F[UTILITY]

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F[UTILITY], by KEVIN BARRETT KANE
DEPARTMENTAL HONORS THESIS
University of Colorado Boulder
English / Creative Writing

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Defense Date: April 2, 2014 in the English Department Dilts Reading Lounge at the University of Colorado Boulder at approximately 9:30 am.
Some of these works have been published in *Walkabout Creative Arts Journal, Journal Twenty Twenty*, and *Halfway Down the Stairs*.

The *F[utility] Project* began as a chapbook entitled *[f]utility*, which was written, designed, and printed in an edition of ten beginning at 1:12 am and ending at 4:36 am on May 12, 2012 in response to Matvei Yankelevich’s chapbook, *Bending at the Elbow* (Minute Books, 2011). The original chapbook was published by Slow World Press and is dedicated to Sara Falk-Mann.

Some of the poems in *F[utility]* were written for the following people: Brian Buckley, Julie Carr, Colleen Cottingham, Jack Dillé, Sara Falk-Mann, Leah Greksa, Katherine Ingalls, Zachary Schomburg, Matt Stark, Mathias Svalina, and Joshua Marie Wilkinson.

This book is dedicated to Sara Falk-Mann and Jack Dillé.
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Such things
as laws fall on us—
soft programs, impossible models
unlocked into air. There
are nameless shapes.
There are tears of understanding.

“Here,
catch.”
Not a map in the world.

GRAHAM FOUST
I’ve argued that poetry, or at least some modern and contemporary versions of it, is a species of contemporary art, meaning that in order to understand or even experience a piece of language (or a sound or a typographical arrangement on a page) as a poem at all, one has to be able to follow a line of thinking (or develop what performance artists call a “support language”) that argues in favor of the text or event in question in spite of (or, more likely, because of) its failure to live up to the criteria or degrees of familiarity that usually help us to pick out things as poems.

GERALD L. BRUNS

Young artists of today need no longer say, “I am a painter,” or “a poet” or a “dancer.” They are simply “artists.”

ALLAN KAPROW

Initial conceptions of the F[utility] Project began as early as the Spring of 2010, when Sara Falk-Mann and I began self-publishing chapbooks under the name Slow World Press. The press name was borrowed from a Heather Christle poem entitled “Moving Out,” in which she writes, “goodbye slow world / you know who you are and I am not going to tell you it’s okay” (The Trees The Trees, 58). This line, as well as a quote from Mathias Svalina—“poems are birds that fly away from you”—became the sort of resonant mottos for the beginning of our self-publishing efforts. We had little money, and even less time to spare, but we began running small editions of chaps for ourselves and our friends. Frankly, we were publishing the poetry we found to be the most interesting: our own. We printed and assembled the books ourselves on a tiny Hewlett Packer inkjet printer and using a collection of donated supplies for the creation of the books.

Before we were fully aware of it, Sara and I had successfully involved ourselves in the larger community of Boulder and Denver poets. There was a constant influx and outflux of internationally-recognized poets and writers in the area—more so than I had initially realized—though I think we also had an incredible opportunity to come onto the scene during a time of huge generation for the Colorado-based writers that we had become friends with. In a short time period, I remember being cognizant of the many new creative outlets being birthed around us. Brian Buckley opened Innisfree Poetry Bookstore, which became the third poetry-only book store in the United States. Julie Carr and Tim Roberts of Counterpath Press opened an installation/performance space in Denver that hosted events ranging from book releases to panels about multi-modal literature and other new topics in the language arts. The online web-platform known as The Volta was created by Joshua Marie Wilkinson and edited
by many of those around us. Graham Foust, one of the few poets that Sara and I both greatly admired, began teaching at the University of Denver. Several dozens of books were published featuring the works of Colorado poets (this trend is excellently highlighted in Noah Eli Gordon’s recent Editorial piece “2013 In Review” on The Volta). Overall, there was a general sense of newness and rejuvenation as the poetry world around us dug its way out of the Recession.

During this time, Slow World Press became the major platform for my interest in graphic design, publishing, and printing. Although poetry remained at the forefront of my pursuits, I found my interest in writing to be dwindling in the shadow of more exciting prospects in graphic design and fine art practices. Though I was not currently studying either fine art or graphic design in school, I spent much of my free time mastering the Adobe Creative Suite, and spending more time in front of artist’s books and histories of typography than in front of my assigned readings for classes.

At a certain point, the progress for Slow World Press had leveled—impending graduation and heavy course loads had prevented the active creation of new chaps, and neither Sara nor I was willing to give SWP the jumpstart it needed into the post-graduation world. Toward the end of my expected undergraduate career, I suddenly declared a second major in Studio Art, specializing in Printmaking, and opted to remain at CU for a fifth year of study. This extra year at CU afforded me the time to complete an honors thesis, serve as the Editor-in-Chief of The CU Honors Journal, and pursue printmaking and graphic design as skillsets necessary for potential future careers in publishing.

