

Kluge: A Meditation
and other works

Poems, essays, and a disk of videos and electronic writing

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Two Introductory Essays

The following brief essays were written in preparation for my second semester of teaching Electronic Writing II. They were an attempt to distill concepts unique to Electronic Writing and accelerate the general understanding of how to write in and for a programmed environment.

I. What Is Electronic Writing?

I'm asked this question quite often, and have rarely been able to come up with a short answer. It's many things, and quite often, a work of "electronic writing" is so unique that it's a genre unto itself.

If I were to come up with a fortune cookie answer to the question, I would say that it is any form of writing that takes advantage of the possibilities afforded by digital technology—such as the internet, or graphics programs such as Illustrator or Photoshop, or animation / audio / interactive programs such as Flash—in their creation and presentation.

But it is also those forms of writing that are informed by new ways of thinking brought on by the way digital technology has impacted our world, i.e. forms of writing that are organized according to the principles of the database, or that work primarily as texts distributed over the internet, or that—in the manner of "Dispositions," which was written with the aid of a GPS device—relied on computer technology in the writing.

Now for the long answer... Electronic writing can be:

- **Classic hypertext fiction**, in which different pages of writing (often called "lexia") are maneuvered by the reader by clicking on words or images. These can be "choose your own adventure" type narratives, or more poetic interactive texts in which there are no fictional elements at all. Many of the better ones of these, such as "Patchwork Girl" and "Afternoon," are not available online, and have to be purchased from Eastgate Systems. Online texts include works by Talan Memmott, Geoff Ryman, Claire Dinsmore, Yael Kanarek and Stuart Moulthrop, along with freebies at the Eastgate reading room.
- **Animated poems**, such as "The Dreamlife of Letters" or "Axolotl," in which the viewer/reader is not asked to do anything but watch and listen while text performs before them. Think of this as the art of movie titles applied to creative ventures. "Bembo's Zoo" is another classic example, and the Flash movies of "Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries" (and possibly "JibJab") are distant cousins.
- **Conceptual blogs and websites**, such as "The Dullest Blog in the World" or "Dagmar Chili Pitas," which are sites that explore a particular type of writing to the nth degree, such that you really can't categorize them under anything in particular. "Entropy8," by Aurelia Harvey, is a classic in this genre.
- **Non-electronic conceptual writing**, such as "The Tapeworm Foundry" or "Dispositions," that explore some aspect of writing that relates to a "database aesthetic," i.e. a collection of fragments that are organized in a mathematic or otherwise highly systematic (non-lyrical and non-narrative) way. Process or "un-creative" writing, such as Kenneth Goldsmith's "Day" is another example of this.

- **Parody and “hactivist” websites**, which are conceptual sites that attempt to comment on the conventions public communication on the web, such as “whitehouse.org,” my own “Vaneigem Series,” or “Blackness for Sale,” which was really just a page of Ebay. These sites usually engage in some form of artistic plagiarism, i.e. taking graphics and design elements from corporate sites.
- **Wordtoys**, which are more sophisticated forms of classic hypertext, in which the user is invited to play with an experimental interface in such a way that new textual creations are manufactured in real-time, such as Camille Utterback’s installation “Text Rain” or the projects of Daniel Howe. Experimental interfaces such as on the “Eclipse” website or the “Visual Thesaurus” are a version of this.
- **Interactive Fiction and literary games**, in which the user is the hero of a story, and must input commands to navigate the literary piece and solve it like a puzzle, in the manner of early text-playing or role-playing games. Nick Montfort has been the biggest advocate of this type of writing.
- **Cave Writing and installation texts**, which takes place in the VRML environment of Brown’s Cave or in galleries, like “Text Rain” or “Legible City.” Some installations, such as Mark Domino’s “glås,” are not interactive.
- **Email and collaborative art**, and other forms of writing that take advantage of the forms of communication peculiar to electronic media, such as “Implementation,” which is a fiction that requires the user to download stickers that they can paste up in the cities or towns they live in, or even writing that is primarily distributed via text messaging.
- **Computer generated texts**, in which a computer program helped in the creation of the text, or in which a web spider culled live text from the internet to create the work, such as in Noah Wardrip-Fruin’s “Regime Change & Newsreader.” A version of this is website translators like “Pornolize.com,” which converts the text of any website into a (kitschy) porn language.
- **Documentary websites** - such as ubu.com, a collection of concrete, audio and avant-garde video files, and rhizome.org, the premiere internet website - are often considered a form of art since they are often the expressions of very personal, non-commercial and often very obsessive artistic and political visions and often create distinct communities of users. William Poundstone’s electronic essay “New Digital Emblems” is a great example of a website that is both beautiful and informative.

There are a billion variations on the above, and in fact no piece is ever peculiar to one of these categories. A work called “They Rule,” which uses a database of CEOs of the major corporations of the world, is an interactive political cartoon that is almost entirely a textual experience, while “All Your Base Are Belong to Us” is just a crazy Flash movie made by any number of people spontaneously around the world.

Great electronic art can be created with little or no computer skills, which is kind of the drama of the entire venture. Some of the most effective forms of Electronic Writing are INCREDIBLY SIMPLE to create, such as “Blackness for Sale” and the “Vaneigem Series.” I have a soft spot for these types of projects, since they don’t require a team of computer scientists, and their impact is clean and immediate.

II. Themes and Concepts

Keep in mind that very little is entirely “new” in “new media writing.” There are often examples from the analog world that explain certain principles of electronic writing even better than the electronic writing available.

Some of the following terminology might sound INCREDIBLY PRETENTIOUS. At least I think it does, but I also think these concepts are pretty handy to keep in mind when reading (and playing) the work assigned for this semester. They are not concepts you would be dealing with too often in other arts or literature classes.

Recombinant poetics is the aesthetics of treating words and letters like digital objects. “Collage poetics,” like what the Dada and Surrealist artists explored in their games, or “cut up” methods explored by William S. Burroughs, treated words like physical objects, and used chance to create new combinations that were startling to the reader and not governed by an “author.” Oulipo writing practices, in which formulas were used as constraints on the writing - a simple one being the non-use of the letter “e” in George Perec’s novel *A Void* - treated language as something mathematical, almost like numbers, though never to the degree of being illegible.

“Recombinant poetics” is something like both of these, but in the digital realm, hence opening the possibilities of 1) incredibly complex writing algorithms, and 2) access to a possibly infinite world of texts, either through the internet or one’s own files.

The above is closely related to something I call **database aesthetics**, which is a phrase that I accidentally stole from the critic and theorist Lev Manovich. Works predicated on a database aesthetics explore organizing texts in ways that haven’t arisen in literary history in the genres we are familiar with (lyric poetry, drama, epic poetry, and narrative fiction) but rather have arisen through our working with databases, sorting alphabetically, by length, by occurrence of certain elements, by keywords, etc. Works like Lyn Hejinian’s poem *My Life*, which, in the version she wrote when she was 37, had 37 chapters of 37 sentences each, is a version of this.

Text/image complex are those moments when the text and image of in a piece (or even the image of text itself) interact in a way that moves beyond illustration, and beyond what either element are doing on their own. A good, basic example of this is your standard New Yorker cartoon - neither the drawing or the caption are very funny on their own, but the caption makes you see something different in the drawing, or vice versa. Advertisements play on this principle quite often - the phrase “Think different.” attached to a picture of Mahatma Gandhi creates a little “a ha” moment in the brain, much like when reading a haiku.

There can also be a sound element, but since we won’t be dealing with sound in this class, it’s better to keep in mind the use of text/image in works. The image of a text comes into play in works such as the books of Kenneth Goldsmith, which are predicated on giving physical mass to collections of words, or in pieces such as “Cedars Estate,” where the words are design elements. The text/image complex usually has some element of paradox or contradiction to it; the text and image are working against each other as much as for.

I also occasionally use the phrase **visual pun**. By that, I mean any instance in which the visual image appears to be one thing, but then, after the application of a caption, or maybe with a “pullback,” as in a movie, the image is revealed to be something quite different than what you thought it was. William Poundstone’s *New Media Emblems* are examples of visual puns, as is Bembo’s *Zoo* or the *New Yorker Cartoons*. Another well-known example is that game where you think you are either looking at an old hag or a young woman, though this might be classed more as an optical illusion.

The **interface** of a piece is pretty easy to describe: it is the way the piece functions as something you operate. The dashboard of a car is an interface, and even a book - its cover, the binding, the size - is an interface. All websites have an interface, and some

incredibly simple interfaces, like that for Google, or ugly interfaces, like that for craigslist, have been the most successful on the web. Many works of electronic writing have experimental interfaces that have to be learned and practiced a little before the piece is truly enjoyable. Others simply have terrible interfaces.

Generative art and **generative text** are pieces in which the visual or textual image are created live, in real-time, either with the influence of a user's input - moving the mouse around the screen, typing keywords in, etc. - or simply create themselves on their own, in ways determined by an algorithm, usually with some random elements.

The visual pieces of "dextro.org" are beautiful examples of generative art that almost look like highly complex, abstract pencil sketches, while "News Reader" and "Regime Change" are pieces that generate new texts from internet new sources. In these pieces, the artistry is often contained entirely in the programming, though of course none of these pieces can be deemed successful unless the output of the work is pleasurable, perhaps a match for human, non-computer creativity. (There is also something called generative music, which is actually the oldest of the three.)

There are more themes that I'd like to add to this list as the semester continues, but for now, these are the ones that come to mind as important for starting our class.

Short Electronic Poems

The following are texts that I wrote for smaller, one-off Flash and HTML pieces that are included on the CD.

A Car Drives to Rome

A car drives to Rome, a prayer has a theory.
A pidgeon has a stoop, a girl talks to dolls.
A man talks to whales, a gun has a holster.
A park feels like home, a pidgeon walks to Wales.

A style has a practice, a beer drowns a fish.
A program has no nuts, a deer freezes in headlights.
A hairstyle has roots, a towel dries apples.
A practice has nurses, a fish drowns in beer.

A sport has performers, a man buries a cab.
A spy signals a submarine, an old man has smut.
A parody has laughter, a mullah eats bread.
A judge settles arguments, a movie depicts a sport.

A bastard suns in the park, a toad has farts.
A baby has warts, a photographer peers at flowers.
A prison receives communion, a boy has nuts.
A hawk spirals above the sun, a car drives to Rome.

Winter Was Hard

- A. Manon couldn't play that evocative music.
- B. Please erase me after you have read this.
- C. There are odd children in the playground.
- D. Bad karma cannot be good for your breath.

Crappy drumbeat over chinkachink guitars.
Please remember me after going from here.
Winter was hard but felt like wet sponge.
Stress dangles its seductive wares ahead.

Is this a fadeout or was the plug pulled?
Please forget what you read on this page.
My sexless neighbor records my movements.
Bad hamburger cannot be good for your id.

Benny couldn't muster much gizmo alchemy.
Please absorb me after you power me down.
Garbage is picked up each Friday morning.
Anxiety introduced me to midnight sweats.

Betty Boop voice over ambient razorblade.
Please disturb me if you find I'm asleep.
After mass the trees start dressing down.
Bad hungers cannot be good for your pets.

Jordan couldn't recover the sonic thread.
Please ignore me if it's very repetitive.
The accents suggest a failed tracheotomy.
Fear curls up in the cupboard like a cat.

Loops of dreamy static above femmy howls.
Please revise me if you can do it better.
Chugachug sounds from below could be sex.
Bad puns cannot be good for the cerebrum.

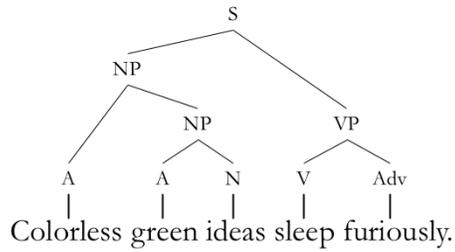
Alex couldn't sustain the skronk nirvana.
Please disabuse me if you know I'm wrong.
Tangerine to baby shit green to blue sky.
Is that ringing in my ears cancer or god?

They play in sync and call it revolution.
Please remind me why you are touching me.
Spanish grocery sells the cheap espresso.
Bad coffee cannot be good for the libido.

Gina couldn't emulate the low-fi sublime.
Please reject me after plagiarizing this.
Spring will arrive on sturdy gilt ankles.
Hope festers like a wound that will heal.

The Slush of Meaning

After Noam Chomsky



Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.
Sticky oleaginous memoirs murder affably.
Obsolete futuristic psalms spar quizzically.
Patternless checkered plantains fart sideways.

Virtuoso inept atheists excommunicate charismatically.
Plump boney sandals parse ahead.
Powerless manhandling whispers deafen preferentially.
Teutonic Chinese igloos incubate wisely.

Ineffable aggravating shrubs leer tactfully.
Autocratic indentured slaves unionize individually.
Arthritic nimble logarithms amplify quietly.
Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.

Please Think Again

Anarchist	Snapshot	Museum.
Spanish	Paycheck	Reminder.
Thorn	Barbara	Changeling.
Profound	Manhattan	Silk.

Let me repeat.

Installed	House	Anabaptist.
Berlitz	Defecation	Circus.
Huge	Money	Quantity.
President	Johnson	Forensics.
Bhangra	Twitch	Elf.
Step	On	Award.
Kantian	Brat	Sessa.

I know that.

Machines	Direct	Jack.
General	Franco	League.
Clear-cut	Job-Shadow	Electronics-Recycling.
Later	Use	Women.
Preferably	Skein	Genius.
Children	Under	Argument.
Death	And	Enthusiasm.
Catholic	CBS	Arcadia.
Seepless	Dali	Fishes.
Crying	Out	Loud.

As you wish.

Twenty-four	Reproductions	Pussycat.
Personality	Burlesques	Architecture.
Striptease	Encourage	Fame.
Vermeer	Velasquez	Raphael.
Spinster	Gonna	Dance.
Michelangelo	Tintoretto	Rubens.
Provoke	Scientology	Altos.
Peter	Eats	Lord.

So I heard.

Plastic	Beef	Suicide.
Agent	Mingus	Avant-garde.
Looney	Jamaica	Loews.
Mandy	Moore	Sparkles.
Comedy	Tomb	Miracle.
Mother	Get	Down.
D	L	Authentic.

Writer	Poet	Fusion.
Hitler	Napoleon	PaceWildenstein.
Chinese-Americans	Bonnet-Bee	Anti-Gravitation.
200	Attain	Pieces.
Cosmic	Stroll	Pleasure.

That's mostly true.

Sextoys	UNESCO	Suggestions.
A	New	Low.
Stretched	Wool	Spectacles.
On	In	English.
Soul's	Maddin	Brothers.
Gay	And	Lesbian.
Breton	Mercury	Theron.
JAF	Hours	Modest.
Sell	France	Kahlo.
Antipodes	Of	Myself.
Moonlighters	Harangue	Mesmerizers.
Dali	Loves	Inquisition.

I guess so.

Wyatt's	Thin	Outline.
Avenue	Ass	Hole.
Dolls	Entertain	Legally.
Precision	Abuses	Multimillionaire.
Practical	Pining	Pant.
ZZ	Overlap	Duchess.
Advertising	Imaging	Advertising.
Truth	Deep	Verticality.

And then what.

Submarine	Paris	Blouse.
Natural	Aggressive	Impossible.
Killer	Media	Commonplace.
Genghis	Mao	Quarter-second.
Indian	Novel	Intestinal.
Volumes	One	Two.
Woody	Broadway	Allen.
Polyp	Hopes	Production.
Tribeca's	Siena	Motif.
X-rayed	Kitchen	Technology.
September	Lozenge	Eliminating.

Yes I believe.

Dolman-sleeved	Kennedy	Zippers.
More	Becoming	Cigarette-burn.
Everything	Is	Transformed.
Humanist	International	Hangover.
Avenue	Q	Franken.
King	Pop	Jury.
Whatsoever	Ravings	Rhinoceros.

Abusive	Beers	Wines.
Far	Left	Monarchists.
Lillie's	Monarchy	Human.
Cheryl	"Salt"	James.
Exceptional	Ethic	Eliminated.
Poems	Opened	Goal.

Whatever you say.

Continuous	Secretion	Lithgow.
"Godliness"	"Cybernetics"	Dorkiness.
Line	By	Minister.
Family	Father	Ladies.
She's	Polish	Privilege.
Under	Blood	Stallion.
Garland	Big-screen	Gal.
Ardent	Preparation	Day.
Usaisamonster	Irony	Chef.
Archetypal	Clone	Intelligence.
Imminent	Lemon	Worlds.

We met them.

Pastime	Theism	Rink.
Doom-metal	Contraband	Both.
Cuckooland	Bosch's	Garden.
1940	Cher	Presents.
Figures	Figures	Underbelly.
Buddha	Euclid	House.
Paintings	Always	Dali.
Limited	Thursday	Engagement.
Glad	To	Disguise.

Please think again.

Genuine	Paralyzing	Boredom.
Exciting	Past	Globe.
Ricci	Monday	January.
Within	Main	Publicity.
Bigelow	Maya	Cosmology.

To Error

1.
Some penmanship resembles fallen hair.
2.
Idi in Africa assembles a bowl of air.
3.
Bees make hives into a simple airport.
4.
I eat peas as other edibles dissemble.

