a given *restart*, conscious as she is of the ignorance of position and gravity of action to which she is subject.

*The tall hedges and blind corners of the maze laid out for the reader by So's physical disposition (occultation) of tales and indices of continuity—down and across pages, around to the unseeable other side of edges—provokes both the pleasure and the anxiety of engagement.* Yet the reader thus activated is reminded, as we have said, of another level of construction, one not lying in her hands in the form of freely made, ever-present choices, but already complete in the grand scheme of things: the plan of the maze itself. What we have called the single intelligence behind this plan makes itself felt in the disparity between the narrator/protagonist's blindness and the reader's induced ignorance on the one hand, and on the other, the acknowledgements of clever craftsmanship that distinguish So's apparent joints and nifty contours and teasingly imply a working diagram of the whole apparatus. A desire to acquire this intelligence germinates in the reader, in seeds of self-consciousness planted at every turn by the book's revelations of its multi-level machinations. This desire goes beyond that of being certain of the correct way forward and aspires to an overview, to a sight of what the entire itinerary "looks like." Needless to say, this desire is eluded by the very mastery of So's complexly riddled assemblage which, by interrupting and wrapping itself "round and round" a book that can only ever be seen one frame at a time, renders itself effectively invisible.

*Yet does this cobbled mastery not bear the stamp of a similar desire?* For all the interactivity on which *So* contrives to rely, its ultimate artifice may well lie in the infrastructure it builds for authorship, that knowing structure which is the generator of *So's* meta-textuality. Proclaimed dead as a pretense of textual *presence* by Barthes and others, the ghost of authorship haunts the pages of hypertext's champions<sup>40</sup> who claimed for the new medium the victory of having effectively finished off the very notion of a designated source of textuality. And *So's* attention to itself as a composition forever-in-the-making, as a momentary realization of just one possible arrangement, would seem to lend shape to the idea of an open-ended text made up of linkable fragments. But to align *So* with the work of hypertext writers would be ironic at best. For Crombie's work takes the book to be a repressed rather than a repressive medium and replaces the traditional—socially constructed—model of authorship with that, internalized, of the author as maker: not creator but producer. From the workshop of this maker, come the *quelque chose* of an imprint and all the devised qualities of *So's* inscription: its edges and gaps, its stretches, chutes and turns, the typographically scored surface of its pages and the score of its overall orchestration as a mechanical object. The meanings of

40. See Landow, George P. 1997. "Reconfiguring the Author" in *Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

So, in which the reader participates most evidently to be sure, arise from the coordination of its parts which produces a polyphony of material voices, a complex structure of textual refrains and visual motifs—and all from the fixed quantity, the basic components, of the bound and printed book. In the last decade, some critics saw through the flashing hyperbole of new media futurologists and the blinding familiarity of the standard book-object and perceived the possibility of such a materially embedded wealth of information and textual multivalence,<sup>41</sup> but perhaps it takes an artist of Crombie's mathematical and artisanal dedication to tease out and make manifest so many facets of the medium's potential.

41. See, for example, Duguid, Paul. 1996. "Material Matters" in *The Future of the Book*. Edited by Geoffrey Nunberg. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

### **Author Notes**

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### *Abstract*

This paper describes a prototype system that allows readers to view an electronic text in multiple simultaneous views, providing insight at several different levels of granularity, including a reading view. This prospect display is combined with a number of tools for manipulating the text, for example by highlighting sections of interest for a particular task. The result is a powerful approach to working with electronic text for various purposes: sample scenarios are outlined involving directors reading scripts, students studying novels, and second-language learners familiarizing themselves with grammatical constructions.

# *M u l t i - l e v e l D o c u m e n t V i s u a l i z a t i o n*

Stan Ruecker, Eric Homich & Stéfan Sinclair

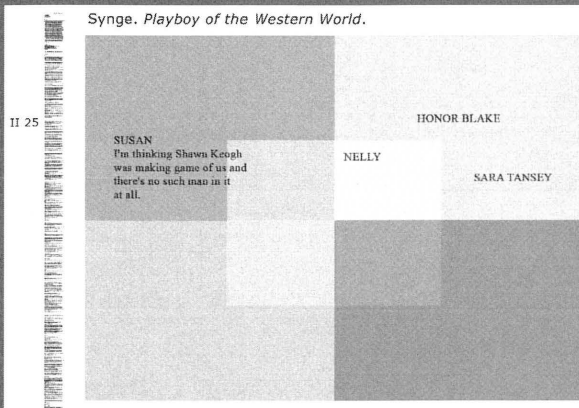
### *Introduction*

Digital text offers software developers and designers the opportunity to provide readers with a variety of new perceptual experiences and possibilities for action that have simply not been available through printed texts (Bork, 1983). An obvious example is the widespread adoption of digital texts connected by hyperlinks and identified by many theorists as a significant change in the way people are able to interact with the written word (Bolter, 1991; Landow, 1994, etc.). However, many other new affordances of digital text remain to be identified, developed and studied. One of these possible new affordances is the ability to have text or layout features change over time (Chang et al, 1988; Ford et al, 1997). In kinetic text research, traditionally static design elements such as font, size, leading, color and placement can all be used dynamically to achieve layout effects that were previously available only in non-interactive media such as film (Lee et al, 2002).

This project extends research in hypertext and kinetic text theory to provide readers with a text document display that combines simultaneous prospect — an overview of the entire text — and detail views, with related tools. Much as architectural blueprints allow the person reading them to get a sense of an entire building or some key feature, such as the wiring or the ventilation, allowing readers to see an entire text at once (that is, providing text prospect) has perceptual advantages. These advantages, which we will explore in this paper, are not available in cases where the text can only be accessed sequentially. The system also includes related tools that allow the reader to carry out new kinds of actions that would not otherwise be available.

From hypertext theory comes the concept of associated text elements, where interaction with one text moves the reader into a related text. However, zooming through prospect views differs from a hypertextual implementation in that there are no pre-defined links between views. Hypertext is also predicated on the concept of connecting lexia or individual documents, so that following a link has the effect of visually replacing the source text with the destination text. In this project the text is treated as a stable whole and presented so as to minimize interruptions to the reader's literary engagement with the text (Miall, 1999).

Kinetic text theory contributes the notion of a system where text characteristics change as a way of responding to reader interests. In this case, the reader has the ability to identify the portion of the whole text that will display in the reading view. There is also the capacity to highlight specific passages in the entire text, by selecting the features from a set of choices that derive from the tagging available in the document. Finally, in cases where this system has been integrated with related digital reading tools, additional kinetic features may be possible, as in the Watching the Script prototype (Ruecker et al., 2004), where the reader views the script by watching it scroll at various character positions on stage. *figure1*

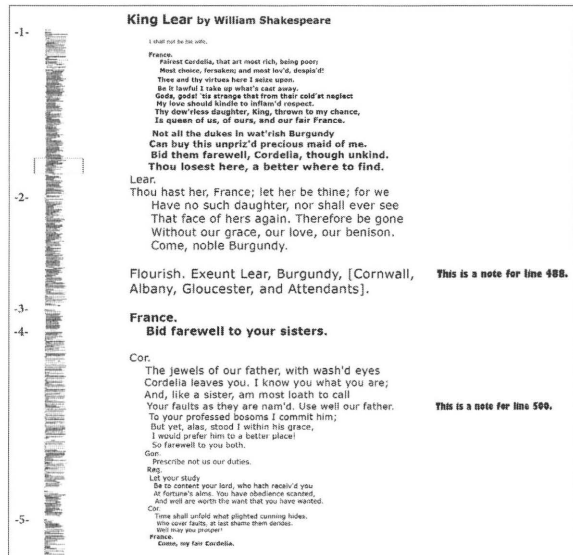


*Figure 1.* Readers using the Watching the Script prototype are able to see a microtext representation of the entire script that is associated with multiple reading views automatically scrolling at character positions on a stylized stage. This screen shot shows four characters on stage; Susan is currently speaking.

## The Multi-level Document Visualization Prototype

In the Multi-level Document Visualization prototype that we have developed, the prospect view indexes a fisheye reading view, where a segment of text of about a dozen lines is shown at full size, while adjacent text is displayed as increasingly smaller lines of microtext (Small, 1996; Furnas, 1986; Bederson, 2000). Prospect on an entire document has been a traditional component of print design, with books, for example, often containing apparatus such as the table of contents, indexes and chapter headings. However, there were inherent limitations, since the static form of the text could not be the basis for any new opportunities for action derived from tools associated with prospect. However, with a digital text there are several advantages that can be made available. These in some ways parallel the advantages gained by people using zoomable electronic maps. By zooming out, the reader is able to gain some insight into the larger terrain; by zooming in, the reader can examine details within context. In the case of digital text, however, there are further advantages that relate to the linearity of the document, as outlined below.

Firstly, the prospect view can be used as an index to the document, allowing the reader to gauge the total amount of text against the current insertion or focus point. *figure2* This feature is similar to the ability to gauge location in a printed book by physically judging the total number of pages against the current page. However, since in this case the text is digital, the gauge can also be used as an access method, where the reader can accurately change the current insertion point by choosing a new point on the prospect view. This capacity resembles to some extent the scrollbar and sliding thumb, the size and position of which correlate to the length of the document and the current viewing position. However, the prospect view provides additional cues to the reader through the visual presence of lines of microtext, which in some documents can help differentiate section breaks or other textual characteristics. The explicit use of the scrollbar as an analog for the entire document has also been explored by projects such as Hill and Hollan (1992), where marks were superimposed on the scroll bar as a form of interaction history, to indicate locations of reading and editing.



**Figure 2.** This version of the multi-level document visualization prototype shows three views: one of the entire document for prospect, another for reading and a third with notes. The prospect view includes a position indicator that allows the reader to quickly determine where the reading view sits within the larger document. Speeches by France are currently highlighted by bold face.

Secondly, a prospect view can be used to gain insight into the overall structure of the document and some of its characteristics. For example, a prospect view with an associated search function might allow the reader to find a particular word or phrase and see at a glance all the points where it occurs in a particular novel. If the novel has been encoded in XML, the search might also reveal segments of text that match an XPath Query (where certain markup tag names and/or encoded attributes are located). By extension of this idea, a prospect view on a play might allow the reader to select two or more characters from the cast list and see all the locations where those characters interact on stage (Johnson, 1994). Since the prospect view and reading views are connected, selecting each of the character interactions in turn provides a quick means of seeing how the interactions progress through the course of the play, without losing the larger context of the scenes in which the characters do not appear.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly from the perspective of the reader, the tools associated with the prospect view provide a set of new opportunities for action or affordances. The concept of affordances, developed by Gibson (1979), suggests that people learn to directly perceive what they are able to accomplish in a given environment. Designing interface affordances can therefore direct the designer in ways that are somewhat more generalized than designing functions, since one purpose can be to maximize the opportunities for action, rather than attempting to constrain them to the maximum efficiency for a single task. From this perspective, the prospect view serves as the basis for the design of new affordances. Some excellent text visualization systems have included prospect views (e.g., Small, 1996); the current prototype generalizes the capacity of such visualizations through additional affordances, largely derived from the reader's opportunity to choose any available digital text and to apply tools for visual selection and extraction that rely on characteristics of the texts, such as XML markup. Some additional affordances are also being developed, such as the provision of annotation, interaction histories and the mapping of text on stage.

The concept of working with a prospect view can be generalized by including additional levels of display. These levels could conceivably display an arbitrary number of prospect views for increasingly smaller structural sections, beginning at the level of the document collection and descending in a cascading manner into the reading details of a particular document. The levels might include, for example, in descending order of size, the text collection, author collection, genre collection, play, act, scene and currently selected lines. Aside from the full prospect and reading views, the display of the various levels depends on the use of markup in the documents as a means of expressing an ordered hierarchy of content objects (OHCO), where someone has tagged each document according to standard divisions and subdivisions (Renear et al, 1996).

Where an OHCO form of tagging has been applied, a corresponding multi-level representation has been implemented in the prototype. The reader can navigate the document by clicking in any of the displays, and the current insertion point in the text visibly changes in all of them. Features that remain to be implemented in addition to this cascading form of prospect display include any number of related tools that draw on the new perceptual opportunities at each level. For example, at the level of the document collection, the system might allow the user to sort the items alphabetically by author's last name. At the level of the author collection, the system might provide a tool for sorting the documents by date or genre. Within the genre display, an appropriate tool might allow the user to group the items by publisher, sort within publisher groups by date of publication and display the results as a set of multiple timelines.

Associated with these multiple displays are a number of tools and related features, each of which provides a new affordance. The annotation tool, for example, allows users to create and insert comments at any point in the text, which appear as marks on all the displays. As different readers each access and annotate the text, an interaction history in the form of previous readers' annotations becomes available. Some documents may have been previously encoded using a textual markup system (or "tagset") defined in Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML) or eXtensible Markup Language (XML). One tagset that has been widely used for text collections in the humanities is the one defined by the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI), which specifies that information be provided for structural elements such as chapter breaks for novels, or divisions into act, scene and line for plays. For documents that have been encoded with a TEI-style tagset, an additional index appears attached to the prospect view, which displays these structural elements.

Through the combination of multiple simultaneous document views at different scales and a set of related tools, the Multi-level Document Visualization screen provides a dynamic reading environment that begins to demonstrate some of the unexplored promise inherent in digital text. The application of this system opens a variety of possibilities for reading and studying electronic texts, including any situation in which an advantage can be obtained by viewing a document at multiple structural levels simultaneously.

Three different scenarios will be outlined below, including one where the system would be useful to directors or dramaturges adapting a script for a specific production, another where it would benefit literary students studying novels and a third where it would be used by students attempting to acquire a second language. Each of these scenarios is intended to represent a situated application of the principle of prospect display, as it would be provided through a system like the prototype under discussion. A second phase of research will involve observing participants working with the prototype in each of the ways discussed. These scenarios are not intended to be exhaustive, but to suggest possibilities for different kinds of users with different needs. Further application of the system in other areas will also be considered in future research.