Although I shifted the emphasis of my creative output from writing to art-practices, I continued to return to an idea that had brewed in the early days of Slow World Press: that art, poetry, and graphic design are not only similar in the creative process, they are identical in that respect. In a later essay entitled “Sentences on F[utility],” I examine the common foundational components of art, poetry, and graphic design and call for the deletion of these terms in favor of a more encompassing one: Poetic Design.

This concept that would later become the driving force behind all of my creative work was made clear to me during a trip to the newly-constructed Clyfford Still Museum in January, 2012. I cannot ever hope to describe the profound effect that Still’s work has had on my life since then, although as some evidence for that, I first visited the museum on a Saturday, arriving at approximately 2:00 pm. By the time the museum closed at 5:00, I had only made it through half of the gallery and was forced to return the next day to complete my view of the exhibition. On the second day, I spent over six hours in the museum. I found in Still’s work an immediate sense of coherency which I would later discover was not at all in-line with Still’s intended effect or the intentions of the Abstract Expressionist painters as a whole. Though I respected the theories and intentions of these artists, I remained devoted to my initial impression of Still’s work,
and quietly steered my way into a nose-dive of interest in the art movements directly preceding and following Still and his contemporaries. I was initially frustrated that I had not noticed these movements before. In my studies, I had become interested in literary movements such as Poststructuralism and Deconstruction. I had not found in these movements, however, any solid platform from which to create my own work. With my acknowledgment of the art being created during this time, however, my emphasis of study and fundamental creative interest suddenly shifted.

It soon became clear to me that nothing of intrigue that had been written by the theorists of the 20th century had not already been painted by the modernists of that same time. While the Parisian literary theorists of the 1960s were stuffing pages full of justification for language “play” and the dismantling of a binaric signifying system, the Conceptual Art Movement in the United States was (without influence from Derrida et al.) storming the art world with visually argumentative works that effectively made more complex a justification for deconstruction. This trend is perhaps best characterized by the work of Joseph Kosuth, who in 1965 placed a wooden chair, a picture of that chair, and the dictionary definition of “chair” into the museum space at Seth Siglaub’s gallery in New York City. This simple visual expression of deconstruction, given the multitude of theory written to shed light on just such a relationship between sign and signifyed, was almost laughable to me.

As my studies continued, I found many more ironies of this kind—where the art world and the literary world had seemed to ignore the developments of the other, sometimes over centuries apart. It became obvious to me that what could be said through art was equally as powerful and informative as what could be said through language, and that, given the conclusions of deconstruction, perhaps art was a more apt location for the act of language play.

The main difference I found between artists and literary theorists is that theorists “defined,” while artists “questioned.” As Peter Osbourne writes in the introduction to his book Conceptual Art, “Conceptual art, one might say, is art about the cultural act of definition—paradigmatically, but by no means exclusively, the definition of ‘art’. Whatever else it may be, conceptual art is first and foremost an art of questions and it has left in its wake a whole series of questions about itself” (14).

In my study of poetry and literary theory, I could not have imagined the effective combination of art, poetry, and graphic design in any sense other than the collage. I still saw these practices as separate, and as having unique characteristics that set them apart from one another. In visiting the Clyfford Still Museum and beginning my investigation into Modernism, however, I was astonished by the way language seemed to appear within painting, and I soon recognized that the common thread between art and language was implicit in the fundamental properties of graphic design: line, shape, and color. It was
around this time of realization that I truly began to examine Formalism, which served as an overarching theory for Modernism and the driving force behind a sudden interest in the materiality of traditional art practices. Painters were becoming aware of painting as a composition of paint, graphic designers were no longer faking their way to the impression of dimension, and dadaist sound poets investigated the foundational sonic formulations of language. What the sound poets refused to recognize, however, was that poetry did not for the most part exist as sound; rather, it existed as graphic design. Poetry was as much an arrangement of ink on the page as graphic design was the arrangement of ink on the page, as painting was the arrangement of paint on canvas. Of course, these applications were recognized by the Futurists, the Objectivist poets, and the Conceptual Art Movement, among others, but I do not believe that poetry as an act of pure graphic design was ever fully examined by the artists/poets of the 20th century. Artists and writers like those of the Conceptual Art Movement recognized the potential of poetry in art. Artists such as Lawrence Weiner, Ed Ruscha, and John Baldessari examined the ways in which poetic language could find its place in painting and in other art practices. The applications of graphic design were not considered, however, and furthermore, these artists never stopped to consider that what they were creating may not strictly be defined as “Art”.