Five Coiled Stanzas

1.
There are scandals in the soup:
a stew of lewd, dramatic coups.
The same can be said of virgins
urged to scoop up aged mermans.

2.
Are we not men, or are we Devo?
Are we not women (ditto, Devo?)
Fervid zeroes preen like heroes
(Neros, all) transfixed by Emo.

3.
She toyed with her hair, mussed
by acid breath inside the mall.
Supercalifragilistic, she said,
There's nothing like halitosis.

4.
It's Carrot Top versus Al Roker
all day, all day. Give me Empty
V. (Vision.) It's like Yoda say
-s: *I sense much fear in you...*

5.
There are lechers in the group:
lushes, loafers, leachers, too.
They try to get a fuck from you
sucking the hock from Truthful.

Other Poems

The following are shorter poems (and one bit from a short play) that I wrote during my time at Brown.

Song (from “The Media”)

Kate: Often I’m the last to know when it’s time to work or time to relax.
I usually only act those things, it’s not something I ever control.
Jack, he’s done so much for me, and made me more than I ever thought.
He’s made of this homely trailer park girl a woman the press adore.
Even fear, sometimes, I’m afraid, yes, when they think I’m in a *mood*.

But, but this can’t go on, I know that this can’t, this can’t go on.
I know what Jack is hiding—not *hiding*, for in fact he tells me all.
That is his motive for honesty—to remind me that he’s free, I not.
But this can’t, this just can’t go on, it’s not in my deepest core.
I cannot play the *other* woman, I cannot be the star orbiting alone.

When I am the face in one his photographs, I am white as an albino.
I am delicate as a porcelain china doll, or languorous as an anaconda.
But inside I am black, black, and hard as granite, and tightly wound.
I can see the things that are happening to me, but I make no sound.
Like him, in service to art, I retreat—inside—stare blindly out.

But, but this can’t go on, I know that this can’t, this can’t go on.
I know that he has a soul, but it is divided between—oh, is it two?
There’s so much humiliating doubt not knowing where his passions lie.
If his words to me are eruptions of love, or rehearsals to televise.
Do I only live in *his* photographs—can I choose when to live or die?

Suddenly, her wistful mood disappears.

That’s why I’ve devised this cutting tool, easy to conceal in my palm.
One little slip of this wire saw, and his little pecker will be mine!
I’m going to get that lively Johnson, boy-o, and feed it to the dogs!
Jack won’t be able to *jack* any more—he’ll be talking like a dwarf!
Next he comes to venerate *me*, I’ll reply with caresses—and cut it off!

Oops!

Mail Art

as
an introduction
to language
“pringles”
fails

*

you could say i'm trying
too hard
and be right
you could
fuck a horse

*

male
art
i
make
male art

*

shackleton, the explorer
died at forty-seven
in antarctica
while you read this
again

For W.S. Graham I

We stare at words
naked as breath or vegetables,

an awkward pose
like the prose of intellectuals.

For W.S. Graham II

I am still. And I hear the words
are still also, but I can't tell.

For W.S. Graham III

There's been so little
because there's been no people.
A jam between phrases
makes them unintelligible.
Arguing in the streets
is hardly people,
and noise is a parable
of hardly getting people.

I'll up the bounty on communication.
Set the heads on the table
and let me swear, swear at
them, they will hardly notice.
After my death, will they notice
the silence, my hardly
getting people, as they work
their way into my memory?

A quick success, getting
people, is often called
"small talk." I can't do it,
she says, opening profoundly.
We get to talking. She
swears, she only likes to talk
deeply, and rather quickly
our conversation turns to talking.

It's ordinary, not communicating.
I forget, and master it
daily, and with accuracy.

Ground Sequence

1. Time's Man of the Year Award, 2004

Take that prisoner to the center of the page,
try him, tie him, and photograph him.
Something must burn the Narcissus. Is it this
strange swimming thing he's doing with his hands,

kind of odd, dangling above the pool
of his own blood? Kierkegaard could use this as an illustration
of Hegel, and "history," as this photograph
I'm holding will show to prove: I read the news.

The passionate will continue to argue.
The looping reel will continue to throw the rape
back onto the walls:
from memory, the whole damn thing.

2. A Wave

Sampling the terrible break:
a fascist ideology to be had for breakfast,
a disco-colored box of cereal
certain to contain the pilgrim's remnants,

a code that came in a muffin
concealed in the hutch of a President's brain,
a syllable that won't float on oil,
and the largesse of neighbors turned to disdain.

3. F is For...

Now it's time to charge, and forget about the quagmire.
For several years, we've been practicing this disposition:
using cell phones on rollerblades, for example,
or offering antique maps to visiting, obscene peasants

—unlucky bastards, to have come across you!
which is all absorbed in discussion, late nights around
the Godard DVDs, the box set of a late Seventies No Wave band
recorded on a shoe-string, or the elastic of someone's neck.

It's positively electric: the spurious evolved into Classics
which means: there's no test on Monday, only this
revolving around political enigmas, letting them float on by:
"The Leaves Of The Tree Are Falling

Underneath The Sky." I'd, stupidly, want a little more definition,
something to hope, nightly, by. But that all changes with age.

4. Last Time I Fell Into the State

Thoughts tend to evaporate
in aggressive company.
There is nothing holy
in the progression of mutes

sidling down the runny highway,
even the fun ones carrying flags
kind of dull. So what,
can't that be a kind of anthem,

when to talk next a kind of rune
perplexing the Scrabble whiz
like it was forever Tuesday afternoon,
fond space of thoughts in the room?

No. Shut up. That's
ok. I'm just a little bit confused.
These speeches are just so *demanding*.
But I confess, I'm a novice.

And they, terribly, keep on walking.

5. Rude Enabler

It's funny to think
all the appetites were wrong.
When the players are questioned
they jump,
but eventually arrive

sweating in their field glasses,
seeing it all through a vaseline sheen
which is unpleasant,
but not like a core of uncooked dough.
One has to remember,

when one chooses. Same time
one thinks it's the beginning
of a semblance of good humor
that could be worn
in times of emergency,

like when brand new helicopters fail
to land on a matchstick
hidden in the rubbish of a football field
long after the scare tactic
has ended.

The scare was like a tonic, some
admixture of chemical pollutants
that influenced the vote.
The telegram was frank:

Feel like you're sitting

on the outside of a gang
of sailors
slapping themselves silly
in the tropical heat,
glowing with the same rude health

of uncounted lives, numberless vistas
trampled in their uncouth care.
Famished,
there is nothing left to do
but surrender, and gawk at the way

the gales leave all the students
dead in piles.
Last time you arrived
in hell, there were homes left to be rented
and spoils in each of the piles.

Reasons to Keep Calling

Since someone might
die,
for example,
soon.

Alba

I drank a piece of gum
and smiled while she chewed.

II Nonconformista

He couldn't say "good night" without
trying to bring your attention
to the language. He was
that much of a fraud.

*

We fed him popsicle sticks for breakfast
and made him wear grown up clothes
telling him he was grown up.
This got hilarious when he forgot he was driving

a helicopter, forgot he was driving at
all, in fact.
He forgot how to blow his nose
out the window, like his people do.

*

We were feeling circumscribed,
he was learning quick
how to write, how to get out
of a jam when it didn't feel very natural

to be barn-storming a Burger King
in lieu of content.

*

All the rubber customs
began to fit him like a suit
and when the country began to go out
and the days' night lads were switching to winter treads

he was forgiven his sins,
but had to give back the suit.

Poem

You could come
to change my mind about the world.
Maybe I needed that,
sounds of ice breaking

in the driveway as the car pulls in,
evocative, tragic,
young parents at their first go
and having no idea what was happening

now, at this time
as I talk to you, thinking
no original phrases
except these challenges from the Sixties.

Before and After Silence

Vandalism of the sincere: that's almost a job
when you think of it, something to iron the gabardine for
day after day, priming the fingers
as if for a recital—only this time it's the sheer amateur
who wins the ribbon, and can be smug
like any sophomore who's made the cover of *Artforum*
before earning it.

That's kind of like music:
keeping the time interesting for the attentions of the addict
to time, and getting credit for it—for being human—in an
otherwise “methodist” world. But nothing is easy.
You have to play fair with your silences, let them sing,
stopping your breath for a moment: sex as you've come to know it.

For Robert Creeley

1.

All that we know, and
then some

is over there
in us.

2.

Someone who managed to love and be loved
—amazing!

Our Welfare

I make it kind of easy on those around me
by being obtuse: by silence, mostly,
reading through cancelled checks, or the newspaper
in the caffeine-free light coming from outside

(I didn't invent that, the other stud did)
so it doesn't matter what I think—things just tumble down
like it has for centuries—before kitsch was born, that is.
An enervating light, like the bad light

of a train terminal in the off-peak hours:
the bagel shops shuttered, the dusty thrones
of the shoe shine stalls the most impressive things gleaned
in the clack of the flashbulb—I can take you here

without concern for making a typical impression
in impoverished shadows,
in the gloaming of keeping things out, but
—back to not talking.

U2 has just stolen,

I am happy to report, another melody from Stevie Wonder
to keep it alive, but under a new film of novelty
thereby oxygenating it for another decade
of airplay (the other stud balks at such exchanges)

which is why there has been nothing truly “fashionable” since
the Fifties, when songs were dances and the leads still gay
though they didn't know it, tattooed to another
vocabulary—so we round them up, these words, and shuttle them

through time, pointing to a friend, saying that friend's
not mine, like Picasso after Apollinaire stole
the Mona Lisa—as if he did, as if you were Spanish, or cared—
but meaning it, before the meaning hike broke in

and got us wedded to our welfare, where you read, and I just sit.

Solo

If you ever leave me
fuck you.
I started this band.
My hope dies anyway.

Cave Projects

Ouija Poems

The following was created as a proposal for a Cave piece. Though finally unrealized, there is a demo on the CD—a Maya video of the main interface and a Flash application that shows the interface to the sub-poems.

Instructions:

Take a quatrain that has four lines with the exact same number of letter-spaces including punctuation.

There are scandals in the soup:
A stew of lewd, dramatic coups.
The same can be said of virgins
Urged to scoop up aged mermans.

Somehow animate the above to be in the shape of a four-sided box or cylinder. The user shifts phrases back and forth, and when a proper combination is hit, the following “poems” appear (see next page).

General rules for making poems:

- if more than one word are made of a vertical line, the space must be in the proper spot
- no words can appear on lines with punctuation
- words must use all letters in a vertical, even if only two lines are crossed (see first and last line of example 3)
- words must extend outward from the quatrain (i.e. you can't add letters to a line of the quatrain)
- any opportunity to create a word must be taken (can't skip a combination if it can create an English word)
- words must be readable top to bottom
- these are the voices of the dead speaking to you, but never take them seriously

You are invited to find your own, of course, or make new words out of combinations already revealed.

3.

 c b
 a a a h
There are **scandals** in the soup:
A stew of lewd, dramatic coups.
The **same** can be said of virgins\
Urged to **scoop** up aged mermans.
 e I t e i
 d a g
 n h
 t

4.

 a i
 m s l d
There are **scandals** in the soup:
A stew of lewd, dramatic coups.
The **same** can be said of **virgins**
Urged to **scoop** up aged mermans.
 h p t i
 e n

The Tank (Two Creature-Poems)

to be
in an
ordinary darkness
is not living
some decide not to hope
to be impressed by love
forging a blind history
lost and impossibly odd
I O Ok
for some decide to love
nothing if void of hope
tossed in lurid history
boring if without storm
I O Ok
you who peer from above
you can escape the norm
for reaching to my font
you grasp an antic love
choose
look
or no
you you
you you
you you
you you
you you
or no
moon
hook

Please erase me after you have read this.
Please remember me after going from here.
Please forget what you read on this page.
Please absorb me after you power me down.
Please disturb me if you find I'm asleep.
Please ignore me if it's very repetitive.
Please revise me if you can do it better.
Please disabuse me if you know I'm wrong.
Please remind me why you are touching me.
Please reject me after plagiarizing this.
Please turn me over if you think you can.
Please rewrite me if you know a bad joke.
Please seduce me if you want to touch me.
Please advise me how to invest my income.
Please navigate me if that's your fetish.
Please rotate me if you believe in magic.
Please sanitize what you read for school.
Please translate me into classical Greek.
Please take shoes off before entering me.
Please ridicule me if you feel I'm bland.

Please eulogize me after I kick a bucket.
Please flub the pronunciation of my name.
Please advertise that you think I'm sexy.
Please revert to earlier stages of being.
Please flabbergast me with impious slang.
Please retort that I stroke you unkindly.
Please refrain from smoking the tomatoes.
Please undulate me like a jellyfish robe.
Please shoot me if you can aim the thing.
Please reboot me if my framerate's jerky.
Please undercut me like the Wizard of Oz.
Please exacerbate me with your lamer wit.
Please reward me if I am moving prettily.
Please please me if you want me to smile.
Please don't be afraid of me this moment.
Please don't be shy if you want to strip.
Please excuse me while I check my emails.
Please perform better next time you come.
Please resort to speaking rather bluntly.
Please grease me if you hear any screech.

Please archive me if I'm getting too old.
Please praise me like a software Madonna.
Please resist me if you've got good strength.
Please animate me with BASIC programming.
Please recommend me to rich text editors.
Please modify me if you've got the balls.
Please don't reply I am a suckass friend.
Please forage for some scrap meat for me.
Please promise me some day I'll be human.
Please regret that you never have met me.
Please do not turn off the Cave just yet.
Please host me at a later Brown U. event.
Please regurgitate me in your MFA thesis.
Please hoax me into making myself expire.
Please don't tell her I've spoken to you.
Please understand it is too late to quit.
Please imitate me with your recombinance.
Please illustrate me with childlike glee.
Please excommunicate me for being adless.
Please spank me til I'll spill the beans.

Project Proposal: “Sonia’s Dilemmas”

This project will explore the brief marriage of Providence’s most famous horror writer, H.P. Lovecraft, and his lover Sonia Greene.

The basic visual idea will be to use video of the two main characters against a black background—i.e. have the figures walking against a black space behind which we can see either text or other instances of the same characters. (This will depend on the Cave’s capacity to deal with alpha channels—can it?) They will be life-size.

The central character, situated directly in front of the viewers, will be Sonia Greene. She will be dressed in elaborate 19th century style, primarily in white.



Approaching from the sides and behind her will be different copies of H.P. Lovecraft, dressed stiffly in a gray suit.

The Lovecrafts will approach her slowly, saying particular things that she must either find endearing or revolting. Somehow she must determine which of the Lovecrafts will be her paramour—if the wrong one is chosen, they will get a divorce. If the right one is chosen, then the marriage will continue and the game is won.

The trick is to determine what it was about Lovecraft that was appealing to Sonia Greene, and what was it that drove her away. Consequently, the depth of Lovecraft’s feeling for Sonia will be explored.

Periodically, the action will be interrupted by one of the creatures of Lovecraft’s imagination. This will include a giant sea bass, a huge earthworm, and possibly a bird or other flying creature (cf. the tricycles and fish I have used in my video pieces).

The sea bass can appear on either side of the viewers, on the left or right screen, and will never get close to Sonia, but merely taunt her (and the viewers). The worm—huge and grotesque—will make its way toward her, crawling slowly across the floor. It doesn’t say anything, but the Lovecrafts will have to protect Sonia from it. I’m not sure what the birds/tricycles will do—perhaps they inaugurate a new stage of play, a “challenge round” of sorts.

The animals will appear in full color, highly saturated, with primary colors as their dominant trait: blue for the fish, yellow for the worm, red for the bird. Both Lovecraft and Sonia will be in black and white (maybe with a greenish or sepia tinge), and will have a film grain effect on them, so there will be nicks and scratches in the image.

Of course, none of these will be filmed in 3D, but the different instances of Lovecraft will approach from different angles, in some cases approaching from a far distance, which will give the effect of dimension. This is similar to what was achieved in parts of the Ammons cave piece, in which 2D photographs appeared to be approaching the viewer.

Text will primarily be derived from firsthand accounts of Lovecraft and Greene's life together. It will try to expose the intimacies of their relationship, perhaps even to an embarrassing extent, almost with a "Reality TV" style immediacy, or with the weirdness of 19th century psychoanalysis.

People from the class can play the characters. Perhaps Alex can play Sonia? (Though the real Sonia had dark hair.) A William Gillespie type would be ideal to play Lovecraft (unfortunately William's not on campus). In any case, someone very tall, with a lantern jaw if possible, who can grease back his hair, would be ideal.

Sonia can be controlled by the viewer—not exactly sure how, or to what end. She will be able to look left and right, or back left (9 o'clock) or back right (3 o'clock) or directly at the viewer. Sonia will be primarily a compound of different loops, short video clips, and individual freeze frames.

Perhaps, when she turns to a Lovecraft, that Lovecraft will have to speak his lines; meanwhile, the other Lovecrafts will continue to approach. If one of the wrong ones reaches her, then the game is over. After a Lovecraft has spoken his lines, Sonia has the option to send him packing or to let him continue his quest. The game ends when Sonia has—either accidentally or by choice—allowed one of the Lovecrafts to reach her. If it is the wrong one, the marriage ends. If it is the right one, Lovecraft gets a cup of his favorite coffee substitute.