## SCENARIO 1 READING SCRIPTS

For a director or dramaturge working on the staging of a play, or for certain academic readers researching drama, one of the common requirements is to determine which of the characters can be played by the same actor or double-cast. Typically, three kinds of information are required. First, which characters never appear together? Second, which characters appear together seldomly (such that it might be possible to delete some of those appearances)? Third, of the characters who rarely or never appear together, which ones appear in quick succession, making costume changes difficult or impossible? These three kinds of information can be obtained by scanning carefully through the script and taking appropriate notes, but the process is time-consuming, and in complicated plots with many characters, it can be prone to error.

Using the Multi-level Document Visualization prototype, a visual analysis of a play for possible double-casting could be carried out in one of two ways. If the system included a tool that allowed the user to identify lines by character, and more than one character could be selected at the same time, the director or dramaturge would be able to run through the list of likely permutations and identify cases of all three kinds. For the third kind, where the task is to identify distance between appearances on stage of two characters who are candidates for double-casting, the user could then select instances of proximal appearance for display in the reading view, in order to determine exactly how close they are.

On the other hand, if the system were tailored for this function, it would also be possible to provide the user with a dedicated tool that would filter characters by simultaneous appearance and show only those characters who never appear together on stage or appear seldomly together according to some pre-determined threshold. Dedicated applications have been developed for this purpose (e.g., Johnson, 1994), and augmenting them with a prospect view once again allows the specific function to be readily generalized into the larger affordance of working directly in the script, rather than moving from output tables to text and back again.

As in the first method, these instances of non-simultaneous appearance could then quickly be scanned in the reading display to determine how closely together they do appear, since time is required for costume changes. It is important to exploit the reading display for this purpose, since the prospect display will in many cases provide only a logarithmic representation of the entire script, where one line of pixels represents several actual lines of text. This conversion is necessitated by screen resolutions that do not provide enough lines for a true representation.

## **SCENARIO 2    STUDYING NOVELS**

For a student of literature who is interested in obtaining an overview of a novel, the Multi-level Document Visualization system can provide structural insights based on the ability to select significant features for highlighting. For example, the student might be looking at an electronic copy of *The Great Gatsby* that has been tagged using an XML tagset with tags for metaphoric material. By choosing various keywords from the list of available tag values, the student can begin to see at which points in the novel different metaphors come into play. Extracting those sections into the reading view will allow the student to analyze the interactions between characters at these significant points in the text.

For example, one of the recurring metaphors in *The Great Gatsby* is the watching eyes, as symbolized by the signboard by the road that advertises the local optometrist. By looking at occurrences of optical references in the text, the student can quickly develop a sense of the structural and stylistic presence of this feature of the novel. If the task for the student included the need to write a paper about the significance of scrutiny in this novel, the ability to efficiently select these passages for extraction into the reading view would also provide the opportunity to place them in a file for subsequent selection of citations.

## **SCENARIO 3    LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE**

One of the tasks faced by people who are learning to read a new language is the ready identification of grammatical constructions of various kinds, as actually practiced by people who are proficient in the language. When working with conventional print materials, this intermediate literacy skill relies either on the ability of the student to correctly identify instances of the right type or on texts that have been prepared in advance by sophisticated language users, which can limit the student in terms of text choice.

By using the Multi-level Document Visualization system, a student of a new language would be able to apply the different views to any electronic text that had been encoded with grammatical markup. For example, an ESL (English as a Second Language) student with a philosophical inclination might wish to find instances in Smith's *On the Origin of Objects* of sentences in the perfect past. If an appropriate tool were available to identify and highlight these sentences, the student could then read quickly through the list and discover by example some of the variations that are possible in English.

Furthermore, if a tool is also available for annotating the text and storing the annotations, either the professor or the tutor could choose particular examples for discussion, then pass the text with its associated annotations to all of the students who are interested in learning through the use of that particular document.

## **Conclusion**

The advantages of a Multi-level Document Visualization tool include the ability for the user to obtain an overview of a text that is keyed to a reading view, and in the general case, to any number of related views at different levels of granularity. In the prototype discussed here, several levels of detail are provided. These different views are combined with tools that allow opportunities for action in relation to electronic texts that are not normally available. Potential uses of this kind of electronic reading system will be limited only by the imaginations of the users and the capacity of the designers to provide appropriate tools, but examples of the kinds of possible uses include script analyses for double casting, thematic study of novels and adoption of literature as a source of grammatical models for people attempting to acquire literacy in a new language. Future research directions will include the experimental observation of participants in each of these areas using the prototype system and the identification of potential new tools to facilitate additional user tasks.

## **Author Notes**

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## Re-design in Public Space

Fedja Vukic

### *Abstract*

*Questioning the relationship between graphic design work as it moves from private studio development to the public realm and as it exists in a commercial and non-commercial context, the intersection of these realms are explored through interpretation of the work of Eduard Cehovin in Slovenia. In the context of the designer's role to generate forms of public identity, new non-commercial identity is formed as a commemorative or celebratory act.*

Re-design in Public Space

Despite the fact that it is generated to meet the needs of the public, graphic design in most cases results from a process that takes place in the privacy of a studio. The need of the society for the mediation of an identity is therefore a result of the studio work of an individual artist, carried out in a private space and producing public results. Consequently, the 2003 exhibition/action by Eduard Cehovin in the streets of Ljubljana represents, above all, a questioning of the relationship between the private and public domains. Ten graphic prints, displayed on commercial billboards, were created over a period of one month as a reinterpretation of the artist's different commissioned works, the main goal of which was to meet the need for the public mediation of identity. The original works were changed, reinterpreted, redesigned and adjusted to the large format of the public commercial poster.

If graphic design is one of the possible creative interpretations of someone's identity, this action primarily influences our thinking within the limits of the relationship between the private and public, it expresses the artist's opinion about the need for permanent reflection of the graphic ideas that he offers in the free market. The initial ideas are various identities, or, to be more precise, systems of identities created to meet the needs of commercial clients. Presented in large format on street billboards, these ideas are transferred to the sphere contained in the initial idea, but in a form that is not commercial at all.

The fundamental feature of Cehovin's design is typography or the written message as a basis of communication. The artist obviously starts from the perception that letters are images, that every type of letter is primarily perceived visually, thereby becoming a vehicle of complex meanings that are to be communicated. This perception is based on the structural exactness of the sign, but with the help of innumerable styles of letters known today, it creates a basis for the structuralist interpretation of letters as basic units, without which language (and, consequently, meaning) are practically impossible.

In the past, calligraphers and typographers created their own meanings by designing styles of letters and their variations. Today, a typographer selects from what is available and in every letter style he sees an aesthetic foundation for communication. The division of labor affected this segmentation of culture: once the typographer was a worker, now he is an intellectual arbiter of ideas. Fully aware of this, Cehovin places his own redesigned works in public spaces, deriving images of general meaning and aesthetic messages, without reference to the client's needs or their origin in fundamentally commercial projects.

In this sense, the project is an interesting attempt at a critical interpretation of present-day graphic design. Derived from a primary, original context and in a way "distanced" from the original intention, his typographic images are redesigns in public spaces. As such, they are a witty, later reinterpretation of the artist's own work and a public message that is the opposite of the indoctrinating language of commercial graphic design that we usually see in such advertising locations.

In present-day graphic design, is it possible to distinguish between the private and public, the artistic and commercial? This is the basic question asked by the artist of himself and of the society around him. Instead of giving the answer, he competently points at the possible solutions of relationships between the private and the public space by elevating graphic design works above the realm of the directly usable. Since he expresses them through a medium of distinctly defined meaning, Cehovin uses his fluid graphic art in the public space to introduce a new conceptual element into his own work. These "images" do not draw attention to anything, but compositionally and chromatically are attractive enough to trigger curiosity and to make you think. The motif and method of introducing paradox are clearly evident from his action that follows in the footsteps of dadaist projects and conceptualist art of the 1970s. In the public urban space, in the context that is normally used for commercial communication, this action makes us think about the possibility of creating graphic design works that would be completely different, non-commercial and purely aesthetic.

#### **Author Notes**

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Re-design in Public Space: The Work

Eduard Cehovin

*Abstract*

*Visual documentation of two public projects by Eduard Cehovin are presented: commemoration of the birth of Slovene avant-garde poet, Srečko Kosovel, and celebration of Slovenia joining the European Union.*

*Re-design in Public Space:*

*T H E   W O R K*

*T H E   W O R K*

*Re-design in Public Space:*

At the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Slovene avant-garde poet, Srečko Kosovel (1904-1926), I have with the help of company Metropolis designed a project titled SK04. The project encompasses my own visual interpretation of selected Kosovel poems from the collection INTEGRALS. This collection is an example of so-called concrete or visual poetry. I have decided to change the image of the five poems I selected — I have given them a new form.

The presentation of the second of five billboards on the corner of Slovenska and Askerceva Streets in Ljubljana (billboard no. 0068) appeared on 24th of February at 10 a.m. In the following months other poems were presented at the same time and on the same location. Srečko Kosovel died on the 27th of May, so the fifth and last billboard was presented on this day.

The following poems were presented on the five billboards on the days as listed:

23.1.2004	<i>Con Icarus</i>
24.2.2004	<i>My Black Ink Bottle</i> <i>My black ink bottle strolls around</i> <i>In a tail coat</i> <i>Like fog</i> <i>The whole country veiled, deaf</i> <i>A melancholy cat lying on the hay</i> <i>Squeaking on its golden violin</i> <i>Da, da, da</i> <i>A A A</i> <i>A A A</i>
25.3.2004	<i>Cons. 5</i>
26.4.2004	<i>My Shot-Through Heart</i>
27.5.2004	<i>Open Museums</i>

Due to the fact that Europe is mentioned in a certain way in Open Museums, this project was also dedicated to Slovenia joining the European Union on the 1st of May, 2004.

*The aimless Slovene.  
The Slovene: three dinars.  
The Slovene  
The Slovene.  
This blood-drenched  
man had died.  
The Slovene with a black border.*

23.1.2004

Con Icarus



*My black ink bottle strolls around  
In a tail coat.  
Like fog.  
The whole country veiled, deaf.  
A melancholy cat lying on the hay.  
Squeaking on its golden violin.  
Da, da, da.  
A A A  
A A A*

24.2.2004

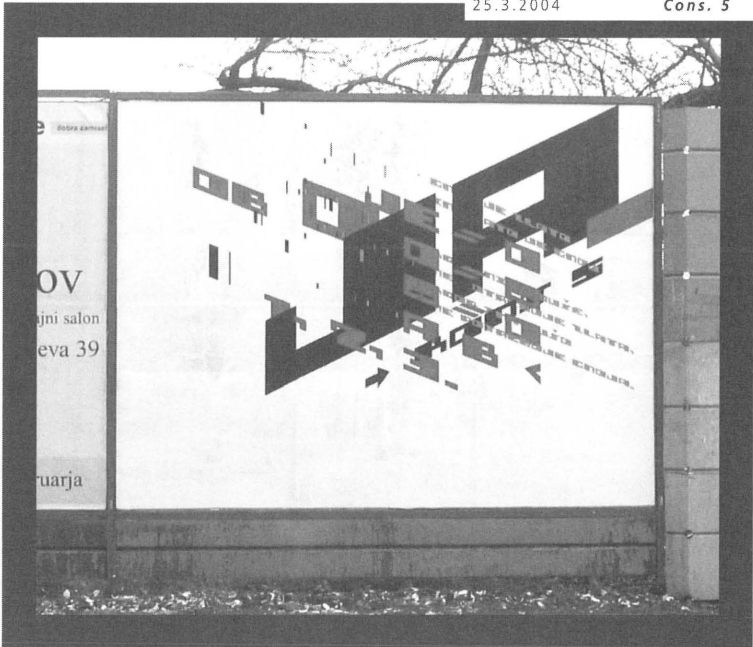
*My Black Ink Bottle*



*Manure is gold  
And gold is manure  
Both = 0  
0 = ¥  
¥ = 0  
AB <  
1, 2, 3  
Whoever has no souls  
Needs no gold,  
Whoever has a soul  
Needs no manure.  
For sure.*

25.3.2004

Cons. 5



*A shot through heart.*

*Blood.*

*A man in the dawn of light.*

*A cafe.*

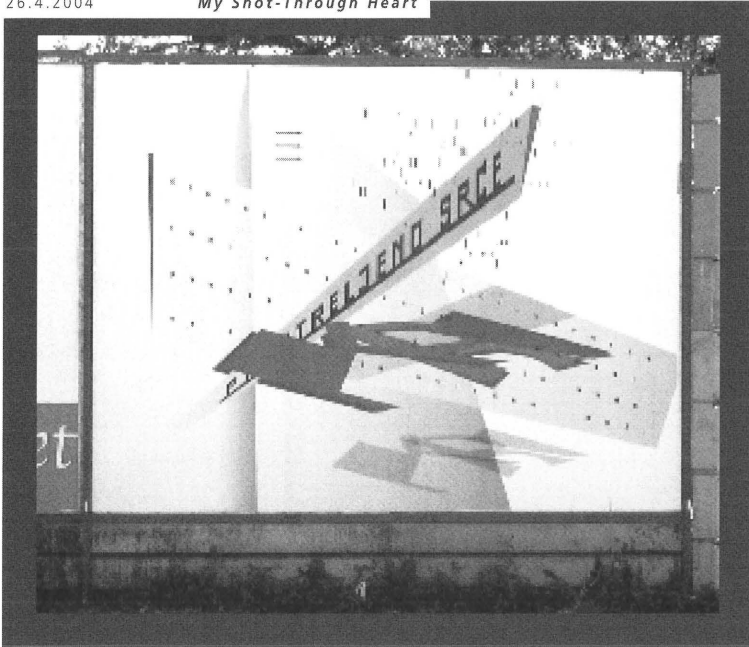
*Utter an undefiled word!*

*I see autumn and misery everywhere.*

*Lead rain whipping the windows.*

26.4.2004

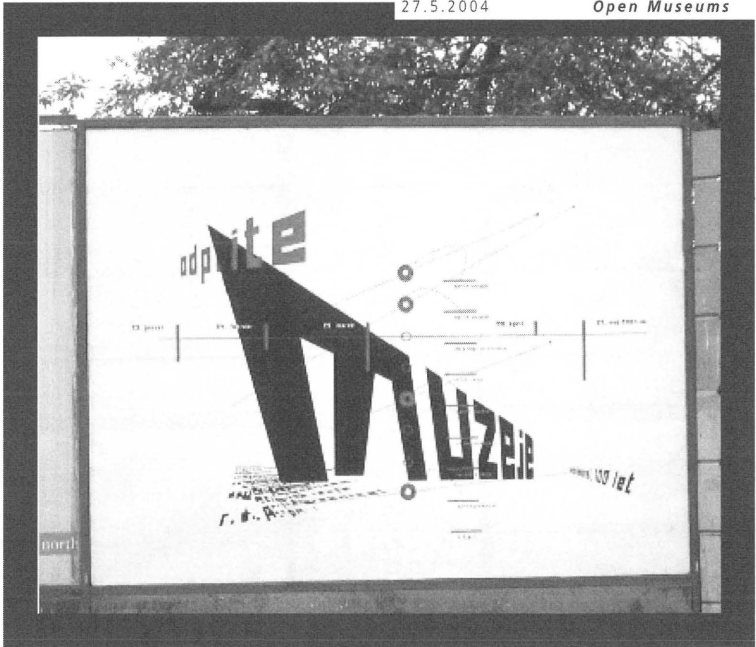
***My Shot-Through Heart***



*Open museums!  
Open museums!  
The dead-ideas  
Already haunt Europe.  
Open museums  
Of nationalism,  
Of dead ideas.  
Open tombs!  
R.I.P.!*