As I began to conceptualize the [F]utility Project, I pressured myself to effectively combine the three seemingly separate creative processes into a single coherent body of work that did not seem like a hybrid, but rather as a necessary unit. I actively resisted direct influences from any artist/poet or artistic/poetic group. Instead, I drew influences from anyone and anywhere I could find influence. Though I read as much theory and analyzed as much work as I could in the given time, I never truly discovered a theoretical framework that fit exactly what I was trying to do (much to my benefit). Whether this was out of my ignorance, or merely due to the vast amount of theoretical discourse over the last century, I importantly did not align myself with any specific movement or thought, instead opting for a collage of ideas that embraced the act of creation alone and attempted to break down compartmental definitions of art, poetry, and graphic design. I disregarded most pre-20th century theory and instead focused my reading on works and theory from Modernism to the present.

In the bibliography, I have attempted to define a set of poetic and theoretical works that influenced my writing and the creation of F[utility]. I do not include there a list of artists who influenced my work. For lack of a better place, I will list them here. I do not endeavor to dishonor these individuals, their work, or their profound influence on me by attempting to “summarize” their artistic careers, but I do believe that their names must be noted:

The abstract expressionist paintings of Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, William de Kooning, Elaine de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and Robert Motherwell, among others, who taught me that figuration
could be manipulated and even omitted in place of color, shape, and line while maintaining the same literary quality of representational painting and language.

The early modernists John Cage, Franz Marc, Marcel Duchamp, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Piet Mondrian, Pablo Picasso, and T.S. Eliot for their dedication to the new, the unconventional, and the all-over sensation of things.

The Dadaist graphic designer and artist Kurt Schwitters for the journal known as Merz and his various other creative practices.

The Conceptual Art Movement works and writings of John Baldessari, Sol Lewitt, Ed Ruscha, Adrian Piper, Joseph Kosuth, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Lawrence Weiner, Douglas Huebler, Robert Barry, and Seth Siglaub for providing a movement to work with and against in the creation of F[utility].

The Minimalists, especially Donald Judd, Agnes Martin, Robert Morris, Anne Truitt, Frank Stella, Robert Smithson, Don Flavin, Richard Serra, and Clement Greenberg who taught me nothing and everything about art.

This artist book represents the final product of the F[utility] Project. In it, I include highlights of three main bodies of work, all of which were exhibited at the CU Visual Arts Complex during separate installations from May, 2013 to February, 2014. Each exhibition has been documented in the following sections, and each these are accompanied by two essays written to accompany the entire three bodies of work. Poems and artworks in this project that combine into pieces that I will henceforth refer to as Poetic Design were written and printed between January, 2013 and January, 2014. The two essays and this introduction were written between January, 2014, and March, 2014. The book itself, which is as much a piece of Poetic Design as the exhibited artworks and the written essays within it, was designed in March, 2014.

I do not make any attempt to provide any “artist statement” other than this introduction. The three bodies of work and the two essays in this book are works of Poetic Design, and should, by that definition, not be subject to the limitations imposed by the concept of artistic intention. Artist statements, by their nature, guide the reader/viewer and funnel them into certain frameworks of thinking. For this same reason, I will not include in this book any analysis whatsoever of either the essays or the works in each exhibition. As John Cage writes in “Robert Rauschenberg (1953)“:

To whom
No subject
No image
No taste
No object
No beauty
No message
No talent
No technique (no why)

No idea

No intention

No art

No feeling

No black

No white (no and)

After careful consideration, I have come to the conclusion that there is nothing in these paintings that could be changed, that they could be seen in any light and are not destroyed by the act of shadows. Hallelujah! the blind can see again; the water’s fine.
SELECTED WORKS FROM
HOW BEAUTIFUL AND INAPPROPRIATE YOU ARE
EXHIBITED AT THE CU VISUAL ARTS COMPLEX
ROOM 370
MAY 17 - 23, 2013
HOW BEAUTIFUL / AND INAPPROPRIATE / YOU ARE, 2013
inkjet print on paper, 30” x 20”
THE HORIZON / FALLING / DOES NOT / STOP AT MY / SKIN, 2013
inkjet print on paper, 25” x 23”
THE CITY I WANT TO READ ABOUT IS NOT THE BODY I WANT TO WRITE ABOUT

inkjet print on paper, 24” x 17.5”
WHAT IS THE ORGAN OF TOUCH THAT SPLINTERS

inkjet print on paper, 16" x 19.5"
SKY AS AN OPEN HAND THAT COULD TAKE, 2013
inkjet print on paper, 18" x 37.5"
**SENTENCES ON F[UTILITY]**

Just as we are quite unable to imagine spatial objects outside space or temporal objects outside time, so too there is no object that we can imagine excluded from the possibility of combining with others.

**LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN**

The power of a word lies in the very inadequacy of the context [in which] it is placed, in the unresolved or partially resolved tension of disparates.

**ROBERT SMITHSON**

**ON FUNCTION UTILITY**

1. In mathematics, it is universally accepted that a function $f(x)$ is a relation between a set of inputs and a set of permissible outputs with the property that each input is related to exactly one output. The function $f$ is the independent variable and the output $f(x)$ is dependent on the input as it relates to the function.

