

The Book as Object and Concept in American Poetry after Modernism

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Abstract

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This dissertation argues that the printed book—as a unit of meaning, a sculptural and visual object, and a consumer good—has been important to American poetry after modernism, and in particular to writers who directly engage the materiality of language in their poetry. In postwar poetry criticism, the “material text” is much discussed but often remains abstract: an emphasis on language as a medium tends to eclipse the literal sense in which texts are made of matter.

This dissertation contends that in American poetry a self-consciousness about the materiality of language has been intimately related to experiments with the physical features of the book. It focuses on the work of four poets—Ezra Pound, Jack Spicer, Susan Howe, and Anne Carson—who exemplify this dual interest in materiality, and who, because they move beyond the isolated lyric toward book-length compositions, also implicate the conceptual force of “the book” in their poetry.

The dissertation's first section, "Production," is situated in the small press printing revolution of the 1950s and 1960s. Its chapters on Pound and Spicer demonstrate how the material features of book-objects (including paper, binding, typography, and images) point to production and distribution contexts and, in so doing, to larger systems of literary and economic value that become an interpretive framework for reading the poetry these books contain. The second section, "Reproduction," turns to recent texts by Howe and Carson that exploit for aesthetic purposes the slippage between the reproducible visual features of the page and the non-transferrable material features of the book. As such, these texts challenge conventional definitions of textuality and highlight the visual and haptic potential of the printed book in the digital age. Together these sections suggest that the printed book has been, and continues to be, a key site for extending the available conditions of possibility for American poetry.

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I continue to value my time in Cincinnati's ArtWorks program, where Pam Sussman introduced me to book arts. It was there that the question "what is a book?" was first posed to me, and over fifteen years later I am still intrigued by that question and still binding books.

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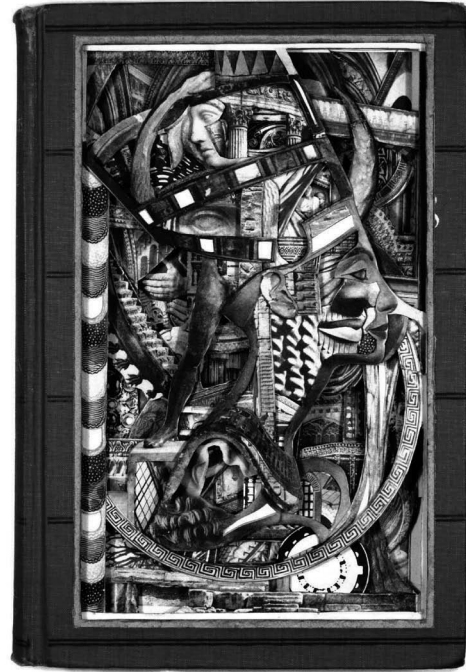
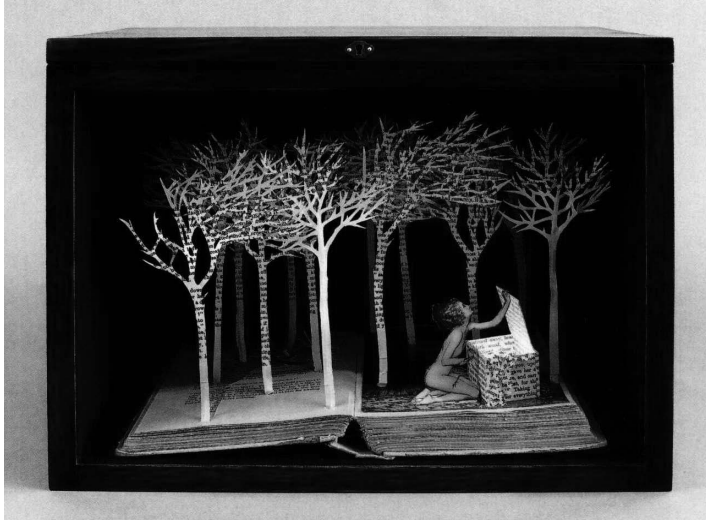
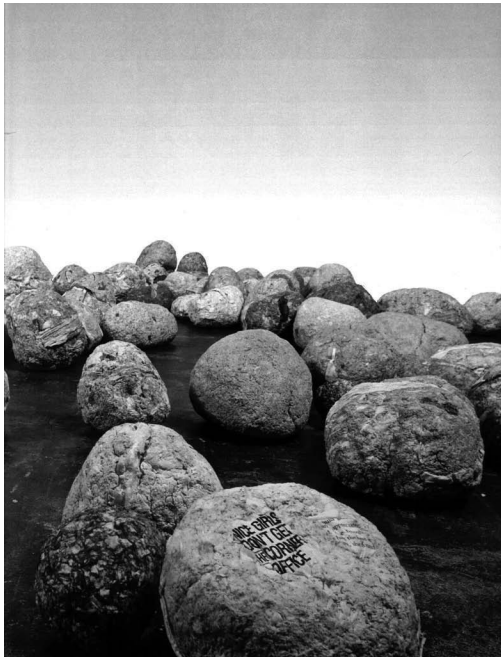
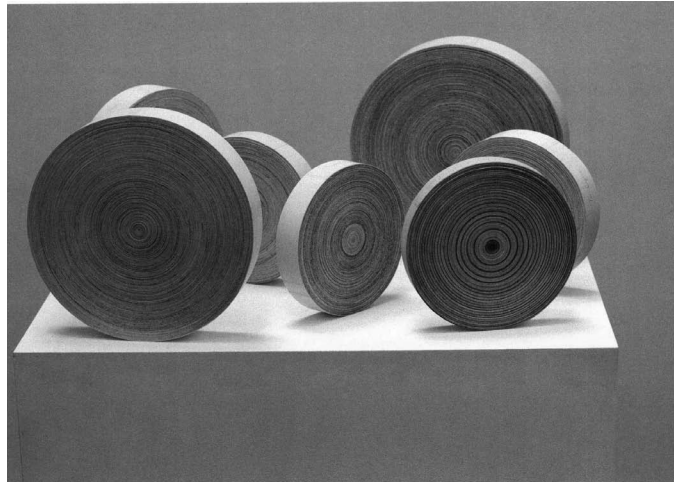


Figure 1. Clockwise from top left:
Su Blackwell, *Pandora Opening Box* (2009)
Brian Dettmer, *Key Monuments 1* (2009)
Jonathan Callan, *Seven Volumes* (2009)
Matej Krén, *Book Cell* (2006)
Lisa Kokin, *Room for Improvement* (2008)



Introduction: Reading Matter

The book's status as object and concept is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in contemporary "bookworks": sculptures and installations made by carving, stacking, dismantling, deforming, and otherwise altering the codex. The range of bookworks is wide, encompassing Su Blackwell's enchanted scenes emerging from the page spread, Brian Dettmer's surgical excavations of imagery and text, Jonathan Callan's circular cross-sections of tightly wound pages, Matej Krén's architectural spaces that use books as bricks, and Lisa Kokin's stones shaped from pulped books (fig. 1). Each of these works draws attention to the codex as a technology by interfering with its function. When the act of reading is thwarted by the book's disfiguration or by the "Do Not Touch" advisory of the gallery, the codex appears simultaneously as iconic object and mere matter. As Garrett Stewart describes, "the book-work—as material object—once denied its mediating purpose as verbal text, can only be studied for the bookwork—as conceptual labor—it performs."¹ The "conceptual labor" of the book includes conjuring deeply ingrained associations with knowledge and authority and an almost talismanic power. Although these associations derive from eras when books were exceedingly rare, valuable, and laborious to produce, bookworks help to show the degree to which they persist in more subtle form in even the most ordinary mass-produced paperbacks. At the same time, bookworks remind us that for all of this conceptual force, books are resolutely physical.

This dissertation considers how aspects of the book that are made vividly apparent by sculptures and installations impact literary works that remain available to reading and handling. More specifically, "The Book as Object and Concept" argues for the significance of the book

¹ Garrett Stewart, *Bookwork: Medium to Object to Concept to Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), xiii.

as both a unit of meaning and a material object to American poetry after modernism. The authors in this dissertation—Ezra Pound, Jack Spicer, Susan Howe, and Anne Carson—make the materiality of written language an explicit subject of their poetry and a crucial element of their poetics, thereby calling attention to the physical form in which this language appears. Too, they share an interest in moving beyond the lyric as the primary unit for poetry, and as such the idea of the book becomes especially potent in their work. This dissertation proposes that these poets’ investments in the materiality of language and the conceptual parameters of the book are crucially bound to the book-objects in which their work appears.

“The Book as Object and Concept” therefore joins an ongoing dialogue between textual studies and literary criticism that aims to account for the complex relationship between textuality and literary meaning. It takes as axiomatic the fact that texts are physical, tangible objects and the book is not simply a passive container for the work. Instead, the specific non-linguistic features of a given book, such as typeface, printing method, paper quality, size, or binding structure—what Jerome McGann terms a text’s “bibliographic code”—help to shape the meaning of the work.² Textual scholarship’s attentiveness to the material potential of the book spans a wide range of locations, genres, and time periods, but this dissertation follows a specific set of investments in the book, rooted in modernist verse experiments, as they develop in the United States after World War II.

Many modernist writers and publishers have been shown to be highly attuned to the materiality of texts, particularly typography and layout,³ and savvy as to the cultural meaning

² Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 13.

³ See Johanna Drucker, *The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909-1923* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

that can obtain in textual objects, whether little magazines or deluxe editions.⁴ Although modernist texts have been central to the textual scholarship of the last several decades, and to the work of McGann and George Bornstein in particular, postwar poetry texts have remained peripheral. “The Book as Object and Concept” picks up where accounts of the modernist book leave off and tracks continued attempts on the part of poets and printers to engage textuality under a shifting set of constraints and possibilities.

The books considered here are “after modernism” chronologically, but also in the sense that modernist expansions of the formal and material aspects of poetry remain relevant to them. Such continuity is most evident in the dissertation’s first chapter, which considers the ways Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* were taken up at the end of his career by the next generation of writers. While Pound is by no means the only precursor for the work addressed in later chapters, he is undoubtedly a forceful one. His poetry offers an indispensable model for Spicer’s attempts to move beyond the isolated lyric, Howe’s citational approach to history, and Carson’s generative uses of translation-as-adaptation. Pound was also a shrewd and influential participant in the print culture of his time; Spicer followed Pound’s lead in opting to construct his own production and reception contexts when the existing ones didn’t suit his taste. Howe and Carson each publish with New Directions, a press that James Laughlin founded in 1936 at Pound’s recommendation. Although Spicer, Howe, and Carson all blend poetry and prose in ways that can be linked to the legacies of Gertrude Stein and William Carlos Williams, Pound serves here as representative of a wider set of modernist experiments in form and investments in the printed book.

⁴ See, for instance, Megan Benton, *Beauty and the Book: Fine Editions and Cultural Distinction in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Catherine Turner, *Marketing Modernism between the Two World Wars* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

In focusing on the book as an object, this dissertation resists the tendency for twentieth-century American poetry criticism invested in the “material text” to swerve back toward abstraction even as it seems to be insisting on the concrete. Such a version of materiality, constructed around the priorities of Language poetry, emphasizes self-consciousness of language as a medium but evades the most literally material aspects of the book. Take, for instance, Charles Bernstein’s claim that “the reinvention, the making of a poetry for our time, is the only thing that makes poetry matter. And that means, literally, making poetry *matter*, that is making poetry that intensifies the matter or materiality of poetry—acoustic, visual, syntactic, semantic” (emphasis in original).⁵ In Bernstein’s rendering, the material text effectively becomes a sound without a source or a two-dimensional page-surface, suspended partway between idea and thing. “The Book as Object and Concept” goes further. While affirming the importance of a strain of American poetry that foregrounds language as material, it insists that our critical understandings of the materiality of poetry—as “acoustic, visual, syntactic, semantic”—are radically incomplete without attention to the book as an object.

Objects set the terms by which literary works circulate. Proponents of the “material text” often construe the foregrounding of language as a politically charged engagement with social conditions, but this kind of engagement would seem to leap off the page directly into the world rather than being mediated through specific objects that are often deeply embedded in the capitalist paradigm of the publishing industry. For instance, Christopher Nealon’s *The Matter of Capital* (2011) makes a compelling argument that “the workings of capitalism are a central subject matter of twentieth-century American poetry in English” and that authors from a variety

⁵ Charles Bernstein, *Attack of the Difficult Poems: Essays and Inventions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 30.

of political perspectives have used poetry to grapple with capitalism's effects on individuals and societies.⁶ However, he does not address the fact that volumes of poetry are themselves "matter" that can participate in (or opt out of) markets. "The Book as Object and Concept" sees the political and social work of poetry as necessarily grounded in the realities of how textual objects are produced and circulated.

Michael Davidson's focus on "palimpsests" offers a useful convergence between the materiality of language and the materiality of the document, and thus his work serves as a model for this dissertation. For Davidson, the palimpsest "describes modern writing's intertextual and material character, its graphic rendering of multiple layers of signification."⁷ Davidson attends to non-linguistic aspects of the text through extensive use of archival documents, and one of the strengths of his work is the capacity for "palimpsest" to draw together a range of poets and practices. As one reviewer puts it, however, "we might agree that the ghost of the material leaves many traces, [but] a pipe cleaner and an etymological citation are not material in the same way."⁸ "The Book as Object and Concept" makes more deliberate distinctions between types of materiality. More fundamentally, whereas Davidson emphasizes composition via the materiality of the manuscript page, "The Book as Object and Concept" focuses on the public object of the printed book.

Because this dissertation emphasizes the social, technological, and material contexts for literature, "American poetry" is defined here in terms of the geographic setting for production

⁶ Christopher Nealon, *The Matter of Capital: Poetry and Crisis in the American Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1.

⁷ Michael Davidson, *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material Word* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 9.

⁸ Deborah Nelson, review of *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material Word* by Michael Davidson, *Modern Philology* 98:1 (2000): 142.

and distribution, rather than the nationality of particular poets. This distinction is particularly relevant in the case of Anne Carson, who was born in Canada but currently lives in the United States and has made major contributions to the poetry of both countries. Poets regularly cross national boundaries and so do works of poetry. This dissertation nevertheless considers “American poetry” to be a powerful construct that is especially relevant to the postwar period.