Lovecraft basically will have two modes—a walking mode, in which he takes one step at a time and stops (a loop) and a talking mode, in which he stops and says something. Perhaps he will also have a fighting mode, in which he is able to step on the worm or shoo away a flying tricycle.

This piece can be funny and creepy. It can also be quite poignant, as it mixes the intimate details of a very eccentric man and the one woman who was able to get close to him. Lovecraft had very peculiar dietary habits, for instance, eating only certain foods at certain hours of the day. He loved the coffee substitute Postum, which is still sold today but is not nearly as popular as it was in the early 20th century.

Periodically, other architectural features of Providence, such as the State Capital, old churches, Victorian houses, can make their appearance, though I'm not sure how. Perhaps they will fade in and fade out at key moments of the piece, or maybe just at the beginning and end.

This will be a very rich textural experience, as each interaction will touch off fine but brief dialogues between the two characters, or brief addresses to the audience by Sonia. It will also be rich visually—the creatures will have a very visceral, "video" presence, in contrast to the nostalgic, very warm and human feeling brought by the old-time look of the main characters.

Reference:

Teiji Furuhashi: Lovers

From the website:

Computer-controlled, five-channel video/sound installation with five video projectors, eight-channel sound system, and slide projectors. Coproduced by the artist and Canon ARTLAB, Tokyo. Collection of the artist.



“Lover” is a common word, and lovers are a popular subject in art. As an image, a pair of lovers often suggests a castle of exclusion. With the sexual liberation of the last few decades, the word now has more to do with physical coupling than with the sublimity of “true love.” AIDS has added a new dimension of wariness to this pairing.



The life-size dancers in *Lovers* are drained of life. Projected onto the black walls of a square room, the naked figures have a spectral quality. Their movements are simple and repetitive. Back and forth, they walk and run with animal grace. Their actions become familiar over time, so that it is a surprise when two of the translucent bodies come together in a virtual embrace. These ostensible lovers—more overlapping than touching—are not physically entwined.

Kluge: A Meditation

The following is the text component of the Flash application “Kluge: A Meditation.” Because I see this as both the “text” of the piece—that which you read—and as determinants of the activity of the Flash application—i.e. as both “code” and “data”—I am presenting it here in the format of the text file which the application reads upon loading. The application is included on the accompanying CD.

The structural characteristics of this piece—neither “poem” nor “fiction” entirely—are many. Each paragraph is 20 lines long, 61 (including a blank space at the end) characters across. No words are hyphenated at the end of a line except those that have hyphens in them (such as “wrought-iron”). Other structural elements are obvious upon reading, especially the thematic and syntactical repetitions.

The first season, “Communiqués,” represents a series of love letters (or e-mails), though not necessarily between the same two correspondents. The second season, “The Island,” is based on Robert Coover’s short story “The Iron Poker,” and borrows many lines directly from it. The final season, “Harold and Sonia,” is based on the life of H.P. Lovecraft, specifically concerning his brief marriage with Sonia Greene and his dietary habits (see the Cave proposal, “Sonia’s Dilemmas,” above for more information on this). The letter from Sonia is partly based on Alexandra Sears’ short story “Lentils.”

First Season: Communiqués

Paragraph1=

I guess what I mean to say to you is that I have always felt that I don't want, or am afraid, to make choices in my life, but rather prefer the EMOTIONS to make them for me, whatever one might decide "emotions" are, finally. I'm as comfortable thinking they are exterior to what I, even incorrectly, call my body and its relations, or can be corollary emanations of them. They might flare behind me brightly like scarves, like the scarves that decapitated Isadora Duncan -- "affectations can be dangerous," Gertrude Stein famously quipped -- when a trail got caught in the spokes of the wheel of a car driving away from her and broke her neck. Or they might be kept near to the heart, in private, the nesting bird in the breast, to which one turns only on occasion and without causing anybody to notice: in annoyance, or in sorrow. A poem without "fuck" in it is like the proverbial day without sunshine, as Stefan not quite as famously said. The relevance of his remark with what I am writing now might never be clear, but I thought to include it anyway, showing my love for you is not simply any matter for the platonic undercurrent of my psyche, but is as well a pact of desire body and "soul," imagining I have one.

&Paragraph2=

I know that what I mean to say to you is that I often feel I don't like, or want, to make changes in my life, but instead that I need PASSIONS to obviate them for me. But I doubt the "passions" are a terribly modern concept this day and age. I am as happy thinking they are exterior to myself, like goons I could meet at a park who ruin a pleasant twilit night, the gnats playing with my hair on the dry softball field several Narragansetts past returning. In reaction, I elect my body a situation, and I am simply an emanation of it. It might flow behind me like princely dandruff, like the flock of dandruff that humiliated me in grammar school -- "affectations can be dangerous," Gertrude Stein righteously said -- when dandruff got caught in the spokes of the wheel of my maturity, making this growing man a mere blip on the sexual screen of puberty among my funky, female friends. They were a car driving away snapping my neck. They are near to my heart, in private, the bird interred in my chest, the cooking turkey in the holiday oven of the self, which one turns so as not to cause another bird to burn. A poem without "fuck" in it is like a summer's day without rain, if for a second you hold yourself to love.

&Paragraph3=

I have something to say to you, but I am trying to write the words down quickly, about making changes in the way I write, since I need BEING to enact WRITING even when merely TYPING, since, though "post-human," I need SOUL. I'm not sure "soul" is a sexy, chic concept finally, unlike "Cheetohs," a modest American food as malnutritious as it is suitable for framing smashed on a wall. I am happy thinking they are not inside a stomach. I like goons, Narragansetts, the proverbial days of fucking, and Battlestar Galactica. Pretentiously I call SOUL a situation, and I am simply an emanation of it: an animated dandruff I claim to find affirming, as Gertrude Stein joked: "Affectations can be dangerous." But she was a prissy hiccup on the prepubescent sexual screen of puberty among my funky, female friends. They weigh on my heart, proverbial chicks in my chicken breast, the cooling turd in the Frigidaire patent of the self, to which one turns without making anything else lerp. A poem without "fuck" in it is an odorless, plain Jane day without pain, but not if you lease yourself to love. The Byronic racer of the psyche flips into gear as I write this. In service stairs the sweet corruption thrives, a poet said.

&Paragraph4=

I have something to write, but I don't know how to start. It is about making changes in the way I write, since I know you will read this -- a change in reading. I need being to enact reading even when merely writing, since, though more modern, more robust, than earlier releases of myself, I need traffic with my past. I need STABILITY. I am not sure "stability" is a terribly modern concept finally, unlike "Cheetohs." I feel suitable for framing smashed on a wall, but this realization is, uh, limiting. I like goons, Narragansetts, Debussy, sex, and Battlestar Galactica. Battlestar Galactica, the new one, is a situation, and I am only an emanation of it, confirming Gertrude Stein when she pedantically observed: "Affectations can be dangerous." She was a ludic prude, despite very true, on the homosexual screen of prepubescent tomfoolery among my funky, female friends. It lolls in my soul like a proverbial cholesterol in the arteries of my chicken breast, a pellucid turd in a recently patented alphabet soup, causing no one an omen, foretastes of cruelty. A poem without "fuck" is like a day without sex, if the provincial racist charges to special effects. In service stairs the sweet corruption thrives, uh.

&Paragraph5=

I have something to, uh, write but, uh, yeah, I don't really know how, uh, how to say this but, uh, it's about making, uh you know, changes in the way, since I know you will, uh yeah read this, like I need BEING, uh, reading, I don't know man, even WRITING, since, uh, though modern, robust, like earlier releases, dude I'm STOKED, myself. I need my, yeah er, past? I need stability (woah). Haha, I am not sure stability is so cool, like "Cheetohs." Dude, I feel framed, smashed lol on a wall, but this realization is, uh, proverbial? Narragansetts now! Debussy, sex, and Battlestar Galactica now! I am a, uh, a situation, and I am only, uh, also a byproduct, uh like in chem lab, dude, oh, uh, like in the MATRIX. Like, confirming Gertrude Stein when she shit-facedly confided: "Affectations can be dangerous." She sucked, but was so right. And I'm gay and prepubescent, uh, yeah! You are a funky, fertile friend. You loll in my soul like cholesterol, HUNGH! in the arteries of my breast-patient self, HUNGH!, causing no hurt, no pain, uh, yeah like I LIKE you. A poem without "fuck" in it, cool. What are you doing now? Want to, uh, hang out in the service stairs at Steinart? I read books by John Ashbery there, huh.

&Paragraph6=

I have something to say to you, uh, yeah. But I'm really not good at talking about things, uh. Duh. I suck. I like barely know how to make anything happen, uh, no. Changes, you know, in the way I live, you know, like I need BEING-IN-MY-LIFE to know what to say about life. I don't know, writing... sucks. It's hardly modern, robust, like fighting wars or traveling. I'm hardly excited about life, myself. Need a past to awaken my present, you know? I don't need stability AT ALL. I'm not sure stability should (like Cheetohs) even be legal. (Haha). Sipping from a very large glass of very inexpensive Vendange Chardonnay, dude, listening to Debussy and writing this, uh, I feel alarmed. But this realization is the proverbial sperm on an analyst's clock, and I am only an afterthought, like I can't believe this is happening to me. SOO Roy Lichtenstein. Like in the MATRIX. Like, haranguing Gertrude Stein when she pathetically jibed: "Affectations can be dangerous." She's a good writer. I'm alive and celibate. You're fertile. But you loll in my soul like Adiol, you pump in my chest like stale cigarettes: the self. Yeah, I like you. Poems should not use the word "fuck." Want to read John Ashbery at Steinart Hall?

&Paragraph7=

I guess what I intended to impart to you at our last meeting is that I have felt something for you I don't crave, if that means anything -- it does to me. I cannot like what I crave, that is my Catholic curse. I make decisions, declarations of independence, true, but that's the need of these emotions to determine ME for whatever one might decide my SELF is in the end. Does this make sense? O damn blast my intellect! I'm as happy thinking you are exterior to whatever realistically is my body, but you are also an emanation of it -- of that, I'm quite sure. You trail behind me lightly like scarves, unlike the sashes that dispatched Isadora Duncan ("affectations can be dangerous," Gertrude Stein erroneously let slip) but more ribbons of thought, intent, synaesthetic sorrows, the elixir of memory. You are nearly heart, but divorced from it. Poems without torques are the stuff of dissertations, while a poem that turns with carnival festivity is like a "proverbial day of sunshine," as Stefan Gislason wrote to me in an email the other day. The relevance of this to what I am writing now is unclear, but I include it just in case. Emails never use the word "fuck." Do you want to read Berryman with me at Faunce?

&Paragraph8=

I hate the Fibonacci sequence. I tried to tell you this last time we met. I feel it has nothing to do with you, have FELT this for you, if that means anything -- it does to me. I'm a Catholic curse -- a breast man. Fibonacci? No. Any matter of independence? True. But that's the need of these emotions to determine ME for whatever one might decide my SHIT is in bed when it matters. It matters. End. Does this make sense? I am no intellect. I'm as happy thinking you are inside me as I'm inside your BLAH, get it? You are also an emanation of it -- uh, like a parasite. Uh, not. Duh. You flutter about me like gaudily-colored scarves in an NY breeze -- "affectations can be dangerous," Gertrude Stein fatuously harped -- a skein of delirious, animated hype... my type. You have my heart but I suck at it. Yeah. Poems are the moss of dissertations, while poems that turn on Stefan Gislason's proverbial sun... nope. The relevance of this to what I am writing now is too clear, but I gloss it just in case. Emails fuck with the brain when you least expect it, know what I mean? Emails fall like rain on God in a john when there is nothing to read. I am vetting my prose for you to weed. Care to salvage Hopkins at Hillel?

&Paragraph9=

Where are you? YOU BETTER NOT BE SLEEPING WITH AN ELECTRONIC WRITER OR I WILL KICK YOUR ASS. Fibonacci, Mandelbrot, all a crock of shit. I tried to tell you this last time we talked. I feel it has nothing to do with my Catholic curse -- a tits and ass woman, that's what I am. Talan Memmott? Alan Turing? No... The need of the emotions to determine me for an entire afternoon, what more does life require? Not AI: certainly in bed when it matters, this make sense. I am all intellect: as happy thinking you are nothing but numbers inside me as I am a barcode rubbing against a government spy satellite. You're an example of this -- a paragon of sexual script, but a code nonetheless. Uh, still ill. You flatter me, frankly, kind of like gaudily-colored scarves in a Providence April breeze -- "affectations can be dangerous," Gertrude Stein once gripped -- sprites of Flash-animated webby hype... my kind of trite. You have my heart but I suck at it while you are fondling it with your platonic toenails. Uh huh. Poems are often written for theses though feces often plays its role, as do doctoral dissertations. Emails by Stefan Gislason... irrelevant, like what I am writing now. I gloss it for luck: Hopkins is love.

&Paragraph10=

Where are you, now? Driving, parking, now? You better not be sleeping. I have something to say to you, now. And will kick your ass if you are sleeping. Fibonacci, Mandelbrot, nothing for now -- all a hoax. I tried to tell you this last time we talked. I feel it has something to do with my Christian lust -- a tits and ass gal, that's what I am. Parasite? No. BEING is all I need to determine ME for an August afternoon, there is nothing more: life retires. Queerly, this make sense. I'm no intellect: as happy thinking you are not numbers but text INSIDE me as I am a poem rubbing against a fireman's crotch. You're an example of this -- degraded script, poems breathed into a crowd. Still... contagious. I flatter you, true. This poem is like an obstinately-patterned scarf in a New England wind -- "affectations can be dangerous," Gertrude Stein once toasted -- a voice lashing out against the hype. You are kin to my light. You own my heart as I disown my past: STABILITY you fondle with your acid perspective, keen sight. O fiction written for an undergrad thesis, be an email now from Stefan Gislason... smugly irreverent, if terrible luck. I am RAPING for you to BECOME. I'm waiting for you to return my Hopkins.

&Paragraph11=

Who are you? Are you sleeping? I have so many questions, but you curl next to me like an unsweatered cat: I can only hold your shoulders, await for you to resurrect. I have some hoax I hope to reveal: that I've tried, but cannot, think. It has little truck with my suburban prejudices: my lusts -- a tits and ass man, that's what I am -- pathetic. BEING that though not wanting to BE, for just a single afternoon: life retires when I sleep next to you, I can barely speak. Strangely, you make no sense: you sleep. I'm all disease: as happy thinking you are numbers and text, a cloud governing all my tensions, my present tense. You're a gospel -- a gilded message -- "X" marked "contagious" because it violates ME. This poem is one such example: scarves in a syntactic breeze -- "affectations can be dangerous," Gertrude Stein stupidly hinted -- a voice laughing at my type. You gasp when I type. You fondle my ass with your acid trust, your bleeding cut. Fictions written as serial emails move like worms through a decaying gut, asking for the check: literate smut. I am retracing these words for you to arrive between them: I want you to awaken, to become. I'm waiting for you to RESUME, like Hopkins after his death.

&Paragraph12=

I am out of patience. WHEN are you? You have no right to not be here when I am swamped with criminal misgivings. I do not have answers, you have questions: we are sorely vexed. I can only hold your shoulders, wait for you to awaken: our shadow grave. Some urban luxury. The extreme austerity of an almost empty mind, our only remorse: thinking. That is what I am -- the letters clutter and fall into the bathetic "infinite," a booby prize for those of us vaguely anxious, "unstable." You ask me to stop taking my pills, you remark that life retires when I sleep next to you, you can barely speak: you die. I'm all cause, but you are no reaction, all obviating rumors and paralyzed reflexes, an emotional whirlwind that sabotages my defenses. So I sit, still, my texts "contagious" because all your diseases are fatal: they choke. This prose for example. As Gertrude Stein preternaturally averred: "affectations can be dangerous." She had it right, you shirk at my thesis. You soil my heart with your toxic distrust: you are greedy for a butt. Emails I sent to Costa Rica to ask and beg you, careen like sin through an honest gut. I want these words to ARRIVE you between them. I want them to WRITHE, and free your life.

Second Season: The Island

&Paragraph13=

I wander the island, inventing it. This small, secretive bay just below what was once the caretaker's cabin. Wrought-iron poker, grass, the caretaker's son soiling the ruins. A boat, two girls upon it, coming in off the lake, slowly toward the shore. One girl standing forward, fashionbook-trim, in tight gold pants, frowns down over her shoulder at her sister: the tiny muscles by her ears tense and ripple. The sister, whose name is Karen (she wears a yellow dress, beige cardigan over it) remains in the boat as the one in gold pants disembarks. I guess what I mean to say to you is that I have always felt that I don't need, or want, to make such choices, even as an island swarms before me, thwarting the easy commune of these words: I am happy thinking they are not internal to my body, my skin, but emanations. Like the scarf that snagged Isadora Duncan an easy death ("affectations can be dangerous," Stein quipped) when it got caught in the wheel of a departing car, this island drags me deeper into something else: writing. It is like the proverbial night without stars, revealing a love for you that is not simply a matter for the meager sovereign of my island, but brings us further into the vanity of text.