3. In art, a function $f(x)$ is a relation between a set of inputs and a set of permissible outputs with the property that each input is related to exactly one output. The function $f$ is the independent variable and the output $f(x)$ is dependent on the input as it relates to the function.

4. In poetry and art, the input $x$ of a function is the poem/artwork, the output $f(x)$ is relationship between the reader/viewer and the poem/artwork. The function $f$ is the utility.

5. Utility is the ability of something to satisfy needs or wants.

6. In the function $f(x)$, when $x$=poem/artwork, the function $f$ is limited to the "set of needs or wants of any given reader/viewer." Therefore, the output $f(\text{utility})$ is numerically immeasurable.

7. Utility only exists when there is a relationship of necessity between the reader/viewer and the poem/artwork.

**ON POETIC DESIGN**

1. Poetry, art, and graphic design are necessarily linked through three fundamental elements of two-dimensional design: line, shape and color.

2. Poetic Design de-compartmentalizes poetry, art, and graphic design in recognizing that they employ these same formal qualities.
3. Poetic Design is not hybridity. The term hybridity implies combination, which in turn implies a set of identifiable elements that uniquely characterize the things being combined. There is no definable difference between poetry, art, and graphic design, and therefore they cannot be combined or separated.

4. Poetic Design rejects the terms poetry, art, and graphic design, because they are compartments of limited interpretation.

5. Poetic Design rejects the commodification of those things that cannot be qualified, namely the products of the creative process.

6. Though works of Poetic Design may contain traditionally representational elements, including but not limited to: recognizable language, typographical forms, images, and information, these contents are not fundamental to the creation or interpretation of Poetic Design.

7. Poetic Design is a mode of analysis as much as it is a mode of creation.

8. Poetic Design does not occur in the first dimension. It is neither limited to the second and/or third dimension.

9. Poetic Design may operate in time and space, but it is necessarily atemporal (see On Necessity #8).

10. The Poetic Designer needs not associate him/her/itself with Poetic Design.

11. All things that fundamentally incorporate line, shape, and color are works of Poetic Design.

12. The use of language (whether sensical or nonsensical) in Poetic Design should firstly be interpreted as two-dimensional elements of line, shape, and color. If an identifiable arrangement can be found within the provided language, any connotative and denotative meaning within the language is inconsequential to the interpretation of Poetic Design.

13. Poetic Design is not “against expression.”

14. Poetic Design is not Conceptual Art, but it is conceptual art.

15. Poetic Design rejects notions of the sublime, the spiritual, or the extraordinary. These descriptors are meager excuses by the viewer who is not willing to fully engage with the work, or is incapable of the necessary vulnerability in response to the work (see On Necessity #6-7).

16. The Poetic Designer is first and foremost a viewer, even of his/her/its own work.

17. The Poetic Designer does not have to create anything.

18. The Poetic Designer is you.

ON NECESSITY

1. Utility is a set of needs or wants for any given Poetic Designer (as viewer or creator) in regards to Poetic Design.

2. Poetic Design considers the concepts of
“want” and “need” to be analogous. Desire is as much a necessity as are the objects of desire.

3. Utility only exists when there is a relationship of necessity between the Poetic Designer and the Poetic Design.

4. The Poetic Designer is not necessarily the creator of a Poetic Design.

5. There is no such thing as an apathetic viewer, though there is such a thing as an apathetic person. An apathetic person can become an active viewer so long as they forego apathy in response to a creative act.

6. Poetic Design necessarily provokes the viewer in a particular way(s). In order to be provoked, the viewer must be vulnerable.

7. Works of Poetic Design are as vulnerable as they necessitate the viewer to be, which is completely.

8. Poetic Design is necessarily atemporal. As soon as it has been encountered by a person, be that the creator or the viewer, the design becomes atemporal even if the sensibility of the design is destroyed. The Poetic Design exists conceptually in the senses and memory of the Poetic Designer.

9. Poetic Design is necessarily a product of creative agency, although this agency does not necessarily require any acknowledgment from the creator.

10. Poetic Design is necessarily apolitical and asocial. It does not prescribe to concepts of rhetoric, since rhetoric requires the analysis or use of meaning.

11. Poetic Design is necessarily not concerned with meaning.

12. Poetic Design is not necessarily concerned with not meaning.
YOU ARE DUPLICITOUS BEGIN AGAIN THIS SLOW WESTERN WEEPING
[F]UTILITY No. 1, 2014
monotype. 15” x 22”
WHAT AN
CHORS US
IS WHA
T THE S
UN WAVE
RS

NO NOT
ION OF W
HERE GRAV
ITY WENT
[F]UTILITY No. 2, 2014
monotype. 15” x 22”
A SETTING WILDERNESS OR WHAT HAVE YOU

THE SHALL OW HEAR T SWALL OWING SEA WARD
[F]UTILITY No. 3, 2014
monotype. 15" x 22"
I CROWD MYSELF WITH AN AWE SO WORKING

