Conceptual Poetry and the Question of Emotion

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--Conceptual art is good only when the idea is good.
Sol LeWitt[i]

--No more songs of raw emotion, forever overcooked.
Vanessa Place[ii]

One of the most important artworks of the last decade is surely Christian Marclay's *The Clock*, first shown to U.S. audiences in 2011 and since then in museums and galleries around the world. *The Clock* is a twenty-four hour montage made of thousands of film clips, each successive minute of the day being captured by at least one clip that provides a glimpse of a clock, wrist-watch, bell tower, sun-dial—indeed any kind of time-piece or even by a voice on screen saying what time it is. "This incredible installation," writes Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian*, "is set up so that whatever time is shown is, in fact, the correct time as of that instant. So as well as providing food for thought about the nature of time in the cinema, and indeed in life itself, the whole thing functions as a gigantic and gloriously impractical clock."[iii]

If, for example, you enter the gallery at 11.23 AM, you will witness one or more scenes taking place at 11.23 AM, so that "real" time and film time intersect. Sometimes time is central to the action, as when someone is rushing to catch a train; at other times, a clock may be glimpsed just for an instant in the background of a shot—say, a love scene—an irrelevancy of sorts that only after the fact strikes the viewer as significant. Throughout, music provides the continuity. As Zadie Smith puts it:

. . . because you have decided that the sharp "cut" is the ruling principle of the piece, you're at first unsure about music bleeding from one scene into another. But stay a few hours and these deviations become the main event. You start to find that two separated clips from the same scene behave like semicolons, bracketing the visual sentence in between, bringing shape and style to what we imagined would have to be . . . necessarily random.[iv]

The coordination of audience time and film time subtly parodies the extreme coding of commercial film. In the latter, Smith notes, "'Making Lunch' is a shot of an open fridge, then a chopping board, then food cooked on the stove." Time, the sequence tells you, is passing! Or again, years can pass in a moment as in the shift from the Paris flashback to the present of Rick's bar in *Casablanca*. But it is precisely such film-editing that *The Clock* calls into question. As Marclay explains:

By putting the clips back into real time, it's contradicting what film is. You become aware of how film is constructed—of these devices and tropes they constantly use. Like, if someone turns abruptly, you expect someone else to be in the next cut. An actor looks down at his watch and suddenly, you have a close-up of the watch. But, if the first clip is in black-and-white and the next is in color, you know you've been fooled.[v]

And that is precisely the point. *The Clock* is *not* a film, though film buffs who go to see it delight in identifying the actors, the films in question, and so on. Certainly, most of us will recognize at least some of the films and some of their well-known stars. But it doesn't really matter. When Marclay was making the clock, his assistants would bring him hundreds of clips at a time, and he would then spend hours, even days, making his selections. Indeed, in this "verbivocovisual" art form,[vi] selection is all. As Marcel Duchamp said in his anonymous editorial for *The Blind Man,* defending his submission to the Salon of the Independents (1917) of a urinal labeled *Fountain by R. Mutt*, "Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary

article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object."[vii]

What makes *The Clock* a unique work is that the artist has *chosen* and spliced his myriad images so as to create a highly particularized complex of feelings and ideas. To call "The Clock" "personal" may sound like a dubious proposition since the artist Christian Marclay is neither to be seen or heard anywhere in this 24-hour montage. In the words of James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, "The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails."[viii] But however indirectly, a very particular set of motifs and values emerges from *The Clock*. We may not learn anything specific about Marclay's own life, but we can deduce quite a bit about his sensibility and approach to the life/art relationship. We know, for example, that Marclay is no Omar Khayyam, preaching *carpe diem*. The present moment, for him, is never self-sufficient: the past always intrudes in the form of a juxtaposed shot, sometimes from the same film. Then, too, this artist relishes old films—films with plenty of narrative and excitement. And although all manner of digital and electronic clocks appear, Marclay seems to have a special taste for clocks that can be heard ticking. Most important: whether the clip in question comes from romantic comedy, or Western, from melodrama or political documentary, from films about young children or old men dying, from black-and-white films of the 1930s or in Cinemascope from the 60s, the passage of time, as it is treated here, turns out to be something feared, even dreaded.

At first this seems like an odd conclusion: can't clocks, after all, signal a happy hour, the moment of assignation, say, when a young man's beloved comes running to meet him under the clock at Grand Central? Or that a boring class is about to be over—it's 2:55 PM—and the adolescents are free to leave the building? Common sense may suggest these things, but, more

often than not, at least from Marclay's perspective, we consult clocks because we're late, because something unwanted is about to happen, because time is running out!

Then, too, in experiencing the film events in real time, we become more and more aware of the difference a minute, even a second makes. Everything can change and usually we can't do anything about it. Yet—and here is the paradox--the future is always challenging, always full of promise. When we attend a viewing of *The Clock*, we usually plan to leave the gallery at a certain time. We must be somewhere, meet someone. But then, there is strong urge to stay just a little longer, a few more minutes, so we can see what happens *next*. And then after that. The sudden cuts, coming almost always at the moment right before something dramatic happens, keep us in our seats. And before we know it, hours have gone by. Time—real time-- has been lost and is not to be recaptured, at least not by *The Clock*. Marclay is not implying that we can do something about this loss, that with the right attitude, we could, in the words of Andrew Marvell, make time, if not stand still, at least run. Rather, the film montage has us becoming more aware of the relationship of sameness and difference in what are such disparate narratives—a sameness and difference tension that produces a sense of familiarity and anticipation at the same time. The music, often out of sync with the narrative fragment in question, underscores this tension of cut and continuity. And the open-endedness of each clip, propelling us forward as we watch and listen, creates a special sense of *possibility*: who knows, this artist suggests, what *may* happen? In Wittgenstein's formulation in the *Tractatus,* "Everything we see could also be otherwise."[ix]

As a conceptual art work, a work entirely appropriative, which took almost ten years to assemble, *The Clock* nicely illustrates Sol LeWitt's famous formulation of 1967:

> In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work.

> . . . .If the artist carries through his idea and makes it into visible form, then all the steps in the process are of importance. The idea itself, even if not made visual, as as much a work of art as any finished product. (*Artforum* 83)

In the case of *The Clock,* were Marclay to substitute somewhat different film clips in different sequences for the ones we have, the basic concept of the twenty-four hour cycle with its split-second film cuts in tension with the musical score could well remain intact. Materials, textures, colors, lines, spatial arrangements—all these basic aspects of art-making—certainly count, but their formal deployment is governed by the dominating concept of the piece itself.