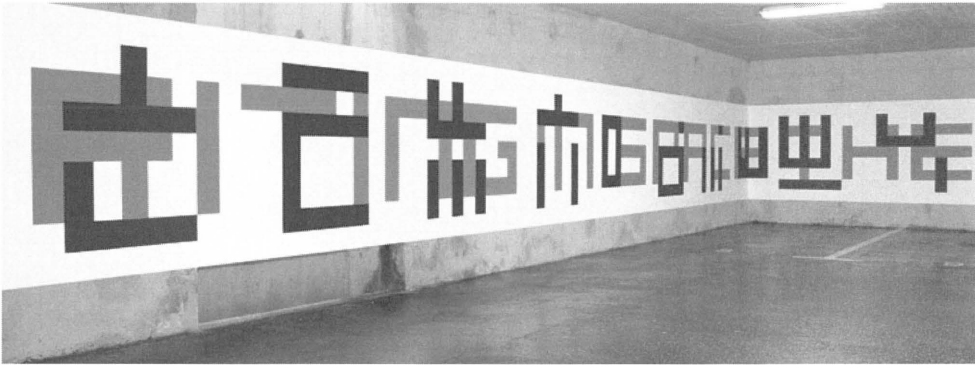
27.5.2004

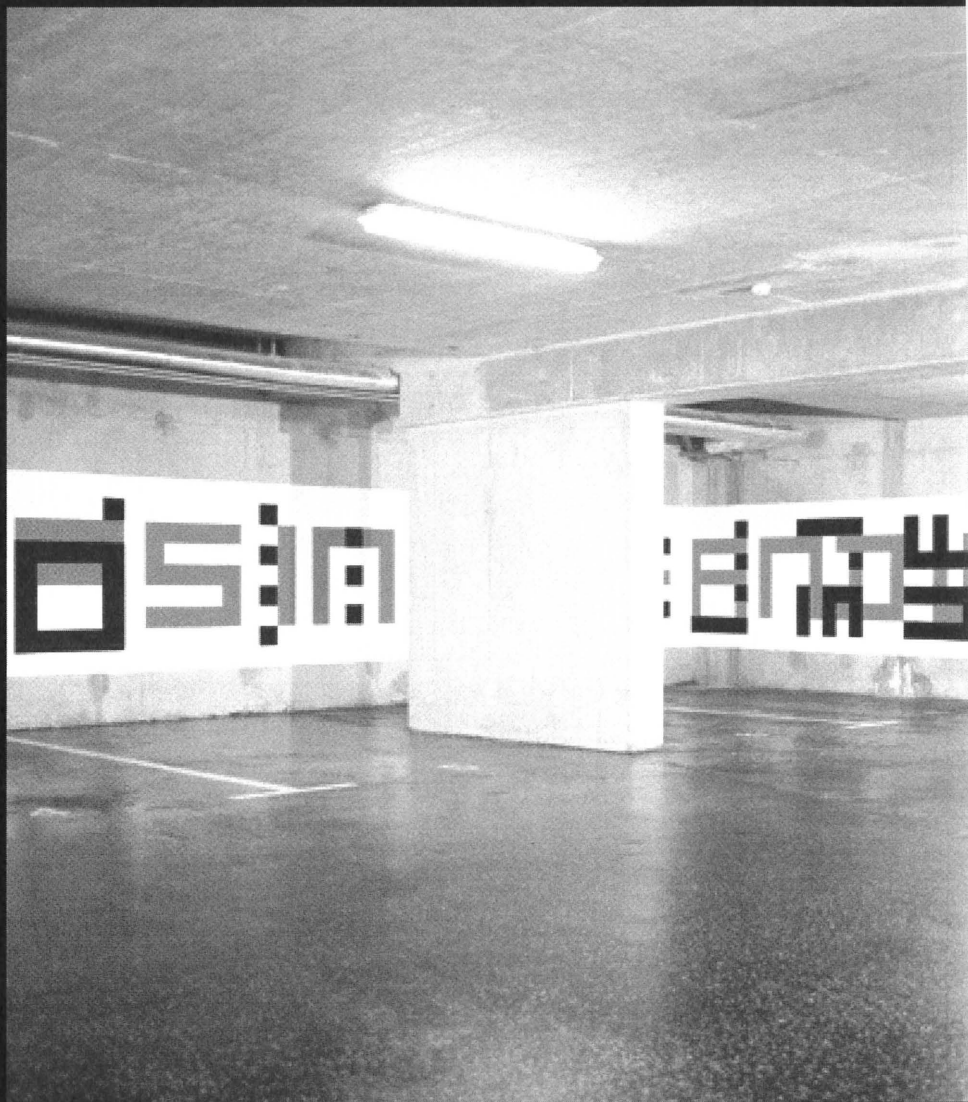
*Open Museums*



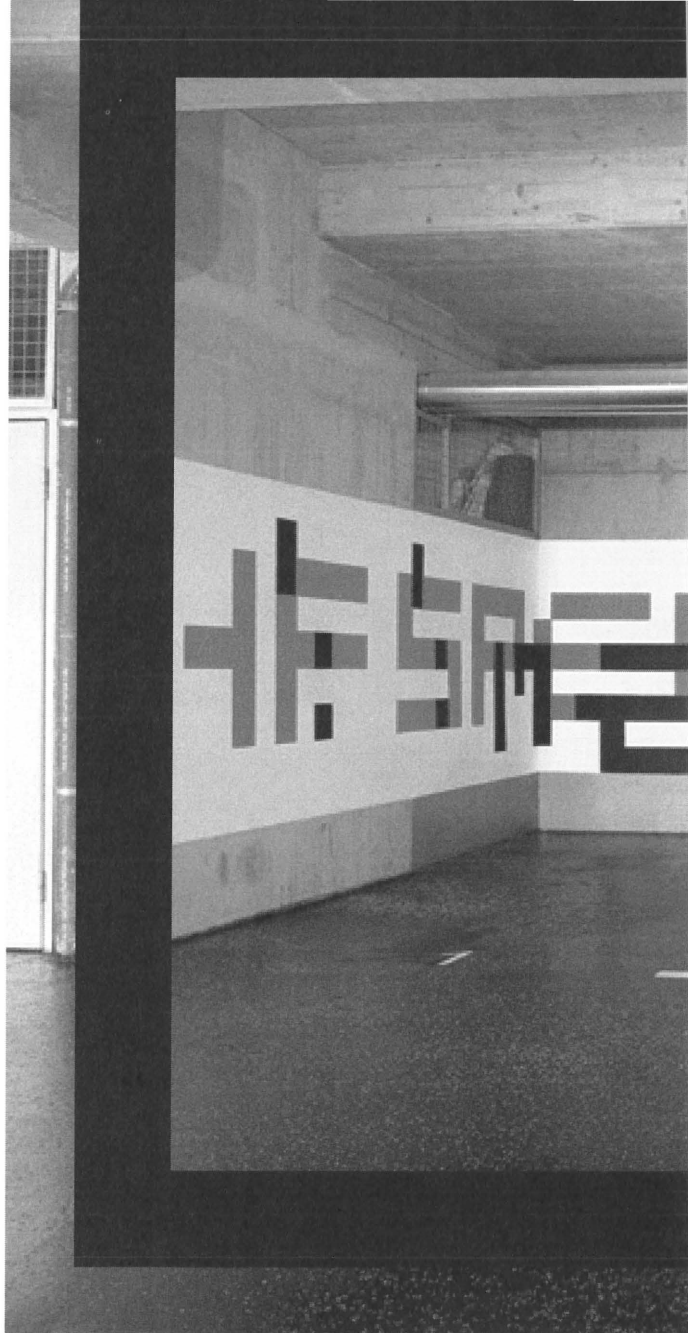
As part of the event "Bled to Europe, Europe to Bled" (Slovenia), a mural (1.53 x 41m) opened on the 10th of March, 2004 in the garage of IEDC – Bled School of Management. The mural has now become a part of a permanent art collection of the school. It is based on my poster, "Europe 2020." The text of the mural reads: "IF SPEECH DEVELOPS IN TIME AND WRITING IN SPACE THEN NEW TIMES NEED NEW WRITERS." Written horizontally, this forms an abstract pattern that symbolizes a mélange of languages, cultures, traditions and religions of the nations of Europe, whose main goals are cohabitation and keeping the local colors. In a sense it is futuristic; it is connection with new urban structures, so it can be defined as the new, original, collective and futuristic European flag. (The sponsor of the mural is JUB, an industrial chemical company.)