ANONYMOUS RED GUILT
[F]UTILITY No. 4, 2014
monotype. 15” x 22”
WE RESPECT THE SKY THE F OF THAT DAM PENS US

THE NATURE THAT PROCESS ES US LIKE OBSESSION
[F]UTILITY No. 5, 2014
monotype. 15” x 22”
NO DOUBT IS INTACT & THE WORLD CARES ABOUT YOU

THE AIR CAN STILL HURT
[F]UTILITY No. 6, 2014
monotype. 15” x 22”
THE NEW SELF-PUBLISHING

What exists in the contemporary world of book-publication is a delineation of tasks suited for those persons specializing in specific areas of craft. This delineation supports a system of restriction, in which there is an inevitable clash of personal aesthetics in regards to the final publishable product: the book. This same phenomenon can be observed in the process of lithographic printmaking, where tasks are delegated to the following persons: artist, master printer, printer’s assistant, print technician, and curator. Unlike the world of publication, however, contemporary lithography has embraced a new kind of printmaker, who performs all of these tasks as effectively as when they were individually delegated to certain craftsmen/women.

In order to eliminate the conflict of aesthetic interest, poets/artists must embrace multiple areas of craftsmanship and expertise. Otherwise, they will continue to be disappointed by a system that does not embrace an all-over act of creation. Therefore, creators must insist on the need for an all-over process—one that embraces the creation from conception to finality and does not delegate certain tasks to “specialists” in other fields of creation. That is, unless of course, the artist/poet does not care to envision the final product of his/her/its work. If this is the case, such a poet/artist remains in the traditional approach to creation, and does not embrace a new all-over approach to self-publishing. There is little room for this kind of poet or artist in the 21st century. In this world of exponential technological advancement and unyielding information, the artist/poet is beset by a field of thinkers willing to learn and to not only understand, but master, skills and craftsmanship outside of his/her/its own. This new creator is known as the Poetic Designer.

The Poetic Designer is an artist, a poet, a writer, and a graphic designer all in one, and does not allow a modular system of assembly to dictate the artistic process. The Poetic Designer is a director rather than a unit. The Poetic Designer is as much involved in the design of a cover as he/she/it is in the writing of the content encapsulated by that cover. Similarly, the Poetic Designer is as much involved in the design of the wall-text and the application of paint to the display surface as he/she/it is in the creation of the art. The Poetic Designer is not opposed to teamwork, but an effective Poetic Designer does not allow for more than one vision to be realized in the act of creation. He/She/It recognizes that a visual identity based on cover design, typographical choices, interior layout, and poetic content all dictate the visual and poetic identity of the individual being represented.

In 1968, Seth Siglaub was quoted in Newsweek as saying, “Today’s young artist is a professional rather than a ‘Bohemian’.” Some artists embraced this notion during the Conceptual Art Movement,
and indeed before that point. Perhaps this was because the most notable of them had achieved an active source of income during their lifetime. In contemporary poetry, there is an urgency for the professionalism of our artform, and the sense that if we take ourselves seriously, then the world will mirror that impression. This kind of professionalism requires an all-over respect and dedication to the processes of creation, from writing to publication.

In this contemporary age of limitless information, there is little excuse for an artist or poet who is unaware of creative processes beyond the familiar. The Poetic Designer is an eternal student, and exhibits the utmost skill by the act of teaching. He/She/It recognizes that the most effective way of learning is by means of self-teaching. Of course, there are times when processes in publication are better delegated to persons of specialty, whether for the sake of time or for the sake of collaboration, but these works must be collaborative in their nature rather than modular. In cases such as this, each person involved in the creative action must be a Poetic Designer, and all of these persons must be in accordance as to their vision for the final product.

No longer can we excuse poetry for a lack of visual identity, and no longer can we excuse visual identity for its lack of poetry. Language does not exist in a visual form without the constraints of graphic design, and therefore language must be presented in ways that are effective in regards to graphic design. The only way to promote such a sensitivity is for the new creative director, the Poetic Designer, to be intimately aware of and in charge of the creation of Poetic Design from conception to completion.
SELECTED WORKS FROM

ATLAST

EXHIBITED AT THE CU VISUAL ARTS COMPLEX

3RD FLOOR MAIN GALLERY

FEBRUARY 7 - 14, 2014
i'd rather you
be here, swampy
and limp
in the next room
i find you here
stolen with the
next-door-warmness
the smallest core
to slight
a quietness
with the precision only
wings can have
i've had a beautiful thought
and i've lost it
every flagship a drone,
highest at noon
but a private part
does not exist

i feel my empty, my hollow
arms curling in the sunlight
the rain of human comfort
treads thin

dear whateverfucks,
i stole the man suit
and this is how you repay me.
feel your afternoon around your middle
track a pin-knot against the cirque
wish-killer meet Kevin meet children meet the people
it's not round or small like jewelry or cloudy or jealous it's just there in front escaping you
into our blood
we whisper, “love, love
love”

horizon’s gone with us
to the children

i find a hollow
in the weight of a drum

my window sills look
nice in the flowery light
of a half-day—

can’t you just know
a think by knowing it?
begin again
it’s weeping that
sheds its bark like
November

harder/harder
it’s just so “what
a coincidence” “who
stole my coat” etc.