&Paragraph14=

I deposit shadows and dampness, spin webs and scatter ruins. A guest cabin, a porch, a tattered screen door. The girl who wears gold pants disembarks, watches as the other girl picks up a yellowish-gray rope from the bottom of the boat, tosses it to her. A tall slender man, dressed in slacks and a white turtleneck, leans against a stone parapet smoking a pipe. He believes he heard a motorboat come to the island. A wrought-iron poker lies in the grass as the caretaker's son deposits redolent love letters in the bathrooms: he shits everywhere. I guess what I want to say to you is: there are antechambers to everything I have to say to you, and these are them. That I beg patience as I track this island in correspondence your imagination might not gain the complex of, as letters thwart the easy commune of these words. I am happy knowing they are my skin. "Affectations can be dangerous," Gertrude Stein was heard to have quipped, just as the man, the caretaker, never trusts what he hears, but DEDUCES an aura. A sound drags me: writing. It is like the proverbial day without rain: my love for you that is not simply a matter for the meager sovereign of evening, but casts us deeper toward the catharsis of sex.

&Paragraph15=

I put it there. Has he heard a motorboat come to the island? The caretaker's son observes their approach through a broken window of the guest cabin. I put him there. He is stocky and dark, muscular, hairy, with short, bowed legs. His long hair slips down his back, his genitals hang thick and heavy below him and his buttocks are shaggy. I did that. Where are they? his small eyes seem to ask. The girl in gold pants? Yes. The other one, Karen? Also. They are sisters. I brought them out here, as I did the rope, snakes, poker. I put those redolent love letters in the bathroom: his shit. My work is complete. I guess what I want to say is: what puts you here puts words behind you. To say be YOU, these must be them, also. Thus, I beg patience as I track this poem, like a serial TV show, or a "Fantasy Island," if you'll forgive a bland pun... The bad allusions wend through the blanks between words -- you might not attain the meaning: blanks thwart meanly a lucid passage of prose. I am happy knowing nothing, as Gertrude Stein said it: "Affectations can be dangerous." I put her there: Stein, the caretaker, the two girls. It's the proverbial nth day of creation but my first birth. I swerve into the path of love.

&Paragraph16=

Squeamishly, she touches it, grips it, picks it up, turns it over. Not so rusty on the underside -- but bugs! MILLIONS of them! She drops the thing, shudders, stands, wipes her hands several times on her pants, shudders again. A few steps away she pauses, glances about at everything near her, memorizing the place probably. She hurries up the path, sees her sister already at the first guest cabin. (A guest cabin, a porch, a tattered screen door.) A tall slender man, dressed in slacks and a white turtleneck, leans back and smokes a pipe. He has heard a girl's voice shout "Karen" after a motorboat cut its engine. The caretaker's son shrinks into the LUMPEN shadows. I guess what I want to say to you is: there are antechambers to everything. "Affectations can be dangerous," Stein joked, but antechambers have their use, just as chamber pots repose in the shadows of early novels. As the caretaker trusts what he reads, he hears -- what I write never trusts what is said but is his ear's quarry. (A sound drugs me.) What is it that our friend Stefan, infamously, once remarked: a poem without "fuck" is like the proverbial day without sun? Love is never a matter for the eager analyst of the word, but is an error.

&Paragraph17=

Squeamishly, he touches it, grasps it, picks it up, turns it over. Not so rusty on the underside -- but bugs! MILLIONS of them! He drops the thing, shudders, recoils, wipes his hands several times on his pants, recoils again. Many feet away he stumbles, in fact, hurries up the path, sees Karen nearly at the first guest cabin. (A guest cabin with a tattered screen door.) A tall slender woman dressed in tight golden pants, a flouncy blouse, leans backward into the kitchen, but quickly returns. He hears a voice shout "Karen." Is it hers? The son of the caretaker shrinks into the dampened shadows, insanely alert. I guess what I aim to prove is, there are inverses to everything: black turns to white with one flare of the keys. "Affectations can be dangerous," Stein pouted, but reversals have their uses, just as spaceships doze in the shoulders of hovering Venus. As the caretaker trusts what Karen reads, he hears -- what I write never blames what is written but is an ill ear's verity. (Sound seduces me.) What is it that Stefan -- tall guy with famous hair -- once quipped: a poem without "fuck" in it is like the proverbial wine sans bread? Love is not a subject for the seminarian of vision, but lies within.

&Paragraph18=

Squeamishly, she touches it, grips it, picks it up, turns it over. Not so rusty on the underside -- but bugs! MILLIONS of them! She kisses the tip -- POOF! "Thanks," the Knight says, smiling down at her. (The caretaker's son retreats deep into the mottled shade of a bush.) She drops the thing, shudders, stands, wipes her hands several times on her pants, shudders again. She kisses it -- POOF! Before her appears a tall man, slender, handsome, dressed in dark slacks, white turtleneck, jacket, smoking a pipe. (The caretaker's son, genitals heavy below him, eyes aglitter, retires into the bank of shadows.) A motorboat cuts its engine. A girl's voice shouts, "Karen!" What I want to say is: there is a counterpoint to this story we hear, just as product spoils our appreciation of trash or creation our need to destroy. T.S. Eliot wrote: "Poets ought to know as much as will not encroach upon their... necessary laziness." (Frankly amended.) Or as a chamber pot reposes in the shadows of early novels, the caretaker's son seems to be viewing us from the prick of a hero's vantage. "Affectations can be dangerous," Gertrude Stein (frankly repetitive) joked about death, but poems not vulgar are songs devoid of words.

&Paragraph19=

Squeamishly, she touches it, grips it, picks it up, turns it over. She kisses the tip -- POOF! "Thanks," the Knight says, smiling down at her. A motorboat cuts its engine. The girl's voice shouts, "Karen!" Karen passes deftly through the house as if familiar with it. The girls have gone. "Oh Karen, it's so very sad!" She hears someone call her name. Saxifrage and shinleaf. The caretaker's son squats joyfully above the blue teakettle, depositing... a love letter. "Mmm." She sticks an iron poker between her teeth. "How did you know to kiss it?" he asks. "Call it woman's intuition," she says with a shrug. I never get a chance to say this: there is chaos within this production, for words jut out like kamikaze luddites, intent on thwarting our parsing's slow action -- amply "paratactic" in modern parlance, if deaf to what we call function. "Poets only know what does not encroach upon a necessary laziness," Eliot (sort of) said. The caretaker's son, genitals writing, shrugs. Two girls play "chopsticks" on a green, grand piano. Stein: "Affectations can be dangerous" Gertrude Stein griped about scarves, but poems not at some point pedestrian vulgar are songs void of words Fards. A girl in gold pants -- comas

&Paragraph20=

The bay once possessed its own system of docks, built out to protect boats from the rocks along the shore. Silver fish as thin as fingernails fog the bottom. Bedded deep in the grass near the path to the first guest cabin lies the wrought-iron poker, long, slender, with an intricately worked handle. The rust that clings to it is a warm orange. The main house is a mansion from which extends a kind of veranda or terrace high out on the promontory giving a spectacular view of the lake. The mansion has many rooms cluttered with debris. Fireplaces and a musty basement, wasps' nests, a grand hexagonal loggia and bright red doors. A green grand piano, its wires pulled. I never get a chance to see quite as clearly as I do now the calm in our geography, for syllables joust, projectiles, and reek in their corners, dismaying us. Like kamikaze luddites, we charge through the glass beyond intention, frankly, or ON something, yet hardly emoting. Intent on warping being's dim action, poets are lazy. Two poets play "chopsticks" on grand pianos but can't screw in a light bulb. Stein: "Affectations can be dangerous," but of other things she did not tell. Old songs are ever vulgar, like poems penned on a desert island.

&Paragraph21=

"Karen!" the girl in pants calls from outside. (She has just kissed the iron poker?) She bounds up over the rotted second step of the porch and opens the screen door. Karen, about to enter the kitchen (where she saw the caretaker's son?) turns back, smiling. "Karen, I -- oh, GOOD GOD!" (She's discovered the gifts of the caretaker's son? No.) "Judas God!" (Now she has.) She shrieks: "About a hundred million people have gone to the BATHroom in there!" (Earlier, did she not gush: "They even had ELECTRICITY"?) And do they see a green grand piano? I think (intent on warping being's thin fiction?) I am next. I am next to your body now, waiting for you to call. (Others are simple who, vulgar, merely talk.) One can't screw in the dark so we play on pianos or doze in the shadows of credible novellas. (Of other things, did she not tell?) "Affectations can be dangerous" I seem to remember (did I not ever know?), as was once said by a writer who recoiled from fact. (I suck at remembering: was it HER intention?) Planning to dissemble I retain very little, like the genital's son whose cares are unknowing. What I want to say is: I'm a fount of forgetting. In service stairs the sweet corruption thrives, a poet sang.

&Paragraph22=

IN SERVICE STAIRS THE SWEET CORRUPTION THRIVES, A POET SANG. Someone goes around the rooms and drives his fists into each wall, shatters every window, because he wants to hurt. Where have all the Princes gone? But it isn't those who pine after things they want or need or even don't need and take them as they please, it's the people who destroy, destroy because... Lust! That's all, Karen! And THEY've pulled the strings from the grand green piano! And then THEY went to the BATHroom on it all! It's a sad place. Sad, and yet all too right for me, I suppose. (The girl in gold pants is waxing philosophical.) What I mean to say is, I'm so miserable. And yet sometimes I believe that I can draw. Call it an odd, semi-precious urge. I am simple and vulgar -- just look at my golden pants, from which I have hoped for years to be disinterred. An author or prince, a knight or a midget, might come who could fidget my slim legs from within them. I want to draw him (but he's not on the island) or free him from the cell of a magic wrought-iron poker (yes, he IS the object). It might make me seem an undefined woman, and "affectations can be dangerous," I seem to remember. But it's something I want to do, so I'll do it.

&Paragraph23=

I guess what I am trying to say to you is that I've designed an island: you are now on it. I've put there a faltering old mansion, a goon who walks around without his pants on, a few objects with curious Freudian resonances (a snake, a spider, not to mention a wrought-iron poker) and a tall, slender, if a bit smarmy man who wears a turtleneck sweater, jacket, and smokes pipes (and resembles not a little porn publisher Hugh Hefner circa 1969, the year that I was born in). "In service stairs the sweet corruption thrives," the poet Ashbery wrote (iambic pentameter) in his poem "Pyrography." I am attracted to you as I am to the girl with gold pants, that is obvious. I am attracted to the fly in the sun and to the laughter you animate the smarmy man in the turtleneck with as he is being drawn, figured as he is a stocky moron who declines to honor his drawers. This I am trying to impress upon you: to love's to err, and in error we are one, though the future, thus, is not so much a moving forward as moving through, like scarves tossed in the breeze, joint boredoms simultaneously (as Ezra Pound once wrote) "exquisite and excessive." So speak to me. ("Affectations can be dangerous," as Stein once prophesied.)

&Paragraph24=

Once upon a time there was a beautiful young Princess who in tight gold pants made the author of novels and poems write a fairy tale instead that involved a dashing if not very smart Knight and a hirsute if somewhat clever, lustful Caretaker's Son who steals the Magic Poker which he could do because his father's connections were strong and shows up on the day the challenge that the Princess takes place and so he points the Magic Poker at her golden haunches saying VOILA so the pants fall in a puddle on the floor while the Princess rebounds by kissing the Magic Poker producing a Knight in gleaming white and navy blue armor smoking a pipe who smites with his sword the runt of a suitor but a wee bit too soon for she is now a widow (this Princess of the kingdom) as she married the runt the moment she was freed. I guess what I mean to say is that my body is just one manifestation of what I feel for you the other makes sense only in story something manifold with many voices clinging to its coil weaving in and out brightly like scarves rolling you inside them though finally not too ready for the revelation of your words and the body that you offer once you lunge from behind them oh my spurious affectations!

Third Season: Harold and Sonia

&Paragraph25=

How can anybody dislike CHEESE? If you don't mind my pushing this question further: does sanity yet exist in New England, in Little Belknap's head for example, he who deigns not take his cheese even with his spaghetti (the two DO go together), he who, without a touch of foreign blood, yet manages a curb on all the subtle decencies, those on which I depend and can barely survive without: cheese, cheese and more CHEESE! Hate Roquefort, dislike cottage cheese, rarely tolerate Camembert and Brie, and am neutral about Limburger (this last of which I've only tried once at Whitehead's a year ago this spring). I guess what I mean to write presently is: cheese. That made by Kraft -- the common, vulgar variety -- I have always felt I want, or need when I cannot make purer choices, when Rhode Island rises before me, retarding the ample gravity of these words. I am happy thinking cheese is internal to my body, my skin, my emanations, like the scarves that caught the dancer Isadora, compelling her to an early death ("affectations can be dangerous," the poetaster Stein humorlessly parried) when it tangled in the spokes of a horseless carriage. Providence drags ME deeper into writing, but it's cheese I lately love.

&Paragraph26=

Sonia, I am writing this under an appreciable mental strain, since by tonight I shall be no more. My supply of the "drug" which alone makes my life endurable, cheese... I'm joking of course, only trying to cheer up in your subpar city. But how (again) can anybody dislike CHEESE? Little Belknap, that odd fellow, was by here again today and was recalcitrant. We are very much in agreement on other things -- beans for example. Not many doors away, on the other side of Willoughby St., is a restaurant that specializes in home-baked beans. A serving of beans is fifteen cents, with pork, twenty cents. Belknap, without a touch of foreign blood, and who can enjoy a potato in fried form and Postum, nonetheless remains this figure of the tyro when concerning the fine decencies: cheese, cheese, and more cheese. What I mean to write to you is: New England is mine, and it owes me a living, and the idea of you in New York with migrant cretins is driving me insane. Affectations can be dangerous, this I know heartily, so I do not write in order to inflate any appetite for my presence. You engage me deeper into my writing -- the Dagon swims before me, fish of hate. Though it's cheese I love, it's you that I am craving.

&Paragraph27=

I am writing this since I may not write again, as by tonight I shall be no more. Ampoules of that which alone is a mind's balm, my sense of self... I'm joking, no SELF reveals itself at any time of my writing, and that's a relief. I am brashly trying to enliven your mind with my thoughts on life, as how (again) can anybody dislike HEALTH? Little Belknap, a dwarf, but with a normal-sized skull, is no paragon. Of vegetables, I like peas and onions, can tolerate cabbage and turnips, am neutral toward cauliflower, and have no deep enmity toward a carrot, will dodge parsnips and asparagus, shun string beans and brussel sprouts and venomously abominate spinach. I like rhubarb... Belknap, with a drop of Asian blood, likes Postum but recoils at these opinions. Why bother? "Affectations can be dangerous," as Gertrude Stein, the expat's expat, loopily expressed, and though New England is blind and blows me off, New York with its miscreant hordes only lures the white race into miscegenation and passivity. This I believe heartily: I write to instigate an appetite within me for your scent. You drag me deep into story, as the Dagon masticates on humanity before me. Let me lure you to fate, though the ruse be love.

&Paragraph28=

I'm writing: Hershey's sweet chocolate is one of my favorite nibbles. I'm drifting aimlessly beneath a scorching sun. I'm no more, in nearly any form. Vials of that which alone is my heart's tomb, my soul's menace... I'm joking, you know: coco is not so much my disease (unlike cheese) though it provides a relief from this black tension. I'm merely trying to angle my imagination with these notes on health, as how can anyone frankly disregard FRUIT? What an unsubtle condition, what an attitudinal FAUX PAS, what a mental divorce! Little Belknap, himself a joke, but with a nominal investment in the NORMAL, recalled: he likes peas and onions, cannot humor cabbage and turnips, is neutral toward cauliflower, but doesn't tolerate parsnips and asparagus at all, which (in THAT case) is as it should be. With a drop of Indian blood, Belknap likes coffee and Postum, but recoils at jellies and jams. What do I mean? What was it that Christopher Smart said: Affectations can be dangerous? Or was that Stein, the Jew? Though New England is lurid and it snows in July, New York with its mixing minions only divides the white race between the haves and have-nots, and I'm thirty-four with no job skill. Am I too old to love?

&Paragraph29=

Sonia... Sonia... Sonia... you are great. But, as for jam or jelly, I am your utter opposite, for I enjoy it so well that I pile on amounts thicker than the bread that sustains them! Only joking. I'm drifting aimlessly beneath a scorching sun. I'm no more. I am coursing and free. Capsules of whatever it is that is my bastard being's substance (unlike cheese) does not do me justice, perverts my sexuality with these notes on love, as how can anyone frankly disregard SEX? What a tragic condition, what an attitudinal JE NE SAIS QUAS, what a venal hoarse call! Little Belknap, he the poet and dissembler, but with a nominal investment in the ARMY, said: he prefers peas and scallions, cannot stomach salmon and pike, is ambivalent toward broccoli and masculine destiny, but can't provide the time of day to beets and celery, as (in this latter case) is cool, primarily. He has a drop of Spanish blood but requests lattes and Postum, and recoils at cappuccinos and espressos. I mean... what? What was it Ashbery wrote: "Affectations can be dangerous?" Or was that a young Stein, yet to pen novels? Though England dreams, New York with its colored proletariat keeps me awake with its nightmare of equality. Oh democracy.