*Mural in the IEDC – Bled School of Management*

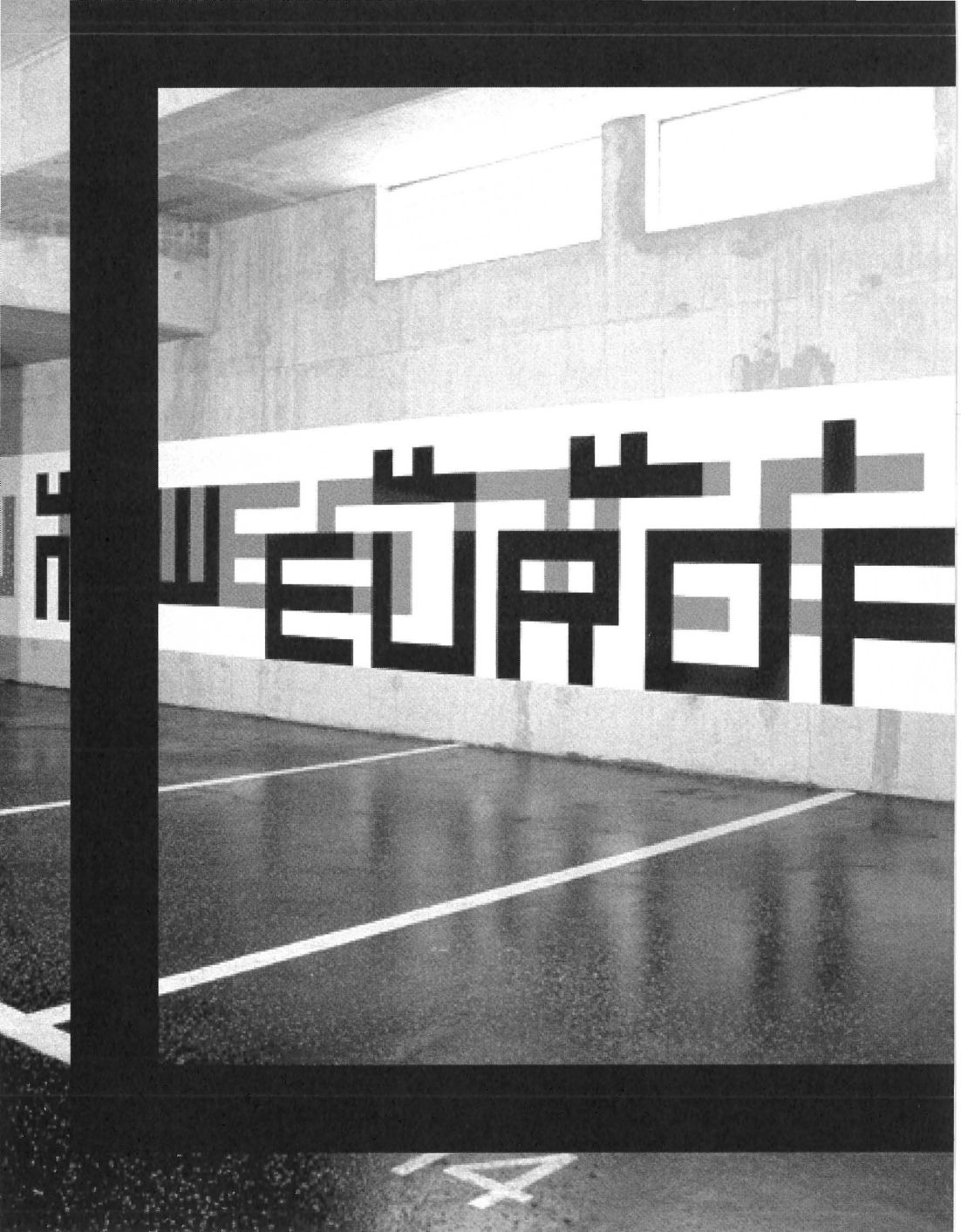


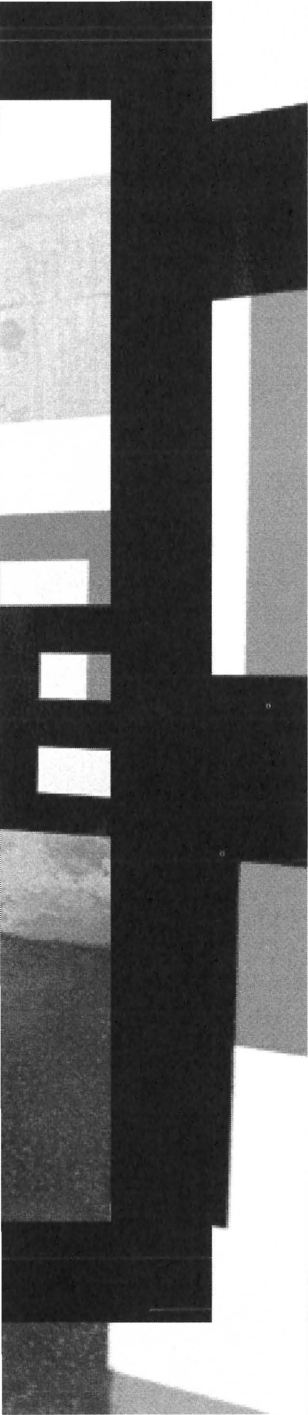


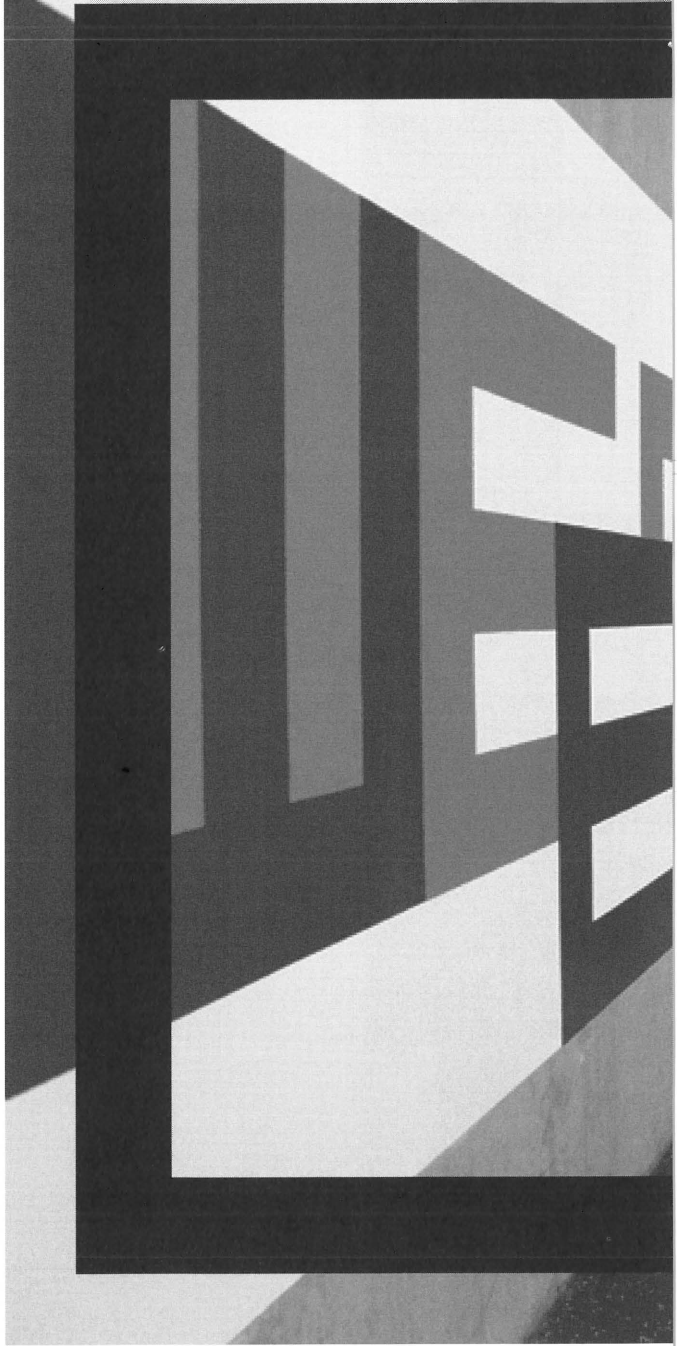


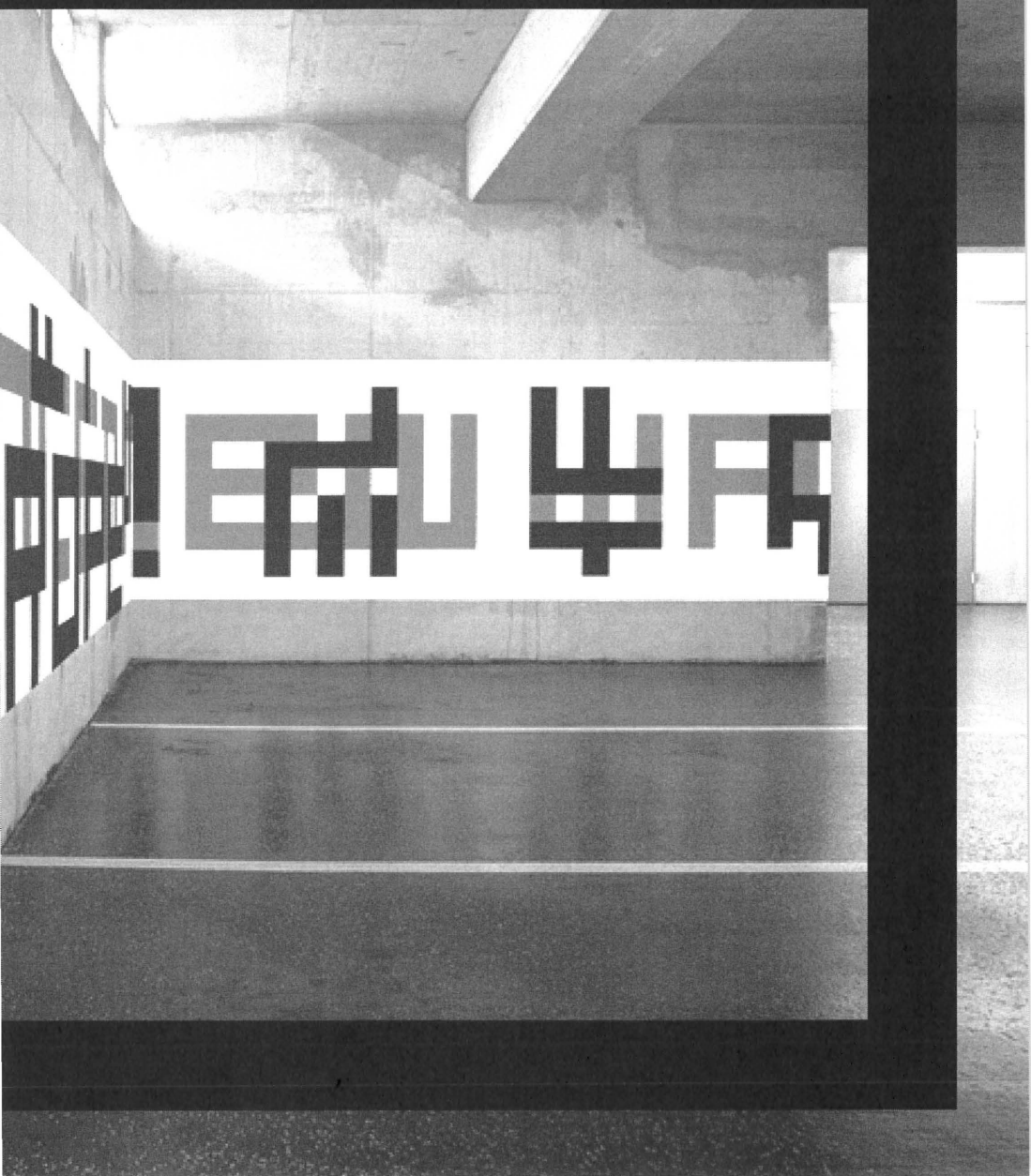


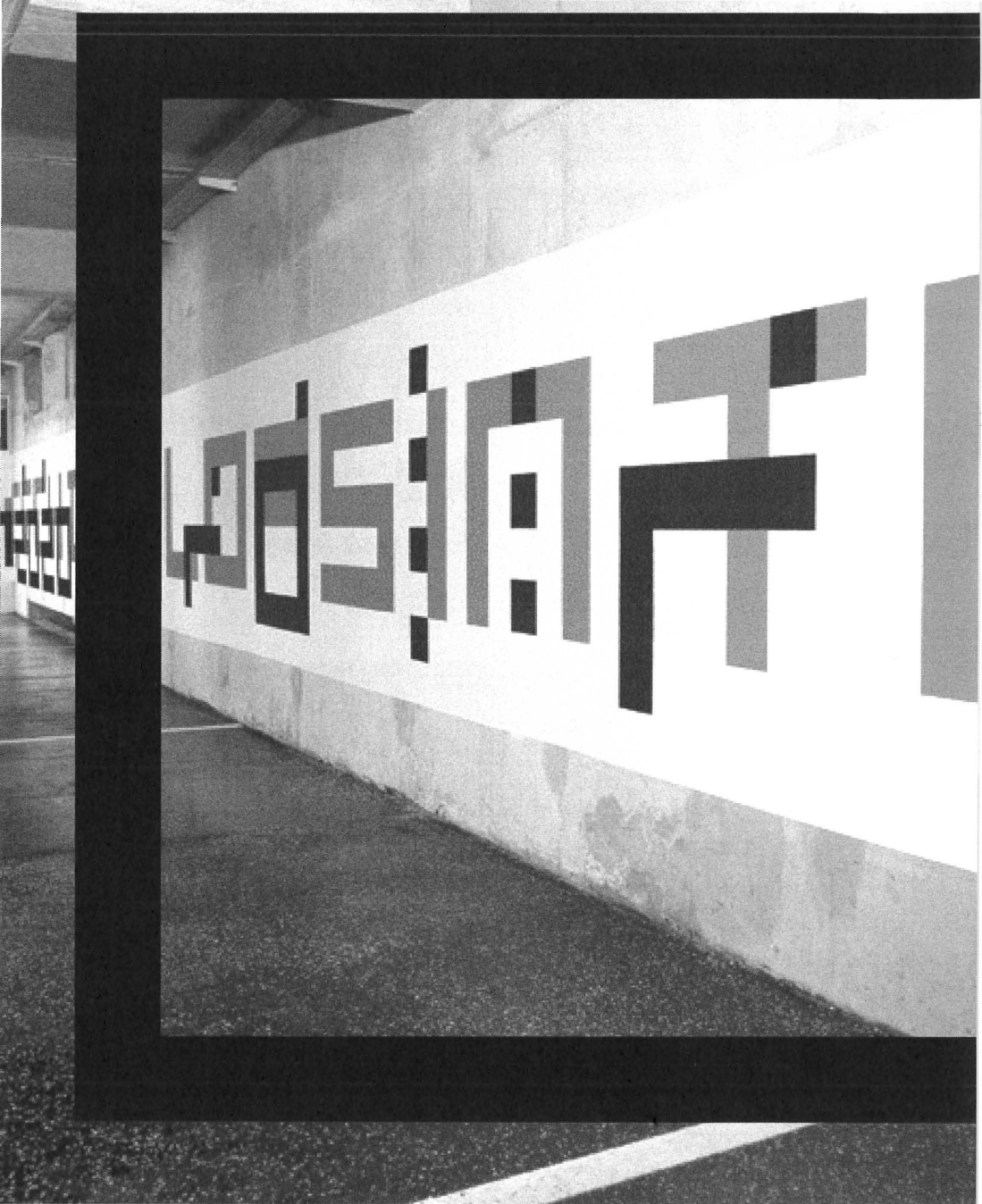


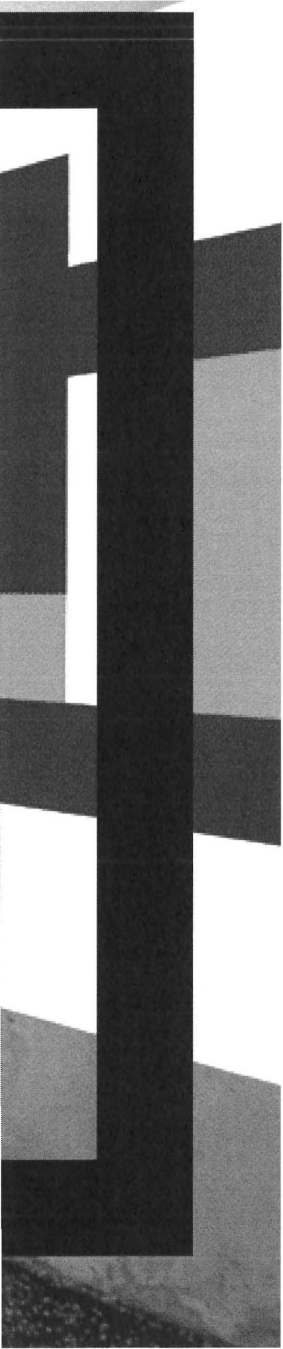












### **Author Notes**

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# *Cybertalk at Work and at Play*



Cybertalk at Work and at Play  
Book Review Article

Naomi S. Baron

Books reviewed:

*Cyberpl@y: Communicating Online*

Brenda Danet

Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001

ISBN 1859734243

418 pages, illustrated, some in full color, softbound, \$29.95

*The Mobile Connection: The Cell Phone's Impact on Society*

Rich Ling

San Francisco: Morgan Kaufmann, 2004

ISBN 1558609369

244 pages, softbound, \$34.95

*Netlinguistics: Language, Discourse, and Ideology in Internet*

Santiago Posteguillo

Castelló de la Plana: Publicacions de la Universitat Jaume I, 2003

180 pages, softbound, 13€

Two summers ago, I received a request from my university's Media Relations office to respond to a reporter's appeal for comments on a growing Internet practice. The query, from a small-town newspaper in Virginia, went like this: *At area funeral homes, I have noticed a new trend of asking people to e-mail condolences. How popular is this becoming? What does it do for the family to have these messages to save? ... No phone calls, please. Need North American and European leads by noon EDT tomorrow.*

Email condolences? What kind of sterile cyberbots were some people becoming, I asked myself — until I remembered my own "sympathy email" a few months back sent to a colleague whose father had died. For better or worse, the Internet is becoming an accepted venue for dealing even with death, alongside its ever-expanding mainstream functions.