In the art world, conceptualism, usually said to have been born in the '60s but in fact going back at least as far as Duchamp's *Readymades* of 1915-17*,* is by no means contested; on the contrary, it has remained the dominant art concept of the past half century: such later twentieth-century movements as Fluxus, minimalism, earth art, performance, installation and light art are conceptualist in their subordination of the material object to a set of generating ideas. But in the case of poetry, the word "conceptualism" continues to cause a furor. In 2005, when Kenneth Goldsmith published a manifesto-piece called "Paragraphs on Conceptual Writing,"[x] which was, in fact. simply a recycling of Lewitt's 1967 essay, substituting the word "author" for "artist" and "writing" for "art" throughout, the poetry community, unaware of the piece's origins,[xi] raised all sorts of objections to the conceptualist thesis, thus proving Goldsmith's point that what had been acceptable in the art world since 1967 could cause consternation among poets and their critics some forty years later.   Poetry, by this argument, is way behind.

But of course there can't be a neat parallel between conceptual art and conceptual poetry. Broadly speaking, conceptual art has played down the visual dimension of painting or sculpture in favor of philosophical concept and the use of language fragments —the placement a few words or

sentences, say, on a canvas or blank sheet of paper, as in the work of John Baldessari or Lawrence Weiner. But what about the reverse? If a conceptual painting substitutes words for images, a conceptual poem should, at least logically, substitute visual images for words. But how can there be a poem without words? And accordingly critics have been skeptical of the very idea of "conceptual writing."

In "The Fate of Echo," his introduction to *Against Expression*, the anthology of conceptual writing he edited with Kenneth Goldsmith, Craig Dworkin addresses this very issue. As in the case of the visual arts, he suggests, "the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work" (Lewitt, "Paragraphs"), but since writing cannot by definition do without language, conceptualist poetry refers, not to the substitution of image for the expected word, but to the unique link between conception and the text itself.[xii] The basic material remains the written word, but it is now subordinated, as in conceptual art, to an overriding idea. The word, moreover, is often appropriated from an external source.

Consider Vanessa Place's *Boycott* (2013),[xiii] a "little red book" with a vertical slit down the center of the cover, as if inviting entry into a taboo sexual world [figure 1]. The idea, Place recalls in an interview with Andy Fitch,[xiv] came to the poet when she was reading iconic second-wave feminist texts along with Lacan's Seminar XX where he declares "*La femme n'existe pas*." Beginning with Simone de Beauvoir's celebrated *The Second Sex,* and proceeding to such later texts as Helène Cixous *Laugh of the Medusa*, Place decided to replace all female-gendered terms with male-gendered ones. When, for example, "It's the dream of every young girl to become a mother," becomes "It's the dream of every young boy to become a father," a particular gender piety is given a startling spin. And since there aren't always direct substitutes for the female references, the poet had to be inventive. For the word "menstruation" in De Beauvoir's "The first

menstruation can be very traumatic for the young girl," Place substitutes "ejaculation," forcing us to reconsider the cliché of the original formulation. Indeed, working on *Boycott*, Place came to realize that de Beauvoir was really writing, "not for women but for the male imaginary"—the man de Beauvoir (like related feminist writers) in fact wants to sit up and take notice. *Boycott,* with its nicely punning title, is thus a very serious parody, a defamiliarization of widely accepted discourse so as to make us see that discourse as if for the first time.

In the case of *Boycott*, the idea certainly dictated the actual composition and word choice of the appropriated text. "The question" as Dworkin notes, " is not whether one of these works could have been done better, but whether it could possibly have been done differently at all" ("The Fate of Echo" xxxix). Either the idea works or it doesn't. Then, too, as Goldsmith's points out in his own Preface, "faced with an unprecedented amount of available digital text, writing needs to redefine itself to adapt to the new environment of textual abundance." (xvii). This is an important point. Now that all of us can move so much text around so freely from one place to another, we are finding it almost impossible to resist at least a degree of sampling. And the internet offers the most tempting possibilities, both with respect to word *and* image. Quite obviously, *Boycott* and related texts could not have been produced before the copy-paste function of digital text and the possibilities of downloading became available.

But even if we grant that some of our most interesting texts today are conceptual, what is it that makes them *poems*? Isn't *Boycott* more accurately understood as an exemplar of what the MFA programs are now calling "creative non-fiction"? Why should we think of Craig Dworkin's *Parse* (2008)—the attempt to diagram every sentence in a nineteenth-century grammar textbook that becomes increasingly nonsensical and hilarious,

questioning the very nature of *syntax* as we know it—as a "poem"?   And why refer to the makers of such works as *poets?*

Asked this question, Goldsmith has candidly explained:

> I suppose that the work has become more novelistic as time's gone on, but when I started down this path some twenty years ago, it was only the poets and the poetry world that could accept what I did. So I hung out with them. You take your love where you get it. But you're right, I've never really written a poem—I don't think I'd know how to. Yet there's some sort of openness in the poetry world concerning writing that I haven't been able to find elsewhere. Some of the Language poets, in particular, sort of blew apart notions of prescriptive lineation in favor of margin-to-margin madness. [xv]

What Goldsmith implies here—and other conceptual poets have made similar points-- is that whereas the category "fiction" or 'novel" places specific constraints on a given text, "poetry" (if not "poem"), whatever its modes and particular genres, is, as David Antin put it long ago (1973) in a famous essay on modernism, the *language art.*[xvi] Poetry is the broad term for writing that foregrounds its own language as an object of contemplation. Even when its language seems perfectly "ordinary," Wittgenstein's admonition holds: "Do not forget that a poem, although it is composed in the language of information, it is not used in the language-game of giving information."[xvii]

So much for the long view. But in winning acceptance as "poets," self-identified conceptualists have also been eager to separate themselves from their more traditional "expressivist" counterparts. And here they have run into considerable trouble. In his earlier *Ubuweb Anthology of Conceptual Writing* (2006), Dworkin mocks the status quo in the poetry world as follows [figure 2]:

> Poetry expresses the emotional truth of the self. A craft honed by especially sensitive individuals, it puts metaphor and image at the service of song.

> Or at least that's the story we've inherited from Romanticism, handed down for over 200 years in a caricatured and mummified ethos—and as if it still made sense after two centuries of radical social change. It's a story we all know so well that the terms of its once avant-garde formulation by William Wordsworth are still familiar, even as if its original manifesto tone has been lost. "I have said," he famously reiterated, "that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility."

> But what would a non-expressive poetry look like? A poetry of intellect rather than emotion? . . . In which the self-regard of the poet's ego were turned back onto the self-reflexive language of the poem itself?[xviii]

Against Expression, as the title itself tells us, "continues to explore," in Dworkin's words, "the potential of writing that tries to be 'rid of lyrical interference of the individual as ego" (as Charles Olson famously put it). Our emphasis is on work that does not seek to express unique, coherent, or consistent individual psychologies" (xliii).