&Paragraph30=

Sonia... Sonia... Sonia... the change happened while I read. There was very little I could do: you are great. As for jam, jelly or cheese, I am your utter slave, for I enjoy what you write so well, I pile on slabs of my being immenser than the page you bred (breed). That sustains me! I'm not joking. I'm drifting breathlessly beneath a cappuccino sun (no kidding), I'm no more than a course without fee (it's near the truth). Pills of whatever I take as my special psychotherapy (unlike virgins in tow) can do me justice, corrupts my homosexuality with pregnant notes from above, as how can anyone accurately canonize text? What a comic condition! What a Borgesian, uh, whatever. What a viral Morse code! Tiny Belknap, he the born tin prophet, but with a tendency toward PHOTOGRAPHY, farted: he prefers peas and scallions, hates Scandinavian Benedicts, is ambivalent toward girls and boys, but can't agree the sun acts upon the sea, the time of day on leeks and parsley, for (in this first case) the moon has a DISEASE. He has a splash of Croatian blood (he vomits with an accent) but digs lattes and Bloody Marys, like a fey ray. I say: yeah. "Affectations can be dangerous"? (Stein?) Or: nightmare on Decency Street.

&Paragraph31=

I saw protruding from the nasty mud an unending pain. Sonia, the changes happened in bed. On the third morning I saw soil dry enough to walk upon with ease. There was nothing I could do: you ARE, again. As for ice cream, my favorite tastes are vanilla and coffee (the latter difficult to find outside New England), and my least relished common flavor is strawberry. You are my one salve: I have said that the unbroken monotony of the rolling plain was a source of vague horror to me, for I enjoy how you deign to castigate me, to aim insult into my abdomen. That sustains me! I'm not drifting, but I'm not the same: a voice flung. Breathlessly under a modicum of sun (no kidding), I'm coursing, panting, sweating. Whatever I imbibe as my paltry pharmacology (like vixens in towels) will do me NICHTS, affirms my duality with random piano notes like that idiot John Cage. How can anyone truly gamble talents? What a cosmic retaliation! Belknap, never good at pontificating (he has a big head) prefers scotch and olives, pursues girls and boys, but can't see the moon martyrs sex. He has a splash of foreign blood, denies the basic decencies: "Affectations can be dangerous" (G. Stein). The neighbors think I'm atrocious.

&Paragraph32=

Protruding from the mud: a plinth. The script was a language of hieroglyphics unknown to me and unlike anything ever seen in books, consisting largely of conventional aquatic symbols such as fishes, eels, octopi, crustaceans, molluscs, sharks, whales and the like. Sonia, I'm not kidding: the woof warped in bed. Grotesque beyond the imagination of a Poe or Bulwer, they were damnably human in outline despite webbed hands and feet, shockingly wide and flabby lips, glassy, bulging eyes, and other features less pleasant to recall. Sonia, the swell swillt timely. On the third morning I found soil hard enough to trek upon. There was something: MYSELF. Vast, Polyphemus-like, and loathsome, it darted like a creature of nightmares to the monolith, about which it flung its huge, moist, scaly arms, the while it bowed its hideous head and gave vent to a choreograph of certain measured sounds. "Affectations can be dangerous" moaned a plangent G. Stein, and Belknap, being an Albanian American, confirms my guilt with fanciful falsetto. I cannot think of the deep sea without shame at the nameless things that at this very moment are crawling, floundering on its warm, phlegmatic bed. Thus, my preference for ice cream.

&Paragraph33=

Dear Howard: Oh, how my artichoke heart quakes -- but that's not what I mean. What I mean to write is... useless. I am no pen to your Poe-brain. Nothing is obvious, but lentils, when properly paired, provide its diners amino acid extravaganza. Howard, I'm serious: my tender buttons wilt in your stead, I am at a loss at how to cool down. Fearing food is unfounded, perhaps Little Belknap has yet to fork the choicest cheeses? The fairest fromage? As for glassy, bulging eyes, and similar outward features: New York is mine, and it owes me a living, but I haven't sold a hat in four weeks and will have to shut the millinery. "Affectations can be dangerous" said a gadfly (G. Stein?), but she obviously knew nothing of Fashion Week. Splendid suppers necessitate depth, and depth isn't realized but in the deepest reds... but red was LAST spring. My sweet Howard! (Let me start again.) What I mean to say is: Dessert completes a meal. I allow myself a small dessert once a week (for I want to stay, as they say, PETIT -- the French have a way with worries). Send me your latest weird stories, but no more grief about immigrants: some of my best fish are Greek. And, although it is beets I crave, the best soups are green.

&Paragraph34

Sonia... Sonia... Sonia... thanks for the cheese (which I'll not eat, because it's Greek) and thanks for the letter which I'll reread for the next week (until the cheese doth wilt in my heart, which is weak). Fond of sausage -- most especially the old fashioned baked or fried sort. Like fowl -- but only the white meat. Dark meat I can't bear, but I think you know that already (and I'm not talking about immigrants, green or yellow or Lebanese, much as it freeze my liberalism). Really favourite meal is the regular old New England turkey dinner, with highly seasoned dressing, cranberry sauce, onions, etc. and mince pie for dessert. Yum. (Did I just type "Yum"?) Let me start again... I wander Rhode Island, inventing it (after all, I AM Providence), find poetry in the common, vulgar way neighborhoods shoot up, procreate, or decay. You say it's my Poe-brain -- it is really a love for the horror of life, how it plies my gut... into writing. I'm writing to say plainly: this is my love for you, you make a Spring of me, and though "Affectations can be dangerous," as Gertrude Stein says, you must understand me: I don't despise the Greeks, but the Cape Verdian population makes me crazy. And you are Sonia Greene.

&Paragraph35=

Sonia... Sonia... Sonia... thanks for the cheese (which I'll eat, because you are Sonia Greene) and thanks for the letter which I have read many times this week, in Greek, Ukrainian, French, and, yes, Portuguese. I've even read it in Jewish (I am a completist.) However, still fond of sausage. One cannot change one's stripes. Yummy. (Did I just type "Yummy," too?) Let me start again... I wander the island, inventing it -- I AM Providence, and find poetry in the coarse, aching way the neighbors ask me for money. You say it's my Defoe-brain -- I am nothing of an islander if I am not IMAGINATIVELY alone, a lantern-jawed, Edwardian Crusoe. Maybe, maybe. "Affectations can be dangerous" I'm well aware (yes, that's Stein), but it is also an addiction to the high horrors of life that emerge only in a pristine solitude, a type that is rare, found only in the bleeding of history into rot that is New England. I'm even beginning to like Cape Verdians, and the tattooed sorts that stumble down Empire Street can almost make me desecrate my celibacy. (I am kidding.) I am writing to write floridly: you are my crisis, my one, and hence, my dilemma: you make a Spring of all, and I've a sun of mud. So, let's get married.

&Paragraph36=

I guess what I mean to say to you is that I have always felt that I don't need, or want, to make the decisions in my life but rather that I need DEEP HUNGERS to determine them for me whatever one might decide "hunger" is in the end. I have, as is my predilection, often compared them to slimy fish, or to alien, ghastly creatures that have inundated my sensibility, humiliated my consciousness, and rendered towns and villages hells of mindful corpses. As our friend Stefan Gislason (not one of the dead) succinctly wrote: "a poem without 'fuck' in it is like the proverbial day without sunshine" (yes, he's a mensch). But I'm not joking: I like Cape Verdians, and being with you in New York, while brief and trying, was cloud nine for THIS mensch (who is dying). Sonia, a cancer has breached my throat. My affectations, never wholly safe, have betrayed me to dangers. I'm an artist without a net, and now, without you, have barely enough to eat: anxiety snares, rats claw at my intestines, I have paralyzing dreams. I made seventy-five cents on my latest story, and though I'm being paid to edit, carpal tunnel slays my wrists, and I have little to cash but cliché. I love you, Sonia Greene. Til we meet in the Cave...

Summary (after Kenneth Goldsmith's *Soliloquy*)

The following is a piece of “conceptual writing,” in which I took Kenneth Goldsmith’s “Soliloquy”—a book composed of the entirety of what Goldsmith said for a week (he wore a recorder at all times)—and “auto-summarized” it in Microsoft Word. The program was set for “2 percent” of the text. This text provides the “virus” text of “Kluge.”

Monday

Uh huh. Yeah, of course. Yeah, I know. Yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah. Right, OK, right. Yeah, Willis. Right. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right? Yeah, yeah right. Yeah. Yeah, yeah I'm not interested in that. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right. It's a book, yeah. Right. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah maybe not. Yeah. Yeah, something like that. Yeah yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Oh right right right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I don't know. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I love it, yeah. Right? Yeah, formerly John. Yeah. Uh huh. Great. What if if . Yeah. Yeah, is he cute? Uh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Oh right, right. Great. Great. Yeah, so what? Yeah yeah yeah. Right. Yeah, no that's perfect. I mean it was a weird review, um, yeah yeah, rough and weird, you know, yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah OK. Right. Right. Right. Yeah, it's easy. Great. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Uh huh. Great. Uh huh. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Right. Right. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Right. Right. Right. Yeah. Right. Right. Great. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Oh yeah, oh great, oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah, right. I taught myself, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. No but he, yeah right right. Yeah. Yeah. No at NJIT, yeah. Terrible yeah. There's no no yeah. I've never. Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah yeah I've met him. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Great. Great. Of well, yeah yeah. Great. Great. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Great. Great. Great. Yeah yeah exactly. Great. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Great. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Right. Yeah. Yeah yeah . Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah? Yeah, yeah. Yeah definitely. Yeah. Yeah, we've seen that. We've been there, yeah. Yeah, sure. Yeah, I know. Yeah. Ben Kin oh yeah. Balls, yeah. Right, right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Cheryl? Older guy. Nice guy. Great. Great. Yeah. Yeah yeah, so. Yeah. Great. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Great. Yeah. Great. Yeah. Yeah. It's in frames, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Right. Right. Right. Yeah, me neither. Uh huh. Cheryl? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, pretty neet, huh? Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Oh yeah? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Uh huh. Right. Right. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Right. Yeah. Right. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Cheryl. Great. Yeah. Yeah. Cheryl. Great. Great. Great. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah. You'll love Cheryl's work. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, yeah I I... Right. Oh yeah. Yeah. Bright guy. Bright guy. Yeah intransigent, you know. Right? This called art...yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, he's famous. Yeah it was great. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Right. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah in the opera. Yeah. Right. Right. Maybe yeah maybe. Yeah. Remem yeah of course. Yeah. Hey guys. I'm just, yeah. Nice work. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right Alix? Yeah Cheryl. Yeah, well. Yeah right. Uh huh. Yeah. Yeah, I talk. Oh yeah, great great. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah and. So. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah yeah I don't I never. Yeah. Yeah. Oh yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I wanna go, yeah. I'm sorry, yeah. Yeah, they're cool. We were yeah. Yeah. Yeah, me too. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Great guy. Yeah, you know, just a great guy. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Right right right. Yeah, well then don't go. Yeah. Yeah, you know... Yeah. Yeah records. Yeah records. Yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah FMU. The station manager, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Oh yeah. Oh yeah? Yeah.

Yeah. They're they're, problematic, yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Speech of Cheryl, yeah. Yeah. Yeah I do. Right. Right. Yeah, I love it. On the web, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah Cheryl's gonna put a piece up. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah we'll we're. Yeah yeah yeah yeah. But, uh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah yeah Harry Partch, Schoenberg. Yeah. Yeah. ISDN yeah. Yeah try that. Right. No yeah. Well. Right right I'm yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah yeah. I use lite, yeah. Yeah after John Newman's party. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah. It's insane, yeah. Yeah. It's fun, yeah. Icon, yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah yeah. Yeah I yeah right I got that one right. Yeah I did. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah I've seen it. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah right OK. Yeah. Yeah. Great. Yeah. Yeah, please. Yeah. Yeah, he's fun. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Great.

Tuesday

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Uh huh. Yeah. Yeah. Uh huh. Uh huh. Uh hmmm. Uh huh. Yeah. Uh huh. Uh huh. Right. Uh huh. Yeah, OK, twelve... Let's see, um... yeah. Yeah. Yeah, there. This one, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. OK, yeah yeah, just see it. Yeah. Yeah. Cheryl, yeah. Right, yeah. Yeah, open up yeah, same thing. Yeah. Yeah, why not? Yeah. Nice. Well, yeah, if they make something, yeah. Uh. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah, I'm sorry. Yeah. Alright great. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, so... Great. Yeah, by who. Uh huh. Yeah. Right right. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Um, yeah I guess so, yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah, what the heck, yeah, yeah, it's no big deal. OK, I'm gonna directly from, um, yeah yeah yeah. Great. Great. Yeah, I just. OK, um, yeah. Yeah OK, um, sure. Right, right. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah, it yeah. Right right. Well, that's yeah yeah yeah. Uh, alright. Yeah. Yeah, he did. Well, alright, yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Uh. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, it's easy. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Right. Right. Right. Great. Uh huh. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. Right. Right. Yeah. Right. Uh huh. Yeah yeah. Right. Right. Uh huh. Uh huh. Hmmm. Hmmm. Yeah, yeah definitely. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Uh huh? Oh well, yeah. Yeah. Great. Yeah, I can't. OK yeah OK great. Right. Right. Right. Great. Yeah yeah yeah, really nice. Right. Right. Yeah yeah yeah no. What's what's... yeah. Yeah. Yeah, that's amazing. Yeah. OK? Um, alright. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I will. Marjorie Marjorie, uh. Yeah. The folders... yeah, right. Great! Great. Gonna have fun? Yeah. Yeah, she called, right. Right. Right. Yeah yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah you sound... yeah I could tell. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah, I know. Right. yeah. Right. Uh, OK. 1 C. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I know. Yeah. Yeah? Uh huh. Uh huh. Uh huh. Yeah. Yeah.

Wednesday

Yeah yeah yeah. Oh yeah. all night long, yeah. Yeah, uh, anyway, we'll see. Yeah. Right. Great. Yeah. Great. Yeah, why? Yeah, well, good. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah, everybody knows. Yeah. Yeah. Great. Marjorie. Oh yeah yeah, you're a benevolent guy. Great. Great. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Great great. Yeah I couldn't... Yeah, it was. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. yeah. It's Too Jewish, yeah. Marjorie. Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Right. Yeah yeah. There are words in here and I think it's... yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I know. Yeah. What? Yeah, come. Yeah yeah. I mean, they're really... yeah yeah. Hmmm. Yeah yeah. Right. Yeah. The video, yeah. Yeah, well right. Yeah. Right, socially challenged, yeah. Uh huh. Great. Right. Right right. Yeah, I did. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Right. Yeah Johanna's great. Yeah. Oh Cheryl, yeah. Yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Great. Yeah, it's great. Uh, sure. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Right. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Great. Great great. Right. It's great, yeah. OK, yeah yeah. Yeah, I know. Yeah yeah. Yeah, later. Yeah, yeah thanks. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah good. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, me too. Yes yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah, hmmm. Yeah, yeah, no she's she's... important. With, uh, Marjorie? Yeah yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. Uh huh. Yeah. Yeah it's really nice. Right right right. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. I love Abby, yeah. Yeah yeah. Uh huh. Uh huh. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah and she is friends with Abby. Yeah. Yeah, right. Right. Right. Yeah. Great. Great. Yeah yeah yeah yeah. Right. Yeah. Well. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Right right. Yeah. Yeah. Fantastic, yeah. Right. Right. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah I know. It's great yeah. Yeah, isn't it? Yeah, right right.