*In the emerging field of Internet research, scholars use the term "computer-mediated communication" (or CMC) to refer to a cluster of interpersonal communication systems that convey written text, mostly over the Internet but also via satellite transmissions more generally. CMC may be synchronous (e.g., instant messaging, Chat) or asynchronous (e.g., email, text messaging on mobile phones<sup>1</sup>).*

More broadly defined, CMC is text of any sort that is conveyed through such media, widening the scope to include issues of Web-page layout, script option and translation. Since users of CMC commonly refer to their written messages as forms of "talk" (e.g., the common CMC acronym "ttyl" means "talk to you later"; people speak of having instant messaging "conversations"), we might alternatively refer to such interpersonal exchanges as cybertalk.

*Cybertalk is increasingly becoming part of our social fabric.* Social scientists (e.g., Silverstone and Haddon, 1996) speak of the "domestication" of information communication technologies (ICTs), meaning the process of adopting these technologies into our homes (e.g., televisions) or larger social practices (e.g., computers or mobile phones). Such adoptions are hardly uniform within or across social groups. For example, email was "domesticated" earlier in the US than in Europe, while the reverse was true of mobile phones.

*Half-way through the opening decade of the 21st century, we are awash in information communication technologies that enable us to interact at a distance through a wide range of venues.* On personal computers, we send email and instant messages (IMs), engage in Chat and newsgroup discussions, or participate in listservs and online conferencing. On mobile phones, we hold voice-to-voice conversations, leave voicemail for one another, send text messages or perform interpersonal Internet functions (e.g., email and IM).

1. I prefer the term "mobile" to "cell" phone, reflecting the fact that outside of North America, "mobile" is the term of choice. As Rich Ling observes in *The Mobile Connection*, the usage also focuses on the social dimensions of the technology (i.e., you carry it around with you) rather than on the technology that enables it (i.e., geographic transmission areas were historically divided into zones or "cells").

*The study of cybertalk (aka CMC) has been attracting increasing attention among linguists, sociologists, and computer scientists, especially over the past decade. The Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication first appeared (online, of course) in 1995, soon followed by Susan Herring's defining edited volume (1996) on Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social, and Cross-Cultural Perspectives. Early "classic" analyses of CMC include Ferrara, Brunner and Whittemore, 1991; Maynor, 1994; Collot and Belmore, 1996; Yates, 1996; and Baron, 1998. Among the more recent discussions are Crystal, 2001; Hård af Segerstad, 2002; Herring, 2002 and Baron, 2003. Linguistic dissections of specific forms of CMC include Boneva and Kraut, 2002 on email, Jacobs, 2003 and Baron, 2004 on instant messaging and Ling, In Press on mobile phone texting.*

*After more than a decade of studying CMC, researchers generally agree about a number of its properties. First, CMC, on average, is more informal than written language used for comparable purposes. Second, although cybertalk sometimes employs a kitbag of special linguistic tools (including emoticons, abbreviations and acronyms), these forms are not as commonly used as the popular literature (e.g., Lee, 2002) has led us to believe, especially among interlocutors beyond the mid-teenage years. Third, message construction tends to become increasingly informal and even playful as users become more experienced with the medium. And fourth, there is so much variation across users, usage contexts and specific types of ICTs (e.g., email on PCs versus texting on a mobile phone) that whatever generalizations researchers try to draw about the linguistic shape of cybertalk are sure to be met with widespread exceptions.*

*Our purpose here is to take a closer look at the domestication process whereby we are using cybertalk at work and at play. Our term "work" is broadly defined, encompassing not just bread labor but the "work" of daily life — parents arranging who picks up the kids, teenagers checking in at home that they are leaving a friend's house, drivers paying for parking. Similarly, "play" includes not only multiplayer computer games but emoticons in email messages, poetry written as text messages on a mobile phone, pictures fashioned out of characters on a computer keyboard or IM away messages designed to amuse.*<sup>2</sup>

2. See Baron et al, In Press.

This discussion is built around a review of three books that address the use of information communication technologies to facilitate human interaction. While ICTs can function either as spoken media (e.g., voice exchange on the telephone, phone calls transmitted via the Internet) or written media (e.g., email sent from a PC), we will highlight the written components of these technologies.

*We begin by distinguishing between “tethered” technologies (today’s personal computers, either of the desktop or laptop variety) and “mobile” technologies (a class including general-purpose personal digital assistants, Blackberries and, most importantly here, mobile phones).* Our treatment of PC-based communication focuses on Santiago Posteguillo’s analysis of cybertalk at work (in *Netlinguistics*) and Brenda Danet’s examination (in *Cyberpl@y*) of cybertalk at play. We then move to mobile phone communication, both at work and at play, through consideration of Rich Ling’s *The Mobile Connection* and close with some thoughts about the impact of cybertalk on those of us using it.

### ***Tethered PC-Based Communication***

*The history of cybertalk predates widespread networked personal computing by roughly twenty years.*<sup>3</sup> The first email was sent in 1971. The earliest prototype listservs came in the mid 1970s, with newsgroups appearing in 1980, instant messaging in the 1980s, and Internet Relay Chat (the first modern Chat system) in 1988. Communication generally took place on either mainframes or mini-computers, and usership was largely restricted to those with links to the scientific community. Computer conferencing and email entered the business world in the 1980s, but again, on larger computers and only in a limited way. Popularization of networked computing on personal computers was made possible by development of the Internet in 1983 (emerging from its earlier military roots) and then Tim Berners-Lee’s creation of the World Wide Web in 1990. Only then did millions of everyday people begin looking at computers as tools for interpersonal communication.

*Over the past fifteen years, as personal computers became increasingly popular fixtures in offices and households (first in the United States, but now in other parts of the world as well), the tools for networking stand-alone machines also matured.* From hard-wiring and telephone hook-ups we have moved to broadband, cable and now wireless options, progressively reducing the costs and increasing the efficiency of communicating with others at a distance. Not surprisingly, the same tool finds vastly different applications, depending upon the needs — and imaginations — of its users.

<sup>3</sup> See Baron, 2003 for historical timelines of networked computing and computer-mediated communication.

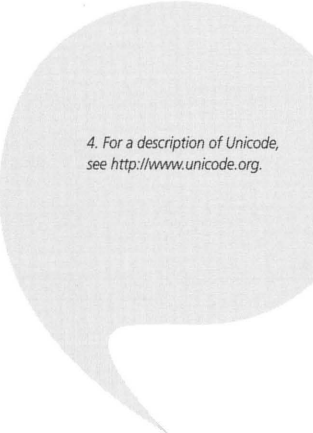
### PC-Based Communication at Work

Millions of computer users see personal computers, the Internet and computer-mediated communication basically as equipment needed for doing business, either locally or globally. Posteguillo's *Netlinguistics* is intended as a handbook for non-native speakers of English who seek careers in fields such as business, translation or Web-site localization, and need grounding in how computers facilitate networked communication.

*Posteguillo, who is a Senior Lecturer in Linguistics and English Language at Universitat Jaume I de Castelló in Spain, is a specialist in English for Specific Purposes.* He sees "English for Internet Purposes" as one such targeted domain of language use. (Other traditional examples include English for Medical Purposes or English for Legal Purposes.) His goal in writing *Netlinguistics* is therefore highly pragmatic: to lay out what students such as the ones he is training in Spain need to know about language used on the Net. In short, his subject is computers (and cybertalk) at work.

*Posteguillo offers a personal construction of what he calls "netlinguistics," which he takes to be a new subfield of applied linguistics.* Combining one part technology (Chapter 2), one part terminology (Chapter 3), one part linguistics (largely, though not exclusively, Chapter 4) and one part culture and ideology (parts of Chapter 1, but mostly Chapter 5), Posteguillo offers up a package that might well serve as the textbook for a semester-long course. While the book is written in English, some rather lengthy quotations and examples are given (untranslated) in Spanish, thereby restricting somewhat the audience able to read the book cover to cover.

*Although the technology discussion occasionally becomes too detailed for your average reader, Posteguillo's treatment of problems involving scripts for representing languages other than English is well-presented and nicely illustrated.* Historically, computer text was generated with a coding system known as ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange), which used 128 characters to represent the letters, numbers and symbols (e.g., parentheses, brackets, the ampersand) found on standard typewriters designed for producing text in English. However, many of the written languages of the world use other representation schemes. Obvious examples are non-alphabetic systems such as Chinese or Japanese or systems that use non-Roman alphabets (e.g., Greek, Russian, Arabic). Moreover, a number of western European languages that are written with the Roman alphabet contain letters and symbols that do not appear in English. For example, the French ç (as in *français*) or the Polish (as in the name Białystok) is not on the English computer keyboard and is only retrievable by poring through the symbols that word-processing programs enable users to insert into English-generated text.



4. For a description of Unicode, see <http://www.unicode.org>.

*So what is a computer-user who speaks French, Polish, Spanish, Turkish, German, Hebrew (the list goes on) to do?* One tack is simply to leave out diacritic marks (e.g., writing *français*) and hope for the best. Spanish users of email, says Posteguillo, commonly omit accents (e.g., using e instead of é) when typing messages. Unfortunately, distinctions of meaning may be lost. As Posteguillo illustrates: while the Spanish phrase *cuando llegue* means “when I arrive,” the accented *cuando llegué* means “when I arrived.” Contemporary international initiatives hope to supplant the limited ASCII system with Unicode, a new text-generating standard that has the technological capacity to accurately represent every known script in the world.<sup>4</sup> However, as my colleagues who speak (and write) languages others than English continue to remind me, Unicode has not yet fulfilled its promise. An obvious short-term fix would be for Spanish (French, Hebrew, etc.) speakers to switch to English in their email, and indeed many do. However, such a move carries cultural and political baggage. While roughly a billion people around the globe speak some level (and version) of English, many bridle at being forced to do so when communicating with a fellow landsman.

*Posteguillo raises several other technological issues that have cultural or ideological ramifications.* Consider emoticons — those stylized icons created largely out of punctuation and symbol keys on the QWERTY keyboard and used to express sentiments such as smiling, i.e., :-) or frowning, i.e., :-( . While a core set of emoticons (along with many regional and small-group innovations) have evolved in the English-speaking world, their usage is hardly universal. Perhaps the most fully developed alternative is the Japanese system of *kaomoji* (see Katsuno and Yano, 2002), though my students from other parts of the globe inform me that email users in their home countries have devised indigenous emoticon systems that are distinct from the familiar American set.

*Another culturally-laden technological issue that Posteguillo raises is the choice of national flags on Web sites that offer users alternative languages in which to read the text or transact business.* Which flag do you use to represent Spanish: one from Mexico? from a South American country? from Spain? What about representing English: the Union Jack or Old Glory? Even putting aside the comparatively minor linguistic differences between, say, Argentine and Castilian Spanish or between American and British English, the long and painful shadow of cultural imperialism remains.

*Moving from technology to terminology, Posteguillo considers some of the lexical issues that language professionals using the Internet are bound to confront.*

Though his examples come from English and Spanish, the principles at work are applicable to cybertalk in other languages. As a linguist, Posteguillo formulates his analysis in familiar linguistic terms, speaking, for example, of such morphological processes as back formation (e.g., to *wordprocess*, a verb derived from the noun compound word-processing) or blending (e.g., *netiquette*, a blend of *net* and *etiquette*). He also addresses the issue of code switching between English and Spanish, yielding such cyberSpanglish as *clickar* (a Spanish infinitive, marked by the suffix *-ar*, based on the English verb *click*) or the Spanish computer magazine entitled *Computer Hoy* (*hoy* being Spanish for ‘today’). Since Posteguillo is also a lexicographer (and one of the authors of the new *Spanish Computing Dictionary* published by Bloomsbury), he is especially sensitive to the issue of whether Spanish- or English-based words are used to denote computer activity (e.g., is it *correo electrónico* or email? *navegador* or *browser*?). *Posteguillo’s treatment of linguistic issues relevant to Internet language probes how choices regarding discourse and genre apply to the construction of cyber-texts.* Should you use the passive voice? present tense? euphemisms? hyperbole? acronyms? and so on. How do spell checkers work and can they be trusted? Is there a special written register (what Posteguillo calls “digital tenor”) that is particularly appropriate for CMC? Is informality always the preferred register? Such questions are of more than academic interest to Posteguillo, since his book is designed for non-native speakers of English who need to become conversant in linguistic subtleties that are rarely included even in advanced courses in English for speakers of other languages.

*The final chapter in Netlinguistics returns to cultural and ideological themes.* One set of concerns is highly pragmatic. How, for example, should dates be represented in e-text intended for international audiences: with the American month + day + year (e.g., 10/5/04, meaning October 5, 2004) or the European day + month + year (e.g., 5/10/04)? To the European eye, 5/10/04 means October 5, but to Americans, it denotes May 10. As with the choice of a flag to represent a language, selection of a date format makes a cultural statement, not to mention constituting a potential source of confusion.

*A second area of concern is subtle issues involving identity.* While Americans are adept at representing themselves on the Web (e.g., in Chat rooms, MUDs, or MOOs<sup>5</sup>) through assumed identities, the practice is less familiar in some other cultures. And what about the tone with which you “accurately” present yourself or address others? Though Posteguillo does not elaborate, choice of terms of address, along with the degree to which the sender appears humble or as a self-promoter, come to mind.

5. MUDs are Multiple User Dungeons (or Dimensions or Discussion — the term has evolved over the years). MOOs are Object-Oriented MUDs. The term “Object-Oriented” refers to a programming style. Both MUDs and MOOs are synchronous forms of CMC.