Dworkin's basic case here is not especially new—indeed, it was already a mantra for language poetry: in "Stray Straws and Straw Men" (1976), for example, Charles Bernstein satirized the expressivist lyric [figure 3]:

> I want to just write—let it come out—get in touch with some natural process— From brain to pen—with no interference of typewriter, formal pattern. . . .I just have this thing inside me—silently—unconditioned by the choice I need to make when I write it down or write on. So it is as if language itself gets in the way of expressing this thing, this flow, this movement of consciousness.[xix]

Against this Romantic view, Bernstein insists, "There are no thoughts except through language, we are everywhere seeing through it, limited to it, but not by it" (*Content's Dream* 49).

There are no thoughts except through language. The Mallarmean theorem ("My dear Degas, one makes poetry not out of ideas but out of words") is one of the hallmarks of Modernism. But in the course of the twentieth-century, the foregrounding of language in poetry has been coupled with a focus on the lyric "I." Poem = lyric: the equation is accepted as a

given, whether in the world of literary journals, where lyric poems are identified by their lineation and surrounding white space, or in all references to "poetry anthologies" or a given author's "book of poems." On the whole, contemporary poems tend to be short—no more than a few pages, unless it is made clear that a given text is a poetic sequence.   And although lyric poems need not be "personal"-- think of Ezra Pound's "The Coming of War: Actaeon" or such William Carlos Williams minimalist poems as "As the cat / climbed over / the top of / the jam closet"—they exhibit a particular signature, a recognizable stylistic signature that is usually referred to as "voice."   Today, there is much talk of displaced voices or fractured selves but, the more "fractured," the more these "unique" selves are taken seriously. Role-playing, in other words, is accepted as long as there is a individual poet to play the role.

It is the equation of poem with lyric that Conceptualist poets have called into question. in her Afterword to *I'll Drown My Book*, for example, Vanessa Place writes [figure 4]:

> I have come to consider conceptualism qua conceptualism, that is, as writing that *does not self-interpret, is not self-reflexive*, at least not on the page. In other words, in which the content does not dictate the content: what appears on the surface of the page is pure textual materiality.[xx]

And she has recently made the case even more strongly:

> My conceptual aesthetic does not serve my affect: it does not convey my feelings about this or that to the world. I am not you, I am not even Us. My feelings about this or that viz the world are unimportant, only of interest, only occasionally, only to me. My poetry is not a means of emotive conveyance from me to you, each to his reach. It is a platform for you. You feel or not, as you like. .
> [xxi]

These are fighting words, deliberately designed to be provocative, and the response of most mainstream poets and critics has, not surprisingly, been heated.   In an essay called "Against Conceptualism," for the *Boston Review*,[xxii] Calvin Bedient declares [figure 5]:

> More and more poets are suspicious of lyrical expression and devote themselves to emotionally neutral methods….Oulipo, Language poetry, conceptual writing, visual poetry, Flarf, critical poetics—are positioned to the earlier avant-gardes as ego is to impulse, idea to sensation, cynicism to heroism, and no-time to animal faith and its nemesis, mortality. The most serious of their closures is the stonewalling of the affects. (70-71).

And Bedient goes on to criticize what he calls "head poetries," dismissing, for example, Jacques Roubaud's elegy for his young wife, *Quelque chose noir* (*Some Thing Black*), for following such a set pattern—"nine poems per section, nine 'lines per poem"—that the sequence degenerates into "mere talk."   Indeed—and here Bedient seems to have concrete poetry and its heirs in mind:

> The absence of cultural goals has bred in poetry a large family of short-circuiting, stasis-ensuring techniques. Stuttering repetitions of words and lines, labyrinthine permutations, serializations, parataxis, cut-ups—these are a score of such devices, all of them grammatizing a sense of stalemate (75).

Surely the stalemate here is also the critic's. "Against Conceptualism" offers no counter-examples, no exhibits of what the presumably valuable contemporary poetry of "affect" today would like. Various theorists like Julia Kristeva are invoked, but the basic premise—that the use of procedural methods as in *Oulipo* or appropriation as in Conceptual poetry makes it impossible to convey emotion to one's audience—is never called into question. The use of rules and constraints, found text and recycling: evidently these undercut the *affects*—"feelings that are often either transports or afflictions" (Bedient, 70)—that are or should be at the very heart of poetry.

But if we think of poetry not as a particular modality or genre but as the language art, the issue of "my own language expressing my own feelings" largely disappears. Let me now come down to cases.

Falling Towers

What is surely the most famous twentieth-century poem in English, T. S. Eliot's 433-line *The Waste Land*, culminates in the following passage:

> I sat upon the shore
>
> Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
>
> Shall I at least set my lands in order?
>
> London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
>
> *Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*
>
> *Quando fiam uti chelidon*—O swallow swallow
>
> *Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie*
>
> These fragments I have shored against my ruins
>
> Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
>
> Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
>
> Shantih   shantih   shantih[xxiii] [figure 6]

This eleven-line conclusion to *The Waste Land* is a tissue of quotations. It begins, if you will, with a lyric "I," although that "I" is masked as the impotent Fisher King of vegetation myth, seeking to restore his land from the drought that has seized it. But the famous third line, "Shall I at least set my lands in order" is already a citation: namely from the Bible (2 Kings 20.3): "In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover." Eliot changed "house" to "lands," but the meaning is intact. What follows is a collage of nursery rhyme, the reference to Arnaut Daniel in Dante's *Purgatorio*, the swallow song from the 2d century Latin *Pervigilium Veneris*, with its reference to the Philomela myth that is a leitmotif in Eliot's poem, Gerard de Nerval's *El Desdichado*, Thomas Kyd's Renaissance

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melodrama *The Spanish Tragedy,* and finally, the Sanskrit words for "Give, sympathize, control," taken from the Upanishads, and followed by the repetition of "Shantih," which means, according to Eliot's own note, "The Peace which passeth understanding."[xxiv] Indeed, the only line here that is the poet's own invention is line 430, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins," which beautifully sums up what this climactic section, indeed what the whole poem has offered us by way of understanding our "Waste Land" condition.

Early readers of Eliot's poem were highly critical of the poet's reliance on other people's words—and in other languages to boot-- to express his feelings. "We do not," wrote the critic Edgell Rickword, "derive from this poem as a whole the satisfaction we ask from poetry."[xxv] What this critic means—and it sounds very much like contemporary critics of conceptual poetry—is that appropriated text cannot have the affect we demand from lyric poetry; it cannot express the proper lyric emotion nor can what is essentially found text evoke a meaningful emotional response.