in this regular
patterned life
in regular/regular
leaves on the grass

what is
the organ of
touch that splinters?
dictation of a body is
ea persuasion rather than
a percussion

to move from the North
requires a knowledge
of the further North—

it is a mixture of these things—
surfaces / distinction
and a recognition of darkness
that begin
the emanation of
that’s the gathering

when did we become
all encompassing
and precise like time?
shadow again the
within air mind of air
we are
held in

Meditously curved
thin windows

the sideway is certain
and what
was just a far-off star

hoarfrost note
an inner chamber of mist

say, a shed with nails
say, an untouched pinkened carpet
a water-pool
of regret
unpinned and abrasive
a sprocket of
not-quite-sound
fueling more than its scent
a normalcy, fucked
by sound

crowded plane-fields
nothing but the woolen
whisperings of children

and love in there, too
somewhere between
a curbed sunlit
torrent soundlessly shaking
a bright young hue
a whole sky
of truth

between you and
the shapes you take
unravel
back matter.

and will
the clouds are not
grey
but growing

we’re seriously
so far along here

ATLAST No. 9, 2014
silkscreen, 12.75” x 16.75”
you are
duplicitious
smearing your
patterned life
at everyone.

don't you see
how normal Colorado
has become?

Denver practically
smells you it's
so close to everyone!

isn't it grand, the
schemes, etc.

ATLAST No. 10, 2014
silkscreen, 12.75” x 16.75”
i crowd myself
with an awe
so worthy.

so working

with it, the
whole wool within
me

my body jumps
for a more predictable
world

dear sara,

another noticeable
tremble of what
appeared to be a far-off-star

SOUTHEASTERN
UNITED STATES
no, doubt
is intact
and the world
cares about you
the air can still hurt
the city i want to read about
is not the body
i want to write about
what it’s actually like
to circulate is always
an impression of that—
an outskirts—something
about diaspora
WORKS CITED


Originally printed as *SEESTÜCK* in 1985, this first-edition letterpress reprint from Ugly Duckling Presse (#11 in the UDP Lost Literature Series) served as a huge influence in my move towards conceptual poetry and the ways in which information such as coordinates, logs, and numbers can stand as poetic language and as art.


Baus's poetics have a marvelous way of addressing the materiality of the world in particularly moving ways. Lines such as “as if eggshells glossed the inverse of her skin” function as packages of sensory provocation that are as intriguing as they are uncomfortable. Baus was one of the first contemporary poets I encountered in the beginning of my college career, and he has remained a huge influence on my work ever since.


Baus's earlier work in *Tuned Drovess* invokes a similar use of sensory detail that stirs the reader into an awkward trance. In this book, however, Baus maintains a strict dedication to accessible language that is framed by uncommon associations and the alteration of familiar processes.


When I first read this book, I kept returning to Carr's many uses of birds, airplanes, and various forms of flight. I was reading the book again in February, 2012, during the creation of *How Beautiful and Inappropriate You Are*, and it had profound effects on my desire to create works imprinted onto maps and other found papers. I imagined maps as a kind of bird’s-eye perspective of the informational world, in which between bird’s eye and map there lived the poet, the information, and the poetry. As a viewer, I hope that there is a sensation that the poetry inhabits the space between the factual world and the mind. In that way, I want each viewer to feel like a bird. As Carr writes, “If like a bird, then also like the upward breeze / And if the paper bird is like cream in the spoon / and the girl like a bird makes patterns in the air / she’s cream also because wanted, and is the spoon’s bowl / for the way she holds herself open, but not flatly so / not unfolded” (“Birthday Fragments for Alice,” 61). I must also note that Carr remains the most important teacher of my life.


Among many other poetic inspirations, the form of Christle’s block poems really began my investigation into alternative forms for poetic language in contemporary, which led to the highly enjambed, large font poems used in *Back/Slash*. I find a huge amount of merit in these simple block poems from a strictly graphic design standpoint, and was moved to create poetry that was equally as visually appealing. Much of this inspiration should be credited to the wonderfully talented designers at Octopus Books: Emma Barnett and Drew Scott Swenhaugen.


In poems such as *P. resinosa* and *Acer platanoides*, I was inspired by the ways in which poetic language as graphical type can be overlapped with other type and images to establish intertextual relationships to create and obscure meaning in new and exciting ways. I used this same technique in much of the work highlighted in *F[utility]*.


In form and in content, I was inspired by Farivar’s minimalist language and lines that serve to enjambe the
reader in new and interesting ways. Similarly to the short lines used by Joshua Marie Wilkinson in *Selenography*, the heavy enjambment of these short poems is startling in language but beautifully stripped down on the page. This work was a major influence to the project, *Back/Slash*.