*But Posteguillo's biggest concern is with the present and future role of English on the Internet. As native speakers of English decline in number and the ranks of non-native speakers continue to grow (Graddol, 1999), English is increasingly becoming the lingua franca through which speakers who share no other mutual language are communicating. This phenomenon, combined with the fact that both the Internet and contemporary personal computing are largely American inventions, reinforces the role of English in cross-national and cross-linguistic cybertalk — a situation many non-Americans find problematic.*

### **PC-Based Communication at Play**

If Posteguillo's book is about putting cybertalk to work, Danet's *Cyberpl@y* has just the opposite goal. Danet, who is Professor Emerita of Sociology and Communication at Hebrew University and Research Affiliate in Anthropology at Yale, has been intrigued by notions of cyber playfulness for over a decade. An early article appeared in 1994 in *Wired* magazine. In 1995, she was guest editor of a special issue of the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* on "Play and Performance." Her book represents a synthesis of much of her research up through 2000, along with a thoughtful integrative perspective. The book, which is heavily illustrated (both in black-and-white and with some beautifully rendered color plates), is accompanied by a Web site.<sup>6</sup>

*A sociologist by training, Danet brings to her enterprise experience from a range of disciplines. She has been writing on linguistic issues since the mid 1970s, on art and aesthetics since the late 1980s, on computer-mediated communication since the mid 1990s and on ethnographic issues throughout her professional career. Her take on the structure and significance of the Internet "at play" is grounded in her own intellectual odyssey.*

*Analysis of cybertalk at play is relatively new in Internet research. As Nancy Baym aptly observed in 1995, "Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is often seen as a means of distributing information, of increasing organizational efficiency, of creating electronic democracy, or of challenging traditional hierarchies. It is rarely seen as a means of making people laugh." Sure, individual users of email, newsgroups or Chat knew about using humor in their messages, and even in the days of mainframes and mini-computers, creation of Snoopy portraits using ASCII characters and fan-fold paper were legendary. However, formal study of computer-text humor is a recent phenomenon that, in significant part, owes its existence to Danet's work.*

6 . <http://micro5.huji.ac.il/~msdanet/cyberpl@y/sitemap.html>

*A reasonable question to pose at the outset is why text-driven communication on the computer is often so playful.* In her first chapter, Danet offers four possible explanations. For starters, she suggests that the medium is interactive, and human interaction invites play. Secondly, since early forms of CMC have strong roots in hacker culture, hacker penchants and practices often found their way into the usage patterns of new CMC aficionados. Hackers, says Danet, “love to play with words and symbols..., love to play with typography and spelling..., [and] cherish virtuoso, playful performance.” A third reason for the playfulness of cybertexts is the “frontier-like quality” of online activity in the 1980s and 1990s. As John Perry Barlow (whom Danet quotes) wrote in 1996, “Cyberspace...has a lot in common with the 19th century West. It is vast, unmapped, culturally and legally ambiguous...and up for grabs....It is, of course, a perfect breeding ground for both outlaws and new ideas about liberty” — and, we might add, an ideal incubator for verbal and visual experimentation. Finally, Danet writes, many forms of cybertalk allow, encourage or even require some degree of user anonymity (ranging from nicknames to creating identities out of whole cloth). Such anonymity is tailor-made for playfulness.

*Cyberpl@y explores the lighter side of computer-based interaction through a variety of genres:* ones that are essentially textual (such as email), forms using text to represent affective talk (here, on Internet Relay Chat, also known as IRC), genres combining textual and visual media (visual greeting cards) and creations that are fundamentally artistic (ASCII art, color art on IRC and playfulness with type fonts). Danet’s goals for the book are to exemplify and analyze play with textual form conveyed via the Internet, as well as to chart the transition from text-only media to multimedia communication. She approaches these goals through five case studies.

*The first case study (Chapter 2) explores stylistic issues in emails she received in the mid 1990s from interlocutors she did not know or at least did not know in a personal context.* Danet argues that although such “public email” reflected considerable stylistic variation, the missives were “drifting toward an emergent style at times more ‘oral,’ and even occasionally more playful than traditional official letter-writing style.” Her analysis of two sets of email corpora lends support to this position.

*My favorite examples, however, come from a stray email Danet received from a student (again, in the mid 1990s) who was requesting a copy of a paper Danet had written.* After a cheerful salutation (“\*Hello\*, Ms. Danet!”), the student began her message with “How are ya doin’ today? I feel quite spiffy too!” and closed with “Thanks a bunch! [... of grapes!] (:.” The rest of the letter, in Danet’s words, “lurches between a wildly playful, informal style, out of place in conventional public correspondence, and a strictly formal, even hypercorrect style.” In other words, the writer has little clue how such a letter should be written, and combines some of the lighthearted informality she might use in spoken conversation (or email) in

addressing friends with elements of formal letter-writing she presumably learned in school. Such “lurching” is reminiscent of the stylistic confusions that arose when earlier technologies such as the telegraph and the telephone were themselves new and without shared conventions of linguistic etiquette (Baron, 2002).

*Danet’s next case study (Chapter 3) analyzes the performance-like character of text in two IRC corpora: the first, a typed simulation of smoking marijuana and the other, a “virtual theatre group” parodying works of Shakespeare. These data were collected in the early half of the 1990s. At that time, users of IRC were still fairly restricted in number, often including people with both technological tenacity and a penchant for zany personal expression. The chapter’s title – “Typed Jazz” – reflects Danet’s contention that CMC (especially in its more playful forms) “frequently becomes a form of artful, stylized performance, partially resembling both oral performance and improvisational jazz.”*

*In Chapter 4, Danet explores the e-greeting card, a phenomenon that enjoyed considerable success in the late 1990s. Her discussion situates digital greeting cards within the larger historical context of early picture postcards and then the paper greeting-card industry, a fascinating story in its own right. Danet’s empirical survey of e-greetings (many of which were initially free) includes birthday cards (the most popular), “love” missives, including valentines (next highest in volume) and cards relating to what she calls “life’s troubles,” including “sorry” cards, get-well greetings and, indeed, condolences. Why did cyber greetings become so popular? Danet points to the growing move from black-and-white to color in newspaper photographs and advertisements, and from text to multimedia (e.g., the addition of animation, streaming video and sound to many Web sites). Cyber greeting cards can do them all, either pre-packaged from vendors or with individual elements selected (or created) by the sender. Writing in early 2001, Danet predicted that such creative productions would be used “as a matter of course” by “digitally sophisticated children and teenagers, for whom being online is part of everyday life.” Yet by 2004, e-greeting cards seem to be on the decline — at least among the young adults I have informally surveyed. Perhaps the novelty has worn off. More importantly, a number of Internet sites are now charging for their services, making phone calls, emails, instant messages or text messages fiscally reasonable alternatives. And of course, there are still paper cards, which a surprising number of Internet users still prefer to send, perhaps out of nostalgia for the hard-copy universe that seems to be crumbling around us. A study by the Pew Internet & American Life project reported that for the 2001 winter season, sixty-three percent of Internet users physically mailed holiday letters or cards, while only twenty-seven percent sent a holiday card or letter via email.<sup>7</sup>*

7. [http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP\\_Holiday\\_2001\\_Report.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Holiday_2001_Report.pdf)

*Chapters 5 and 6 make up the next case study: a look at ASCII art, starting with its monochromatic beginnings in the 1960s and continuing through the second half of the 1990s, with its transformation into colorful text-based images, sometimes transmitted via Internet Relay Chat. In the early days of computing, a number of bored — but creative — computer devotees, often working late at night in the bowels of university computer facilities, wrote programs for representing displays of ASCII characters. When printed out, these programs formed pictures, often of well-known subjects such as cartoon characters, Christmas trees, political figures or even the Mona Lisa. Danet explains that antecedents of this “constructive” art form include mosaics, “pattern poetry” and typewriter art. In the 1980s and early 90s, with the proliferation of personal computers (with typewriter-style keyboards and modem hook-ups) and widening access to university computer mainframes, the art form found new homes on the Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs) and Usenet newsgroups that thousands of computer geeks began frequenting. Development of the World Wide Web and of expanding computer memory size facilitated the transmission and storage of images. As pictures shifted from black-and-white to dazzling color, the artistic possibilities vastly increased.*

*ASCII images were originally designed as stand-alone productions. In the late 1990s, ASCII art went interactive, as a number of IRC Channels began using visual images in lieu of text for communication. Literally speaking, of course, the art was composed of typed ASCII characters. Moreover, captions or words were often embedded in the art. Many of the composite images look like greeting cards; others contain enmeshed text reading “hello” or “hugs,” expressing the types of sentiments found in some traditional text-based Chat rooms or newsgroups. A goodly number of the productions obviously took many hours to create. Danet learned from her interviews with “players” in these IRC Channels that some were online twelve or more hours a day — creating, managing and sharing images. While the results provide visual delight to their viewers, we might well ask at what point the “play” part of this art ends and the desire for social connection (and perhaps approval) begins.*

*The final case study (Chapter 7) continues the theme of computer-generated art by looking at the new face of typography in the age of individually-managed cybertalk. Why, asks Danet, have people other than professional designers gotten interested in typography, and how have computers and the Internet helped promote this preoccupation? A piece of the answer lies in hardware and software developments.*

The Macintosh, introduced in 1984, offered everyman (and woman) their first real chance to manipulate type fonts. Subsequent appearance of the tools for desktop publishing (including software packages, now often built into word-processing programs, plus inexpensive printers) made it possible for each of us to control our own press. A generation of children has now grown up knowing about point sizes and being able to choose from Times New Roman, Courier, Bookman or Verdana. In addition to offering a new venue for play (whether in creating word-processed text, email signature files or IM profiles), the computer typography revolution has heightened our sensitivity to the impact that the color and form of letters can have on how readers interpret messages.

*Beyond the humor, the playfulness, the performance and the aesthetics that computer-mediated communication permits, Danet reminds us in her concluding chapter that the Internet and the personal computers we use to access it are fundamentally democratizing tools.* The computer, says Danet, has "opened up many new avenues for human expression and communication, for people of all walks of life without formal training in programming or hardware aspects of computing." True, and all for the better. But there is another, much more portable tool that requires (at least for its basic operation) even less training and that also is in the process of introducing profound changes in the ways we use language to work and play with others at a distance. That tool is the mobile phone.

### **Mobile Phone-Based Communication**

According to the US Census Bureau, the world's population in the year 2003 was nearly 6.31 billion people. That same year, the number of mobile phone subscriptions in the world was approximately 1.34 billion. Roughly speaking, then, more than one in six people on the face of the earth had a mobile phone subscription — even more than the nearly 1.15 billion subscribers to landline phones.<sup>8</sup>

*What are all those people doing with mobile phones?* Today's mobiles support multiple communication functions. You can talk person-to-person or leave a voicemail message. You can send a text message, a photograph (if you have a camera phone) or sound files. You can also write poetry, "express yourself" through choice of ring tone or external phone cover, or use the Web to access news updates or email. And outside of the US, phones are commonly performing a host of non-communication tasks, ranging from doing bank transfers to buying food from vending machines or opening garage doors.

8. <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/>. These mobile and landline statistics are necessarily approximate because some users have multiple subscriptions while other share subscriptions.

*Mobile phones achieved widespread popularity in Europe and Asia by the mid to late 1990s, thanks to a multi-national European effort known as GSM (Group Spécial Mobile) that established a uniform mobile telephone system for Europe.*<sup>9</sup>

While the GSM system was designed for transmitting voice data, a small amount of bandwidth was left over after the voice functions had been accommodated. Designers used that space to create a short messaging service (SMS) via which customers could input brief written messages (no more than 160 characters) by taping out alphanumeric texts on the tiny phone keypad. The rest, as they say, is history. Text messaging on mobile phones (known as SMS in most of the world) developed rapidly because of its adoption among European and Asian teenagers and young adults. SMS was cheaper than making a voice phone call, and the written nature of the system made possible communication that could not be monitored — say, by teachers or parents. While texting is now becoming popular in America (thanks, in part, to massive advertising campaigns by mobile phone providers), the medium is still less developed in the US than elsewhere.

*Over the past five years, social scientists have begun studying SMS as a form of written communication.* Much of the research (e.g., Doering, 2002; Grinter and Eldridge, 2001; Hård and Segerstad, 2002; Ito, In Press; Ling, In Press) has been centered in northern Europe and Japan. Rich Ling, who is a sociologist by training and now a senior research scientist at Telenor (Norway's largest telecommunications company), is one of the most established experts on mobile phone telephony, including the phone as a venue for text messaging. *The Mobile Connection* constitutes a synthesis of his empirical research, as well as a participant-observer's perspective on the impact of the mobile phone on the lives of individuals and social groups. While Ling's book pays particular attention to use of mobiles by teenagers and young adults (especially in Norway, where he conducts much of his research), he also has important things to say about international and older cohorts. Both "older" and "younger" people use mobiles for getting work done (including work of the household and personal management variety) and for recreational purposes. Yet not surprisingly, older people are more likely to "work" with their mobiles and younger users to "play." *Although much of the mobile phone use Ling describes involves texting, a sector of the people in the data sets he describes talk on the phone as well (or even exclusively).* Generally speaking, the older the user, the more likely he or she is to employ voice functions rather than texting functions. A Japanese study (Hashimoto, 2002) found that while more than seventy-five percent of households had mobile phone service, usage varied considerably by age.

9. Over time, "GSM" has come to mean "Global System for Mobile Telecommunication," as the historical origins of the system receded in users' minds and as GSM for mobile telephony spread worldwide.

Nearly ninety percent of people in the 20-24 year-old range reported using mobile phones, but only seventy-nine percent in the 35-39 year-old range did so. When it came to specifically using text messaging services, the disparity grew: eighty-three percent of 20-24 year-olds but only thirty-nine percent of 35-39 year-olds. In Norway, the age differential seems to set in early. Ling reports that while Norwegian teenagers and young adults as a group were sending between 6 and 9 text messages a day (peaking at nine messages daily for females 16-19 years old), the number plummeted to fewer than three daily in the 25-34 year-old cohort. In fact, another study of Norwegian teenagers that Ling references found that among heavy mobile users, the number of phone calls began to outpace the number of text messages by the time users were age 18.