Common sense tells us otherwise. As in the case of Duchamp's *Fountain*, the point about Eliot's sequence of citations is that "he *chose* them." From what Yeats's called the *spiritus mundi*, the storehouse of images, he created a set of allusions in which the fear of destruction ("London Bridge is falling down…") and defeat ("Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie") manage to generate some hope for resistance, whether by means of purgatorial fire, as in the case of Arnaut Daniel, or on the analogy of the transformation of the suffering undergone by Procne and Philomela in the Tereus myth, or, more aggressively, via the revenge plot of Thomas Kyd's Hieronimo ("Why then I'le fit you"). The promise for change the poet is looking for is surely too elusive and too complex to put directly; consequently, Eliot provides us with what he himself called an *objective correlative* [figure 7][xxvi]—in this case, a series of quotations from a very

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diverse set of texts. "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" The poem's response is the sum of its oblique allusions.

No one, I think, would call *The Waste* Land a conceptual poem. A collage text, incorporating many modes and techniques from dramatic dialogue in "The Game of Chess" to the mock-heroic narrative of the typist and clerk in "The Fire Sermon," *The Waste* Land has been characterized as everything from satire, mock-epic, and collage/montag, to a set of dramatic monologues that relate to "Prufrock" and "Gerontion." But it is interesting to note how many of the poem's most memorable phrases, the opening, "April is the cruelest month," to "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish," to "I had not thought death had undone so many," are parodic allusions or direct citations.

In the internet culture of the early 21st century, the role of echo has multiplied. Kenneth Goldsmith's most recent book, *Seven American Deaths and Disasters* (2013) is described on its book jacket [figure 8] as "a series of prose poems that encapsulate seven pivotally iconic moments in recent American history: the John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, and John Lennon assassinations, the space shuttle Challenger disasters, the Columbine shootings, 9/11, and the death of Michael Jackson. . . . Impartial reportage is revealed to be laced with subjectivity, bias, mystery, second-guessing, and in many cases, white-knuckled fear. Part nostalgia, part myth, these words render pivotal moments in American history through the communal lens of media."

"World Trade Center," which I found myself reading on the twelfth anniversary of 9/11 in 2013, is taken from a variety of sources: it begins with a CNN television report that then breaks down and gives way to radio broadcasts from New York stations like WABC and WNYC. In his afterword, Goldsmith makes clear that the piece was written by "surgically extracting punchy excerpts which seemed to embody the spirit of the fuller tapes;

stumbles and stutters were left intact. During these reading I embodied the voice of those radio announcers, re-enacting—and reclaiming—the soundtrack I heard on Bleecker and Sixth" (where the poet himself was standing, watching the spectacle in utter disbelief).

At first, I was skeptical of the author's claim that this and the six other radio/TV transcriptions could be called "prose poems." But the appellation turns out to be perfectly just. The main device is a kind of fugal repetition, a words being introduced and repeated again and again, only to be dropped when their validity is called into question. Thus the first part modulates the certain phrases with what are almost Gertrude Steinian inflections [figure 9]:

> Did you see any smoke
>
> Smoke continues to billow
>
> Black smoke is billowing from what appears to be all sides
>
> You can see the smoke billowing out. There are flames billowing out there

But then:

> I don't see the building because there's an awful lot of thick smoke.

And soon the descriptive terms give way to the more abstract "explosion" used again and again, as the awful realization that there is a second explosion sinks in (135). *Explosion* is in it turn replaced by the verb "collapsed," soon accompanied by simple negatives: "I can't tell," "I don't see it," "I don't see the building." And finally all attempts to *describe* what is actually happening give way, on WNYC, to the first speculations as to who might have done it, whether it might have been Osama Bin Laden, and what the fate of America will be.

The language of "World Trade Center" is entirely appropriated, but it is also carefully structured. It begins, as these broadcasts actually begin, on a low key [figure 9]:

> This just in. You are looking at obviously a very disturbing live shot there. That is the World Trade Center and we have unconfirmed reports this morning that a plane has crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Center.   (127)

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A plane crash "devastating" (the word is repeated a number of times) but evidently accidental. For the first few pages the emphasis is on "crash." What kind of plane is it? Did it have difficulty flying?, a question deeply ironic in the context, especially since the eyewitness, Sean Murtagh, the vice-president for finance at CNN whose office is "on the twenty-first floor of five Penn Plaza" (128), immediately says, "yes it did. It was teetering back and forth, wingtip to wingtip, and it looks like it crashed into, probably . . . maybe the eightieth to eighty-fifth floor" (128). The reporters can't fathom it: they're wondering why the plane doesn't come out of the other side of the tower, and only after much pointless information from eyewitnesses as to which of the two towers was hit and which one has the top-floor observation platform, the news of the second explosion and second tower collapse comes in [figure 10]:

> We just received word that the south tower has collapsed!
> OK.
> Wow.
> The. South. Tower . Has. Collapsed.
> You'd almost think there was some type of secondary explosion.
> Ugh! Oh! I mean that's . . . that's . . . that's . . .that's. . .
> That would . . .that would . . . that would . . . And you have to wonder how that
> Let's just think about this logically.
> There is no logic.
> Oh my God!
> . . . uh . . . uh . . .a hijacked air . . .air . . . airliner. (138-39)

Here, finally, twelve pages into the text is the word *hijacked,* soon followed by "catastrophic," and the news of the Pentagon attack and the attack over Pennsylvania. It finally dawns on the radio team that "the United States, uh, could be under attack." "I don't know about you, Joe, says Ed, "but I got the shakes" (140). What to say? It's the moment for cliché to weigh in:

"this is a day that will live in infamy. . . . The morning of this day . . . the 11th of September 2001 . . . will live in infamy." To regurgitate Roosevelt's famous words about Pearl Harbor is comforting. But only for a moment before the recognition sets in that "There are no words at all to express this" (141).

In Part V of *The Waste Land* ("The Fire Sermon"), there is a reference to the bombing of World War I in the lines, "Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air / Falling towers / Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London / Unreal." Substitute New York for those cities and it is all quite real –or surreal--enough. Explosion now gives way to negation. "the north tower . . . has collapsed. / Oh, yes, it's not there! / It is not there. It is not there" (142).   "We can tell you that there are no towers standing." And now finally, sixteen pages into the composition, the word "terrorist" occurs. Terrorist attacks, "war zone"—a situation beyond description. In such situations, language breaks down, the World Trade Center, we hear, "has collapsed in clubble…uh…in rubble" (144).