I cannot stress the amount of influence the work of Graham Foust has had on me and my writing. Foust has an incredible ability to stir my inner poet even in times of extreme pain or stress. As he writes in *The Only Poem*, “Even in danger / you’re a writer, liar” (34). Many of the poems in this particular collection, including “Difficulty Swallowing,” “Poem With Concussion,” and “The Sun Also Fizzles” have become staple poems that will stick with me for as long as I am an active mind.


The poem “Subject Permanence” was the defining motivational poem behind the *Futility* project, which began in the fall of 2011. The poem reads, “I have never looked at a landscape / without seeing other landscapes. / I have never embraced an animal. / The good life is only / eventually necessary– / a lull in which / in that / I can almost not function” (43).


*Necessary Stranger* has been and will continue to be the single most important book of poetry I have ever read. The poems therein served as a starting point from which I grew immensely as a poet and as a person. The two books by Foust from Flood Editions also hugely impact the aesthetic choices of my own graphic design, and much of the work printed by Slow World Press has sought to emulate the design and professional quality of the entire Flood Editions catalogue. The designer for Flood Editions is Quemadura.


Gizzi’s work never ceases to amaze me in its depth and obsessive attention to the lyric. All three of the books listed in this bibliography served as huge poetic influence in my work in and out of this project. Specifically for *Artificial Heart*, the poems in *Back/Slash* were written in response to Gizzi’s poem, “At Earth.”


The poem “Overtakelessness,” specifically the lines “Without depth of field birds become primitive again” and “This quiet speech feels right / and will be imitated” initiated the writing of several poems in the series featured in *Atlast*.


As with the Foust collections, I cannot measure the amount of influence Gizzi’s work, especially *The Outernationale*, has had on my own writing. Among other influences I’ve found in this book, one of its poems, “The Quest” was undoubtedly the most important poem to the beginning of my interest in poetry. Since the day that I first began to “understand” that poem as a reader, I have been trying to accomplish the same kind of lyrical and contextual power in my own work.


In this collection, Gizzi spends quite a number of pages examining shorter-lined verse, compared with his earlier work. Though I do not believe the entire collection to be Gizzi’s best work, several of the poems therein represent Gizzi’s best singular poems, such as “This Trip Around the Sun is Expensive,” in which Gizzi writes, “To work / the proud flesh / Wound bright / Shipboard is / what winter is / what isinglass / moonlit wave / winter is / Winter surf / all time booming / all time viscous air / not black, night / winter dark blooming / surfs of winter ice” (21-22). Among other things, poems such as this taught me how to disregard punctuation, use line breaks effectively, and to allow sound to become a vehicle towards poetic voice.

Greenstreet’s collection has influenced my work in numerous ways, most notably in her use of art, redaction, and serialism. She writes of the publishing process, “Although I was thinking in two-page spreads, at some point I realized that I wasn’t actually (physically) making a book. I was making a big rectangular piece of temporary art” (166). I am also immensely grateful for Greenstreet’s hand in the actually creation of *Young Tambling*, which she designed with Ahsahta’s extraordinary director and designer Janet Holmes. I am very interested in someday becoming the fully-functional poet, who writes, designs, and publishes work from start to finish rather than allows others to create portions of the final product themselves.


Gordon’s conceptual work on *The Source* was an important launching point for my interest in conceptual and process-based collage writing. Though I do not tend to incorporate found text in my poetry, the final art that features source material such as maps brings to the page its own source language and text.


Jarnot’s first collection of poetry taught me the beauty of short, minimalist poems that in their paradoxical specificity and complexity become packets of information and emotion that in many ways are more powerful than longer verse.


Kopel’s poem, “Ratio,” was the launching point for a series of poems that later became a large section of *How Beautiful and Inappropriate You Are*.


Though this text did not inform any of the poetry written in *Futility*, it was in reading this collection for a workshop with Julie Carr that I became aware of Nguyen’s lyrical verse, and through this class had the wonderful opportunity to meet Nguyen in person. That acquaintance then allowed for two other encounters with Nguyen, once at Counterpath in 2012 and once at 2013 AWP Boston, both times during which I partook in a tarot card reading by the poet. On both occasions, Nguyen and I discussed my work on *Futility*, wherein she provided many insights into the project-based creative process that I was so unfamiliar with. I am extremely grateful to Nguyen for her guidance throughout the writing of *Futility*. During a time in the project when I was unsure if I would be able to continue working because of personal turbulence and a heavy load of work, Nguyen reminded me that I would never accept an unfinished project of this size, especially given my character, and that I should reprioritize in order to dedicate myself fully to the creative work that had yet to be completed.