### **Phone-Based Communication at Work**

The mobile phone can be a highly practical device. American professionals (businessmen and women, lawyers and such) are quite familiar with using the voice functions of mobiles to transact business while they wait for planes, walk down the street and (alas) drive, but commonly execute written cybertexts through email on a Blackberry. Their European counterparts also conduct business by speaking on mobiles, but written CMC missives are typically done as text messages on the same mobile phone. In Europe, texting also fills more pedestrian work-related functions, as I learned a few years back from an ad in the high-speed train between Heathrow Airport and Paddington Station in London. A commercial service was offering to pick up your luggage when you arrived at Heathrow, deliver it to your home or hotel and send you an SMS when it had arrived. As an American, whose phone at the time could not handle SMS even in the US, I felt like a visitor from an underdeveloped country.

*Ling devotes two chapters to the practical side of mobile communication, looking at issues of safety (Chapter 3) and coordination of everyday life (Chapter 4).* Even before the events of September 11, 2001 in the US and of March 11, 2004 in Madrid, using mobile phones in times of emergency (or in case of emergency) has been seen as a vital function of mobiles.<sup>10</sup> Ling reports that as early as 1999, approximately eighty-two percent of the participants in focus groups across Europe fully agreed with the statement "The mobile phone is useful in an emergency." A Norwegian study done in 2001 revealed that people 50 years of age and older were more likely to value mobiles in case of emergency than were younger cohorts. However, as teenagers on both sides of the Atlantic will tell you, parents are often the driving force behind their children getting mobile phones "for safety sake."

10. For an analysis of the ongoing use of mobiles as safety devices in Israel, see Cohen and Lemish, 2004.

*Safety may be a prime reason for procuring a mobile, but coordination of everyday life is, for many people, the major reason for using it.* Ling has extensively studied how Europeans harness the mobile phone to orchestrate the business of day-to-day activities involving other people (what Ling calls micro-coordination): planning what movie we will see tonight, reminding our spouse to pick up the dry cleaning, telling our mother we are staying after school to work on a project. In a study of SMS messages sent by a random sample of Norwegian SMS users in 2000, Ling found that nearly forty percent of the messages dealt with either direct coordination of activity ("The car is done so we can get it at 4") or requests for mutually beneficial behavior ("Remember to buy bread").

*This preponderance of short-term instrumental messages is hardly surprising.* After all, for decades we have used landline phones in similar ways. Yet as Ling correctly argues, mobile telephony is also creating a new way of thinking about time. The mobile phone, says Ling, "is challeng[ing] mechanical timekeeping [i.e., clocks] as a way of coordinating everyday activity." In 1963, Louis Mumford, an historian of science and technology, wrote that "The clock is not merely a means of keeping track of hours but of synchronizing actions." People used to set a time to meet, making arrangements by letter, telephone or face-to-face encounter. Once they physically set out for the rendezvous, they were essentially incommunicado. It therefore behooved both parties to be on time. With the coming of mobile phones (either as voice or text messaging devices), we have the option of "softening" time. If we are stuck in traffic or the bus is late, we whip out our mobiles and inform the other party of the delay. Being able to adjust our ETA as we move through space leads us to rethink the notion of being "on time," since "on time" becomes literally a moving target.

### **Phone-Based Communication at Play**

Besides the practical side of mobile telephony, there is the fun part. Fun can be defined many ways. In 2001, The *Guardian* ran an SMS poetry contest, complete with a first prize of £1,000.<sup>11</sup> Commercial establishments have recognized that sale of distinctive ring tones to fun-loving mobile users is big business, generating \$3 billion in 2003.<sup>12</sup> And "fun" is also a general antidote to boredom. As one 17-year-old Norwegian boy in Ling's studies explained, "Often when we are sitting on the bus or subway it is boring and so we can write messages and that entertains us in those boring moments."

11. <http://books.guardian.co.uk/games/mobilepoems/0,9405,450649,00.html>  
12. <http://www.informam-media.com/mobilemusic>

*Ling focuses on the ways in which Norwegian teenagers and young adults use mobile phones to build and manage social relationships. Admittedly, adolescent and early adult social experiences are not always playful or joyous. Yet like choosing ring tones or arranging where to hang out on Saturday night, they are all part of the growing up process. For simplicity, we will look at teen and young adult mobile phone usage all of a piece. Within this age cohort, we are overwhelmingly looking at texting, not talking. In the words of one 17-year-old, "Mobile [telephoning] equals SMS for me, nothing more." Reading Ling's analysis of teenage and young adult mobile phone practices (Chapter 5), it becomes obvious that mobiles play a critical role in establishing and maintaining social status. To quote from one of Ling's focus groups:*

<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Why do you think that young people are so interested in mobile phones?</b>
<b>Kristian (age 23)</b>	<b>Social status.</b>
<b>Bjorn (age 22)</b>	<b>Mobiles are a fashion thing</b>
<b>Kristian (age 25)</b>	<b>Mobiles are status — the more expensive, the cooler you are.</b>

The status theme plays out in many ways. There are fashion issues: what make or model phone you have. There is the numbers game of using the size of the address list in your phone to quantify your popularity. (A seven-year running average in Norway revealed that teenagers had an average of ninety-eight names listed in their phone's address book, while 20-24 year-olds averaged one-hundred-six.) And there are those distinctive ring tones. *Mobiles also help the young in navigating social interaction.* Middle-schoolers (at least in Norway) can enlarge their geographic sphere (e.g., going downtown after school, meeting a friend on Saturday) because mobiles enable them to assure parents they have moved safely from point A to point B. Teenagers use their mobiles to seek out social action. "On a Friday there are a lot more text messages than on the Thursday because people are out and need to find out what is going on," said one 17-year-old. SMSs often serve as interactive homing devices. Rather than set a specific time and place to meet, teenagers commonly keep messaging one another as their plans evolve. A third important social navigation function of the mobile is to monitor which social interactions to engage in. Teenagers (like adults) can pick and choose which phone calls to answer and which SMSs to read (and when). Parents are often the ones screened out. In the words of 18-year-old Nina, "Like, if a certain number calls, it goes right into the telephone voicemail. For example, if parents call...."

*Moreover, mobiles sometimes have a role in developing romantic relationships.* Not only does texting allow participants to think through messages before sending them, but receivers can manipulate the amount of time they take before responding (answering too quickly makes you seem overly eager). Particularly for girls, composing SMSs to potential (or actual) boyfriends sometimes becomes a communal affair, with a circle of friends handing around a draft message (i.e., passing around the phone) before the SMS is actually sent. *Girls seem to enjoy the medium more than boys.* As 17-year-old Erin explained, "Most of the messages I get from boys are pretty short because they don't think it is fun to sit there and punch in on the phone. That is more of a girl thing." Judging from Ling's analysis of the linguistic structure of Norwegian SMSs, Erin is largely right. Ling reports in Chapter 7 (and in more detail in Ling, In Press) that teenage and young adult females are more likely to write longer messages with more complex syntax, use more capitalization and punctuation, include more salutations and closings and incorporate more abbreviations and emoticons into their texts than their male counterparts.

*Ling bookends The Mobile Connection with introductory and concluding chapters (1 and 2) and a concluding chapter (8) that set modern mobile telephony within an historical context, that evaluate alternative sociological models for explaining the adoption of mobile phones into our lives (Ling favors the domestication model), and that probe the broader social implications of this technology that permits us to be in continual contact with one another.* Will mobile telephony intensify relationships within a close circle of friends? Will it make us less mindful of those not in our address book? Will it make us oblivious to those in our physical midst? (*The Mobile Connection* has an insightful discussion in Chapter 6 of the intrusive nature of mobile telephony. Think of all those phones going off — and conversations going on — in train compartments, restaurants and even university classrooms or houses of worship. Clearly, our sense of social obligation to those around us is undergoing a sea change.) These are important questions, whose answers may only emerge with time.

*In closing, I would like to comment on one social implication of cybertalk (whether on a PC or a mobile, whether at work or at play) that is already discernable — and worrisome.* That is our changing experience in being physically distanced from people who are important in our lives.

### ***Cybertalk and the End of Anticipation***

Atop many old houses on the New England coast, you can still find what are known as widow's walks — rooftop perches where the wives of seafarers used to look out for the return of the ships bearing their husbands (many of whom, unfortunately, never came back). Such widow's walks make no sense today. Travelers simply call ahead, email, IM or send an SMS.

*For many centuries, we communicated with those at a distance through letters.* If the distance was great (e.g., across a continent or an ocean), the letter might take months to arrive. In the days of the telegram and the simple landline phone, communication with those dear to us was still not always practicable. Except in cases of emergency (or considerable wealth), passengers on ocean vessels had no access to telecommunications; for those on terra firma, the nearest telephone might be many miles away. When the apparatus was in place, using it was often prohibitively expensive. Yes, by the first half of the 20th century you could call from New York to London or from Washington to California, but the price of even a short conversation was beyond the pocketbook of most.<sup>13</sup> In between letters or brief telephone calls, friends and relatives would live their separate lives, undergoing experiences and formulating thoughts, large and small, that they stored up to share with one another when they next met or communicated through letter or phone. Anticipation of a future encounter (be it with longing or dread) became part of who we were as individuals and how we responded to each other when we were reunited. There was so much to say — about what had happened, about our ideas and plans, about what we might share together.

*The new cybertalk technology enables us to eliminate interpersonal distance by keeping us in constant communication.* Parents of teenagers who are continually sending SMSs to friends or dashing home to IM a classmate with whom they just spent an entire day often ask (as did the father of one of Ling's interviewees), "Is it actually necessary that everybody needs to talk with each other all the time?"

*But the issue of perpetual contact<sup>14</sup> goes beyond teenagers and adolescents to the core of how adults now interact with one another and with their progeny.* If we are emailing, texting or even speaking on the phone multiple times daily with our spouse or significant other, how much is left to share when we rendezvous at the end of the day? If children away at summer camp communicate regularly with parents through some form of cybertalk, what excitement is left to reveal upon their return and how much maturation can go on when they are wirelessly tethered to home base? With the proliferation of CMC, many homecomings are becoming occasions to reminisce about information and experiences that have already been shared rather than opportunities to live in the moment.

13. In 1946, for example, a ten minute call between New York and Los Angeles cost \$50 in 2004 dollars — down from almost \$250 (again, in 2004 dollars) in 1920 (Stern, 2004).

14. See Katz and Aakhus's *Perpetual Contact* (2002).

*The linguist John McWhorter has recently argued (2003) that mobile phones return their users to a more "natural state" of interpersonal interaction than most societies have experienced for decades or even centuries. People, says McWhorter, are essentially talking creatures, as evidenced by the amount of conversation that characterized your average pre-modern tribe or pre-industrial village. The forces of history that sent us from rural homes into cities, upon the high seas, into uncharted lands, out West, even into voluntary seclusion — in short, beyond the daily face-to-face talking zone of those we know — are being neutralized by the mobile phone. But is such constant communication desirable? So much of western civilization, not to mention the very notion of individuality and the rise of Protestantism, is built upon the premise that we need to be alone, apart from others in order to think and grow. Coming back together is enriched by our individual absences. What kinds of accomplishments, what kinds of thoughts, what kinds of relationships will we have if we never venture out from hearth and home, family and friends, email and SMS? Today, computers and mobile phones are bridging physical distance through perpetual contact. What remains to be seen is whether ubiquitous conversation-at-a-distance will undermine our strength as individuals who can come together for rewarding interpersonal experiences lived in the present moment.*

### **Author Notes**

*Naomi S. Baron is Professor of Linguistics at American University in Washington, DC. Her research interests include the relationship between speech and writing, the impact of technology on language, the history of English and child language acquisition. She is the author of six books, including Computer Languages: A Guide for the Perplexed (1986), Growing Up with Language (1992) and Alphabet to Email: How Written English Evolved and Where It's Heading (2000). Professor Baron is currently analyzing the linguistics of email, instant messaging and text messaging in preparation for a new book, tentatively entitled Beyond Email: Language in the New Millennium.*

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# *Activity Centered Design: An Ecological Approach to Designing Smart Tools and Usable Systems*

**Geri Gay and Helene Hembrooke**

Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2004

ISBN 0-262-07248-3

135 pages, cloth, illustrated, \$30.00

Developed by Russian psychologists, Activity Theory became a popular framework for the design of HCI (Human Computer Interaction), especially CSCW (Computer Supported Collaborative Work) and mobile computing system for its emphasis on the social factors of human activities and the context of use.

Activity Centered Design: An Ecological Approach to Designing Smart Tools and Usable Systems provides a good opportunity to see how the Activity Centered Design compensates for the User Centered Design (UCD) approach with regard to 'usefulness.' The heavy emphasis on individual user's usable interactions in UCD is often criticized for its under representation of other relevant user groups' interests in a social context and the system's overall usefulness for them. In this book, the focus of discussion in designing user interface is shifted from the individual user-centered view in a laboratory setting to cooperation of different user groups doing cross-boundary tasks in networked contexts.

The major concern of this book (and the projects from Cornell HCI lab also) is how the mediating devices used for communication and learning affect outcomes, process and motivation. The authors start their analysis from an introductory chapter on Activity Theory and Ecological principles, the two basic frameworks of this book. They apply Engeström's Activity Analysis to the topic of communication and learning, along with three key concepts from Activity Theory: Mediation, Object-Orientedness and Disturbance. Ecological theories are quoted for the adaptive aspect of their interactive systems.

The mediation of human beings and objects by tools and its development over time, the major Activity Theory concept, are illustrated in the later chapters with projects from the Cornell HCI lab. E-Graffiti, a project, demonstrates what can happen when people meet a new technology without knowing how to use it. Another example, the Handscape project, shows different attitudes and expectations toward emerging technology before and after users tested prototypes. This project also served as an example of user-involved (not 'centered') design process by engaging various stakeholders (museum professionals, museum patrons, system designers) and their needs in its early stage of development.