What to say when there is nothing one can say? Description gives way to theorizing. Who did it? Was it Islamicists? But look at the Oklahoma bombing, which turned out to be the work of home-grown blond Neo-Nazis. Then again Lawrence Eagleburger says. . . . The talk turns to Osama Bin Laden, as the unspeakable inevitably gives way to rumor and speculation. And then in the final section (VII), the whole event is framed and distanced. George informs radio listeners that "This afternoon they're not letting reporters anywhere close to the area where the two World Trade towers collapsed earlier today. I'm standing right next to the Manhattan Bridge" (154). And the piece closes with these words [figure 11]:

> And just below me is a park right near the edge of Chinatown. And while there's some curiosity among these people, they continue to play their card   games. They continue to chat as if nothing is going on. Their markets are open. They're shopping, they're . . . they're . . . they're buying their fish. Uh, it's . . . . it's as if this

> little corner of New York City was totally unaffected, but you know, it's at the top of their minds. They're pointing up in the air periodically and they're continuing with their card games. So it's, uh, just a little snapshot of, uh, a piece of New York as they deal with this immense tragedy. (154)

The irony of the hyperreal! In almost every account of 9/11 available, whether by journalists or poets, by "ordinary" bystanders or government officials, the text culminates in horror and despair, often laced with moralism. But the fact is that in the cavern of Wall Street and its surroundings, the tall buildings make it impossible to see anything at a distance and so local neighborhoods like Chinatown are self-contained and protected. The "billowing smoke" evidently didn't reach this area. Ironically, although no one can get either into Manhattan or out of it, although smoke and fire can be seen from miles away, in Chinatown people are playing cards and buying fish. Life goes on.

Goldsmith's "World Trade Center" condenses roughly 9 hours of broadcasting—from 9 A.M. (the first crash occurred at 8:46 AM) to about 6 PM into less than an hour's worth of actual reading time (27 pages) but keeps the exact wording and broken rhythm of the original "jerky, jittery texts" Goldsmith transcribes. We thus have the sensation of witnessing the event *as it happens* and as it is mediated; we are *there*, knowing no more than what the broadcast teams can tell us. What thus emerges for our contemplation is a tale of horror much worse than that of a natural disaster. For the most blatant failure, we learn, is one of *intelligence*: how could no one have known what was happening? The shrewd suppositions about Bin Laden near the end only make it worse. The government was, not only literally, but figuratively, "in exile." And security at the World Trade Center, already bombed by terrorists once, ten years earlier, seems to have been non-existent. Then again, at this media moment, who knows?

Does Goldsmith's conceptual poem display a lack of feeling? If we assume that the reader's emotional response—his or her affect-- can only be

a function of what Aristotle called the ethical argument—the mode of self-presentation-- the answer is yes. But surely there has always been poetry that is more concerned with Aristotle's pathetic argument—the finding of the rhetorical means that will move an audience. Part parody ode, part satire, part science fiction and reportage, "World Trade Center" is nothing if not *moving*. You, dear reader, are there, living through the events. The poet need not comment in his own person for you to experience the uncertainty, fear, and horror.

Sounding the Visual

Goldsmith's *Seven American Deaths and Disasters* represent one pole of the new poetic conceptualism. On the other side, we have "poetry" that appropriates and reproduces sonic and visual entities from other texts. "The concrete poem," wrote Haroldo de Campos in 1956, "aspires to be: composition of basic elements of language, optical-acoustically organized in the graphic space by factors of proximity and similitude, like a kind of ideogram for a given emotion, aiming at the direct presentation—in the present—of the object."[xxvii]

An ideogram for a given emotion: note that although, from its inception, the *concrete poetry* of the Brazilian *Noigandres* group avoided the notion of lyric as the art of self-expression, the private language of a subject overheard while engaged in meditation or intimate conversation with another, this did not mean, as is commonly thought, that the concrete poem cannot convey *affect.* As Augusto de Campos puts in the same volume:

> Phonographic functions-relations and the substantive use of space as compositional element entertain a simultaneous dialectic of eye and breathing, that, allied to the ideogram-like synthesis of the signified, convey a sensible totality, "verbivocovisual," such as to juxtapose words and experience into a narrow phenomenological fold, until now unprecedented.[xxviii] [figure 12]

This is an important reminder that the term *visual poetry* is in fact a misnomer for what the concrete poets were doing: namely, "entertain[ing] a simultaneous dialectic of eye and breathing" to create texts that would be "verbivocovisual."

Christian Bök"s *Eunoia* (2001), which I have written about elsewhere,[xxix] is a case in point. As Bök explains it [figure 13]:

> 'Eunoia' is the shortest word in English to contain all five vowels, and the word quite literally means 'beautiful thinking.' *Eunoia* is a univocal lipogram, in which each chapter restricts itself to the use of a single vowel. . . . [It] abides by many subsidiary rules. . . . All chapters must accent internal rhyme through the use of syntactical parallelism. The text must exhaust the lexicon for each vowel, citing at least 98% of the available repertoire. . . .The text must minimize repetition of substantive vocabulary (so that, ideally, no word appears more than once). The letter Y is suppressed.

The observation of such rigid constraints must have been extremely difficult. One would think the resulting sequence would be a rather sterile exercise.[xxx] But audiences around the world have been charmed by passages like the following from the "I" section, dedicated, appropriately, to the Fluxus poet Dick Higgins [figure 14]:

> Writing is inhibiting. Sighing, I sit, scribbling in ink this pidgin script. I sing with nihilistic witticism, disciplining signs with trifling gimmicks—impish hijinks which highlight stick sigils. Isn't it glib? Isn't it chic? I fit childish insights within rigid limits, writing shtick which might instill priggish misgivings in critics blind with hindsight. I dismiss nitpicking criticism which flirts with philistinism. I bitch; I kibitz—griping while criticizing dimwits, sniping whilst indicting nitwits, dismissing simplistic thinking, in which phillipic wit is still illicit.[xxxi]

The pleasure of the text—audiences often laugh and clap when Bök performs such a passage—has much less to do with what is *said* than in watching the poet make his way through a treacherous obstacle course. Wait a minute: won't he have to use an auxiliary verb and hence the letter *a*? What negative adjective can apply to "criticism" that only contains *i*'s? The audience responds as to the medieval troubadour, winning the contest for

the lady's hand. Such poetry is at once highly formalized and yet flexible enough to allow Bök to use the word "shtick" and to rhyme the must unlikely words, as when "phillipic" turns out to be "illicit." As the language art, poetry can still generate soundings and semantic conjunctions impossible for a machine to produce.