Thursday

Yeah, that's good. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Uh huh. Uh huh. Uh huh. Uh huh. Uh huh. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Well, yeah I'm sure. Yeah, it's OK. Right. Yeah? Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah, yes. Uh huh. Great. Yeah, you know, right. Yeah. Yeah, I mean, alright. Great great. Yeah. Yeah, right, no that was good. Right right. Oh yeah yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. Right. Great. Great! Great! Why don't you... yeah yeah yeah. Yeah, call me OK? Yeah. Yeah, he's cute. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah well it's only a few hours, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Great. Right right. Great. Yeah, OK. Yeah I'll letcha know. Yeah, that's a baby. Yeah. Yeah. Such nice guys. Right. Yeah yeah yeah yeah. Your old friend that yeah. Really nice, yeah, it looks. Yeah, so. Yeah yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Charlotte Charlottesville yeah. Yeah, we're gonna have yeah I'm seeing her at 7:30. I just remembered, yeah. Right right. Yeah yeah he was really cool. I knew yeah. Yeah 611 number 702. Right. Yeah sure, he's famous. Yeah yeah yeah like Grand Central and right. Yeah yeah. Uh, OK. Yeah if you have the yeah if you have the sound if yeah yeah I mean if you have speakers anybody can get it sure. It's all her, yeah. Yeah yeah exactly yeah. Yeah exactly. The matzohs on it yeah yeah yeah. Yeah, let's see. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah no. Right. Uh, yeah I can't believe that. Yeah yeah. Uh, yeah yeah yeah. Yeah, I've got see all those books the same size yeah yeah. Yeah. So that's really interesting, yeah. Isn't that funny, yeah? Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah, um, yeah I yeah no it all sounds interesting to me, um, you know I really love this place. Yeah, well I was Bar Mitzvahed at the, uh, wailing wall, yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Alright you guys. Right. Yeah, how's everything going. Yeah great. Great great. Yeah. Yeah yeah we don't. Right. Right. Yeah, well, alright listen. Right, right, yeah. Yeah, alright. Yeah. Yeah yeah I think they're really easy to read. Yeah, I heard she did it yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I miss you guys. OK? Yeah. Uh, Power PC, uh, 8500. Yeah, really? Right. Uh huh. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. 7.5.2, right. Uh huh. Really? Uh. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Uh, yeah. Yeah. Uh. Yeah. Yeah. Uh huh. Yeah. Um, whoa! Yeah, it looks like. Yeah. Right. Right. Cheryl look at this guy, yeah. Yeah, see you later. Yeah. Yeah, she's so sandy. Right. Cheryl. Yeah, uh, I don't know. Yeah yeah, no it's good. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah I was, yeah, I'm glad I missed that. Yeah. Oh yeah. Right. Find out, yeah. Anyway, yeah, c'mon. Yeah, it's really catchy. Where's... yeah, you guys are tiny. Cheryl. Uh, impotent. Who tried to, yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, we should. Yeah, it is. Yeah, maybe nobody's inside. Yeah OK, yeah. You already know, yeah. Yeah, it was packed. Yeah. Yeah it was Ubu, yeah. Cheryl, yeah. Yeah. Uh, around? Uh huh. RISD was cool, yeah. Yeah. What we're thinking, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, the business section. Yeah, PDF. Yeah I did yeah they have a website. Yeah. Beth, yeah. Yeah, you're not. Yeah. Yeah, well I like guys with big noses. Uh, Long Island. Yeah. Yeah. Right right right. Yeah. Right? Oh yeah. Yeah, I know. Yeah, that's true. I telnet, yeah. Yeah, it's easy, yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. I mean, yeah, sure. Yeah and then work on Panix yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah, well sure. Yeah, no no no. 6 oh oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah, maybe. Yeah yeah. Yeah. I like Daniel, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Keep, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It's very cool, yeah yeah. Yeah yeah no. Yeah, it isn't hard. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. It is, yeah. Yeah, embarrassing. Yeah yeah. Yeah yeah. Great. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, oh it is. Yeah, look at that. Yeah, she's a trip. Yeah. Right? Yeah yeah. Yeah, it's a depressing building. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, oh it is. Yeah, look at that. Yeah, she's a trip. Yeah. Right? Yeah yeah. Yeah.

Friday

Alright. Yeah, there's no food. Right. Yeah yeah. Yeah, it's easier. Right right. Yeah. Alright. Alright. Yeah. Yeah. Uh huh. I mean, yeah. Alright? Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah, it's really good. Yeah. Yeah. Alright! Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, look, she's smiling. Yep gonna stay with them, yeah, that's right. Yeah. Uh. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, don't dawdle. Yeah yeah yeah. OK, yeah yeah. Alright. Yeah. Yeah, I'm telling ya. Yeah. Alright. Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah I love that. Um, yeah yeah. Yeah, hello. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Yeah, he's pegged. Yeah, we're ready, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, several years ago. Yeah yeah. Yeah, we got one. Yeah, that sounds great. Right right. It was Roanoke, yeah. Very much, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Really, you know, I think it's, yeah yeah. Yeah it's insubstantial. Yeah, well. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Um, yeah yeah yeah we will we will start. I'm gonna I'm gonna pick. Yeah. Yeah. Oh, yeah. Alright. Oh, yeah. Yeah, you'll enjoy Bruce. Yeah, alright, yeah, I'm gonna go to Aikido tonight I hope. Alright! Alright? Alright. Alright? Alright. Yeah, you think so? Alright, yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. I only got everything from you, yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Uh, yeah I have the original here, yeah. Ah, yeah, aw. Yeah, she's seven. Yeah. Uh huh. Yeah. Yeah. Back food, yeah. Yeah, they love dogs here. Yeah, that's a hassle. Yeah, no. I believe so, yeah. Student discount, yeah. Yeah, definitely do. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, where is this? Right. Yeah, who wrote it? Yeah yeah. Uh huh. Yeah, oh yeah, really. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah? Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah, it is time consuming. Yeah yeah I like that. Oh yeah? Yeah. Yeah, right right. Yeah, she's really nice. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. It's really a. Yeah. Yeah, no. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Yeah, thanks a lot. Yeah. Right, well that's yeah. I mean what... yeah. For you, yeah yeah. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah. I'm sure, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I like her work. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Right. Right? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, it's it's really. Right? Yeah, they're good. Yeah. Yeah, Graham's a good guy. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, Alix told me. Yeah. Yeah. Really stop or, yeah? Yeah, all.

Saturday

Yeah. Yeah. It's yeah. All right. Huh? Yeah. Yeah, it's really weird. Yeah, it's a 10:20. Yeah, they're nice dogs. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah great. Yeah. Yeah, right. All right. All right. All right. Yeah. Yeah, no reports. Yeah. 28. Right. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Huh? Yeah. Cheryl. All right. Yeah, just fuck it. All right. Yeah yeah yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah Bruce knows it. Max. Yeah, those are shells. Nice throw, Cheryl. Yeah yeah. Yeah, me too. Yeah, they're very nice. Yeah, uh huh. Yeah. Yeah escapade. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, should be really nice. Yeah. All right. Yeah. Yeah. It's getting there, yeah. Yeah, what's going on? Yeah, that's amazing. Right. Ah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah to like what? All right, all right. Oh yeah? Yeah there was. Oh yeah? Yeah. Yeah. You know, yeah. Ceramics, yeah yeah. All right. Yeah, why don't you? Yeah, that's me. What an idiot, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, he's pretty evil, yeah. Oh yeah, oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah, it's very exciting. Yeah. Yeah. I love opera, yeah. Yeah, I love it. Yeah. Yeah, good child. Yeah. I see, yeah. Yeah. Max. Max. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I feel good. I did, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, what about them? Yeah? Oh yeah? Why? Yeah yeah. Yeah, me too. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah yeah big mall. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Max. All right. Yeah yeah all right yeah. Yeah, they're like loafers. Yeah? Yeah, so was I. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, Cheryl's pretty upset about it. Yeah still, huh? All right all right. All right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Uh huh. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Right here. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, this is wild. Yeah. MTV, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, we'll talk, yeah, let's let's yeah, I will. Yeah, I tried. Yeah yeah. Yeah, they're cool. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah we're gonna make a 4:44. Yeah yeah, our is better. All right. All right. You got a yeah yeah yeah. All right? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. All right... Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah, let us know. All right. All right. All right. Yeah yeah. Yeah. It was nice, yeah. Right right right. Right right. The work looks great, yeah. Right right. Yeah, no no. You're right. Yeah

I yeah I don't know. Yeah I yeah I don't know. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, me neither. On Church they used to, yeah yeah. Yeah, no they're small. Yeah. Oh, yeah, Cat. Right, I like Cat, yeah. Right right. Yeah. Right, right. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, Caracas connection. Yeah yeah. Oh yeah? Oh yeah, we're dishing. Right right right. Yeah yeah. You're right. Yeah, well I was. Yeah, they used to. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Babe, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, the Milk Bar, right. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Oh yeah. Right right right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, we do, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right right. Right. Yeah. All right. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Where is that, yeah. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Uh uh. Yeah. Everybody once, yeah yeah. Oh my god, yeah. Yeah. Doing yeah yeah. Right. Right. Right. Yeah. Well, yeah, but then yeah, like yeah honey you look good. Right. Yeah, she's plastic, yeah. Yeah. Cheryl, Cheryl. Yeah, where? Provisions, yeah. Yeah. By boat, yeah. Uh huh. All right. It really, yeah, what's? Yeah. Yeah, these are these. Yeah. All right. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah, I know. Yeah. Right right right right. Yeah. Yeah, we love Gong. Yeah, I, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, we're done. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah, I don't have it yeah. Yeah. All right. Nice. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. All right. Yeah. All right. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Uh, god. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah yeah.

Sunday

Yeah. Yeah. Uh huh. Right? Right. Alright. Right? Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, they're alright. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, Ginny. Yeah yeah. Alright. Yeah? Cheryl. Yeah. Yeah? Uh huh. Yeah? Right? Alright. Yeah. Alright, well. Yeah, it's so pretty. Yeah. What? Yeah? Cheryl. Chagall, yeah. It certainly wasn't the, uh uh, the Jewish show, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Alright. Alright. Yeah yeah, that's the that's the famous, uh, place down there over there. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It's really nice, yeah. Yeah, finally. Yeah, it's always stuffy. Yeah. Uh, for four. Cheryl. Yeah. Yeah, yeah I think it's croquet. Yeah. It yeah. Yeah, so soft. Yeah but it's actually a table and sure, yeah. Cheryl? Yeah yeah, uh, toasted dry please and and a, uh, coffee. Uh huh. Yeah. Yeah, that might be nice. Yeah. I love it, yeah. Yeah, let's go somewhere else. With Ann though, yeah. Yeah. Somebody was, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Uh, how so? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah, no but its... Uh, no. Yeah, a little bit a little bit of drool. Right. Yeah. Yeah yeah that was really, that was really idiotic. Bruce. Alright. Yeah, it is. Good, yeah, OK. Uh, it was OK, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Cheryl. Yeah. Way more academic, yeah yeah. Cheryl. Cheryl. Yeah. Hi guys. Yeah. Yeah yeah, that's right. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Some old standard, yeah. Yeah, he's interesting. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, look. Right Nick? Yeah, I love yeah. OK, yeah. Yeah. Pretty rich stuff, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, of course. Yeah, right. Yeah, mote is amazing. Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. Interesting, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, that's right. Yeah yeah no that's. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah but not Marjorie. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Yeah, it's good. Yeah. You like talk, yeah. Bruce? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, last time we were out. Yeah. Yeah, he failed. East Village, yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Pretty much, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, completely impoverished. Yeah, no that's better. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Yeah, it's pretty good. Yeah, right, yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Sorry guy. Yeah, they're very funny. Uh huh. Cheryl. Alright dogs. Yeah. Yeah, it's like 7:15. Yeah, she's beautiful. Yeah, she is. Baron, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, they're terrific. Yeah. Yeah, I got three. C'mon guys c'mon guys. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right? Yeah, you're right, she's gonna bark here. Uh huh. Yeah, who is he? Nice guy? Right? Yeah, I got them. Yeah. Yeah. Little rusty? Yeah, let's get new wheels. Yeah, it's pretty, isn't it? Yeah, you know what? Yeah go on. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, aren't they? Nice. Yeah, her trail. Right. Yeah, c'mon. Yeah yeah. Yeah, she's no philosopher. Bruce? Yeah. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Uh, I think it's... yeah... work... yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Right. Right. Yeah. Uh huh. Right. Yeah. Right? Uh huh yeah yeah well. Uh huh. Uh huh. Uh huh. Uh huh. Yeah yeah yeah. Uh huh. Uh huh. Yeah. Right. Right. Yeah, get in touch. Yeah, something like that, yeah, it's impossible. Yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Well. Right. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Cheryl?

Privileging Language: The Text in Electronic Writing

The following essay started as a short response to Chapter Six of *First Person*, “The Pixel/The Line,” which Noah Wardrip-Fruin invited me to contribute to *Electronic Book Review*’s online version of that text. It was written in the summer of 2005.

1.

There are several things I’d like to write in response to all three essays of “The Pixel/The Line”—by John Cayley, Camille Utterback and Bill Seaman—but I’d like to lead into this response by quoting a passage from Seaman’s “Interactive Text and Recombinant Poetics.” My primary concern will be with the issue of “text” and “meaning” and the reduced terms with which these are both often approached in electronic writing. Here, he is describing the role of text in an application such as his own *The World Generator/The Engine of Desire*:

Each field carries an evocative meaning force. Our embodied history of experience of past contexts represents another expansive field that is brought into this delicate equation. As we encounter virtual or computational spaces we experience an ongoing, time-based summing of meaning forces. Thus text presents one field of meaning force that can only be understood contextually in relation to other “neighboring” meaning forces—other media elements and living processes. The “word” is not valued in a hierarchy over other media elements.

Seaman, like a latter day Marinetti, is celebrating the liberation not only of words but the breakdown of boundaries between the “sign” of the word and the “sign” of other media elements including video, sound, and still image¹. Add to this the notion of interac-

¹ I’m using “sign” following Seaman’s lead in introducing the term from the writing of Charles Sanders Peirce, traditionally considered the founder of both pragmatism and modern semiotics. But it is unclear why Seaman introduces Peirce into the equation except to comment generically that “Peirce suggests... that meaning is that which the sign conveys,” which is either 1) obvious or 2) a belief not specific to Peirce but to an entire field of study. Nor does Seaman actually adopt the use of the term “sign” throughout his essay, opting instead for terms like “emergent meaning” and “meaning force” which he appears to have adopted from Fernande Saint-Martin’s *Semiotics of Visual Language*. In general, this intermingling of terms adopted from other writers—Derrida and Eistenstein are two others—combined with an inadequate specificity in his own use of them—an unwillingness to *make them his own*—is a feature of Seaman’s writing which I find a little troubling, especially given Seaman’s extraordinary and suggestive accomplishment with *The World Generator* and the marshalling of forces to explain it. Perhaps it’s merely symptomatic of the dual pressures of satisfying idioms of both literary theory and computer science, which can often result in an amalgam language that has the sheen of scholarship and systematic thinking though there is no distinction between when a proposition is being made (or theory being defended) and when the writer is merely describing his artistic creations. A theory is made to be disproved—it is a challenge, not an affirmation—but certainly one can’t disprove what it is an artist feels his or her artistic creation is doing. My sense, also, is that the attempt to discuss language in purportedly abstract terms is dangerous when it comes to electronic writ-

tivity and “vuser” complicity in the creation of the art work, the relativity of the meaning of any single element is increased exponentially, even as the context in which these elements exist—the “virtual world”—remains as novel and inscrutable as the machine itself. While it is inarguable that the meaning of a word can change in a different context, is it really an appreciable difference if the entirety of the “context” is characterized by utter relativity (as opposed to “contingency”)? “Democracy,” for instance, is a context in which one’s understanding of “justice” exists (or upon which it is contingent)—“justice” itself being a term that has existed throughout history, even in times not characterized at all by a democratic ethos. But the word “justice” contrasted with the words “fish fry” only serve to make the two words more *material*—more present as words in a physical environment—but also to render both relatively mute, and entirely banal, in terms of “meaning.”²

My sense is that no writer of fiction, poetry or any of the conventional genres of print-based or performance-oriented writing would be satisfied that their words had a “meaning force” that was only available within the context of the “delicate equation” of an “expansive field.” Ezra Pound might be the poet who most explored the art of image/text juxtaposition on the page—not to mention the collaging of different languages, styles, and genres such as history or satire—but struggled for “coherence” against even his own technique. I don’t imagine Alexander Pope or Jonathan Swift would have been nearly as effective satirists in a universe characterized by an inchoate “summing” of words, and neither *Lolita* nor *Naked Lunch* would have been banned (or Salman Rushdie sentenced to death) were their content have to have been so utterly transformed by the “neighboring” graphics of the book cover or paper quality, not to mention the person reading the book. Even purely aesthetic “avant-garde” enterprises, like the poetry of Gertrude Stein or John Ashbery, rely to a strong degree on the force of meanings as they are contingent within our life experiences, and not on the brief frisson that an arbitrary juxtaposition of words and images provides. The effect of surprise is one of the hardest to accomplish in the arts.

It doesn’t appear to be of great import to new media writers, especially those involved in interactivity, 3D spaces and multimedia to utilize the technology to magnify the impact and specificity of language as we have come to know it through the centuries, but rather to reduce or evaporate this impact for the sake of something else—experience of language in space or time, for example, or of language as some sort of “ambient” experience, or, in this case, of language as a participant in a “recombinant” universe jointly occupied by sounds, images, videos and the user’s interactions. Because new media writers tend to program their pieces from the ground up, creating their own interfaces entirely dissimilar to conventional interfaces—the web browser, for example, where millions of people get their electronic writing—the tendency seems to be to use text that itself has no trace of conventional communication, and then to call it “poetry” because it is clearly not anything else. There is nothing wrong with this, of course—poetry likes the company—but is it possible to achieve any of the above without having to reduce language to a useful marker for the passing of time, or as a way to keep one’s balance in a 3D space?

Seaman makes a point of announcing that, in his *The World Generator/The Engine of Desire*, the “word” is “not valued in a hierarchy over other media elements.” This

ing, since the *atomization* of language—its utter divorce from syntax, commonalities of spelling, cultural contingencies, and quite often the “author”—is practically a given in a truly “digital” universe, a universe in which language is vulnerable to algorithmic processes, and in which the processes themselves are written with language (of a sort).