Temporally, this dissertation’s ken extends into the present, and therefore coincides with one of the most radical global transformations of textuality in human history, namely the advent of electronic texts. Although the possibilities afforded by digital technologies are significant to chapters three and four of “The Book as Object and Concept,” this dissertation concentrates exclusively on the printed book. This focus is in part an argument against the tendency to understand history through a facile division into manuscript, print, and digital cultures. Too often framed, however implicitly, as teleology, the manuscript-print-digital narrative runs the risk of ignoring interactions between these modes that are not limited to “transitional” periods between them. As Bonnie Mak notes, the presumed “simple coordination between physical platform, mode of production, and historical period” obscures a variety of “simultaneous, overlapping, mutually responsive, complementary, and even contradictory” textual strategies.⁹ As contemporary bookworks suggest, in the electronic age the printed book continues to signify in its own right, and not only as a foil to the digital or an occasion for nostalgia. If anything, digital transformations of textuality have created heightened consciousness of and significance for the materiality of all kinds of texts. This dissertation shows that, for certain poets, printers, and designers, such consciousness has been ongoing and profoundly important to the printed literary objects they have created.

⁹ Bonnie Mak, *How the Page Matters* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 4.

Mapping the Book

There is no unified theory of the book. The book can be approached from a variety of angles within multiple disciplinary frameworks, each with its own insights and blind spots. This dissertation is a work of bibliography in the expanded sense proposed by D. F. McKenzie, incorporating attention to the physical details of “texts as recorded forms” as well as the “social processes of their transmission.”¹⁰ It also draws on book history, literary criticism, and art history in order to account for the multifaceted nature of the book. The theory of the book underlying this project is therefore not so much a single new model as a new means of describing where and how these existing perspectives converge as they apply to the printed book in the twentieth and twenty-first century.

“The Book as Object and Concept” organizes this convergence along three axes: linguistic, socioeconomic, and material. Understood in linguistic terms, the book is a combination of the linguistic code of a book-length work and the paratexts that delimit and frame the literary work’s boundaries. As a socioeconomic phenomenon, the book is a consumer good that moves between people and across time and space through processes of authorship, production, distribution, reception, and preservation. Materially, the book is a visual and haptic structure that draws on the arts of papermaking, typography, printing, and binding. All of these aspects of the book are live in any printed book of poetry from this period, but certain aspects may be more or less relevant to specific books. What follows is a brief taxonomy of how one might understand the book along linguistic, socioeconomic, and material axes with attention to what each perspective contributes to this dissertation.

¹⁰ D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 12, 13.

The Linguistic Book

F. W. Bateson's often-repeated question "If the Mona Lisa is in the Louvre, where are Hamlet and Lycidias?" offers a commonsensical shortcut into the problem of textual ontology.¹¹ Without an original to which copies refer, the literary work exceeds its material forms at the same time as it cannot exist outside of those forms. This situation is further complicated by the tendency for variation between instances of the work. Peter Shillingsburg therefore describes the "work" as "that which is manifested in and implied by the material and linguistic forms of texts thought to be variant forms of a single literary entity."¹² The "linguistic text," by contrast, is a "sign sequence...displayed in a document," making the material text—referred to in this dissertation as simply the "text"—the "union of Linguistic Text and Document."¹³ The linguistic text, then, hovers between the conceptual and material; as a sequence of signs, it can be retranscribed in new material forms and is therefore not equivalent to the text, but the linguistic text is only available for reading—and as chapter four will argue, handling—once it achieves a material form.

In linguistic terms, the "book" includes the linguistic text conceived at the level of the book—a distinction that is important because a book of poetry can consist of multiple poems, i.e., multiple linguistic texts representing multiple discrete works. A book of poetry can also be comprised of a single poem or an installment of a longer poem, but in all of these cases the book of poetry operates as a linguistic unit. As Michael Hinds and Stephen Matterson argue, the

¹¹ Joseph Grigely is quick to point out that, as one of the most famous artworks in existence, the Mona Lisa is also one of the most enthusiastically reproduced—not only in textbooks, but on posters, T-shirts, postcards, coffee mugs, fridge magnets, etc. Joseph Grigely, *Textuality: Art, Theory, and Textual Criticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 156.

¹² Peter Shillingsburg, "Text as Matter, Concept, and Action," *Studies in Bibliography* 44 (1991): 81.

¹³ *Ibid.*

critical and pedagogical emphasis for American poetry has tended to fall on the individual poem, in spite of the fact that many poets identify an investment in the book as a whole.¹⁴ Certainly Spicer, Howe, and Carson each imagine the book as a unified work even when it consists of multiple segments, some of which may be prose, that have their own integrity as literary works. For Pound's *Cantos* the relationship is construed differently, with the book as an installment of the larger project, and in this case each book negotiates between its local concerns and the work as a whole. Generally, then, the conceptual boundary of the book offers multiple possibilities for segmentation and compilation, suggesting forms of unity and closure that can interact in dynamic ways with the poetry a volume contains.

The book's status as a unit is aided by the presence of paratexts, those liminal genres that surround the text proper and are part of the book as a linguistic phenomenon even as they are distinct from the linguistic text of the literary work. Paratexts aid in affirming the literary text's coherence as a book, and Gérard Genette goes so far as to claim that, "the paratext is what allows the text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers."¹⁵ In providing information about the text, paratexts also provide a point of entry for interpretation. There exist a wide range of paratextual genres; most relevant to this dissertation are the colophon, copyright designation, title page, and blurb. As Genette notes, paratexts "do not constitute a uniformly unvarying and systematic presence around a text," and the presence or absence of certain genres can itself give significant information about a given book.¹⁶ Paratexts, in other words, are conventions that convey meaning both through their specific content and their participation in a system of

¹⁴ Michael Hinds and Stephen Matterson, eds., *Rebound: The American Poetry Book* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 1.

¹⁵ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

authorizing, promoting, and making books legible. Paratextual conventions develop out of the communicative needs of particular moments in time, and as such they vary historically, but paratextual conventions also help to shape interactions between authors, publishers, books, and readers. Although they are linguistic, paratexts are often occasioned by the production of an edition and situated in predictable places in and on the book-object. They are therefore intimately linked to the book as a material object as well as a consumer good. Chapters one and two place particular stress on the publisher's paratexts that communicate key information about the book's position in relation to the market.

The Socioeconomic Book

As literary texts and material objects, books participate in a complex set of social and economic systems. Robert Darnton offers a much-cited model for understanding the book through a "communications circuit" that includes the author, publisher, printer, shipper, bookseller, and reader, under the influence of intellectual, social, economic, political, and legal factors. In this model, "the reader completes the circuit because he influences the author both before and after the act of composition."¹⁷ Thomas Adams and Nicholas Barker note that Darnton "deals with people, rather than the book," and they revise his model by focusing on the stages in the life of a book rather than the agents involved.¹⁸ In Adams' and Barker's schema, the book moves through a cycle of publication, manufacture, distribution, reception, and survival. Intellectual, political, legal, religious, and commercial influences, as well as "social behaviour and taste," exert pressure on the book as it travels through these stages. Because

¹⁷ Robert Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette* (New York: Norton, 1990), 111.

¹⁸ Thomas Adams and Nicolas Barker, "A New Model for the Study of the Book," *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society*, ed. Nicolas Barker (London: British Library, 1993), 12.

they are primarily concerned with the “bibliographical document,” Adams and Barker subsume authorship into publication; the author becomes significant not at the time she writes the text but at the time she decides to multiply it. As their creators acknowledge, these models hardly begin to account for the intricacies of how particular books are created or used, but they nevertheless offer a useful outline of the ways books move through the world.

When it comes to the book’s socioeconomic dimensions, this dissertation’s two main investments are in technology and the commercial pressures of the publishing industry. The history of the book is in large part a history of the development of interrelated technologies for producing, selling, and preserving books, and although technology does not have a clear place in the models proposed by Darnton or Adams and Barker, it can have profound effects on the agents and actions they describe—including authors, who write within a horizon of possibilities for making, distributing, and conserving material book-objects. Technological innovation is driven in many cases by the imperatives of commerce, and this dissertation is also interested in the effects of the commercial pressures exerted by the publishing industry as they influence the specific material forms taken by books. These effects include attempts by authors and printers to subvert or reconfigure the book’s status as a consumer good.

The Material Book

Literary works require a material support and, as we have seen, the specific features of textual objects can be collectively referred to as “bibliographic code.” Because the concept of bibliographic code includes the entire network of material features of the book, it covers aspects that are visual as well as structural, effectively capturing the ways that these aspects of the book work in concert. However, “The Book as Object and Concept” also aims to disentangle the visual

and structural components of the book in chapters three and four where the difference becomes vital to the works in question.

Because written language must be seen to be read, the book necessarily engages the relationship between the verbal and the visual, literary and visual art. The practical ways in which a written text is a visual phenomenon suggest that, as W. J. T. Mitchell puts it, “the image/text problem is not just something constructed ‘between’ the arts, the media, or different forms of representation, but an unavoidable issue *within* the individual arts and media.”¹⁹ A visual approach to the book focuses primarily on the page, including typography, layout, and illustration. Johanna Drucker identifies two distinct “mode[s] of typographic enunciation” that emerge with the printing press: “unmarked” texts, aligned with literary production, aim for unobtrusive typography; “marked” texts, aligned with advertising, draw attention to the visual aspects of typography and use different typefaces and sizes to create more overt visual hierarchy.²⁰ While Drucker’s focus is on literary texts that are typographically marked, Paul Gutjahr and Megan Benton have shown that typography is also significant to those texts that fall into Drucker’s “unmarked” category.²¹ Although typography plays a role in all four chapters, Howe’s work offers the most marked uses. The visuality of the book can be further amplified by the use of images, whether as part of the paratextual framing of the text—as we will see in work by Pound and Spicer—or as part of the text proper, as is the case with recent work by Carson.

This confluence of image and text, however, occurs within the context of the book’s

¹⁹ W. J. T. Mitchell *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 94.

²⁰ Johanna Drucker, *The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909-1923* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 93-94.

²¹ Paul C. Gutjahr and Megan Benton, eds., *Illuminating Letters: Typography and Literary Interpretation* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

three-dimensionality. “Even in its most conventional format,” writes Drucker, “the book is a sculptural object. It has spatial dimensions, material qualities, and a complex structure.”²² In common usage, “book” refers to a codex, the structure that has dominated book production in print culture. The form of the codex privileges the arrangement of text and/or images as individual pages that are paired in spreads and accessed by turning the book’s leaves. Book artists have pushed the boundaries of the sculptural book well beyond the ordinary rectangle of the codex, fashioning books out of everything from fans to quilts, cell phones to flattened beer cans, and electronic books have further unsettled the presumed equivalence between book and codex. In all of these forms, as a “sculptural object” the book is haptic as well as visual; aspects such as size, material support, and binding contribute to the book’s overall look as well as its feel. The consequences of haptic interaction are directly taken up in chapter four in relation to books by Anne Carson that exceed the typical structural expectations of the codex.

Chapter Overview

“The Book as Object and Concept in American Poetry after Modernism” is divided into two sections, “Production” and “Reproduction,” with two chapters in each section. When it comes to books, production almost always *is* reproduction in the sense that printing involves creating multiple copies. The two sections, however, have distinct concerns: “Production” attends to the markers of how, when, and by whom a book was made as those markers are inscribed on the book itself, whereas “Reproduction” focuses on the possibilities created when the pages of a book are reproduced in their visual specificity rather than retranscribed.

²² Jerome Rothenberg and Steven Clay, eds., *A Book of the Book: Some Works & Projections About the Book & Writing* (New York: Granary Books, 2000), 457.

I. Production

When it comes to production, one of the modernist era's most enduring—and underappreciated—contributions to the book is the promotional dust jacket, and particularly the genre of the blurb. The blurb's history therefore offers an ideal site for examining the book's evolving relationship to the publishing industry and its entanglement in commercial concerns. The word “blurb”²³ entered the lexicon when at the 1907 annual publisher's trade association dinner American humorist Gelett Burgess presented copies of his *Are You a Bromide?* in a satirical dust jacket featuring “Miss Belinda Blurb in the act of blurbing” (fig. 2). Announcing, “YES! This is a ‘BLURB’! All the Other Publishers commit them. Why Shouldn't We?,” the jacket goes on to describe the book with excess of enthusiasm and paucity of content. The cover image of Belinda Blurb, which according to Burgess' publisher was “lifted from a Lydia Pinkham or tooth-powder advertisement,” further mocks the promotional function of the jacket.²⁴ At the root of the blurb's bad reputation is a profound discomfort about the relationship between literature and commerce that has existed since Gutenberg. The promotional dust jacket evolved in a context of rapid industrialization that included the shift from rag to wood pulp paper, the mechanization of the printing press, and hot metal typesetting—all of which drove down the cost of books and increased their availability. Miss Belinda Blurb, like the promotional dust jacket more generally, is a modernist phenomenon. Although she owes her existence to the introduction of publisher's cloth bindings in the 1820s,²⁵ it was only in the first few decades of the twentieth

²³ Burgess coined the term to refer to publisher's descriptions, but in contemporary parlance, “blurb” has come to refer primarily to glowing endorsements from authors and critics. These attributed blurbs did often appear on early twentieth century jackets, but they were pulled from existing reviews as there was not yet a system in place for soliciting so-called advance praise.

²⁴ B. W. Huebsch, “Footnotes to a Publisher's Life,” *Colophon*, Summer 1937, 41.

²⁵ Once publishers began issuing books in permanent cloth bindings rather than selling loosely gathered quires for readers to take to the binder themselves, detachable paper wrappers were

century, as the publishing industry underwent rapid corporatization, that the multiple surfaces of the jacket were colonized for promotional purposes. Material shortages related to the First World War prompted publishers to shift design energy from the binding to the jacket, and the 1920s saw the promotional dust jacket become a standard component of the commercial book. In addition to being charming in her own right, Belinda Blurb stands metonymically for the book industry's participation in a consumer culture increasingly dependent on branding and advertising. "The Book as Object and Concept" proposes that the promotional dust jacket constitutes a defining aspect of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century trade edition that poets and printers both used and reacted against.

Before Burgess saw fit to lampoon the promotional dust jacket, however, British artist and writer William Morris made a far more dramatic critique of and intervention into the commercial publishing industry with the 1891 founding of his Kelmscott Press. In response to what he took to be the increasingly low quality of Victorian typography and book construction, Morris turned to medieval texts as models, producing typographically elaborate books on a handpress. Kelmscott Press was indebted to Morris's socialist principles and his idealized fantasy of medieval Britain, which served as a foil to the alienated labor of industrialization. Kelmscott served as a model for a number of early twentieth-century private presses in Britain and the United States, and although when fine press printing crossed the Atlantic it lost much of its political force, it retained certain aesthetic sensibilities and Kelmscott's critique of the poor quality of commercial books.

In 1929, the American fine press printer Bruce Rogers produced a title page and colophon for an imaginary work, *No Ado About Nothing*, in order to mock the fine press printing

devised to protect these bindings on their way to the customer. For a comprehensive account of the rise of the dust jacket, see G. Thomas Tanselle, *Book-Jackets: Their History, Use, and Form* (Charlottesville: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 2012).