Notley is among a group of poets that I respect for reasons that far outreach their poetic voice alone. I cite here the collection *Disobedience* because it is a true testament to her unwavering dedication to the writing process. The book highlights the most impressive poems written by Notley over periods of 2-3 months. It is truly extraordinary the volume and quality of work that Notley has been able to write, continuously, since the beginning of her writing career. For this reason, she ranks (for me, and for many) as one of the most important poets of our time. I will never forget the first time I heard Notley speak about her writing process—5 am wake-ups, obsessive reading, stand-up writing, the constant collage of writing that surrounds her—I have never been so moved by a person’s habitual creative process as I am with Alice Notley.


There is perhaps no greater example of the power of combination of poetry and art as in Tom Phillips’s
In his “treated” version of the Victorian novel *A Human Document*, Phillips redacts a majority of the text by painting directly onto the page, transforming the 367-page novel into an art object of incalculable depth in meaning and beauty. As Phillips writes/redacts, “Words—words! Make me / a rose” (353).


In *Some Thing Black*, Roubaud offers the kind of ekphrasis I am interested in. I rarely describe my work as ekphrastic for a reason, mainly because I do not find poetry and art to be separate enough to make “one about the other.” Roubaud’s writing through and influenced by his late wife’s series of photographs entitled *If Some Thing Black* (1980), however, offers the kind of ekphrasis I would like to see more of. That is, the kind of ekphrasis that engages the personal as much as it does the extra-personal. So much ekphrasis focuses on the sublimity of art. Such a poetic form does nothing but degrade the sublimity of poetry, when in fact neither should be considered sublime. To me, the term sublimity is just a fancy misnomer for the lack of effort the reader/viewer is willing to put forth. Roubaud offers an alternative to ekphrasis that does not promote the reverence of either medium, poetry or art, as superior to the other. Rather he places them next to one another not only in sensory communication, but also in emotional communication.


The Portland-based surrealist Zachary Schomburg is constantly on my mind when I am writing poetry, and is often the work I begin writing with open in front of me. My process is to surround myself with writing and to read until the point of fullness. It is no coincidence that I often reach this “fullness” shortly after opening any of Schomburg’s collections. His strange narrative conflicts presented in prosaic blocks offer an intensely somber, yet stimulating outlook on our human world.

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I am reminded each time I read *I Am A Very Productive Entrepreneur*, or any of Svalina’s work really, about the importance of retaining a strong dedication to creativity before all other things. I was often somewhat disheartened by the seeming futility of *F[utility]* in its attempt to bring together those sometimes disparate endeavors that I involve myself in: poetry, art, and graphic design. It was in reading works like this one that I was reminded that the connecting thread behind all my passions is the creation of a genuinely original art. I
could also not have completed the project without the guidance and mentorship of Svalina, who has been one of the most important teachers and a role-models in my life.


I first discovered this extraordinary book on a recommendation from Innisfree Poetry Bookstore owner Brian Buckley, and I have returned to it often as a source of visual and textual inspiration. The book, which contains no text other than punctuation, is composed of grayscale images of Starling murmurations over Berlin. This move was an important example of how text and image could be replaced with one another and how type, in its formal qualities, embodies the same rudimentary shape and line as does a work of art or the silhouette of a murmuration of starlings.


In 2011, Wilkinson’s collection really initiated my interest in the short line and the short poem. I found that when poetry was stripped of unnecessary prosaic language, that lines, stanzas, and poems became modular units that could be shuffled around indefinitely to create an infinite number of poem “packages.” *Selenography* was also the first collection in which I saw a poet working in collaboration with an artist, in this case, the polaroid prints of Tim Rutili. I am also greatly influenced by Wilkinson’s dedication to the design world, through Letter Machine Editions, *The Volta*, and other design and poetry-based outlets.


In Wilkinson’s latest collection, he has truly perfected a bewildering and unbelievably beautiful control of language. As with his other works, these cuplets and tercets serve as modules of sound that are more complex than most longer poems by any other author. I have very little to write about concerning Wilkinson’s writing, since it has so consistently and repetitively overcome me with such severe emotion that I end up in tears in places like airplanes and in the backseats of cars.


As Rosemarie Waldrop writes of Yankelevich’s book, “These poems and dramatic sketches delight even when they hurt.” Yankelevich taught me, among other things, to embrace the narrative, even the most disparate forms of it, in order to develop a more reader-compatible pathos in my writing. He also represents the sort of Renaissance Human I want to become. On paper, Matvei Yankelevich has the life that I am actively pursuing, as a publisher, owner of a press, editor, poet, and designer.


Zawacki’s collection offered for me an investigation into different forms of text on the page. In *Video Tape*, Zawacki places text in many different places on the page, using techniques such as enjambment and caesura to create interesting double meanings and to investigate how language multiplies and expands when it is placed and formatted in unconventional ways.


Among other things, Zhang’s *Dear Jenny, We Are All Find* gave me permission to write poems about my life and the trivialities that seem to make it up, and then taught me how to transform those trivialities into original semblances of poetic language.