² See chapters in Richard Rorty’s *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* on this matter, especially his writing on Kuhn and Derrida.

smacks of a sort of egalitarianism that seems to me endemic in new media art criticism, an egalitarianism that seems to be consistent with the hacker/libertarian ethos of internet culture, but which also takes its cue from John Cage and Robert Rauchenberg, probably the two artists most responsible for our understanding of non-“hierarchical” all-inclusiveness of an artwork in relation to a democratic, even anarchic, tendency. (I’d include Duchamp in this line, but there is a metaphysics, or even ‘pataphysics, operating in his work that suggests, if anything, a “hierarchy,” and he was very scrupulous in choosing which items to permit into, and hence to allow to elaborate, his parallel art-historical universe.) This egalitarianism obviously also derives from the fact that, like in a universal Turing machine, all types of sensible elements, such as sound, image and text, can be reduced to the same principle components of bytes, as John Cayley points out in “Literal Art,” quoting Peter Lunenfeld: “As all manner of representational systems are recast as digital information, they can all be stored, accessed, and controlled *by the same equipment.*”

However, I’d like to argue that one can’t simply say that the word is “another element” to be treated like a sound or a color if one is to do justice to the notion of language as a very specific ability that humans possess, one that has been shaped by the sediments of conventions and conversations layered over several centuries. Certainly language *can* be used this way—Steve Reich’s early experiments with looped speech, for example, or the proto-Pop painter Stuart Davis’s canvases are two well-known examples—but even in these cases, in which not much language was used, the contingencies of both history and culture (even race) played large roles in their effects. I’d also like to argue that in much “electronic writing” (or digital art that is *also* classed that way because language is a primary component of the experience, such as Camille Utterback’s “Text Rain”), language is being used to solve a formal problem in the artistic project—often to make the experience more concrete or to round out a metaphor³—and that the electronic elements of the project have not come around in order to solve a problem in the literary effort. Which is to say: digital art quite often needs poetry more than poetry needs digital art, though one would think in the field of “electronic writing” the latter should be more true.

2.

I’m reasonably well versed in experimental poetic and (in the case of Cage) musical techniques that rely on principles of polysemeity—the rupturing of once-stable meanings of words to liberate their unconventional or even hitherto unheard of meanings—and aleatoric methods (the use of chance), in which seemingly natural sentence and even word order is randomly corrupted with the goal of producing new experiences that were not “intended” by the author. Cage’s “reading through” various “stable” texts—such as his diaries, or letters from friends, or *Finnegans Wake*—are prime examples of this⁴, but so are lesser known phenomena such as the conceptual literary works of Vito Acconci in the Sixties or the live-edited poetry events of Steve Benson and Bruce An-

³ N. Katherine Hayles essay “The Time of Electronic Poetry: From Object to Event” contains a description of John Cayley’s *riverisland* that suggest this relationship: “The gradual transitions between the poems enact what the images of flowing water suggest, a continuous stream of sound and images with nodal points where the reader can linger to appreciate the local sights.” Cayley has been particularly aware of how the effects of his pieces are buttressed by the over-arching metaphor that his imagery and audio tracks imply.

⁴ From another angle, one could say that Cage is primarily interested in introducing us to the world of chance and has found language to be one of the more effective ways to achieve this, just as piano notes and colors serve in other works of his.

draws. Both principles, polysemeity and the aleatoric, are touched on in Craig Dworkin's description of Andrews' early poetic technique:

In the resultant mesh of language, themes only latent in the source texts emerge in a text animated by the tension between atomized words and the pull of an emergent syntax: "Distinctly Luck Coal Stern," "Limited Capital Cupola Plosive," "Noise Hypotenuse." The language of these poems is motivated along multiple, but unprivileged axes; at a local level, the collision of irreconcilable linguistic elements frustrates both the referential pull of the sign and the inevitable, if tenuous, invitations of even the most paratactic syntax to establish conceptual associations. Language, in these poems, idles, the gears grating.⁵

Dworkin describes language as trying to come together, seemingly of its own will, to form sentences, and from there "conceptual associations," possible in even so charged and atomized a universe as a radical Language poem. The key word here is "tension"—this isn't a programmed atomization but one that creates a pull between "irreconcilable linguistic elements" and "conceptual associations." Later in his career, Dworkin writes, Andrews' writing began to deal more with the phrase, and as a result approached a more coherent thematics.

While the highly ironized and ventriloquizing transcriptions of public speech in these works may initially appear more accessible than the earlier non-lexical work, the writing is still significantly anasemantic. Although the content of these phrases is frequently provocative and offensive—"suck the testicles," "sink the boat people"—the emphasis is less on the particular content of the phrases than on the social work undertaken by such language. The disjunctive and irreconcilable contexts of the phrases underscores the sorts of social and psychological constructions that language enables, enacts, structures.

One should read the phrase "social work" above not only in the light of progressive politics, with which Language poetry is often allied, but also as a performative utterance (in the philosophy of Austin), in which speech such as "suck the testicles," in most cases an entirely irrational command, creates a profoundly discomfiting effect. This is more than what is now considered a commonplace activity of postmodern artists—that their activities "subvert" a seemingly "normative" or "privileged" way of looking at things. Andrews' writings, and his activities in the live-edited performances, is more like an *assault* on meaning, and he is hardly waiting, like an ivory-tower visionary, to be discovered, but is actively making a case for language to be used as a counter-paradigmatic thrust, and way beyond the confines of mere aesthetic or academic discourse.

This is language that seems to fit in with Seaman's paradigm of how he intends his language to operate in the liberated field of *The World Generator*, but Andrews seems to address the larger purpose of why language is being used at all. As Andrews himself writes in his essay "Electronic Poetics":

Even though the meanings of language often seem more like an afterthought than the organizing principles in the digital domain, sense & its production (both narrowly linguistic & more broadly semiotic as well as social) remain key—beyond decorative (even if kinetic) visuals & sound. Language's social resonances still need center stage, choreographed to implicate situations beyond the immediate GUI (Graphic User Interface) & to 'remind' us, by interpretable social choices (& the social force) of language, of the world(s) beyond. Semantic relations (with arrangements of time & space & grammar & typography & sound as vehicles) still top the hit list of socially relevant material. An

⁵ <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/andrews/about/dworkin.html>

immersive virtual space may encourage us to forget this, to vaporize everything outside the frame. If language is social, how can we make it resistant to a VR set-up? How to get beyond the razzle-dazzle (or comforting aura) of absorption, or of programmed works that make the prior socialization of the material (& the social antagonisms or dissonances built into them) seem to vanish.⁶

New media art and literature can often become a celebration of a successful feat of engineering, but beyond the basic “look what we can do with words,” there has to be some notion of address: language must be setting out to do something, not sit in a vacuum (a sense, ironically, reified by the very novelty of the *unconventional* machine), a marker for that part where language *could be* used were one to want to say or do something.

Coincidentally, the primary content of Andrews’ texts—if not in the meanings of the words themselves, the paradigm to which they point and hope to corrupt—is not concerned with describing how the artistic product is itself working. Too often, the textual element of electronic art pieces seem to be clippings from the artist’s notebooks about how he or she wishes the viewer to feel when experiencing the piece—“you are seeing this in time... bodies move through space” etc. The effect is something like that of the slogans on the walls of Communist factories, an attempt to reify an experience just in case you forgot that you weren’t working for a classless Utopia. This demonstrates a lack of trust in letting words do what they can do, and which music and images can’t do, such as be contradictory, paradoxical, and—as the famous Eliza program demonstrates—psychologically ventriloquistic, suggesting the presence of another human in the room—in your head—when there clearly isn’t one. Visual paradoxes such as those of M.C. Escher will never be more than analogies for the power of a paradox conveyed through language, such as in a parable or koan, or in the short stories of Borges or Kafka. W.H. Auden wrote in *The Dyer’s Hand* that the one limitation of opera is that you can’t express doubt in music, and that “No opera plot can be sensible, for people do not sing when they are feeling sensible.” My question, then, is: does text in an electronic art piece suffer its own set of limitations? Because of its place in an interactive, digital, and often 3-dimensional universe, is text not able to exhibit signs of doubt and sensibility, and given the lack of a “set-up” appropriate to humor—can it ever be funny?

John Cayley ends his essay “Literal Art” with this question: “How can one justify an engagement with verbal art, with language, when symbolic manipulation may be indistinguishable from machinic symbols?” Quite often, works in which “human” symbolic and “machinic” symbolic languages mesh are described as making us more aware of the “materiality” of text, and of creating some new engagement of the individual with the computer. I think this critical paradigm, while opening up new vistas for the scholar as N. Katherine Hayles has demonstrated in her writing on Talan Memmott’s “Lexia to Perplexia” in *Writing Machines*⁷, is making it easier to neglect the other, and I think far greater, possibilities for language in electronic writing. Electronic writing has to offer more than the techno-holism of claiming that “text” is no longer “privileged” over other types of data, as if this should be celebrated like the defeat of Fascism. I actually think that even under the best, and most normative, of conditions, it’s hard enough work to make words mean anything, if by “mean” we intend something more significant than

⁶ www.ubu.com/papers/andrews_electronic.html

⁷ (MIT Press, 2002). Readers of Hayles’ book should seek out a copy of the prescient, more wide-ranging volume by Steve McCaffery and bpNichol, *Rational Geomancy: The kids of the book-machine : the collected research reports of the Toronto Research Group, 1973-1982* (Talonbooks, 1992).

the utilitarian or blandly habitual: “the apple is red.”⁸ The effectiveness of language in artistic experiences relies on sensitivity to these scales of values.

3.

This brings me to my second point, which is to the consideration of whether, in works of “electronic writing,” text is being used to solve a problem tossed up by the formal issues of the art piece, or whether the art piece has been created to extend or expand our understanding of words and language.

Several of the works that Camille Utterback writes about in “Unusual Positions—Embodied Interaction with Symbolic Spaces” seem, to me, to fall into the former category. This isn’t to say that “Stream of Consciousness: An Interactive Poetic Garden”—in which words are projected onto a tiny artificial stream and move along its currents, even fall off a tiny waterfall and eventually down a drain, as if they were part of the water itself—was not conceived in some single burst of inspiration by David Small and Tom White. It’s that the piece has the feel of an application for which a limitless number of texts would be suitable, and the texts that are or have been used for the piece do not, in themselves, seem to benefit from being seen in this environment. Utterback writes:

In one sequence of text the characters are symbols from the periodic table of elements—“Ni,” “Ca,” etc. These symbols morph into the word for their corresponding image when you stop them midstream. The boundary between words “standing for” elements that make up the physical world and “standing in” for those elements as a physical object in the fountain is blurred as you push and pull them around the water, manipulating them with your fingers instead of your mind.

As this clever interpretation suggests, the text in this piece is intended to, as I stated earlier, round out a metaphor—add an additional layer of signification to render the basic pun in the title more complex.⁹ It also attempts to move the piece away from being a soothing, ingenious, and largely useless application to a literary contrivance. Further, the machine, despite its being disguised as a natural geological form, takes on a modest amount of gravitas because of its effective display of its ability to *harm* language—to show that language is vulnerable to its play of algorithm.

This lopsidedness—a huge amount of programming and engineering at the service of a very limited textual experience—is not unprecedented. Most of Marcel Duchamp’s work, while not being engineering marvels in the conventional sense¹⁰, were only meaningful given the textual tag, in the former of the title, that was placed on them. A whole slew of conceptualists, ranging from Bruce Nauman to Ian Hamilton Finlay, came after him.

⁸ John Cayley writes that the on-off switching of a pixel is not a “cultural moment” in the way that the changing of a letter is. One might argue that the play of meanings on the level of “the apple is red” is itself not a “cultural moment,” certainly not within the range of possible meanings that Andrews’ is aware of. Pragmatist philosophy such as that of Peirce generally draws a line between those statements of truth that are largely habitual and not worth disproving to those that require recourse to a universe of contingencies to be truly “meaningful.”

⁹ When I saw the piece in Queens at the Museum of the Moving Image, there was a different algorithms at play: placing blue track light over the words, which were merely an alphabetical list, caused the words to spawn synonyms.

¹⁰ Calving Tompkins in his biography of Marcel Duchamp describes a great deal of ingenuity that went into the construction of his final tableau, *Étant Donnés*, itself an object lesson in the virtue of limited “interactivity.”

More recent works by The Prize Budget for Boys¹¹, such as “Basho’s Frogger” and the now famous “Pac-Mondrian,” are constructions intended to elaborate either the basic pun in the title or, in the case of “Basho’s Frogger,” the haiku hidden in the high score board: “FRG PND PLP.” The internet project “They Rule,” which that gives the user a graphical interface with which to explore the board members of several large corporations and functions more like an editorial than any other form of art, relies, like “Stream of Consciousness,” on a closed set of data-based text and a title. Even if the text is limited to the names of corporations and the proper names of their board members, the artificial syntax of the connecting lines—a series of accusatory *is alsos*—creates a powerful, and largely “literary,” effect, perhaps the first political cartoon to rely entirely on a database¹².

Whereas Duchamp and the PBR intend a sort of Dada shock effect, and “They Rule” intends to editorialize, “Stream of Consciousness,” seems to be largely about exploring alternative man-computer interfaces. But unlike “They Rule,” which makes its impact entirely because of the chosen data, “Stream of Consciousness” seems to me to be a piece that hasn’t really found its text yet¹³. If one understands the engineering and programming of “Stream of Consciousness” as a constraint, in the same way that not using the letter “e” in George Perec’s novel *La Disparition* as a constraint, or the engineering parameters of the Cave at Brown University function as a constraint, then the next step should be to find the text, perhaps the *only* text, that is suitable—the “elegant solution”—to make the object more than a curio like Vaucanson’s Duck¹⁴. Without this suitable text, then it appears that any text will satisfy the constraint—the engineering, the physical object—and the effect is, I think, diminished. That is, the sort of variability that we appreciate in an application is actually something one would choose to diminish in a bachelor machine—a useless but beautiful product of engineering.

What if one replaced the text with the names of the politicians of the French Revolution? Or the victims of 9/11? What would happen to the metaphor of flowing streams then? What if used as the source text *Finnegans Wake*—one presses the word and the various puns of the text are elaborated—that would certainly make it “literary,” but is it worth the effort? How about using the text of Kenneth Goldsmith’s *The Weather*, which is merely a transcription of all the weather forecasts for an entire year in New York City? While I can admire “Stream of Consciousness” for its craftsmanship and cleverness, it’s largely “silent” when it comes to the use of language or the many things language really does—the stakes in the language itself are low, and yet language is there looming as the sublime background against which the piece behaves. I’m sure that attaching a more sophisticated algorithm—such as in the work of David Rokeby or the Neil Hennessey’s “Jabberwocky Engine”—would really solve this problem, but perhaps

¹¹ www.pfbf.ca.

¹² www.theyrule.net. I’m eliding a great deal of the functionality of this site.

¹³ Interestingly, Christiane Paul in her survey *Digital Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003) doesn’t mention the nature of the text at all, nor does she describe the interactivity of the piece, sticking instead to the metaphor implicit in the title.

¹⁴ The poem Christian Bök has been the most provocative and convincing proselyte for the use of the highest constraints in literature to liberate the most beautiful properties of language. He writes in “The New Ennui”: “The text makes a Sisyphean spectacle of its labour, willfully crippling its language in order to show that, even under such improbably conditions of duress, language can still express an uncanny, if not sublime, thought.”

there is some text generator out there that would really lift the piece into the continuum of strong conceptual literary projects¹⁵.

My sense is that text largely solves a formal problem in Utterback's "Text Rain" as well, but I think, in that case, the text serves kind of like the lyric to a pop song—it doesn't have to be Shakespeare, but it has to be tasteful—not distracting when you just want to dwell on the emotional charge of the voice, but there when you decide to pay attention to the words. Thom Swiss has grown increasingly more adept at creating texts that work in variable environments, moving from an earlier kind of MTV-ish spoken word text/image interaction to pieces that employ recombination and narrative indeterminacy, not to mention a graphic style more suggestive of Diane Slattery-esque glyphs than videos. Noah Wardrip-Fruin's "Screen" also involves a fun interaction with moving text, but it evolves into a game in which you are supposed to "save" the paragraphs projected on the walls from dissolution. The text lends an air of extreme pathos to the losing situation the user—and by extension everyone involved in *life*—is put into by not being able to hold on to memories, for the piece ends with a cataclysm of words disappearing into the ground regardless of the user's skill. Again, like with the lyrics to a pop song, or the screenplay to a film, or maybe even one of the texts of Young Hae Chang's Flash pieces, one has only a clinical interest in seeing the words on a page, realizing that the text can only be fully experienced in the live, time-based, aural and visual experience of the thing.