YES, this is a "BLURB"!

All the Other Publishers commit them. Why Shouldn't We?

MISS
BELINDA
BLURB



IN
THE ACT OF
BLURBING

ARE YOU A BROMIDE?

BY

GELETT BURGESS

Say! Ain't this book a 90-H. P., six-cylinder Seller? If WE do say it as shouldn't, WE consider that this man Burgess has got Henry James locked into the coal-bin, telephoning for "Information"

WE expect to sell 350 copies of this great, grand book. It has gush and go to it, it has that Certain Something which makes you want to crawl through thirty miles of dense tropical jungle and bite somebody in the neck. No hero no heroine, nothing like that for OURS, but when you've *READ* this masterpiece, you'll know what a BOOK is, and you'll sic it onto your mother-in-law, your dentist and the pale youth who dips hot-air into Little Marjorie until 4 Q. M. in the front parlour. This book has 42-carat THRILLS in it. It fairly BURBLES. Ask the man at the counter what HE thinks of it! He's seen Janice Meredith faded to a mauve magenta. He's seen BLURBS before, and he's dead wise. He'll say:

This Book is the Proud Purple Penultimate!!

Figure 2. Jacket for *Are You a Bromide?* (1907)

conventions that he had been instrumental in adapting for an American audience. The title page describes the work as “unprinted with invisible ink” “without woodcuts by George Wolf Plank,” and the colophon promises that “before (if ever) [the work] is printed from real type the press will be destroyed and the sheets will be spread upon the River Bronx.” “Undesigned by the undersigned” Rogers, the “edition” of *No Ado About Nothing* is billed as “loosely unlimited to practically no copies of which this isn’t no. 1.”²⁶ Rogers’ title page and colophon record the ironic position of fine press printing in the 1920s: begun by Morris in “protest against the ethos of Victorian industrial capitalism,” fine press printing had become a quintessential “example of conspicuous consumption.”²⁷ More subtly, in the absence of a text proper, Rogers’ mock title page and colophon hint that these pages may be the most important “works” of fine press printing. When books are meant to be admired more than read, the genres that count are those that document the materials used, the labor invested, the limitedness of the edition, and the authenticity of the volume in hand.

In the 1960s, the small press publishing upsurge known as the “mimeograph revolution” offered another intervention in the commercial book industry. Technologically, it became easier than ever to start up a printing operation: as publishing houses transitioned to offset printing they offloaded letterpress equipment at a nominal cost, and the introduction of mimeograph and Multi-Lith machines similarly lowered up-front expenses for printing by dramatic degrees. Perhaps more importantly, the printing outfits created around these technologies offered opportunities to circumvent the commercial publishing industry’s parameters for literary value. Aware of the fact that, as A. J. Liebling put it, “freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those

²⁶ Megan Benton, *Beauty and the Book: Fine Editions and Cultural Distinction in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 234-235.

²⁷ quoted in Megan Benton, *Beauty and the Book*, 233.

who own one,” the printers of the mimeograph revolution were often motivated by political agendas that were underrepresented in the mainstream press.²⁸ At the same time, the freedom afforded by the era’s small press movement was also aesthetic, allowing small communities of writers to eschew the taste-making monopolies of the major publishing houses. This sense of political and aesthetic independence serves to unite under one banner a wide spectrum of printed objects that included posters, broadsides, handbills, magazines, newsletters, and books of wildly varied production quality. Fewer than half of the publications associated with the mimeograph revolution were printed on actual mimeograph machines, but even the letterpress and offset publications share in the revolutionary ethos.

At first glance these works seem to have little in common with fine press printing. Fine press printers typically treat printing as a laborious craft, drawing on pre-industrial traditions of bookmaking and rejecting the impermanence of mass-produced books (for instance, the frequent use of non-archival paper). The printers of the mimeograph revolution often opted for speed, integrated low production quality into a pop-culture aesthetic, and put the ephemerality of their texts to use as an indicator of contemporary relevance. However, mimeograph printers share with fine press printers a resistance to the mainstream publishing industry represented by Belinda Blurb. Both modes locate value in limited editions and smaller communities of producers and consumers. “Production” proposes that the mimeograph revolution followed the fine press movement in aligning a set of production practices with a system of values, and both relied heavily on bibliographic code and paratexts to inscribe the production context—and therefore a set of parameters for reading—into the material object of the book.

The first chapter of “Production,” “Pirating Pound: *Drafts & Fragments* in 1960s

²⁸ A. J. Liebling, “Do You Belong in Journalism?”, *New Yorker*, May 14, 1960: 105.

Mimeograph Culture,” takes the first three editions of Ezra Pound’s final volume of cantos as a case study for comparing the effects of bibliographic code and paratexts in commercial, fine press, and mimeograph printing. This volume was initially pirated in mimeograph by Ed Sanders’ Fuck You Press. While James Laughlin’s New Directions was in the process of producing an authorized version, Laughlin arranged to have the poems hand-printed in a deluxe edition by K. K. Merker’s Stone Wall Press. Because the *Drafts & Fragments* volume was printed in these three different modes in rapid succession, this work highlights the ways production context can impact a particular text. Pound’s *Cantos* have long challenged textual criticism’s notions of the relationship between intention and error, and the final segment of the *Cantos* pushes to extremity questions of textual authority. Furthermore, Pound’s *Cantos* played a pivotal role in postwar American poetry’s attempts to move beyond the codified narrative of modernism, and this chapter proposes that Sanders’ piracy of the *Drafts & Fragments* poems offers a snapshot of how Pound’s work was being taken up by the next generation of poets.

Chapter two, “The ‘Small Scruffly Editions’ of Jack Spicer,” likewise considers the production context of small press printing during the mimeograph revolution but shifts the focus to how Spicer made deliberate use of the material markers of this context as a foundational component of his poetics. All the books that Spicer published during his lifetime were printed by small Bay Area presses, and these books emphatically register their time and place in colophons, title pages, dedications, typography, images, and bindings. This chapter considers how Spicer’s books use graphemics, paratexts, and bibliographic code to draw attention to production context and foreground their own status as objects. Spicer’s books therefore participate in his ongoing engagements with the capacity for language—and particularly poetry—to mediate between the material and immaterial.

Spicer's first editions, like the pirated *Drafts & Fragments*, were printed in small runs and have since their initial production become increasingly rare, expensive, and delicate, leaving the shelves of the bookstore for the climate-controlled vaults of special collections. Arguments for the significance of bibliographic code and paratexts therefore quickly result in an editorial dilemma. Texts must be continually produced anew in order to stay in circulation, and if such features are crucial to the texts they frame, the question becomes whether and how these features should be represented in future editions. The facsimile edition offers a pragmatic way out of this bind by making it possible to reproduce certain aspects of a specific edition. Nevertheless, as the following section shows, facsimile reproduction comes with its own theoretical and material complexities. Rather than addressing these editorial problems head-on, "Reproduction" considers what aesthetic possibilities facsimile reproduction might create.

II. Reproduction

Although graphite has a very different color and texture than Xerox ink, viewers of Molly Springfield's detailed pencil drawings of photocopies of books in her 2007 installation *Translation* often did not realize these were drawings until prompted (fig. 3).²⁹ Up close it is clear that Springfield has meticulously and painstakingly copied these works by hand but from afar they appear as mere mechanical reproductions. Springfield's drawings are so thoroughly indebted to Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" that her version of the first page of Benjamin's essay walks a fine line between playful self-consciousness and overkill.³⁰ According to Benjamin, the mechanical reproduction enabled by photography and film

²⁹ Johnny Ray Houston, "Copy This: Two New Gallery Shows Ask You to Adjust Your Toner," *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, March 11, 2009.

³⁰ Molly Springfield, "Mode of Production," graphite on paper, 11 x 8.5 inches, 2006.

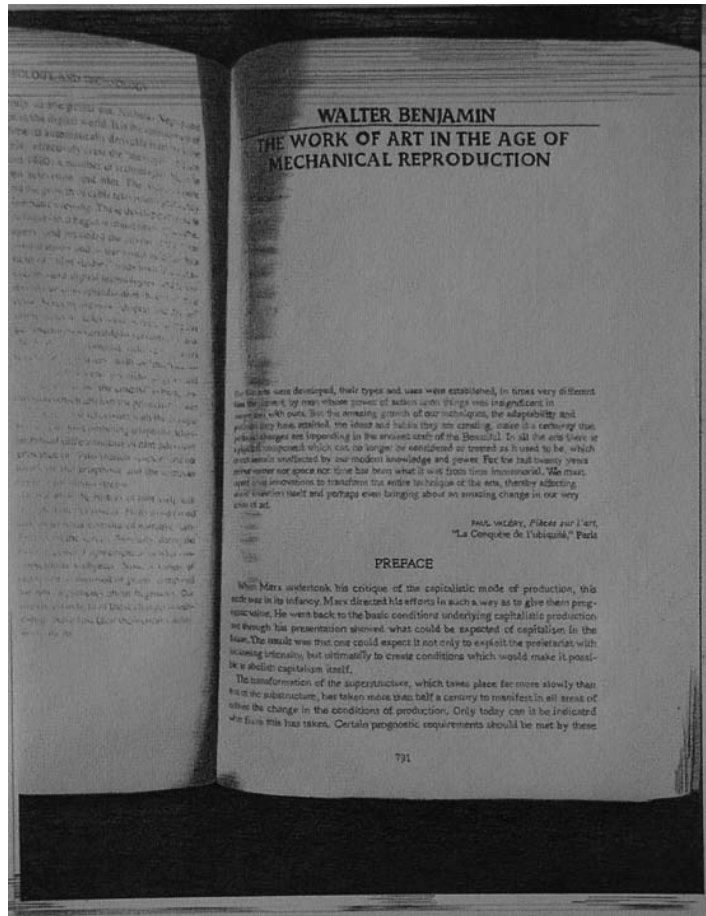


Figure 3. Molly Springfield, *Mode of Production*, graphite on paper. 2006. 11 x 8.5 inches.

diminishes the artwork’s aura—its “presence in time and space”—and “substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence.” The copy can then travel where the original cannot.³¹ Springfield’s ploy is to add a layer of reproduction that increases rather than diminishes aura. Springfield inverts the process Benjamin describes: out of a banal and widely available reproduction technology she generates a singular, auratic object, an original of sorts, to be viewed in a gallery. At the same time, she shows the photocopied page to possess its own aesthetic: the flattening of the gutter into a grey or black strip; the text block fanning away from the copied pages; patterns of streaking in the ink; the often-oversaturated black border surrounding the book; the faithful

³¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1968), 220.

rendering of underlining, marginalia, and scraps of paper used as bookmarks. That viewers could easily look past Springfield's medium—graphite on paper—and equate the photocopier's visual markers with the technology *per se* speaks to the power of that aesthetic.

In separating the visual components of a page from its material support, Springfield's hand-drawn photocopies point to a tension crucial to facsimile reproduction. The first facsimiles strove to recreate fragile medieval manuscripts so that the original could be preserved while the copy remained available for handling; these "facsimiles," however, might be better described as replicas since they aim to reproduce the object as a whole. Facsimile editions of modern texts typically reproduce only two-dimensional visual aspects of the document's pages. Even in its most conventional uses, the facsimile shifts the terms of copying from reinscription to reproduction, redefining the parameters of a text to include its visual attributes. As such, although facsimile reproduction is a pragmatic editorial tool, it is also an unparalleled site for examining the complexity of textual ontology.

"Reproduction" focuses on poets' uses of facsimile reproduction for aesthetic rather than editorial purposes. In so doing, it puts the facsimile edition in dialogue with artists' books, which likewise negotiate materiality, originality, reproduction, and aura while blurring the division between literature and visual art. As we will see, artists' books are difficult to define, but in a general sense they are works designed for the book format that make use of the book's visual and structural possibilities.

Reproduction is a central question for artists' books, which can be roughly divided into two camps: those that favor commercial production methods with larger print runs and those that favor more traditional or artisanal production methods and are therefore created in limited editions. The former, dubbed "democratic multiples," often use the format of the book precisely

because it disrupts the emphasis on aura. Handcrafted limited edition artists' books, by contrast, resemble fine press printing in their integration of their handcraft—and the consequent difficulty of their production—into their meaning. “Reproduction” examines works that use technologies or tropes of the facsimile and also fall into the broad category of the artist's book. In so doing, it explores the relationship between the visual and haptic, and argues that certain acts of copying can amplify aura, and copies can come to mean more and differently than the original.

Accordingly, the dissertation's third chapter, “Susan Howe's Facsimile Aesthetic,” follows a shift in the poet's work from typographic experiments to photographs of print artifacts to “type-collages”: multi-typeface poems forged from fragments of broken off and overlapping text. Howe's type-collages resemble her earlier typographic experiments in certain ways, but they differ dramatically in that they cannot be retranscribed. This chapter attributes the shift in Howe's visual strategies to her reading of Dickinson's manuscripts as represented in *The Birth-Mark*. This 1993 critical-creative work argues for understanding Dickinson's poetry as fundamentally visual and proposes that Dickinson's poetry includes calligraphic features significant to her meaning that are impossible to fully represent in type. Howe therefore promotes reading Dickinson's manuscripts in facsimile, and argument that opens up the possibility in her own work for a kind of poetry that is equally linguistic and visual but that is mobile across material forms. In other words, Howe arrives at a visual poetry that makes aesthetic use of the capacities of the facsimile edition.

The dissertation's final chapter, “Handcraft and Handle in Anne Carson's Visual-Haptic Trade Editions,” considers two recent books by Carson, *Nox* (2010) and *Antigonick* (2012). *Nox* uses an accordion format to replicate an original blank codex into which Carson has collaged textual fragments and photographs, and *Antigonick* is lettered by Carson with illustrations on

vellum interleaves. At the same time as these two books rely on visual reproduction to represent handiwork, they each introduce haptic features that encourage awareness of the role of the hand in reading. Handcraft and handle become venues for exploring history, whether personal or public, through materiality. Carson's books go beyond the standard format for the trade edition, participating in the wide category of artists' books; nevertheless, these books fit comfortably within the production, distribution, and reception mechanisms of mainstream publishing. As such, they suggest potential for the commercial publishing industry to produce books that exploit for artistic purposes the specific features of print.

In turning the book of poetry into a work of visual art, Howe and Carson return us to the contemporary bookwork's vivid commentary on the book's linguistic, material, and socioeconomic functions. This dissertation contends that, in a similar fashion to bookworks, the poetry of Pound, Spicer, Howe, and Carson draws attention to the book as an object and concept, asserting the book's materiality while invoking its capacity for conveying ideas that transcend physical form. Still, their texts remain firmly committed to the book as, in Keith Smith's words, an "intimate...one-to-one confrontation [between] the bookmaker and viewer."³² Although they ask to be read materially, these books remain reading matter—language that is reproducible, portable, and held in the hand.