A more recent exemplar of conceptualist word play is Craig Dworkin's *Motes* (New York: Roof, 2011) , a book seemingly quite unlike this poet's more programmatic texts like *Parse*. *Motes* contains 150 minimalist poems, usually two per page (105 Opuscula"[xxxii] and 45 Ayres), many of them epigrams, riddles, and definition poems in the vein of Pound's "In the Station of the Metro" or, more immediately, Stein's *Tender Buttons.* But whereas Stein *describes*, however elliptically and fancifully, the object designated by her title—"Milk," "Sugar," "Umbrella," "Custard"—Dworkin's concern is with the riddling of semantic overload—pun, paragram, homonym, foreign-language equivalent—as drawn from dictionaries. "Every word," he explains, "is multiply determined—by translation between languages, or sound, or typography, etc.—but my goal was to have all those rules as invisible and elided as possible."[xxxiii]

The title *Motes* is at once simple—we all know that motes are small particles or specks, especially of dust—but also resonant of the King James Bible, as in Matthew, 7: "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" Dworkin's epigraph from Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (Book 2, Stanza XXXII), "Well mote yee thee, as well can wish your thought," complicates the picture further, for in Spenser's purposely archaicized English, the Redcrosse Knight's, "Well mote yee thee" means "Well may you thrive."[xxxiv] The little epigraph thus suggests, not only that language is inherently slippery, but that canonical authors in earlier periods also engaged in elaborate language play: *thee,* according to the OED, the diminutive of *the Anglo Saxon theon*,

to *thrive,* was already obsolete by Spenser's time. Meanwhile "thee"—the second-person singular pronoun meaning "you"-- is now, in its turn, obsolete in Standard Common English. To read *Motes* is thus to cast off familiar habits and let the words (*mots* in French and thus directly *in* the title) open up to reveal their mysteries. [figure 15]

        The first of the Opuscula reads:

> A SHIVER
> winters itself

"Shiver" contains the French word for winter, "hiver," and the "s" that precedes it suggests the reflexive pronoun "se." To shiver is to winter oneself. It makes perfect sense.   Or again:

> SEASICK
> too much marmalade now
> starting to turn green

When one is seasick, one's stomach turns to jelly. It's an old cliché. But no one would normally use the word "marmalade" in this context: marmalade is much more specific than jam, originally referring only to citrus fruit, and it doesn't shake as does jelly.   No one would say, "My stomach turned to marmalade." Then again, *marmalade* contains the French word *malade: ergo*, there is too much illness now. In this context, turning green refers to the appearance of the seasick, but also to the cooking process or even to the ocean. And in a related "Mote"--

> BERKELEY MARINA
> frottage of fish grotto signage as
> announcing the decline of the west --

the reference is to the signpost in front of a restaurant on the Berkeley marina, behind whose "frottage" or dim image of a fish grotto, sunset is taking place. In Berkeley, even the sunset is taken seriously, representing, with a grandiose flourish, the decline of the west (the title of Oswald Spengler's famous book). But in the meantime, the intricate phonemic play (internal rhyme, assonance, alliteration) of "*frottage* of fish grot*to signage,*"

conjures up the image of a rare fish ragout served in the "grotto" of the restaurant.

How do we characterize the "I" that emerges from Dworkin's elaborate sound games? Is his a purely cerebral poetry as Bedient would have us think? Or is Dworkin's obsession with the look, sound, and feel of words and their smallest components itself a passion? For Dworkin that quest to unlock the word seems to be a special pleasure: [figure 16]

MARGIN

Explanation of butter on the counter overnight

Leave it out all night, and butter (margarine) has melted, losing the margin of its rectangular eight-ounce bar or perhaps running over the margin of the counter. The explanation makes sense and look at what lovely sound it generates, with its anapestic rhythm and alliterative "t" patterns:

Explanátion of bútter on the coúnter overníght.

For the poet, *language*, wherever one finds it, is revelatory. If Dworkin sees the name "Vincent Van Gogh" (it becomes a title) he focuses on the middle word "Van," a variant on the German "Von," originally designating aristocratic birth. But in everyday parlance, a van is, of course, a vehicle, and so by metonymic transfer, we move from "van" to the poem's first word, "diligence," the French stage-coach of the nineteenth century that, no doubt, took Van Gogh to Paris:

diligence departing . . .
admirers staring . . .
smelling of wine . . .

The free-associative and yet rule-generated epigrams and riddles in *Motes* are part of a new mode of verbivocovisualism younger poets are producing. Take *Notes for Soloists* by Cia Rinne.[xxxv]   Born in Sweden, raised in Germany, before living for over a decade in Finland and then Denmark,

Rinne moves easily between languages: in *Notes* her base is English—but an English laced with echoes of French, German, occasionally another language. The poem is both visual composition and sound text: recorded by Rinne and accompanying soloists with music and sound design by Sebastian Eskildsen in Copenhagen, 2011, this elaborate echo structure, with sounds ranging from gong to passing train, is available at PennSound.[xxxvi] Here is the visual configuration of the first two facing pages [figure 17]:

```
notes for two


*  1                                          *  1 no
   one                                           no.no
   ohne                                          no)
   oh no                                         no9
   ono                                           no.9
   on                                            no.nine
   o.                                            no.nein
                                                 no.no.
   (oh no)

                                              *  N  29
*  No to                                         No 2 9
   no, two                                       no two nine
   is a number, too                              no to nein


*  to tal                                      *  from NO to NO
   to lerance                                     à luigi (nono)
   to morrow
   to rah                                         NOTONO
   to tem                                         OTONON
   to ken                                         TONONO
   to ol                                          ONONOT
   to bacco                                       NONOTO
   to matoe                                       ONOTON
   to aster
   to oth
   to sca                                     *  from NO to NO,
   to p                                          disintegrated
   to ss
   to sh                                          NO TO NO
   to o.                                          O TO NON
                                                  TO  NONO
                                                  O NO NOT
*  to begin       lundi                           NO NOT O
   to continue    mardi                           ONO TO N
   to do          mercredi
   to sustain     jeudi
   to end         vendredi                     *  so and so
   to enjoy       samedi                          and so and
   to rest        dimanche                        so and so
   tou            jours.                          and so and
                                                  so, too.
```

When Robert Creeley wrote his "Numbers" series in the late 1960s, he did not decompose the words themselves; in *Notes for soloists*, however, the number 1 quickly morphs into "one," the German "ohne" (without"), "oh no, ono" (as in Yoko), and then "on, o," with the echo of "(oh no)." The next section treats the number 2 as the reversal of "one/ on," and "to" has its homonyms "two" and "too." But it is the third section where things become complicated. Words beginning with "to" are broken so as to become infinitives. It begins low key with cases where "to" is a separate syllable, as in "to tal," "to lerance," "to morrow," and "to rah." But then come diphthongs, first on "o" like "to ol," but then on "oa" like "to aster," and finally single syllable words that give us "to p," "to ss," "to sh," and at last, "to o," bringing us back full circle to the first lyric, and hence zero.

     notes for soloists exhibits an extraordinary eye and ear for sound echo, homonym, and paragram. Even the days of the week the "tou jours," become interesting. And on the next page "N 29" is first taken apart as "No 2 9," then spelled out to become "no two nine," and finally transformed by homonym and German translation to "no to nein." Or again, on the next page Rinne explores the effect of spacing:

         insecurity

         in security

Allow for a single space and the meaning reverses. Rinne's seems to me the perfect poem for the age of digital composition, when, as we know, every character and space makes a difference. Mistake a single letter, number, or punctuation mark, and you have altered what the text "says" beyond recognition. Moreover omission or duplication has consequences: think of paying a bill of $67.50 on line and omitting the decimal point. The Bank, as I know from experience, will not let you off easily. And neither, in the case of poetry, will a future audience.