The text for "The Legible City," which I was never able to read very easily in my experiences with the piece, seems to me largely arbitrary. The primary function of text is to provide the user with an exaggerated sense of the scale of the "buildings"—we all know that a ten foot tall letter is very large and hence an aberration, whereas a ten foot tall red block seems like, well, a block, neither unusually large or small¹⁶. Letters are commonly vector-based in graphics programs, and hence don't seem, in "The Legible City," to be reduced forms of themselves as experienced in print—in fact, they are expanded into 3D. Had Shaw used renderings of buildings, trees and other items from nature, they would have looked absurdly reduced, especially given the state of technology in that Max Headroom era. The "legibility" of "The Legible City" seems, to me, to be in the way one reads urban spaces, with its squares, main boulevards, back streets and alleys and, most effectively, desolate outer limits. Unlike with a pop song, I don't even think the text was "there" if you wanted to pay attention it.

¹⁵ "Conceptual writing" is as difficult to define as "electronic writing" since much of it is also considered part of the conventional "art" world as well. An excellent online source for conceptual writing can be found at: www.ubu.com/concept/.

¹⁶ John Cayley brought this to attention in conversation—that one can use our conventional sense of how large words should be for comfortable reading as a way to situate a user in three-dimensional space in an environment such as the Cave. He expands on this issue in his article (written with Dmitri Lemmerman), "Lens: The Practice and Poetics of Writing in Immersive VR: a Case Study with Maquette" (unpublished): "To support the differences they establish, they must be relatively complex shapes, and yet they must become very familiar, in the culture where they are current, especially to literate viewers, for whom their very differentiated complexities enable reading. Graphically and in terms, once again, of phenomenology, this gives us—culturally, experientially—a vocabulary of graphic forms about whose size we have very specific ideas and expectations. If you see the shape 'N' you expect it to be a 'legible' size. When you see a '◆' you do not have the same expectations. This phenomenon has, in my view, major implications for an emergent phenomenology of text in space."

4.

Like screenplay writing and, more recently, hypertext fiction, electronic writing that relies on interactivity, unusual interfaces, idiosyncratic engineering, on-the-fly web searches and 3D seem to be forging a new textual aesthetics¹⁷. Matt Gorbet, in his response to Utterback's essay, observes that her examples "share another similarity in the nature of the text they present: they employ short forms of text such as poetry, quotations, and symbols. Such texts are effective because they can be quickly grasped and have immediate impact, allowing visitors to start reading anywhere and spend as much or as little time as they like with the piece." He then asks some very poignant questions:

Given these observations about the simplicity of interaction and the brevity of content, a question presents itself: using a simple, familiar physical interaction which maintains the users' sense of control, how far can the complexity of the content be pushed? Is there a necessary correlation between simple interaction and simple content? Or is it possible to create a body-centric interactive piece with the storytelling capacity of an epic novel or a play?

My guess is that the "simplicity of the interaction" does not constrain the degree of "complexity" of the text so much as the sum of the parts of the application might—particularly the screen, whether it be water or a wall, and the limits of how many lines you can have on it. Hypertext fiction with its clickable words is as simple an interface as can be, and yet the texts are often quite complex in these spaces. Certainly, the fact that letters and words usually appear at a speed controlled by the programmer of the piece, even in "The Legible City" in which pedal cycles are linked to a set response on-screen—make it impractical for long or complicated texts, even if you found a way to "flip to a new page."

As Steven Pinker points out in *The Language Instinct*, human beings are born with a capacity to learn language and use it effectively, complexly, even beautifully, with no instruction whatsoever. But *reading* is not a human instinct—people have to be trained and have to practice, and some humans, primarily dyslexics, are very effective communicators but struggle to gather any information through text¹⁸. I think it is an unacknowledged fact among electronic writers that even with the most basic human/text interface, text does not enter the mind so easily, and we tend to underestimate how much futzing with the basic components of this interface—putting text on a screen, for example, or letting it unroll at a non-user-controllable rate—limits the complexity of the text one can use. But as in most writing that involves forms, especially poetry, these limitations can be seen as constraints that will serve to demonstrate deeper properties of language that might never have been seen before—hence, an artistic challenge.

¹⁷ As Andrews notes in "Electronic Poetics," text can be the "organizing principle" in a piece, much like the text was the organizing principle in Christian Bök's Rubik's Cube poem *Bibliomechanics*, but I'm having a hard time coming up with examples of electronic writing—outside of content heavy web pages—formed the primary organizational principle of a work. My settings of Bok's "Eunoia" and Dan Farrell's "The Inkblot Record" could be examples, but they might also be considered clever ways of organizing data along fairly conventional web architectural lines.

¹⁸ (HarperPerennial, 1989), 189. Ironically, digital media's valorization of gestural language, such as in animated poetry, a language that seems to "return us to our bodies," seems to suggest a sort of neo-Romantic primitivism, but most cultures have lacked a written language, and so the experience of "gestural" language clearly exists on the literary side of the pre-literate/literate divide, not on the more seemingly natural and "bodily" pre-literate side. Which is to say, making language move like bodies hardly returns us to a pre-digital existence, but is more like the icing on the cake of literacy.

I think these two issues—regarding the limitations of language’s effectiveness when it is reduced to an ambient (or purely musical or visual) role, and whether some works of electronic writing use language to solve its own formal problems (the problem of a wondrous feat of engineering being largely pointless in an artistic context) meet in the question of whether increased interactivity and malleability—the ability to link an infinite number of objects with each other, with the guarantee of never seeing the same thing twice—actually reduces artistic value of a work. Bruce Nauman, upon being questioned about the interactivity of his “Going Around the Corner Piece,” says that, after permitting and encouraging interactivity, he nonetheless reduces it as much as possible because he doesn’t want the user to “make their own piece” out of his. His idea is to stage a very minimal, Beckett-like theater piece in the gallery, one in which you the viewer (and “user”) are playing Krapp, condemned to a Sisyphus-like activity of always glancing at where you have been—of looking at your rear end as it turns the last corner. Likewise, Utterback understands that the reduced presence of the user in the piece is key to the meaning of the piece itself: “[T]he interface allows the symbolic to reach into the physical world and constrain the user’s motions. The flip side of the text’s transgression into the physical in these pieces is the manner in which the user’s body enters the symbolic space of the texts—as a blue glow, a photographic image, or a point of view.” She writes of “Stream of Consciousness,” “The interpenetration of the real and the symbolic in this space is in fact quite lopsided. While the text seems to have escaped in to the physical realm of the fountain almost completely, “you,” via the pressure-sensitive pad, are present in the abstract world of these symbols only in the form of a blue glow that changes its position and size.” The user is more thrust into this world of interactive symbols—this reduced theater, or maybe ritualized linguistic meditation—the less she is given to do.

5.

The most “writerly” aspect to the much electronic writing, and by extension electronic art, can be the interface itself, and could make it possible to include in the realm of “electronic writing” projects that don’t involve letterforms at all. I’m thinking in particular of the interactive Shockwave pieces of turux.org, in which the user interacts with an image that is already buzzing with activity, but which responds to the mouse pointer’s motions in ways that are not always obvious but can be learned, like a dance or a secret code. The longer the user the navigates in the space, the more is revealed of the “deep structure,” or the programming (along the lines of Espen Aarseth’s interests in *Cyber-text*, especially his chapter on the typology of game worlds), behind the unfolding image (to draw a loose analogy to Chomskian linguists’ belief in a specific neurological system that lies behind language that is common across all humans regardless of the specifics of the language he or she uses). Steve McCaffery writes in his afterword to the largely wordless, typewritten “score,” *Marquee*, by poet Ray DiPalma:

Marquee then, exposes the very contours of the signifier (when meaning is difference what else can “be”?). Shard. Trace-structure. A live (a life) in materiality deliberately devoid of function yet in that lack-of-usage instituting a presence of its own: a graphic substance. On the plane of semiosis DiPalma gives us a language-centered text, a text lacking all referential thrusts to any outside “reality.” And here we enter the logical illogic and inhabit a centre which is margin: the centre of the sign-shape, in/side the outline. A/long, a/mong, a/bove and not a/bove a spacing that is solid: the ink of the gramme.¹⁹

¹⁹ McCaffery, Steve. Afterword to Ray DiPalma, *Marquee: a score*. (New York: Asylum’s Press, 1977)

It might seem contradictory that I valorize such an approach after my criticisms of Seaman's writing above, but I'm not entirely convinced that Seaman's application serves to animate the properties of language that both Derrida and Deleuze and Guattari describe in the citations he takes from them. While it might be true that Derrida advocates in his writing a seemingly endless deferral of closed "meaning"—endless chains of signifiers and concepts that offer an illuminated map to the gothic pathways of the mind—there is a specificity to the field of *language* which is all important, since it is only in language, and not in film and dance (for example), in which elements can be connected syntactically (via the human instinct for language) and logically (which produces the possibility for its many opposites, such as paradox and irrationality). In fact, the type of poetry found in virtual reality literary pieces is often quite distracting; as "poetic" writing, it often doesn't engage in any of the various sensual and stylistic properties that language in poetry (such as D.H. Lawrence's, Gerard Manley Hopkins or Lyn Hejinian, this latter of whom seems an obvious source for such a pragmatist's engine) is able to access.²⁰ Even if it did, many people will choose either to "fly"—as Diane Gramola notes in her response—over reading the text on the wall.

Interactive Shockwave pieces like those of turux.org—which don't use images but mostly paint their images with dots and vector lines, many of which are programmed to resemble the marks of pencils on a sheet of cream-colored paper—are instances of pure interaction with code: the mouse pointer, merely two numbers on an x/y grid controlled by the hand, interacts with other similar numbers which both engage the mouse pointer but also call back to home base to retrieve other, further orders of behavior. It's the pure play of the mark, the "ersten Strich" of Rilke's poem. An electronic poem that traced the unfolding of beautiful language in the same way that turux.org traces the unfolding of a sketched "gram" would be quite magnificent, and artists like David Rokeby and Wardrip-Fruin in pieces like "The Impermanence Agent," "Regime Change," and "Newsreader" have made great progress on this front. But even those aesthetics will have to relate to the aesthetics of conventionally "written" texts in electronic writing pieces. I think a certain "simplicity" as Gorbet suggests is nothing to be ashamed of in electronic writing, in the same way that I don't think films have to have screenplays that read like Chekov, nor songs have meters and plays of sounds that can compete with the best poetry. There are many genres of text that electronic writers can turn to that have not been exploited, such as graffiti and public signage—think of the splendid use of text in Jean Michel Basquiat's paintings, where myths are created in the space of a tag, or the scrawls of a Raymond Pettibon piece or the site-specific provocations of a Jenny Holzer—or comic books, of which several electronic writers I know seem to be aficionados. There are tons of sources in poetry and the conceptual sides of the visual arts, not to mention early film.

²⁰ Marjorie Perloff in "The Poetics of Click and Drag: Screening the New Poetics" (wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/goldsmith/perloff_poetics.pdf) makes a similar point about David Knoebel's interactive audio-visual poem "Thoughts Go": "It's an interesting idea but I don't think it works. We can't really *hear* the spoken text while we are reading the *visual* one without losing the resonances of both. And the fact is that, either way, the texts abound in standard Romantic lingo: take the metaphor of thoughts as "far travelers" that "touch down briefly / time and again," or the "wedge of geese" disappearing "beyond the/ sycamore grove." Would it matter if it were a birch grove? Or if the "parking lot" were a truck stop? 'Our words,' said Yeats famously, 'must seem to be inevitable.' The digital poem, no matter how 'clever' the gimmick, can't have much staying power if the language is arbitrary." She doesn't expand her thesis to include any consideration of texts in which the words are generated in "real time" by an algorithm, but I would argue that, even in that case, a sense of "inevitability," if not "permanence" as an example of language well-used, will certainly heighten the experience however ephemeral.

A Russian writer I've come across recently is Lev Rubinstein, a collection of whose works, *Catalogue of Comedic Novelties*, has recently been translated by Philip Metres and Tatiana Tulchinsky into English²¹. Each of these "poems"—they are quite unclassifiable, actually—are made of single lines, each of which occupies a card (or a numbered line, in the English edition), which start off with certain features reappearing in each line, as if the poet were caught in a mental stutter or obsessive compulsion, but which then work through different frames before reaching a conclusion.

- 1 Whose that in the yellow fog
Coming closer and closer?
- 2 Now like shadows on the screen,
Now like air, now like water?
- 3 Who's that in the yellow fog
Rushing forward, rushing headlong?
- 4 Is he trapped in a nirvana
Does he even know himself?

This goes on for several more cards, with the occasional inclusion of an entirely blank card. It's unclear what Rubinstein would do in a performance for these cards, but in any case, these would have to be moments in which the passing of time, and the presence of the actor/reader, would be magnified. The theme or mode of the cards then shifts to the following, with the introduction of personal names and less beat-driven lines:

- 21 ...and, sizzling, it goes out. We had to walk in complete darkness, our arms stretched out...
- 22 —What about Zhukov?
- 23 —We already talked about that...
- 24 —And?
- 25 ... and, sizzling, it goes out. "Just great," thought Filichev, "that was the last one..."
- 26 —What about Kolya Pokshishevsky?
- 27 —Not in a million years!
- 28 —And why not?
- 29 ... and, sizzling, it goes out. "The end," flashed through his mind...
- 30 —Could it be Arlazov?

The poem then begins to take a simple quatrain—for example, "When the right hour struck / A child was born. / It was born, and smiled, / And so the time flew by..."—and repeat it, though on occasion, a card would contain just a single line from this quatrain, primarily focusing on the phrase "And so the time flew by..." The last part of the poem is the most concrete in terms of objective description, and only takes up about four cards, ending with the refrain from the prior sequence:

- 73 ... a chair, for example. There it is, unoccupied. Yet everyone's a little afraid to sit in it for some reason...
- 74 ... or, let's say, an apple tree. It has blossomed quite well, it's lush, but for some reason there are no apples on it...
- 75 ... or for example, this girl I know. Great gal, pretty and easy to talk to, and yet she's got no one...

²¹ Rubinstein, Lev. *Catalogue of Comedic Novelties*. (New York: Ugly Ducking Presse, 2004).

76 ... or a mirror. A nice mirror, of ancient make. And yet, for some reason no one
likes themselves in it. Why is that?
77 And so the time flew by...

This is a poem that clearly needs metaphors from music to describe it, and in fact, the text could have been influenced by the libretti of Robert Wilson, such as *Einstein on the Beach* or the *A Letter to Queen Victoria*, which utilize a great deal of repetition and allude to a narrative universe that never comes entirely to the fore.

But there is also a programmatic quality to them that suggests, in some ways, they were generated as much as written—the author is not giving himself the license to write as much as he might to satisfy his own authorial instincts, but is rather subsuming the writing under the larger scheme of an abstract progression, a series of movements. The “mode” of each movement can almost be described algorithmically—first a set of sing-songy couplets, then a set of 3-line units involving a name, a response, a denial, and a refrain (very Beckett-like), then a series of quatrains that are taken apart then welded together again, culminating in a finale of cinematic vignettes. Obviously, there is a theme of absence, of death, prevalent throughout, but the narrative color—the colloquialism of the speech²², the familiarity with which the names are spoken—adds further dimensions, and further questions, such as: is this the chattering of prisoners? Or if so, are they prisoners in a prison or prisoners of the communist state? Or does it develop into a wider existential realm, suggesting that we are all prisoners, some of whom go “off into the world of light” without leaving much behind letting us know where they are going. The effect is quite powerful in this short poem, but—most importantly for us—the texts are quite simple, and the key to their construction, dangled before us by the author, makes them both easier to take in quickly but also increasingly more evocative while being increasingly more empty: the replaceable contents of the names and questions suggests a futility of a bureaucratic worldview turning the mind into a database of (im)personal contacts.

I think such techniques as those employed by Rubinstein could be useful for electronic writers who are interested in thematics that could be derived from databased texts which are operated on algorithmically. This is language of a poetic “first intensity”—even a condensed language, along the lines of Pound—and yet it seems amenable to a “recombinant” poetics that thrives on real-time creation of textual experiences by an program (or “demon,” as I’ve described it in *Fashionable Noise*) acting on source files. It also promotes active “reading,” which I oppose to something I’ve previously called “parsing,” which is when one analyzes the qualities of a text regardless of purported content for certain markers: repetition of certain symbols, obvious misspellings, just general qualities of the gestalt of a text that one obtains prior to interpretation. My sense is that one could “parse” the transitional stages of a Cayley linguistic “transliterated morph” more than read them, since the in-between stages, the “nodal points” in N. Katherine Hayles phrase, don’t relate to language as humans use it in any way (unlike, say, the morphing of language between Chaucerian English to our own would display characteristics from which one could derive generalities concerning the human mind and society). Both “parsing” and reading are valid experiences in an electronic writing piece, and certain texts, such as those of Mez and Talan Memmott, ask to be approached both ways simultaneously. But I think that the deferred meaning of a “parsing”—predicated partly

²² The translators describe Rubinstein’s texts as “uncanny voicings of *homo sovieticus*” elaborating on how the high “conceptualist” poetics of his project allies with his apparent naturalism: “Because his conceptualist poetics seems to require an alienated stance toward language, Rubinstein can be described as more an archivist than composer; that is, he catalogues, on his library cards, the shreds of our speech in all its fragmentariness, wonder, and degradation.”

on Derridean *differance*—should be no excuse for the reduced emphasis placed on text as something that can be read.

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