³² Keith Smith, *Structure of the Visual Book* (Rochester: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1984), 35.

Chapter 1. Pirating Pound: *Drafts & Fragments* in 1960s Mimeograph Culture

On October 28 [1967] Pound's longtime companion, Olga Rudge, told [Allen] Ginsberg during lunch in Venice that Pound now had enough new poems for a fresh book of the 'Cantos.' Little did they know that I was on that very day hard at work on an edition of them!

—Ed Sanders, *Fug You*

Unfinished in any conventional sense, *Drafts & Fragments of Cantos CX-CXVI* stands as a functional conclusion to Pound's multi-volume, multi-decade *Cantos*. When Pound began work on these poems in 1958, he was by all accounts in a slump: his health was failing and his writing laborious. In 1960, Donald Hall arranged to interview Pound for the *Paris Review*, and the magazine hoped to print some of the poet's new work alongside the interview. After much encouragement, Pound sent Hall a collection of canto drafts to type out into a cleaner copy. This set of poems was sent in April; by May, Hall received—to his surprise—an extensively revised second version of the poems. Hall made two carbons of each poetry manuscript and soon after lent his carbon of the second version to Tom Clark to aid Clark in writing an honors thesis on the *Cantos*. In 1967, Clark ran into Ed Sanders—poet, musician, mimeograph publisher, and the proprietor of New York City's Peace Eye Bookstore who had recently been acquitted of obscenity charges. When Sanders asked Clark if he had any manuscripts they could “instantly freak into print,” Clark handed over the *Cantos* typescript. Within days a mimeographed piracy was circulating. James Laughlin, Pound's longtime publisher at New Directions, had been attempting for several years to persuade Pound to publish a volume of new cantos but to no avail. After seeing the piracy Laughlin stepped up his campaign, eventually convincing a reluctant Pound to authorize a New Directions trade edition, as well as a fine press edition by K. K. Merker's Stone Wall Press, on the grounds that they must act quickly to secure copyright

for the final cantos.¹ These extraordinary circumstances present thorny problems when it comes to documenting *Drafts & Fragments*' production, and they make for a vexing ending to Pound's life poem.

In addressing the *Drafts & Fragments* poems, textual critics have therefore focused on the monumental project of excavating the volume's composition and publication history, attempting to organize autograph manuscripts, typescripts, published versions, and correspondence into a narrative that might shed light on what Pound wrote when and under what conditions.² In these accounts the pirated edition has been treated as a historical fact, significant only in terms of its consequences, and the Stone Wall Press edition has largely been ignored. This chapter argues instead that the first three editions of the final *Cantos*—the Fuck You Press piracy, the handprinted Stone Wall Press version, and the commercial New Directions edition—merit attention at the level of bibliographic code because these versions offer distinct ways of imagining *Drafts & Fragments* and register competing ideas about literary value at both aesthetic and economic levels. The printing technologies used (mimeograph, letterpress, and offset) correspond to distinct distribution and reception contexts at the same time that each technology places Pound and the *Cantos* in a different literary-historical trajectory. Bibliographic code is especially crucial to understanding the piracy, which uses material features to signal participation in the mimeograph revolution of the 1960s. When read in terms of the mimeograph revolution the piracy does not simply lack authority but challenges the terms by which textual and literary authority are typically constructed, offering a savvy reading of

¹ Peter Stoicheff, *The Hall of Mirrors: Drafts & Fragments and the End of Ezra Pound's Cantos* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 51-60.

² For the most thorough accounts of the composition and publication history of the *Drafts & Fragments* poems, see Peter Stoicheff's *The Hall of Mirrors*, and Ronald Bush's "Unstill, Ever Turning," *Text* 7 (1994): 397-422.

the *Cantos*' place in mid-century American poetry that in some ways does more justice to the volume than the authorized editions could.

The *Cantos* has of course proved a rich site for textual scholarship, not least of all because questions of textuality and authority are central to the poem itself. As Jerome McGann puts it, “the bibliographical problems of the *Cantos* are simultaneously hermeneutical. They go to the very heart of the work’s meaning.”³ Dense with allusions and quotations spanning centuries, continents, and languages, the *Cantos* is—among other things—an idiosyncratic network of source material. As Pound incorporated a multitude of other texts into his, he faithfully, and at times knowingly, repeated their errors; the poet also added his own by misremembering, mistranslating, mistranscribing, and misspelling. Typesetters introduced still more errors. Pound was aware of the capacity for errors to signal textual genealogies—“the stream wherethru and whereby our legend came”⁴—and he took an unsystematic approach to the errors in his text: some he studiously emended, some he let stand, some he simply ignored. Hugh Kenner reports that a typesetter at the Hours Press repeated the lines “A day when historians left blanks in their writings, / But that time seems to be passing” in a 1930 printing of canto 13, and when several decades later Kenner asked Pound whether he would like the repeat corrected for an anthology publication, Pound replied, “Repeat in 13 sanctioned by time and the author, or rather first by the author, who never objects to the typesetter making improvements.”⁵

³ Jerome McGann, “Pound’s *Cantos*: A Poem Including Bibliography,” in *A Poem Containing History: Textual Studies in The Cantos*, ed. Lawrence Rainey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 33.

⁴ Ezra Pound, unpublished letter to Lewis Maverick, quoted in Christine Froula, *To Write Paradise: Style and Error in Pound’s Cantos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 146.

⁵ Hugh Kenner, “Notes on Amateur Emendations,” *A Poem Containing History: Textual Studies in The Cantos* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 26.

The notion that even accidental printer's errors could be "sanctioned by time" or preferred by the author is at odds with a conventional approach to scholarly editing, which seeks to clear a text of "corruptions" introduced by agents other than the author.⁶ The implications of this approach are made most clear by its detractors, and Joseph Grigely's particularly aggressive critique argues for the eclectic text—which combines readings from multiple witnesses into an idealized ahistorical version—as a form of "textual eugenics." In doing so he cites Fredson Bowers' reference to "the remorseless corrupting influence that eats away at a text during the course of its transmission," and his concomitant assertion that the bibliographer's role is to "guard the purity of the important basic documents of our literature and culture."⁷ As Jack Stillinger notes, this vision of textuality construes "every alteration and revision by friends, relatives, copyists, editors, printers, publishers, and censors alike" as a form of "impurity or contamination" and if collaborative elements are inextricable the editor is forced "to devise ingenious explanations to show the collaborator was the author's 'delegated' agent and the revisions merely carried out the author's intentions."⁸

Christine Froula observes that while the errors in the *Cantos* may be "relatively trivial in themselves," they "challenge some deeply rooted assumptions about correctness, about history, about poetic authority, about the ability to even posit, let alone to 'recover,' an 'authorial intention' or an 'ideal text.'"⁹ Froula reads the poem's approach to error and authority

⁶ Such an approach takes W. W. Greg's "The Rationale of Copy-Text" (1950) as a starting point but is more appropriately attributed to Fredson Bowers, who extended Greg's theory and installed it at the center of textual criticism. Bowers made explicit appeals to the notion of "final authorial intention," a term that does not appear in Greg's essay.

⁷ Joseph Grigely, *Textualterity: Art, Theory, and Textual Criticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 23.

⁸ Jack Stillinger, "Multiple Authorship and the Question of Authority," *Text 5* (1991): 291.

⁹ Christine Froula, *To Write Paradise*, 7.

both thematically and stylistically, arguing that “*The Cantos* subverts the traditional concept of epic authority, redefining it as a collaboration between author and readers.”¹⁰ Through its documentary and demonstrably fallible approach to history, the poem critiques the epic’s claims to transcendent truth or objectivity and in Froula’s formulation the poem’s errors are of a piece with its approach to epic more generally.

Editors seeking to reconstruct a more authoritative text of the *Cantos* must therefore tread carefully. A 1989 statement from New Directions insists that “Ezra Pound himself would not have wanted a quote-unquote corrected text to be established for his *Cantos*,” because “the intrinsic character of the work is constituted by the very things—the so-called mistakes and inconsistencies—that a scholarly editing of the text would alter.”¹¹ Whether or not this is a fair assessment of scholarly editing as currently practiced, the New Directions statement speaks to the special difficulties the *Cantos* present for such a project.

Although textual scholars, acknowledging the special case of the *Cantos*, have lately approached the work with a more capacious social-text framework,¹² Sanders’ edition of the final cantos has remained disqualified from serious critical attention. In his letter first relaying news of the *Cantos* piracy to Pound, James Laughlin had the following to say:

¹⁰ Ibid., 158.

¹¹ Peter Glassgold, “A Statement from New Directions,” in *A Poem Containing History: Textual Studies in The Cantos*, ed. Lawrence Rainey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 275.

¹² In *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*, McGann claims that the fixation on final authorial intentions stems from a misapplication of textual critical practices (namely the “Lachmann method”) developed to deal with classical and Biblical texts. McGann’s editorial recommendations are quite general: he argues that “the best scholarly editions establish their texts according to a catholic set of guidelines and priorities whose relative authority shifts and alters under changing circumstances” (94). The real force of McGann’s argument, though, is in his reconstruction of what constitutes authorship and authority. McGann argues that the notion of authorial intention needs to be reevaluated and replaced with “a socialized concept of authorship and textual authority” that sees authors as embedded in complex social institutions (8).

I have not sent you a copy of the pirate's stuff, because it is so obscene. Not only full of errors, but a hideous, semi-obscene cover, and words which I cannot dictate to the nice young lady who types my letters on the title page. This all comes out of the dope culture of the Lower East Side. They are all high on one drug or another and don't care what they do.¹³

The tenor of Laughlin's descriptions of the piracy has persisted in the criticism of Peter Stoicheff, who describes the first authorized edition of *Drafts & Fragments* as "the necessary counterattack on a 1967 pirated edition of poems (crudely printed by a disdainful Fuck You Press) whose preemption of Pound's control over the place and character of publication effectively prevents us from knowing whether he would otherwise have made his last cantos public as a volume, and in what specific form."¹⁴ Although Stoicheff asserts that *Drafts & Fragments* is "as much the product of readers' and editors' wishes and necessary interventions as of Pound's," he does not allow Sanders any standing as reader or editor.¹⁵ John Young notes that "critics, including Stoicheff, still privilege Pound's reading of *The Cantos*, and this practice necessarily recapitulates the structure of poetic authority *The Cantos* denies." Young therefore wonders what exactly it would entail to understand the *Cantos* as a "provisional product...not governed by [Pound's] authorial intentions."¹⁶

In taking up this question, though, Ed Sanders appears to have beaten us to the punch. Sanders' work is squarely situated in the mimeograph revolution of the 1960s, when access to

¹³ Gregory Barnhisel, *James Laughlin, New Directions, and the Remaking of Ezra Pound* (Amhurst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 193-194.

¹⁴ Stoicheff, *Hall of Mirrors*, 34.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ John Young, review of *The Hall of Mirrors: Drafts & Fragments and the End of Ezra Pound's Cantos*, by Peter Stoicheff, *Text* 10 (1997): 426.

several inexpensive reproduction technologies—including the mimeograph, letterpress machines discarded by modernizing publishing houses, and the small Multi-Lith offset machine—led to an explosion of small press printing in the United States. With these technologies, writers could bypass traditional publishing venues and distribute work quickly and cheaply, often in the context of local artistic communities. The publications produced during the mimeograph revolution range from professional-quality offset-printed, perfect-bound books to blurry copies with sloppy hand-lettering and staple bindings. Printers such as Sanders who opted for the quick-and-dirty end of the spectrum embraced the ephemerality of their texts under the aegis of immediacy, and low production quality affirmed their do-it-yourself ethos. This chapter proposes that Sanders' piracy did not merely precipitate publication of the “real” *Drafts & Fragments*; rather, by positioning the final cantos in the mimeograph revolution's alternate framework for understanding authorship, textuality, and transmission, the piracy contributes to an understanding of the *Cantos* that moves beyond the metric of Pound's intentions for the poem and begins to account for the *Cantos* as an evolving project whose reach extends into the next generation of American poetry.

The “Dee Looks Edtn” and the “Stock-Sized Volume of Commerce”

Bibliographic code mattered to the *Cantos* from the start. Pound published the three earliest incarnations of the *Cantos* in fine press editions that call attention to their own material production: the 1925 *Draft of XVI. Cantos* and 1928 *Draft of the Cantos 17-27* with William Bird's Three Mountains Press, and the 1930 *Draft of XXX Cantos* with Nancy Cunard's Hours

Press.¹⁷ Pound expressed enthusiasm for the design of the Three Mountains edition of the first *Cantos* installment in a 1923 letter to Kate Buss:

The Three Mts. is following this prose series by a dee looks edtn of my Cantos (about 16 of 'em, I think) of UNRIVALLED magnificence. Price 25 dollars per copy, and 50 and 100 bones for Vellum and illuminateds.

It is to be one of the real bits of printing; modern book to be jacked up to somewhere near level of mediaeval mss. No Kelmscott mess of illegibility.¹⁸

Jerome McGann reads the bibliographic code of this volume, particularly its use of typography, as contributing to the meaning-making system of the *Cantos*. He focuses in particular on the elaborate ornamental capitals designed by Henry Strater, which feature the canto number spelled out (i.e. “the thirteenth canto”) in an uncial-inspired typeface¹⁹ and a small illustration (in the case of canto 13, a pastoral scene). McGann views “the physique of Pound’s 1925/1928 edition...not simply [as] an allusion to Morris, Pre-Raphaelitism, and the recent history of decorative printing” but “equally an allusion, *through them*, to the renaissance revolution in printing initiated around the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.”²⁰ In McGann’s reading, the 1930 Hours Press edition, for which Dorothy Pound designed abstract Vorticist-style capitals,

¹⁷ Cunard took over Bird’s Three Mountains Press and renamed it The Hours Press in 1928. Both operations were located in Paris.

¹⁸ quoted in Miranda Hickman, “‘To Facilitate the Traffic’ (or ‘Damn Deluxe Edtns’): Ezra Pound’s Turn from the Deluxe,” *Paideuma* 28 (1999), 174. “No Kelmscott mess of illegibility” refers to William Morris’s tendency in his Kelmscott Press books to use such elaborate typefaces and decorative elements as to render reading them quite difficult.

¹⁹ Uncial is a rounded majuscule script that was used by Greek and Latin scribes in the third through eighth centuries, well before the introduction of the printing press.

²⁰ Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 140. Pound, of course, explicitly distances his book from Morris’s Kelmscott Press in his letter to Buss, and a more appropriate point of reference for the lucid typography of the 1925 Three Mountains *Cantos* may be the Bodley Head.