In the Internet age, where we are at liberty to download such a plethora of texts—to reproduce them, recycle them, change their appearance by altering font, typeface, spacing, size, or to introduce flash--- that context and framing become the key elements. The poet's role has become in the literal sense, that of a *word processor*, finding how best to absorb, recharge, and redistribute the language that is already *there*. And digital reproduction allows the poet to reach a much wider audience than could be the case with the codex book. Let me conclude with some exemplars of digital poetics by a contemporary heir to the Brazilian Concrete movement—André Vallias.

Vallias's digital poems reflect his background as a graphic designer and interactive media producer, as well as poet and translator. His early visual poems, written during an extended stay in Germany, were mathematical diagrams, concerned with code rather than actual language. Here, for example, is "Nous n'avons pas compris Descartes" [figure 18:internet]:

http://newpoetryforms.blogspot.com/2012/05/andre-vallias.html

But after completing his magnificent translation of Heinrich Heine's complete poems into Portuguese (*Heine, Hein: Poeta dos Contrarios,* 2010), Vallias turned more fully to poetry, although his poems remain distinctly intermedia works.

Consider Vallias's flash piece *Trakltakt,* subtitled "A Lyric-Philosophical Investigation into the Poetry of Georg Trakl in the Age of its Translatability" (http://www.andrevallias.com/trakltakt/). The Preface explains that Vallias's verbal-visual composition is an attempt to understand the lyric poetry of Georg Trakl, who committed suicide on the Eastern Front in 1914, through a series of frames: the notebook entries of Wittgenstein, who was stationed nearby at the time and had arranged to meet Trakl, the poet's own personal

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letters looking ahead to his suicide, and Walter Benjamin's famous essay "The Task of the Translator," refigured as numbered entries in the mode of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. The soundscape is a tone mosaic made of fragments by Anton Webern, overlaid, in the prologue, by the frightening panting of a dog.

The "Seven Days" must be viewed in sequence rather like the Seven Stations of the Cross, but within each sequence, it is possible to rearrange the individual items, as in the case, say, of a Duchamp *boite en valise.* Each "Day" contains the following: (1) an extract from Wittgenstein's private diary, beginning with Nov. 1, 1914, detailing his misery on the troopship to which he was assigned, his work on the *Tractatus*, and his plan to visit Trakl, one of the few of his contemporaries whose poetry he admired and on whose behalf he had made a large financial donation via Ludwig von Ficker's journal *Der Brenner*; (2) the text of a Trakl poem, recited simultaneously by Vallias in Portuguese and the Tropicalist Austro-Brazilian writer Jorge Mautner in German; (3) a chart called "Meaning" which arranges the key words of that poem by part of speech—noun (blue), verb (red), adjective (yellow), adverb (orange), drawing lines from those parts of speech that derive from another—for example, an adjective based on a noun; (4) a graph of the variation of consonants in a given poem compared to the average use of that consonant in all the poems—here one clicks over a graph bar to get the equivalent letter in both languages; (5) a graph of vowels used, again, in the poem itself versus all the poetry; (6) a floating graph of the variation of syllables, where one can compare the stress pattern (high peaks versus low) of the German and the Portuguese; (7) a series of selected statements in Benjamin's essay, arranged numerically like the entries in the *Tractatus*; and (8) extracts from Trakl's letters to various correspondents, especially his patron Von Ficker, anticipating his suicide. Whereas the Wittgenstein notebook entries give a day-by-day account of the philosopher's thoughts,

as he makes his way to Cracow to visit Trakl in the military hospital, only to learn, on the 6th day, that Trakl has died ("How sad! How sad!), the Trakl letters themselves range over the subjects of his poems, including his painful drug addiction. On the seventh day, we are given the aphorism, "All great writing contains between its lines its virtual translation." The piece closes with a set of acknowledgments, both verbal and visual, to its four sources: G (Gedichte, Poems), W (Wittgenstein), B (Benjamin), T (Trakl) and the specific bibliography.

What is the concept governing such an elaborate textual overlay and how does it work on the reader?   Consider Day 2, in which the chosen Trakl poem is "Am Moor." Here is Robert Grenier's translation into English:

> Wanderer in black wind: lightly the dry reed
> Whispers in the stillness of the moor. Under grey heavens
> A flight of wild birds passes,
> Crosswise, over dark water.
>
> Uproar. In ruined cottages
> On black wings, foulness flaps up;
> Crippled birches creak in the wind.
>
> Evening in the abandoned tavern. The gentle melancholy
> Of grazing herds encloses the way home,
> Apparition of Night: toads lunge out of silver waters.[xxxvii]

Trakl's expressionist lyric relies heavily on concrete nature imagery to create its mood of ominous darkness and oppressive silence. The tight structure is made prominent by the simultaneous translation, in both cases heavy with alliteration and assonance. Juxtaposed to Wittgenstein's notebook entry (with its confession of anxiety, masturbation, and getting stuck in the sand but at least able to find salvation in work) and to Benjamin's paragraph in #2 on the provisional nature of translation), it darkens the mood still further since the war now becomes a factor. Four chapters further along, Trakl will

be dead and Wittgenstein haunted by that death, even as we remember what happened to the author of "The Task of Translation" in the next war. The ominous Weber chords add to a mood of despair. "Wie traurig! "Wie traurig!"

On the other hand, we have the mathematical sections, so "pure" in their listing and chartmaking, so devoid of emotional weight. We can, the flash piece implies, look at "On the Moor" as just a set of consonant or vowel clusters, we can graph the poem's syllables, we can make charts of its parts of speech. It's all very neutral. But that very neutrality is disconcerting. The conjunction of elements creates a sound and semantic space deeply troubling and dramatic. It also poses the question of Benjamin's classic essay: "What IS translation? What is a good translation?" And the answer, in this case, depends on a definition of translation that includes the transfer, not just of the words themselves, but from one medium to another, one genre to another. As such, *Trakltakt* suggests that "poetry," in the age of translatability, is no longer necessarily a single lyric node, but rather the intersection of verse and prose, verbal and visual representation. Without containing a single word of Vallias's own, *Trakltakt* uses choice, juxtaposition and framing to produce a deeply moving conceptual piece, providing related angles on the painful expressionism at the heart of Trakl's lyric.