However, the examples and discussions in this book need more depth. The discoveries of NOMAD project — the ambivalent effect of mobile computing on learning <sup>o</sup>™ are rather predictable. The discussion of CampusAware, another project, includes differences between the insiders' notes about certain locations (more informal and opinionated) from the outsiders', clearly exemplifying that user knowledge provides another context of use in this system. This is a useful insight, but needs more commentary in terms of the motivations — the various reasons they share knowledge with others behind the observed activities — to develop into a more intelligent system.

The example of the same project, in the last chapter for spatial pattern finding, was presented without any conclusive findings, this ended up being the authors' projection of what might be possibly uncovered when the real job of configuration analysis is done. Some of the research findings are not significantly different from the results from other design approaches; they repeat the same conclusion. One reason for this is found in the fact that the interaction styles of the technical solutions (2D and 3D chat room, e-mail, Instant Messenger) they tested in these projects are not original, so they have the same old usability problems discovered from previous research. It is well understood that these projects only prototyped some functional aspects; the main focus of the research was not to develop technically creative solutions. Nevertheless the functionality, usability and aesthetic of these systems had a great influence on the whole experience, and kept users from reaching enhanced social experience within museum or campus.

Also the projects introduced in this book are communication and learning systems based on computer-mediated communication, so the social aspects were rather obvious. But given the Activity Theory assertion that every activity is socially determined, more insightful discoveries were expected from the kind of activities we usually consider 'personal,' but that actually have hidden social dimensions. For instance, notetaking in the classroom is basically a personal activity, but it is a socially trained habit, and at the same time it is in the context of the lecture and other students' behaviors. Note-takers have to choose what to write, but their choices are not completely independent from what others choose to write, as well as what the lecturer wants to communicate.

Overall, this book is useful for designers and researchers who are familiar with the basic concept of Activity Theory and some of the quoted research in relation to Engeström, Kuutti, Nardi and Gibson. It might be even more useful to be read with a comparative analysis of other frameworks for studying context, such as Nardi's examination in Situated Action Models and Distributed Cognition. Each framework has developed its own emphasis on the choice of research methods to meet various project requirements, based on the diversity of human activities.

*Reviewed by Young ae Hahn, a PHD candidate at the Institute of Design, Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago.*

Book Received

*Art and Cook*  
*Love Food, Live Design*  
*and Dream Art*

**Allen Ben, Emmanuel Paletz, Einav Gefen Dubnikov, Liron Meller  
and Melanie R. Underwood**

New York: Digital in Space, Inc.

ISBN 0-9743089-2-7

304 pages, full color illustrations, large format, hardbound, \$59.95

As a fan of unusual cookbooks (Herter's *Bull Cook and Authentic Historical Recipes and Practices* or Marinetti's *Futurist Cookbook*) — I can't resist this one. It comes in a sincere egg carton big enough to accommodate thirty-six eggs. Graphically it is over the top with interesting representations of the recipe result and visual analogies and metaphors in the spirit of Salvador Dali and other art historical references. For example, Semolina Cake Diamonds with Nut Topping and Honey-Flavored Yogurt is listed as a tribute to Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*. This is really fun. A listing of art references in relation to specific pages provide some clarity at the end of the book for the visual play that might have escaped the reader-cook. Each recipe has a spread allowing for clear listing of ingredients, an image of the final product and whatever visual entertainment the authors provide. The recipes look very interesting and I anticipate trying them out. *Art and Cook* makes it impossible to ignore the creative similarity between cooking and graphic design.

Book Received

# *Crossing the Blvd* *Strangers, neighbors, aliens* *in a new America*

**Warren Lehrer & Judith Sloan**

New York: W.W. Norton, 2003

ISBN 0-393-05737-2

400 pages, illustrated in full color throughout, hardbound with audio CD, \$35.00

Queens, New York is the most ethnically diverse location in the United States as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau. Through interviewing its residents and documenting its vibrant neighborhoods, the authors celebrate the immigration stories that we all have or have had a stake in. Of the seventy-nine individuals interviewed, most arrived in this country after 1990. The authors are sensitive to the language as spoken; English often once, twice or more times removed from the speaker's language of origin. The cadence and the hybrid nature of the audio-taped interviews is retained giving the stories flavor. The authors organize the stories into five movements: 1) religious freedom and spiritual healing; 2) asylum seekers escaping war and ethnic cleansing; 3) families reunited and traditions reborn; 4) community action and reconciliation; and 5) collisions and collaborations between people with different roles and goals. This is a sympathetic move toward the stories themselves and also the reader as it gives the collection a discernable shape.

I opened the book with the intention to browse and read a few stories, but was captured by its variety and detail. The stories are simply told, not dramatized or edited for maximum effect. It reminds the reader of the innumerable untold stories present among those living in the United States — stories of escape, separation, longing, brutality and deceit. All elements of high drama, but simply reported here. Another theme running through the stories are cultural connections; how to maintain them, how to share them and in what ways a hybrid culture emerges. Many of the stories are from educated people, those with skills, who upon coming to this country start out doing the most menial work to survive. And these people are survivors.

Design of this book fluctuates from something near advanced textbook design to something approaching artists' book. The material presented is rich and complex, so in the very early pages the authors describe the visual organization of the book — how to know who is speaking, where ancillary information about history or policy might be presented and how certain terms are used. Overall it is a bold and graphic book that makes visible people who might otherwise remain relatively invisible and “other.” It has a New York in-your-face kind of boldness that confronts the reader with the variety of humanity found in Queens neighborhoods.

The audio CD that accompanies the hardbound publication is not a rendering of the visible book in auditory form. It is an extension of the material through which voices of the subjects are heard often in their own language with a quiet translation. Musical forms from various countries as well as the production of original musical culture provide added context and depth. All this is paced and mixed in the best NPR (National Public Radio) tradition. It is a sophisticated addition to the book.

## *Colors of the World* *A Geography of Color*

**Jean-Philippe Lenclos and Dominique Lenclos**

New York: W.W. Norton, 2004

ISBN 0-393-73147-2

288 pages, full color illustrations, softbound, \$49.95

Opening with samples of forty-two soils from all over the world showing subtle changes in color from beige to yellow to green to orange, red, brown and near black, the authors survey and scrutinize color as used in various cultures. They document color in vernacular architecture via material difference, historical change, seasonal change and illumination. This is no casual activity — they observe and photographically document, collect samples, make comparisons and consider the influence of texture and brightness. Examining color use within a culture, they synthesize their observations in color palettes and renderings of buildings and spaces. They also go across cultures to compare the use of a specific color. There are differences in cultural use of color. For example, try to imagine some magical way to accurately estimate a culture's total use of saturation across all colors. Close your eyes and remember rural Mexico or Africa — this may be as close as one gets. The book is a feast for open eyes.

Book Received

# *Design Research, Methods and Perspectives*

**Brenda Laurel, editor**

Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004

ISBN 0-262-12263-4

334 pages, illustrations, spot color throughout, hardbound, \$39.95

This book opens with an informative matrix that places the articles in sections about people, form, process and action against research methodologies, contexts, subjects and domains, indicating, for example, if an article discusses process and theory. This opens the reader's mind to an intentional selection of articles for a particular reading based on an interest or curiosity. Presuming the identification of issues or topics is fairly accurate, it is interesting to look at the strong or weak presence over all the articles of the topics identified. For example, qualitative research is strongly represented in contrast to quantitative, while commercial and exploratory research substantially submerge academic. Admittedly, the book tries to cover much territory, but its skew leans toward qualitative and procedural methods, commercial and exploratory contexts, designers as subjects and practice as its primary domain. This is hardly surprising as design continues its struggle to emerge from its craft history to become a discipline. From a publishing perspective, this is probably a risky design book to begin with, so a focus on practicality may make it useful to forward thinking design practitioners and educators. The MIT Press deserves praise for taking on this risky venture; one hopes it is the first of several books detailing design's discovery of the importance of research.

Not all the articles are reporting on research. Some are more like case studies or justifications of design practice. Among the most interesting contributions are those that discuss the relationship between creativity and research and those that discuss the problems and strategies for moving a design concept through organizational business culture. The last section on action contains several game related projects. Games force the practice of early prototyping and necessitate user observation and its translation into game modification.

The authors in this compendium are primarily American with a very few foreigners — they are largely drawn from the editor's associations at Art Center, other west coast institutions and corporations. The range of research strategies and kinds of projects reported cover a wide spectrum. None of the articles exceed ten pages so readers, who may be new to design research, can move in and out of articles easily. Particularly for designers without research experience, this is a good book.

Book Received

# *Metro Letters*

## *A typeface for the Twin Cities*

**Deborah Littlejohn, editor**

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Design Institute Dialog Book, 2003

ISBN 0-9729696-1-6

160 pages, illustrated, softbound, \$29.95

Can a typeface become an integral part of a city's urban culture and identity? This is the question running throughout this book. Begun as a research experiment at the University of Minnesota's Design Institute, a short list of type designers were invited to participate in a competition to design a typeface for Minneapolis & St. Paul, the 'twins' in the title. The six competitors were: Peter Bilak, The Hague; Erik van Blokland and Just van Rossum, LettError, The Hague & Haarlem; Gilles Gavillet and David Rust, Optimo, Geneva & Lausanne; Sibylle Hagmann, Kontour, Houston; Conor Mangat, Inflection, Kentfield, California; and Eric Olson, Process Type Foundry, Minneapolis & St. Paul.

Competitions are a not well-explored form of investigation in communication design in general and this one is in the best tradition of architectural competitions. Of the six proposals, the winner was Erik van Blokland and Just van Rossum of LettError in the Netherlands. Their rendition of "Twin" was selected in part due to its mutable and adaptive possibilities that are expected to become a family of ten alphabets. The font arrived with its "Panchromatic Hybrid Style Alternator," a sophisticated randomizing software program. "...Twin proposes that identity need not mean identical — that we can share common 'family' characteristics, display an underlying relatedness, while nevertheless maintaining our individual uniqueness and distinctive attributes..." — just like our genetic heritage. These type designers are known for their 1990 face, Beowulf, that used the first randomizing program to morph letters based on use. Twin extends this idea.

Returning to the question raised at the opening of this brief commentary, it is important to note that Minneapolis & St. Paul are no longer Garrison Keiller's white bread America, but a mixed community of Hmong, Ethiopians, Eritreans, Somalis and European-Americans. Thus Twin, the typeface with its morphing possibilities seems appropriate for the cities.

In the best architectural tradition, the book seeks to expose the process through documentation and reflection. One recalls architectural competitions such as the one for the main branch of the Chicago Public Library, documented by WGBH as a program and video called "Design Wars." This kind of behind-the-scene understanding of design process is unusual and revealing. In *Metro Letters*, the six competitors are interviewed, their submissions are shown and the judges' comments and critique are presented. The competition process and the development process for the final selection are also presented.

The book itself is a model of documentation, handsomely designed and well structured.

Book Received

# *Sense 1 and Sense 2* *The Art and Science of* *Creating Lasting Brands*

**Lippincott Mercer**

Gloucester, MA: Rockport Publishers, 2004

Volume 1: 222 pages, full color, large format, softbound

Volume 2: 288 pages, 2 color, large format, softbound, \$55.00

Lippincott Mercer's Design & Brand Strategy Consulting, is arguably one of the premier offices engaged with branding. The two volumes published by Rockport are an interesting historical look at their work and their writings about brand phenomenon. Beautifully presented, the two volumes are packaged in a plastic sleeve that will preserve their heavy softbound shapes.

Volume 1 is primarily a visual resource containing their work with brief commentary and reference to more extensive discussion in Volume 2. The first volume has nine chapters devoted to issues such as: the birth of corporate identity, design and business, the role of naming, customer experience of design and others. The index for this volume presents the chapters with reference to their conceptual content. The identity programs are not specifically listed in the index and they are not presented in chronological order in the body of the book; hence the visual references are put into conceptual frameworks.

Volume 2 is a reprise of Lippincott Mercer's publication *Design Sense and Nonsense*. It presents in chronological order articles from volume 1, number 1 in 1956 through 96 in 2002. The index in this volume refers to specific identity programs as they are discussed or referred to in the various articles. This volume contains a wealth of information and experience with branding. For those interested in a history of branding or engaged with contemporary work in this area, these two volumes are essential resources. So often consultants massage their ego with large format presentations of their work — while this may be present here to a degree, the thoughtful writing and analysis of issues with regard to branding make this a contribution to knowledge.

Book Received

*World Graphic Design*  
*Contemporary Graphics from Africa, the Far*  
*East, Latin America and the Middle East*  
*Geoffrey Cabab*

London: Merrell, 2004

ISBN 1-85894-219-5

160 pages, full color illustration, hardbound, \$49.95

The intention of this book cannot be fulfilled. It opens stating that it will explore graphic imagery developed outside “the influence of the European tradition.” The world is too small now (and has been for some time) to escape multi-cultural influence — in any direction. It is an interesting question, however, to consider in what way designers can escape global influence. The use of syntax and imagery in this work, whether photography or illustration, is as sophisticated and controlled as any I’ve seen. The pragmatics of who the clients are and who the audience is, tends to direct the design toward more sophisticated approaches as well. The work represented is beautifully printed — also a sign of a client with money who desires to attract others with money to the product or service in question. Some pieces fall outside the realm of commerce: announcement of poetry readings, literature colloquium, etc. But even here in low budget, low impact projects, the designer cannot express other than sophistication — after all they are visually literate. What is vernacular communication like in these countries? Is it useful, i.e., does it communicate? Can the local escape the global? Would a designer be so bold as to try this? Is it even possible?

*New Student’s Dictionary*

New York: Harper Collins, 2003

ISBN 0060564563

836 page dictionary & 222 page grammar guide, illustrated, 2 color, softbound, \$13.95

Promoted as “the ultimate resource for teachers and students of English as a second language”, this dictionary labels frequently used words, includes warning notes regarding misuse and accounts for ninety percent of written and spoken language. The typography and organization is very clear with the second color (blue) used judiciously to flag headwords and usage information set out in a frame. Dictionary publishers since 1874, they continue to produce legible and readable references, this time for ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers and students.



## JOURNAL INFORMATION

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