“mediates between the self-consciously antiquated physicalness of the 1925/1928 texts and the more transparent trade edition texts of 1933 and thereafter.”²¹

McGann constructs Pound’s shift to trade publication as a “descent” toward a “more transparent” textuality, but he avoids speculation as to why Pound would ultimately opt to publish these and the rest of the *Cantos* in what he called “the stock-sized volume of commerce.”²² In taking up this question, Miranda Hickman identifies several factors that compelled Pound to turn deliberately away from deluxe editions, namely “their limited quantity, their ornamentation, and their shrinking capacity for cultural work.”²³ In Hickman’s view the trade publication of the *Cantos* was not a tragic winnowing away of bibliographic significance so much as a deliberate decision on Pound’s part to capitalize on different kinds of textual possibilities. As Pound in the 1930s came to view even the *Cantos* “primarily as a means of conveying crucial economic and political information to the public,” he felt an increased sense of urgency about distributing his work, and deluxe editions simply could not reach the audience he desired.²⁴ Hickman also points to Pound’s admiration for the fascist aesthetic on display at the 1932 Esposizione del Decennio in Rome (an event celebrating ten years of the Mussolini regime), and conjectures that in the context of such typographic austerity the ornamental flourishes of deluxe editions ceased to appeal to him. Pound’s 1935 adoption on his personal letterhead of the sans serif block capital typeface from Mussolini’s posters and handbills would seem to confirm Hickman’s suspicions.²⁵

²¹ Ibid., 131.

²² Ezra Pound, “The Inquest into the State of Contemporary English Prose” (1923), quoted in Gregory Barnhisel, *Remaking of Ezra Pound*, 23.

²³ Miranda Hickman, “To Facilitate the Traffic,” 176. Hickman also notes that deluxe editions became increasingly difficult to produce in the economic climate of the 1930s.

²⁴ Ibid., 185.

²⁵ Barnhisel, *Remaking of Ezra Pound*, 77. Pound’s letterhead from 1935-1937 also dated the year from the start of the Mussolini regime in 1922, i.e. “ANNO XIII” for 1935.

Perhaps most importantly, Hickman argues that Pound turned away from the deluxe edition because it had been co-opted by larger publishing firms and therefore had lost much of its “counter-hegemonic power.” During the 1920s craze for deluxe editions, commercial presses—most notably Random House—began printing expensive deluxe editions by classic authors. “Increasingly, deluxe books were no longer primarily associated with new modern writers seeking to defy the mainstream,” and such editions, instead of undermining the commercial publishing system, became their quintessential product.²⁶ Pound put the matter thus in a 1931 letter to Caresse Crosby of Black Sun Press:

The de luxe book was (has been) useful in breaking the strangle hold that the s. o. b. had on ALL publication. But the minute the luxe was made into a trust (Random Louse etc.) and forced into trade channels it ceased pretty much to be useful // e.g. you found yourself tied by what cd SELL.²⁷

Although in describing his satisfaction with the Three Mountains edition Pound focused on the capacity for fine printing to “jack up” a modern book’s aesthetics to the realm of the medieval manuscript, here Pound emphasizes the deluxe edition’s initial affiliation with independent publishing and its potential to provide an alternative to the sales-oriented commercial house.

Taken at face value, Pound’s statement to Crosby seems to pit creative expression against “what cd SELL,” but Pound did not shy away from certain forms of literary marketing and promotion.²⁸ As Gregory Barnhisel notes, in addition to “advis[ing] his small-press publishers on

²⁶ Hickman, “To Facilitate the Traffic,” 184.

²⁷ Quoted in Hickman, “To Facilitate the Traffic,” 183. Pound does not make clear in the context of the original letter to whom “the s. o. b” refers.

²⁸ Timothy Materer even casts Imagism—a movement Pound conjured out of thin air to “sell” H.D.’s earliest poems to *Poetry*—as a marketing strategy. See “Make It Sell! Ezra Pound Advertises Modernism,” *Marketing Modernisms: Self-Promotion, Canonization, Rereading*. ed Kevin Dettmar and Stephen Watt (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

how to most effectively market his books,” Pound “avidly pursued the larger markets available through the trade publishers when those publishers (Liveright, Knopf, Heubsch) began to show interest in modernist writing.”²⁹ Pound’s choice to break off his relationship with Farrar and Reinhart and publish with New Directions happened in part because Farrar and Reinhart did such a dismal job selling his books, retaining Pound on their list primarily to capitalize on his prestige rather than to profit from the sale of his work. Barnhisel points out that while “*commercial* is the term *against* which almost all of the actors of the story of Pound’s reputation...define themselves,” “almost every figure in modernism engaged, often happily, in commercial activities” (emphasis in original).³⁰

The majority of Pound’s readers in the late 1960s United States would have encountered *Drafts & Fragments* in the commercial New Directions edition, which gives no indication of the volume’s anomalous path to publication. The front flap of the dust jacket offers the following assurance of authorial agency: “Ezra Pound has now released for publication in book form those parts of Cantos 110-117 on which he has been working in recent years.”³¹ While technically accurate, this statement does little justice to the cajoling required for the “release” of these poems. Although the title *Drafts & Fragments of Cantos CX-CXVI* (which was provided by Laughlin) suggests that the volume is incomplete or provisional, it also recalls the first three volumes of the *Cantos: A Draft of XVI. Cantos, A Draft of Cantos 17-27, and A Draft of XXX Cantos*.

²⁹ Barnhisel, *Remaking*, 12, 24.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

³¹ Ezra Pound, *Drafts & Fragments of Cantos CX-CXVII* (New York: New Directions, 1968), jacket.

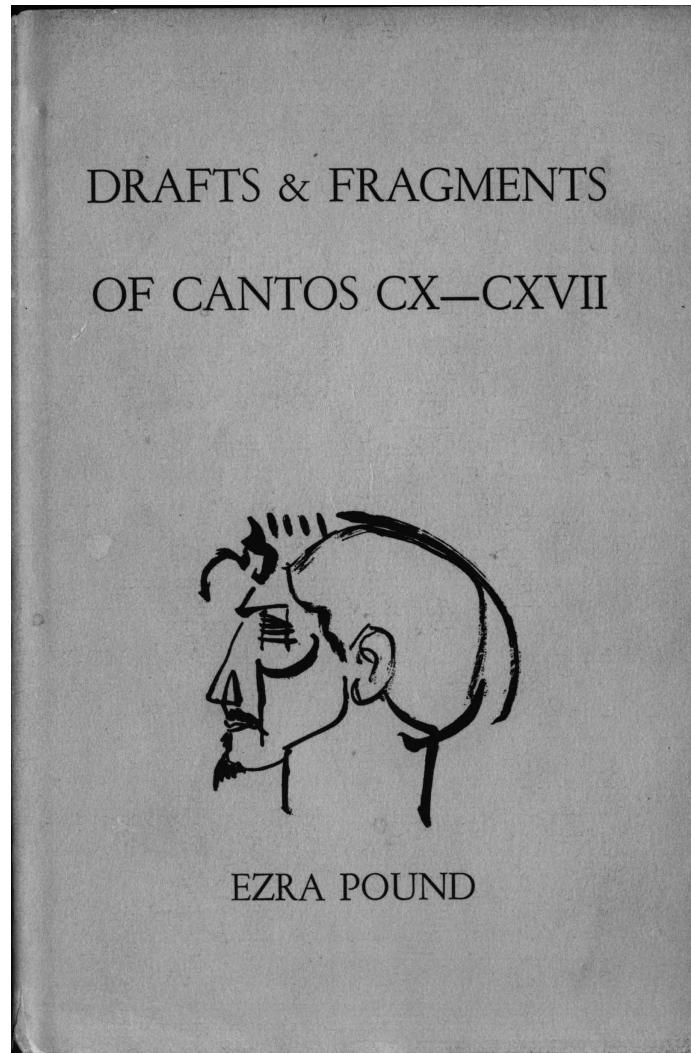


Figure 1. Jacket for the New Directions *Drafts & Fragments* (1968)

The dust jacket's cover image—a drawing of Ezra Pound's profile by the French artist Henri Gaudier-Brzeska—similarly refers to earlier volumes, since the sketch had served as the “brand” for the *Cantos* since the 1948 *Pisan Cantos* (fig. 1). The visual scheme initiated by the *Pisan Cantos* is an odd choice compared with jackets for the firm's other modernist authors produced around the same time, many of which were designed in an emphatically contemporary style by Alvin Lustig. The firm's New Classics Series, which reprinted recent works that had gone out of print, featured Lustig's designs on jackets for numerous modernist authors, including

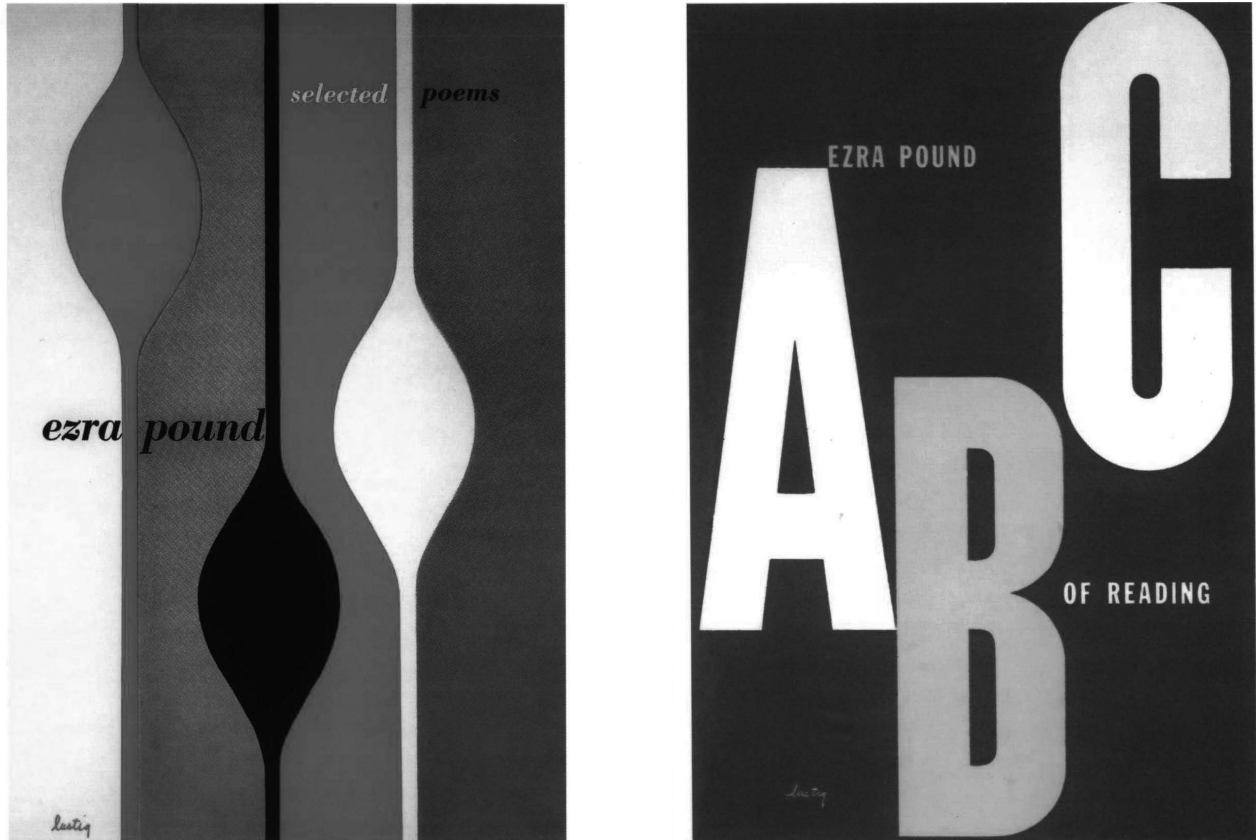


Figure 2. Alvin Lustig's designs for the 1949 *Selected Poems* (left) and 1949 *ABC of Reading* (right)

Djuna Barnes, F. Scott Fitzgerald, E. M. Forster, Henry James, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Gertrude Stein, Evelyn Waugh, Nathaniel West, and William Carlos Williams. Pound's *Selected Poems* (1949) and *ABC of Reading* (1949) appeared in Lustig jackets as well (fig. 2).

Laughlin reports that when Lustig entered the picture in 1938 the eight New Directions books already in print “were jacketed in a very conservative, ‘booky,’ way” and “sales were pretty dreary.” After New Directions “brightened the books up with the Lustig covers,”

Immediately, [the books] began to move. Stores which had been ordering one book at a time began ordering five books at a time. It was clear that the visual appeal was doing its work. Stores began devoting window displays to the books where before they had hidden them away on the shelves.

Laughlin estimates that these jackets increased sales by three hundred percent, a fact that did not sit entirely well with him, as it suggested that the covers mattered more than the contents when it came to getting books into the hands of readers.

Lustig's eye-catching, abstract, and thoroughly modern jackets stand in stark contrast to the one used for *Drafts & Fragments*. In fact, the jacket for the earliest New Directions *Cantos* volume, *Cantos LII-LXXI*, may fall short of the standard set by Lustig but it has a more modern-looking design than the later jackets. With the bottom two-thirds printed in bright red and the author and title in a sans-serif font, the *Cantos LII-LXXI* jacket at least gestures toward a more contemporary aesthetic. By contrast, the design formula initiated with the Pisan *Cantos*, which uses a serif font and sparse single-color printing on neutral-colored matte paper, resembles jackets typical of the 1910s more so than the 1940s. Well aware that splashy jackets sell books, Laughlin nevertheless opted to package the *Cantos* in a way that can only be described as "conservative" and "booky." When New Directions began using the Gaudier-Brzeska sketch, the image already pointed back to the days of Vorticism, when Gaudier-Brzeska's work appeared alongside Pound's in the journal *Blast*.³² This sketch serves to affiliate Pound with the early twentieth-century avant-garde, thereby invoking a version of Pound that pre-dates his cockeyed political and economic theories, treasonous radio broadcasts, and confinement in St. Elizabeths psychiatric hospital.