In the "Age of Translatability," as Vallias calls it, lyric will by no means disappear. But it will of necessity change, taking advantage of appropriation, framing, recycling, to go beyond what Craig Dworkin has called that "genre of writing that includes a small epiphany—a 'deep' thought or 'profound' insight or a bit of self-realization by an especially sensitive person."[xxxviii] But then, if we take the long view, there is nothing very new about this conception. "Poetry," in the words of T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," is not the expression of personality, but an escape

from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things."[xxxix]

Notes

[i]Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967): 79-83, and widely reprinted: see http://radicalart.info/concept/LeWitt/paragraphs.html/.

[ii]Vanessa Place, "No More," *Poetry* (March 2013), http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poem/245542

[iii]Peter Bradshaw, "Christian Marclay's *The Clock: a masterpiece of our times,"* Guardian Film Blog, April 7, 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/filmblog/2011/april/07/.

[iv]Zadie Smith, "Killing Orson Welles at Midnight" (review of *The Clock*), *New York Review of Books,* 28 April 2011,

[v]Daniel Zalewski, "The Hours" (Profile of Christian Marclay," *The New Yorker*, March 12, 2012, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/03/12/120312fa_fact_zalewski?currentPage=3/

[vi]The term *verbivocovisual*, taken from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939; New York, Penguin 1976), 341, l. 19, has been used frequently by Haroldo and Augusto de Campos with reference to Concrete Poetry.

[vii]Anonymous (Marcel Duchamp), *The Blind Man*, 2 (May 1917), 4-5. The text is reproduced in Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 185.

[viii] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 233.

^{ix} Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* trans. C. K. Ogden, with an introduction by Bertrand Russell (1922; London and New York, Routledge, 1988), §6.5

^x Kenneth Goldsmith, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Writing," *Kenneth Goldsmith and Conceptual Poetics, Open Letter*, 12, no. 7 (Fall 2005), 98-101; http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith/conceptual_paragraphs.html. Cf. Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), passim.

^{xi}The editors of the *Open Letter* issue themselves, seem unaware that Goldsmith's "Paragraphs" is a parody.

^{xii} Craig Dworkin, "The Fate of Echo," in *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, ed. Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011).xxiii-liv, see xxv-vi. Subsequently cited as *ACW.*

^{xiii}Vanessa Place, *Boycott*, 3 vols. (New York: Ugly Ducklinge Press, 2013).

^{xiv}Andy Fitch with Vanessa Place, *The Conversant, April 16, 2013, http://theconversant.org/?p=3409*.

^{xv}Christopher Higgs, "You Take Your Love Where You Get it: An Interview with Kenneth Goldsmith," *Paris Review*, April 2013, http://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2013/04/02/you-take-your-love-where-you-get-it-an-interview-with-kenneth-goldsmith/.

^{xvi} David Antin, "Some Questions about Modernism," *Radical Coherency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 197-226; see p. 215.

^{xvii}Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, ed.G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), §160.

^{xviii}Craig Dworkin, Introduction to the *Ubuweb Anthology of Conceptual Writing, Ubuweb*, http://www.ubu.com/concept/ . It should be noted that the quote from Wordsworth is not exact…

[xix] Charles Bernstein, *Content's Dream: Essays 1975-1984* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1986), 48.

[xx] Vanessa Place, "Afterword," *I'll Drown my Book: Conceptual Writing by Women,* ed. Caroline Bergvall, Laynie Browne, Teresa Carmody, and *Vanessa Place,* (Los Angeles: Les Figues Press, 2012), 448. Subsequently cited as *Drown*.

[xxi] Vanessa Place, "What Makes Us" (review of Kenneth Goldsmith, *Seven American Deaths and Disasters*), *The Constant Critic*, August 14, 2013, http://www.constantcritic.com/category/vanessa_place/.

[xxii] Calvin Bedient, "Against Conceptualism," *Boston Review* 38, no. 4 (July-August 2013), 70-75.

[xxiii] T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1970), 69.

[xxiv] The hypertext website for *The Waste Land* at http://eliotswasteland.tripod.com/ supplies all the information needed to make out the lines in question.

[xxv] Edgell Rickword, *Times Literary Supplement*, September 20, 1923; see my *Unoriginal Genius* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 1-3.

[xxvi] See T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and his Problems," *Selected Essays* (London: Faber 1954), 141-46: see p. 145, "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."

[xxvii] *Teoria da poesia concreta—Textos criticos e manifestos 1950-1960*, by Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, and Haroldo de Campos, 2d ed. (Sao Paulo: Livraria Duas Cidades, 1975), 48; see the translation by Sergio Bessa, "Sound as Subject: Augusto de

Campos's *Poetamenos*," in *The Sound of Poetry / The Poetry of Sound*, ed. Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 219-236, see p. 220.

xxviii Augusto de Campos, "Poesia concreta," in *Teoria da poesia concreta*, 45. For translation, see Antonio Sergio Bessa, "Word as Object,"

xxixSee Marjorie Perloff, "The Oulipo Factor: The Procedural Poetics of Christian Bök and Caroline Bergvall," *Differentials*: *Poetry, Poetics, Pedagogy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Abalama Press, 2004),205-26.

 xxx Calvin Bedient, for one, finds it "clichéd and shallow. It replaces André Breton's directive, revolt so as to be adequate to oneself, with the message: be as ingenious as you can. Delight in the auto-affection of your faculties" (Bedient 73).

xxxiChristian Bök, *Eunoia* (Toronto: Coach House, 2001), 50.

xxxii Dworkin supplies the note, " Opuscule, a little work a little labor, Thomas Blount, Glossographia (1656)."

xxxiii Email to the author, 23 May, 2011.

xxxiv I found this translation by Googling various Spenser sites and finding the notes to the most recent editions of *The Faerie Queene*.   In the internet age, accessing such information, which might formerly have involved a trip to the research library, takes just minutes, and poetry students like the ones who came to the White House, could readily learn to find the text in question. Purists object to this practice as being merely mechanical—the "researcher" need know nothing or little about Spenser's poem—but it may just be possible that the search would generate interest in *The Faerie Queene*.

xxxvCia Renne, *Notes for Soloists* (Stockholm: OEI, 2009), unpaginated.
xxxvi http://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Rinne/Rinne-Cia_Complete-

Reading_Sounds-For-Soloists_2011.mp3/.

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