As such, this dust jacket corresponds to the narrative constructed by Barnhisel, who tracks Laughlin's considerable influence on Pound's career from the 1930s when Laughlin "decried the commodification of art" and pitched Pound's texts to an upper-class audience on

³² That Gaudier-Brzeska was killed in the trenches in World War I further underscores the image's association with the early twentieth century.

the argument that “Pound’s works promoted healthy values—economic justice and cultural renewal.”³³ Laughlin was forced to change tack when Pound’s treason trial all but halted the sale of his works, and in the 1950s and 1960s, Laughlin worked hard to convince readers to “ignore [Pound’s] political activities, biography, and beliefs and to read the poetry for its internal qualities alone.”³⁴ To that end, Laughlin reprinted critical texts by Pound, many of them from the early years of his career, but refused to print new political and economic material or to reprint Pound’s older work on such subjects. This strategy effectively prevented Pound, who was still eager to engage in cultural and social criticism, from interfering with his own success under the formalist rubric endorsed by Laughlin. As Barnhisel notes, Laughlin’s rhetorical stance against the commercialization of literature was—like Pound’s own—coupled with a commitment to selling Pound’s work, and New Directions participated in many of the same promotional strategies of more commercially-oriented publishing houses.³⁵

The dust jacket for *Drafts & Fragments* exemplifies Laughlin’s postwar “remaking” of Pound, focusing as it does on the poet’s past achievements. The jacket’s back cover is devoted to a priced list of Pound’s poetry, prose, and translations available from New Directions, ranging in cost from \$1.50 to \$10.00. The back flap gives special attention to the most expensive of these books, a volume of correspondence between Pound and James Joyce. “Pound did not discover Joyce,” it reads, “but he recognized his genius in the first stories and then unselfishly dedicated himself to Joyce’s welfare.”³⁶ The description also promises that the volume contains Pound’s “spontaneous reactions” to works of Joyce’s, including *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*. Taken as a whole,

³³ Barnhisel, *Remaking of Ezra Pound*, 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-7.

³⁶ Pound, *Drafts & Fragments* (New Directions), jacket.

the dust jacket of this edition deploys Pound's role in the literary culture of the early twentieth century as a marketing strategy.

The Stone Wall Press *Drafts & Fragments* likewise conjures up an early twentieth century Pound by referring back to the earliest *Cantos* volumes, but the edition also casts an eye much further backward to the handpress period. Twelve inches tall, hand-printed in two colors, hand-bound, and sold exclusively by word of mouth at \$100 a copy, the Stone Wall *Drafts & Fragments* immediately announces its distance from the mechanized commercial book industry and an affiliation with the fine press tradition. When fine press printing crossed the Atlantic it lost much of the political force that had been central to Kelmscott Press, but these printing practices retained an aura of dignity, permanence, and distance from the exigencies of the literary marketplace—in part because fine press books were not readily available in bookstores, and do not address themselves to a general readership—if they are intended to be “read,” in a traditional sense, at all.

Unlike many fine presses, however, Stone Wall Press primarily published the work of new writers in affordable editions. K. K. Merker was a publisher, not just a printer, and he was an early supporter of such poets as Mark Strand, Donald Justice, and Philip Levine. Merker's primary motivation for publishing a handful of established authors (beginning with Theodore Roethke) was to “lend credibility to the rest of the list and give a seriousness to the young poets [he] was printing.”³⁷ Stone Wall, then, was a fitting publisher for the *Cantos*, as the press aimed to reinvigorate the independent taste-making function that Pound initially admired in ventures such as Three Mountains and the Hours Press.

³⁷ Sidney E. Berger, *Printing and the Mind of Merker: A Bibliographical Study* (New York: Grolier Club, 1997), 17.

Typical Stone Wall Press books were modest in proportion and price, even though they were produced on a handpress. The same year that Merker printed the *Cantos* he also published James Tate's *Notes of Woe* in an eight-inch volume with two-color printing that sold for a mere \$5.75. However, because in the case of *Drafts & Fragments* Merker was hired as a printer by New Directions, Laughlin had the final word on decisions about the book's format. Merker reports that *Drafts & Fragments* was like Merker's other books "designed to be small, not large"; however, after looking at the proofs, Laughlin complained that at such a small size "he couldn't sell it for what he wanted to sell it for."³⁸ Even if Laughlin's primary motivations for dramatically increasing the price were economic, the high cost of the Stone Wall *Drafts & Fragments* transformed the volume's purchasers into patrons—a role memorialized in earlier cantos through the figure of Sigismondo Malatesta.

In increasing the size at Laughlin's behest, Merker created a book of magisterial proportions. Reflecting on how the edition turned out, Merker writes,

On this size page I should have used a 16-point type. The width of the lines doesn't call in any way for such a large format. But I was just increasing the size of the page to make [James Laughlin] happy. I like the way it came out, but in this book you see the thin man trying to get out of the fat man. The body is a little bulkier than the bone structure is.³⁹

Drafts & Fragments may not align perfectly with the overall Stone Wall Press aesthetic and it may not exhibit best practices in type-to-page ratio, but Merker's description does much to explain the effect Laughlin aimed for in this fine press edition. The volume is stately, calling

³⁸ Ibid., 30.

³⁹ Ibid.

clear attention to the circumstances of its production and emphatically participating in a craft tradition of printing that can be traced all the way back to Gutenberg. By invoking this tradition, the Stone Wall edition situates *Drafts and Fragments* in a lineage of enduring cultural products whose literary value is understood to be intrinsic rather than determined by markets.

The colophon of the Stone Wall *Drafts & Fragments* reads, “This edition of Ezra Pound’s *Drafts & Fragments of Cantos CX-CXVII* was printed on the hand-press by K.K. Merker, The Stone Wall Press, Iowa City, in Romanee type on Umbria paper. The edition consists of 310 copies: Numbers 1 to 200 for New Directions, New York; Numbers 201-300 for Faber and Faber Ltd, London; Numbers 301-310 for the Stone Wall Press. // All copies are signed by the author.”⁴⁰ Including such a colophon is standard practice in fine press printing; however, read as a response to the piracy, this particular colophon becomes a promise of controlled transmission. Printed using specific materials, with each copy numbered and signed, this edition cannot be copied, only forged. Pound’s signature bestows his blessing and suggests more authorial involvement in the production of the edition than was the case. The overall effect of the Stone Wall *Drafts & Fragments* is to situate the *Cantos* in a long historical trajectory leading back to the advent of printing, and to affirm the work’s authenticity as a product of Pound’s intention.

In spite of the major differences between the New Directions and Stone Wall *Drafts & Fragments*, both editions locate their authority in having been sanctioned by Pound, even though he had initially withheld authorization for these volumes. Each edition orients itself toward a distinct stratum of the literary marketplace, but each is nevertheless legitimated through its affiliation with recognized channels for the sale of literary works. Taken together, these editions

⁴⁰ Ezra Pound, *Drafts & Fragments of Cantos CX-CXVII* (Iowa City: Stone Wall Press, 1968).

work to wrest control over the final cantos away from the Fuck You Press piracy by restoring the text to more conventional forms.

“Total Assault on the Culture”

Ed Sanders evidently relished the paratextual prerogatives of the publisher, as the title pages, colophons, and other editorial apparatuses he produced for his Fuck You Press are often colorful and seldom brief. Sanders’ enthusiasm for paratext reaches its zenith in the 1964 *Valorium Edition of the Entire Extant Works of Thales!*, subtitled “the famous Milesian poet / philosopher physicist, astronomer / mathematician, cosmologist, / Urstoff-freak, / absent-minded professor, / & madman // with an introduction by ARISTOTLE.”⁴¹ “Valorium” crossbreeds the variorum edition with Valium, putting a 1960s countercultural spin on the work of scholarly editing. The first opening of the *Valorium Edition* is given over to a simple title page, and the following opening offers the advertised introduction by Aristotle, which turns out to be written in Greek. The final opening is blank. The edition’s punch line, then, is that no written work by Thales survives (if it ever existed) and Thales is known entirely through secondary sources, including Aristotle. Directly engaging the complexities of transmission and the power of context to frame a text, the edition takes to extremity Gérard Genette’s claim that “the paratext is what enables a text to become a book” by demonstrating that that paratexts have the power to make a book out of even textual absence.⁴²

⁴¹ Ed Sanders, *Valorium Edition of the Entire Extant Work of Thales!* (New York: Fuck You Press, 1964), cover.

⁴² Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-2.

Paratexts also play a major role in Sanders' piracy of W. H. Auden's *The Platonic Blow*, a sexually explicit long poem that Auden publicly denied writing and the only other Fuck You Press piracy. The poem's first appearance in the "Third Anniversary Mad Motherfucker Issue" of *Fuck You / A Magazine of the Arts* was untitled but prefaced by a handwritten note labeling it "a Gobble Poem snatched from the notebook of W. H. Auden & now believed to be in the Morgan Library," thereby incorporating the text's transmission into its bid for authenticity.⁴³ In the stand-alone version, Sanders omits this note and in the front matter assigns copyright to the (obviously fictitious) "Dietrich Von Buttfükel Gobble Grope Fellowship."⁴⁴ Auden, very much alive in 1965, might have contested this claim to copyright had he been willing to take credit for writing the work. As he was not, Sanders' copyright designation teases Auden and draws attention to the murky authority of the poem. The colophon carries on in a similar fashion, promising:

A Trade edition of 300 copies

A Rough Trade Edition of 5 numbered copies, each with beautiful slurp drawing
by the artist Joe Brainard

An edition of 3 numbered copies, each with a sealed packet sewn in, containing
secret gobble relics from the body of W. H. Auden

The Turkey Edition, 2 copies, which reveals the names of the publishers, both evil
poets, Toe Queens, and cocksman, scandalously freaking in the Lower East Side⁴⁵

Here Sanders plays along with the practice of releasing trade and deluxe editions simultaneously

⁴³ Ed Sanders, ed., *Fuck You / A Magazine of the Arts* 8 no. 5 (1965).

⁴⁴ W. H. Auden, *The Platonic Blow* (New York: Fuck You Press, 1965).

⁴⁵ Ibid. In their bibliography of Auden, Barry Bloomfield and Edward Mendelson soberly note, "there appears to be no evidence for the existence of the last two editions described in the pamphlet itself." *W. H. Auden: a Bibliography 1924-1969* (University Press of Virginia: Charlottesville, 1972).

while redefining “deluxe” in Fuck You Press terms. In both the *Valorium Edition* and *The Platonic Blow* Sanders invokes longstanding print conventions—variorum and deluxe editions, copyrights and colophons—as part of his appropriation of texts for new audiences and purposes.

By comparison to other Fuck You Press productions, Ezra Pound’s *Cantos 110-116*—the Fuck You Press title for what would later be *Drafts & Fragments*—has minimal paratextual and visual flourishes. Mimeographed on single-sided letter-sized paper and staple-bound, the edition makes no attempt to disguise its swift, low-budget production. The cover collage of a male torso and diamonds by Joe Brainard, while classy in comparison to other Fuck You Press productions, does not bear any apparent relationship to the *Drafts & Fragments* poems (fig. 3). The title page, although it does feature Sanders’ usual decorative motif of disembodied male genitalia and a drawing of “Gash Cow,” restrains its textual components to title, author, press, and place of publication (fig. 4). The place of publication is given as “a secret location in the lower east side,” an announcement at once practical—acknowledging as it does the legal consequences of violating copyright and obscenity laws—and provocative. The edition quietly omits copyright rather than flaunting its lack of authorization.

The final page of *Cantos 110-116* includes a simple colophon declaring that the edition consists of 300 copies and recording the present volume’s number. Again, given Sanders’ liberties with the colophon for *The Platonic Blow*, this one is surprisingly straight-faced. While the *Cantos 110-116* colophon participates in the strategy of increasing value for an edition by insisting on scarcity, and promises a select audience much in the manner of fine press colophons, it also acknowledges the ephemerality of the medium: mimeograph stencils wear out after several hundred copies, becoming increasingly blurry and eventually tearing, so larger print runs are impractical. The cachet of this edition is not, as in fine press editions, located in its enduring

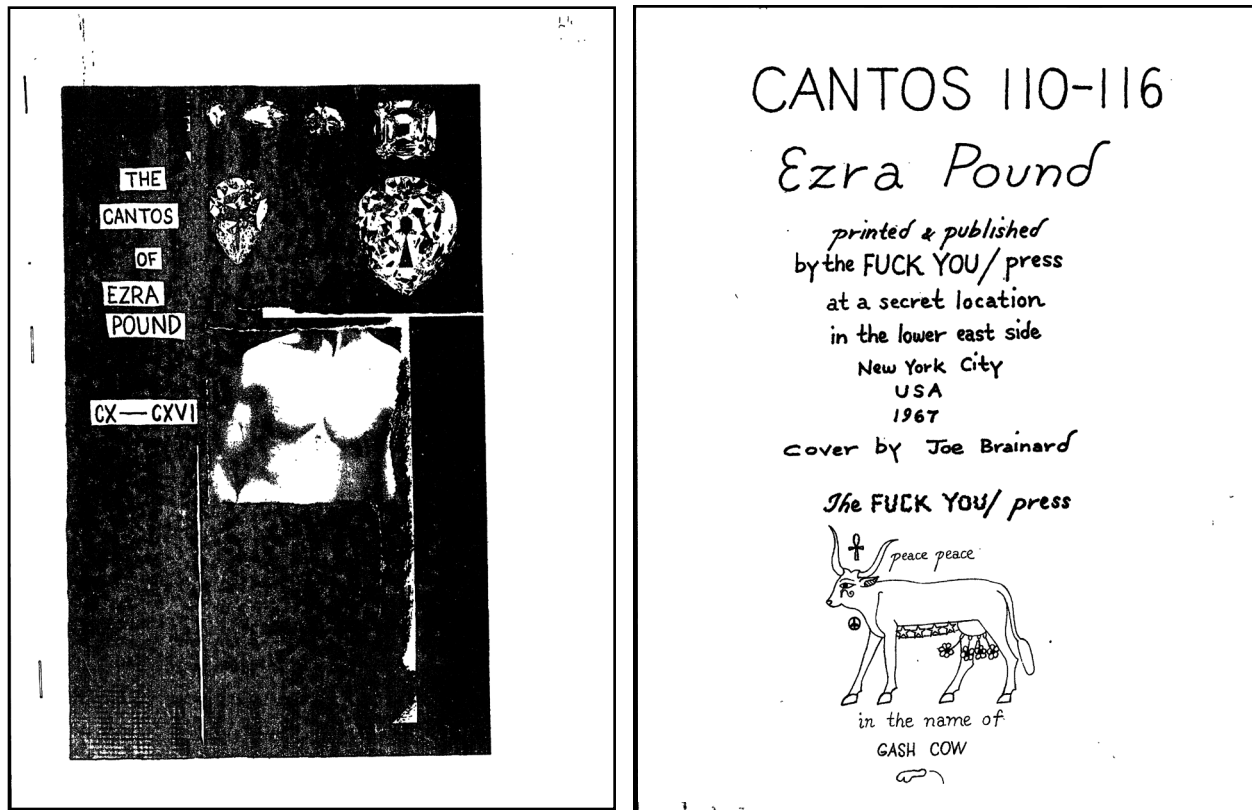


Figure 3. Cover (left) and title page (right) for the Fuck You Press *Cantos 110-116* (1968).

value or rarefied materials but rather in its novelty, as the piracy offered an opportunity to read these new cantos immediately, before they were published in an authorized form.⁴⁶

The mimeograph revolution was defined by this form of immediacy, and poets publishing in this context reveled in the possibility of getting their work into print as soon as possible. The poet Ron Loewinsohn writes of mimeograph magazines:

More important than the quality of their contents was the fact of [their] abundance and speed. Having them, we could see what we were doing, as it came, hot off the griddle. We could get instant response to what we'd written last week, & we could

⁴⁶ Between 1960 and 1967, portions of all of the cantos from 110-116 appeared in periodicals, but it would have taken a dedicated reader to track down all of these publications.

respond instantly to what the guy across town or across the country had written last week.”⁴⁷

As Loewinsohn indicates, a sense of real-time dialogue became as important as what was being said. In this context that privileged rapid circulation of texts, the value of copyright was not a given. Some writers rejected copyright altogether, and recorded an absence of copyright in their texts. Richard Brautigan’s 1968 *Please Plant this Book* reads “THIS BOOK IS FREE. // Permission is granted to reprint this book by anyone as long as it is not sold.”⁴⁸ Diane Di Prima’s 1971 *Revolutionary Letters* begins with the note “The Revolutionary Letters are free poetry and may be reprinted anywhere by anyone...Power to the people’s mimeo machines!”⁴⁹

Spurning copyright allowed these poets to encourage faster and wider circulation of their work, but it also represented an intervention into property-based constructions of individual authorship. Copyright only became an author’s right in the eighteenth century, having initially consisted of a manuscript owner’s “right to grant permission to copy” a text and, with the advent of print, a publisher’s exclusive right to print a work (so as to ensure that rival editions did not render the initial investment profitless). Martha Woodmansee traces “the ‘author’ in the modern sense” to “the emergence in the eighteenth century of writers who sought to earn their livelihood from the sale of their writings to the news and rapidly expanding reading public.”⁵⁰ In light of the link between copyright and the literary market, Mark Rose maintains that “the distinguishing

⁴⁷ Loewinsohn’s perspective on magazines applies equally to the single-author products of a press like *Fuck You*, which were materially indistinguishable from magazines. Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips, *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980* (New York: Granary Books, 1998), 14.

⁴⁸ Richard Brautigan, *Please Plant This Book* (San Francisco: [Graham Mackintosh], 1968).

⁴⁹ Quoted in James Sullivan, *On the Walls and in the Streets: American Poetry Broadides from the 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 61.

⁵⁰ Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 36.

characteristic of the modern author...is proprietorship; the author is conceived as the originator and therefore the owner of a special kind of commodity, the work.”⁵¹ By renouncing their copyright protections in the front matter of their books, authors such as Brautigan and Di Prima reframed authorship in terms of textual creation and circulation rather than sale. This approach to authorship encouraged an understanding of a book of poems as a social interaction rather than a work of isolated genius.⁵² Certainly a difference exists between relinquishing copyright to one’s own work and pirating someone else’s, but both scenarios confront deeply entrenched ideas of authorship, readership, and property.

Pound, who seldom missed an opportunity to weigh in on what he took to be his era’s most pressing problems, expressed his own views on copyright and textual circulation in a 1918 article in the *New Age*. “Copyrights and Tariffs” has Pound lamenting the protectionist U.S. copyright laws that effectively legalized piracy of texts by international authors. These laws, Pound argues, made editions by foreign authors cheaper than those by Americans, thereby hindering American authors in their own nation’s book market. He goes on to critique copyright expiration on similar grounds: the public domain “permits dead authors to compete on unjust terms with living authors,” and “unscrupulous, but well-meaning publishers...print dead authors more cheaply than living ones BECAUSE *they do not have to pay royalties*” (emphasis in the

⁵¹ Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1.

⁵² These writers challenged copyright norms by unmooring the text from its status as property, but writers have also challenged the definitions of originality that enable the literary text to become distinct property in the first place. Paul Saint-Amour contends that modernist experiments in appropriation and collage were enabled by the era’s legal climate and that today’s more stringent intellectual property laws would make experiments such as the *Cantos* all but impossible. See Paul Saint-Amour, *The Copywrights: Intellectual Property and the Literary Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003) and Paul Saint-Amour, ed., *Modernism and Copyright* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

original).⁵³ Pound considers this to be “to the disadvantage of contemporary literature, to the disadvantage of literary production.”⁵⁴

Instead, he proposes a copyright statute that would give authors, American or otherwise, perpetual copyright for their work. He quickly qualifies this individualist, property-centered approach to copyright by adding

BUT the heirs of an author should be powerless to prevent the publication of his works or to extract any excessive royalties. If the heirs neglect to keep a man’s work in print and at a price not greater than the price of his books during his life, then unauthorized publishers should be at liberty to reprint said works, paying to heirs a royalty not more than 20 per cent. and not less than 10 per cent.

In a legal analysis of Pound’s proposed statute, Robert Spoo observes that “what Pound initially characterizes as perpetual protection for authors’ intellectual labor is essentially a scheme for maximizing the availability of works and translations.”⁵⁵ The author’s rights remain absolute only so long as the author (or heir) responsibly executes the public function of publication. Pound further limits the author’s rights once a work has “sold a certain number of copies, let us say 100,000,” at which point “there should be no means of indefinitely preventing a very cheap reissue of his work. Let us say a shilling a volume” with royalties again payable at twenty percent. This “compulsory license for cheap editions”—by Spoo’s estimates the most radical provision of Pound’s proposed statute—creates a tipping point at which copyright, having run its course as an incentive for authorship, becomes foremost a matter of serving the public good.

⁵³ Ezra Pound, “Copyright and Tariff,” *New Age*, October 3, 1918: 363.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Robert Spoo, “Ezra Pound’s Copyright Statute: Perpetual Rights and the Problem of Heirs,” *UCLA Law Review* 56 (2009): 1797.

Such a copyright statute, which ultimately privileges circulation over individual ownership, is in keeping with the poet's famous injunctions against usury, particularly as expressed in *Guide to Kulchur*: "Usury endows no printing press. Usurers do not desire circulation of knowledge."⁵⁶

What Spoo describes as Pound's "attempts to promote unimpeded communication among living writers of all nations" begins to sound oddly similar to the perspective on copyright embraced by many mimeograph poets and printers, and the specifics of Pound's statute resonate with Sanders' professed motivations for pirating the *Cantos*. Sanders narrated the *Cantos* piracy thus in a 1998 interview: "We had heard Dorothy [Pound] was holding up the publication of [these cantos]. At that time even more than now I had an almost microscopic knowledge of all the *Cantos*, and I decided that they were by Pound....So I did what I did."⁵⁷ The notion that the poems were being suppressed by Dorothy Pound may now seem slightly absurd in light of Pound's demonstrated reluctance to authorize a volume of these poems even after the piracy, but it's worth recalling that the Hall typescript that served as the basis for the piracy was seven years old by the time Sanders acquired a copy, and prior to the piracy's intervention, an edition of these *Cantos* was nowhere in sight. In Pound's proposed statute, provisions for cheap editions would only kick in once the author or heirs had failed to keep a text in circulation. With versions of some of the final cantos already appearing in periodicals, Sanders could reasonably understand the text of the *Drafts & Fragments* poems to be in a state of impeded circulation.

Money was certainly among Sanders' motivations for printing *Cantos 110-116* as well, and although Sanders reports giving away a hundred copies to friends, he also sold 100 copies to the Gotham Bookmart for \$6.00 apiece, a high price by comparison to the hardcover New

⁵⁶ Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1952), 62.

⁵⁷ Daniel Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 70.

Directions volume which retailed for \$3.95. The sale netted Sanders and Tom Clark \$491 to split. The handwritten “accounting statement” for the publication reprinted in Sanders’ autobiography has a line for “10% Pound,” but Sanders doesn’t mention whether this \$60 ever reached the author.⁵⁸ Had Sanders actually sent Pound the ten percent cut, he would have come close to complying with the spirit of Pound’s proposed statute in which authors would still be remunerated after losing control of their copyright protections.

Sanders’ willingness to make money on the piracy of Pound’s work was no doubt also impacted by his disappointment and disgust regarding Pound’s anti-Semitism. In his autobiography, Sanders recounts a 1963 trip to the Library of Congress to listen to recordings of Pound’s wartime broadcasts in an attempt to address what he calls “the Lb Q” (short for “the Pound Question”): “how to deal with his Anti-Semitism against the background of his undeniable talents as a poet.” Sanders adds that, “To poets in the Beat, Black Mountain, Objectivist, or Deep Image tradition, it was a serious issue.”⁵⁹ Although Sanders never says so explicitly, his descriptions of the piracy suggest that lost respect for Pound contributed to his willingness to print the work without permission.

Still, to understand the piracy as merely a malevolent money-making scheme oversimplifies the meaning that this publication would have had to Sanders and to readers purchasing Sanders’ publications from “under the counter of [their] favorite bookstore.”⁶⁰ Sanders’ editorial projects were unabashedly political, particularly in the case of the fourteen issues of *Fuck You / A Magazine of the Arts*, which he released at irregular intervals between 1962 and

⁵⁸ Ed Sanders, *Fug You: An Informal History of the Peace Eye Bookstore, the Fuck You Press, the Fugs, and Counterculture in the Lower East Side* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2011), 286.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶⁰ Ed Sanders, ed., *Fuck You / A Magazine of the Arts* 4 (1962).

1965. As Daniel Kane puts it, “the magazine was encyclopedic in its embrace of all movements and publishing practices that threatened conventional morality.”⁶¹ The first issue, for instance, is dedicated to “pacifism, unilateral disarmament, national defense through nonviolent resistance, multilateral indiscriminate apertural conjugation, anarchism, world federalism, civil disobedience, obstructers and submarine boarders, and all those groped by J. Edgar Hoover in the silent halls of Congress.”⁶² As this relatively tame example suggests, the magazine’s numerous editorial paratexts parodied the rhetoric of even those positions it espoused. Most often, the magazine’s assault on convention was accomplished by treating sexuality with an over-the-top hilarity that was lost on the censors. With rollicking excess, the magazine uses the language of radical sexual politics to construct a radical politics of print: *Fuck You* is regularly described as “published, printed, edited... & ejaculated by Ed Sanders”; notes on contributors intertwine assertions of literary genius and sexual prowess; and Sanders’ stated editorial policy—“I’ll print anything”—coincides with the magazine’s rhetoric of promiscuity. In light of the larger project of the Fuck You Press, *Cantos 110-116* registers a strong statement about literary ownership and freedom of the press: texts should circulate, and if the author won’t circulate the text, someone else ought to.

Given the forcefulness of Sanders’ political agenda, it can be easy to forget that Fuck You Press was also an artistic endeavor, aimed at upsetting the aesthetic norms represented by the mainstream publishing industry and critical establishment. Fuck You Press’s opposition to the book trade’s legal parameters of copyright and obscenity was constitutive of an avant-garde poetics positioning itself outside the literary conventions of the time. Sanders’ “*cri de mimeo*”⁶³ of “I’ll print anything” promised writers a venue in which their work could reach an audience

⁶¹ Kane, *All Poets Welcome*, 72.

⁶² Ed Sanders, ed., *Fuck You / A Magazine of the Arts* 1 (1962).

⁶³ Sanders, *Fug You*, 29.

without being vetted according to a pre-existing poetic standard. With poetics taken into account, the choice to use the *Cantos* to make a statement about copyright is neither arbitrary nor exclusively opportunistic. Sanders' claim to an "almost microscopic knowledge of all the *Cantos*" in his description of the piracy points to an explicit investment in Pound's work that pre-dates the *Drafts & Fragments* poems.

Such sentiments were shared by many poets who came of age after World War II and turned toward Pound—and away from T. S. Eliot—as a model for their writing. In the introduction to his landmark 1960 anthology *The New American Poetry*, Donald Allen claims that the poets he includes are "following the practice and precepts of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams" but have "built on their achievements and gone on to evolve new conceptions of the poem... They are our avant-garde, the true continuers of the modern movement in American poetry."⁶⁴ James Breslin hastens to point out the contradiction in describing an avant-garde as the continuation of an earlier movement, and he sees this tension as defining the post-war moment in American poetry. Breslin recounts the sense of historical misfortune that many writers felt in the 1950's, coming on the heels of modernism at a time when many of modernism's major figures were still alive and publishing. However, "the problem for a young poet in the early or mid-fifties was not simply the looming presence of that 'dynasty of extraordinary gifts and powers'; nor was it exactly that all modernist assumptions about poetry had run dry."⁶⁵ Instead, writers had to contend with the fact that a "particular phase of modernism—that identified with Eliot and with the New Criticism in America—had achieved

⁶⁴ Donald Hall, ed., *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 1.

⁶⁵ James Breslin, *From Modern to Contemporary: American Poetry, 1945-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 12.

a powerful hegemony which successfully domesticated modernism.”⁶⁶ Rather than repudiating modernism per se, then, post-war American poets repudiated the ossified, orthodox vision of modernism that was slowly entrenching itself in the academy. They instead declared their allegiance to writers, especially Pound and (to a lesser extent) Williams, who represented an experimental tradition and an outsider version of modernism.⁶⁷

A wide range of writers learned from Pound. Marjorie Perloff asks, “What is it in Pound’s oeuvre that has made such a difference in the poetry of the later twentieth century, a difference that transcends, in curious ways, the local differences between individual poets?”⁶⁸ Her answers include Pound’s “drive toward precision, particularity, immediacy,” “the ‘break[ing] of the pentameter’ in favor of the ‘musical’ free verse line,” “the use of translation as the invention of a desired other,” and—in her view most important—“the example of the *Cantos* as ‘a poem including history,’ the new conception of the poem as ‘the tale of the tribe’ that no longer privileges lyric over narrative (or even drama), that can incorporate the contemporary and the archaic, economics and myth, the everyday and the elevated.”⁶⁹ Laszlo Gefin locates Pound’s primary influence in his introduction of the ideogram, tracing the resultant paratactic strategies through such writers as Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff, George Oppen, Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Robert Creeley.⁷⁰

For his part, Sanders’ most apparent poetic debt to Pound is his use of Egyptian hieroglyphs, modeled in no small way on the ideograms of the *Cantos*. Hieroglyphs appear

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁸ Marjorie Perloff, “The Contemporary of Our Grandchildren,” *Ezra Pound among the Poets*, ed. George Bornstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 197.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 198.

⁷⁰ Laszlo Géfin, *Ideogram: History of a Poetic Method*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).

regularly in the illustrations and editorial paratexts for Fuck You Press, and Sanders' appropriation of the Eye of Horus hieroglyph—which he dubbed the “peace eye”—offered the name for the Peace Eye Bookstore as well as its logo (featured prominently on the front of the store). With these Egyptian hieroglyphs Sanders also “commingled” his own “glyphs,” which included “magic mushrooms, hookahs, the Egyptian scarab, the Lawrencian Boat of Death,⁷¹ the peace sign, spurting dongs, hypodermic needles, and Peace Eye and its Wayward Tongue.”⁷² Sanders incorporated such glyphs into his poems as well as the front and back matter of Fuck You Press's periodicals and books, and his use of these hieroglyphs can be read as a direct borrowing from the *Cantos*.

However, the cues that Sanders and other writers of the mimeograph revolution took from Pound were not limited to poetic form. Considering Pound's influence in “social, historical, political, institutional, and interpersonal contexts,” Christopher Beach argues that the defining feature of the Pound tradition is its approach to tradition itself as “a vortex of diverse poetic and artistic practices that can be rediscovered and resynthesized in new directions by new writers and that are constantly leading toward a new sense of ‘culture’—‘a living paideuma and not a dead one’”⁷³ Such an understanding of tradition does much to account for how Pound, in spite of his support of Italian fascism and his anti-Semitism, would come to be embraced by the next generation's most politically engaged writers even as they rejected his politics and prejudices. In a 1962 letter to Pound, George Oppen succinctly explained,

⁷¹ In *Fug You*, Sanders describes this glyph as a “small, single-person Egyptian boat found as a hieroglyph on thousands of funerary texts, which I identified with D. H. Lawrence's ‘Boat of Death’” (8). (Lawrence's poem is in fact titled “Ship of Death.”)

⁷² Sanders, *Fug You*, 53, 97-98.

⁷³ Christopher Beach, *ABC of Influence: Ezra Pound and the Remaking of American Poetic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 4.

I suppose if we should take to talking politics to each other I would disagree even more actively than all those others who have disagreed, but there has been no one living during my life time who has been as generous or as pure as you toward literature and toward writers. Nor anyone less generously thanked.

I know of no one who does not owe you a debt.⁷⁴

Given how many writers echoed this statement at one point or another in their careers, Beach argues that, counter to Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" model, the mode of influence in which Pound participated involved foregrounding rather than repressing a relationship to one's influences. In borrowing source material freely and overtly in the *Cantos*, Pound gave poets permission to borrow just as freely from his own work and a model for how to do so.

Sanders writes in his autobiography, "If eyes were sandpaper, I would have long ago erased the texts in Pound's collected earlier poems, *Personae*. His relentless scholarship, his mixture of tough and tender lyrics, and his love of Greek and Latin helped me become a poet."⁷⁵

The ambivalence of Sanders' metaphor is telling: he portrays reading and re-reading Pound's work as an act of reverence but also of erasure. Sanders' edition of the *Cantos* strikes a similar balance; as this chapter argues, it is at once an homage to Pound—an affirmation of his continued relevance not just to history but to the present—and a defiant appropriation of his poetry and poetic legacy.

There is no denying that the mimeograph edition of the *Drafts & Fragments* poems violates Pound's intention, especially since the manuscript used as the basis for the edition was an earlier version than the one Pound sanctioned for New Directions to print. However, Sanders' edition does Pound the great favor of affiliating him with an active experimental poetic community.

⁷⁴ George Oppen, *The Selected Letters of George Oppen* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 71-72.

⁷⁵ Sanders, *Fug You*, 47.

Although the text of *Cantos 110-116* was by no means “hot off the griddle” in terms of its composition, its publication in mimeograph form gave it an up-to-the-minute quality that sharply contrasts with both the New Directions and Stone Wall Press editions. While the New Directions edition of *Drafts & Fragments* presents Pound as a relic of a bygone era of innovation, and the Stone Wall Press edition abstracts the *Cantos* from the present moment through its participation in a longstanding tradition of handprinting, the piracy creates a framework for reading the final cantos that emphasizes the poem’s ongoing impact on American poetry.

“And as to Who Will Copy This Palimpsest?”

That the piracy’s bibliographic code inflects the poems it contains is particularly significant for *Drafts & Fragments* because the volume appraises, often ambivalently, the *Cantos* project as a whole. In these final cantos, Pound’s poetic method again resembles that of the earliest cantos: sharp, condensed images follow one another, neatly capturing political or historical ideas rather than expounding on them. Lawrence Rainey, asserting the centrality of history to the *Cantos*, writes that “Pound could always turn out a line that invoked quite conventional, even banal notions of beauty...and in his mature years he seemed to have tossed them off with abandon, even disdainfully, sprinkling them like faux bijoux amid the thorny thickets of historical documents and endless lists of worthy emperors from China.”⁷⁶ In the *Drafts & Fragments* poems, however, historical and political commentary is, if not “sprinkled amid,” at least balanced with, scenes of natural beauty and harmony. These cantos feature “water

⁷⁶ Lawrence Rainey, *A Poem Containing History: Textual Studies in The Cantos* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 1.

They have certainly been helped along by a string of New Directions promotional materials that encourage comparison between the *Cantos* and the *Commedia*. In a 1940 pamphlet pasted into the first 500 copies of *Cantos LII-LXXI*, Laughlin (writing under the initials “H.H.”) reports that “certain of Pound’s revelations to his publisher about the work in progress seem to indicate a more than casual influence of the structure of the *Commedia*. A recent letter stated that two thirds of the poem were completed and that he (Pound) was ready to plunge into the Empyrean.”⁸⁶

The publisher’s description on the front flap of Pound’s 1956 *Section: Rock-Drill 85-95 de los cantares* claims that the “major theme as the *Cantos* move into their third and final phase” is the “domination of benevolence. And though no exact correspondence is intended, we think of the Thrones of Dante’s *Paradiso*.”⁸⁷ The following section of the *Cantos*—the volume that preceded *Drafts & Fragments*—was titled *Thrones 96-109 de los cantares*, and the front flap of this 1959 volume begins “critics have long recognized a structural parallel between Pound’s *Cantos* and The Divine Comedy. This relationship becomes more explicit with the publication of these fourteen new cantos, which Pound, following Dante’s *Paradiso*, has entitled ‘Thrones.’”⁸⁸

In light of these promises of an epic modeled on the *Divine Comedy*, the famous pronouncement of canto 116, “I cannot make it cohere,” reads as a weighty admission of failure in the New Directions edition.⁸⁹ However, when situated within mimeograph culture, which worked to undermine the “well-wrought urn” ideal of the recent New Criticism, Pound’s investment in coherence is almost anachronistic. Many of the poets affiliated with the mimeograph revolution had already capitalized on the possibilities of creative juxtaposition

⁸⁶ Ezra Pound, *Cantos LII-LXXI* (New York: New Directions, 1940).

⁸⁷ Ezra Pound, *Section: Rock-Drill 85-95 de los cantares* (New York: New Directions, 1956).

⁸⁸ Ezra Pound, *Thrones 96-109 de los cantares* (New York: New Directions, 1959).

⁸⁹ Pound, *Drafts & Fragments* (New Directions), 26.

presented by the *Cantos*, without the obligation of formal unity. Whether Pound's poem had failed to cohere or given up trying hardly mattered; the postwar poetic culture had, at least in its more experimental enclaves, already moved on to a valuation of the fragmented or unresolvable.

Nevertheless, the piracy is paradoxically more "finished" than the New Directions trade edition since it concludes with the end of canto 116 rather than the fragments meant to be appended to earlier Cantos. Although the last line of canto 116 ends with an ellipsis in the Fuck You Press version, emphasizing that the *Cantos* project will continue either literally or figuratively after the volume's provisional ending, the Fuck You Press text is also titled *Cantos 110-116* rather than labeled a "draft." In a certain sense the label "draft" affixed itself implicitly to mimeograph products, which were often rushed into print immediately upon composition; this publish-first-revise-later attitude finds its precursor in the ongoing and ever-shifting method of the *Cantos*. The designation of the final cantos as "drafts & fragments" may in the end say more about the implications of permanence and polish inherent to trade and fine press printing than it says about the state of these poems.

In one of the reflective passages of the final cantos, the text calls attention to its own future, asking "And as to who will copy this palimpsest?"⁹⁰ In the Stone Wall Press edition, surrounded by immense medieval-style margins, this line recalls the errors and losses of textual transmission catalogued in earlier cantos. Because the edition's hand-printing casts the act of copying as a laborious enterprise, the question "And as to who will copy this palimpsest?" takes on a wistful tone. Pound's question necessarily becomes figurative in the New Directions edition, which includes in the front matter a legal clause explicitly forbidding reproduction "in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording...without

⁹⁰ Pound, *Drafts & Fragments* (New Directions), 27.

permission in writing from the Publisher.”⁹¹ By contrast, the mimeograph machine opens the possibility that readers themselves could literally and figuratively copy the *Cantos*’ “palimpsest,” and in the Fuck You Press edition the line’s question becomes an imperative to keep the text alive through circulation.

The piracy, then, perceptively attends to the poem’s investment in textuality as a historical and material phenomenon and its querying of the grounds of epic authority. To dismiss the piracy as simply illegitimate is to miss the point of the edition, which aspires to a version of legitimacy based in street-level production and circulation. The Fuck You Press edition of *Cantos 110-116* presents possibilities for understanding the work in ways that are not overdetermined by an emphasis on Pound’s intention, instead foregrounding the text’s role in and significance for the culture of the time.

Conclusion: Shift Key

The limits of understanding the final cantos in terms of intention are perhaps best summarized by an anecdote recorded by Merker in his description of printing the *Stone Wall Drafts & Fragments*. Merker claims to have asked Laughlin if he could line up Pound’s erratic indentations so that text would fall at consistent distances from the left margin, but Laughlin insisted that the printing had to reflect the manuscript exactly. Merker preserved the spacing from the manuscript as best he could, although it turned out that Pound hadn’t been the one to type the manuscript and the irregular indentations were caused by a mechanical problem with the shift key

⁹¹ Ibid., front matter.

on the portable typewriter that had been used.⁹² In the catalogue of printing errors in the *Cantos* this is a minor entry, and Laughlin's desire to preserve Pound's spacing is commendable; he well deserved his role as the *Cantos*'s publisher. Nevertheless, the faulty shift key underscores the perils of even the most well meaning attempts to enact authorial intention in the final cantos.

This chapter has argued that Pound's intention need not be the sole, or even the primary, consideration when approaching the *Cantos*, and that the bibliographic code of the Sanders piracy opens up possibilities for reading the poem that are based in the poem's own confrontation with the complexities of authorship and textuality. Such an approach is not an editorial theory, and it doesn't help a publisher decide whether to line up the indentations or memorialize the faulty typewriter key. Still, it suggests that even the most audacious interpretations and redeployments of literary texts can be read for the bibliographic meaning they contains rather than the authority they lack. From this perspective, bibliographic code is itself an interpretive gesture, and while editions that cleave to intention may have the most to say about the author's vision for the work, editions that depart as radically from authorial intention as *Cantos 110-116* offer complex and concrete information about the culture in which the work was distributed and received.

Each of the three initial editions of the *Drafts & Fragments* poems not only enacts a battle at the level of bibliographic code over the meaning of the final cantos, it also serves as synecdoche for a mode of printing important to 1960s American poetry. Reading American poetry of the 1960s through the interaction between commercial, fine press, and mimeograph printing points to a wider significance for the bibliographic code of individual volumes, even those volumes that initially appear bibliographically "more transparent." *Drafts & Fragments*'

⁹² Berger, *Printing*, 31.

almost simultaneous appearance in mimeograph, fine press, and commercial editions is atypical, but these three editions allow for a direct comparison across printing modes that throws into relief the effects of these modes, at the level of textual authority as well as poetic meaning.

Chapter 2. The “Small Scruffly Editions” of Jack Spicer

In a 1957 letter to Robin Blaser incorporated into his poetic sequence “Admonitions,” Jack Spicer famously writes, “There is really no single poem.... Poems should echo and reecho against each other. They should create resonances. They cannot live alone any more than we can.”¹ Spicer likens the individual poems produced earlier in his career to “one night stands filled (the best of them) with their own emotions, but pointing nowhere, as meaningless as sex in a Turkish bath.”² Spicer’s repudiation playfully reserves for his early work a certain kind of success—neither his lyrics nor “sex in a Turkish bath” come off too badly—but his conviction that poems could achieve more by resonating against one another was sincere. Each of the volumes that Spicer sent to press during his lifetime comprised a book-length project, which he called a “serial poem.”³ Spicer published each of his volumes with small local presses—most often White Rabbit Press, founded in 1957 by Joe Dunn at Spicer’s encouragement—and he half-jokingly prohibited circulation of his books outside of the Bay Area, thereby snubbing the East Coast literary scene.⁴ These publication practices left him relatively unknown and his books mostly out of print at the time of his early death in 1965, but they allowed him to tightly manage the forms in which his texts appeared and to constrain the horizon of their reception.

In the 1975 *Collected Books of Jack Spicer*, which marked the first time Jack Spicer’s work was available to a national audience, Robin Blaser chose to include “all the work *in books* of the years 1957-1965” (emphasis in the original) in order to “foreground the special value the

¹ Jack Spicer, *My Vocabulary Did This to Me: The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer*, ed. Peter Gizzi and Kevin Killian (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 163.

² Ibid.

³ Jack Spicer, *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer*, ed. Robin Blaser (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), 273.

⁴ Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

poet gave to composition by book.”⁵ Blaser’s editorial decisions affirm the centrality of the book to Spicer’s work at the same time that his phrasing betrays a critical bias toward understanding “the book” primarily as a linguistic unit. However, the attention Spicer gave to the material features of his texts suggests that his strategy of “composition by book” is inextricable from an awareness of and investment in the book-as-object. This chapter argues that Spicer exploits the printed book’s material possibilities from multiple angles in order to reinforce central aspects of his poetics. In Spicer’s work, the book-object acts as an interface between the immaterial and material—a potent site where language finds incarnation, the author moves between historical person and linguistic construct, the dead converse with the living, and the work of art participates in the all-too-human realms of commerce and criticism.

“Materiality,” writes Bill Brown “may seem to make the most sense when it is opposed to another term: the material serves as a commonsensical antithesis to, for instance, the spiritual, the abstract, the phenomenal, the virtual, and the formal, not to mention the immaterial.”⁶ In the realm of textuality, the material text stands in contrast to the literary work, an abstraction that transcends instantiation in any document.⁷ The material text is itself polarized between the linguistic text—the sequence of signs that represents the literary work—and what Jerome McGann terms “bibliographic code”: features such as paper, ink, binding, typeface, layout,

⁵ Spicer, *Collected Books*, 288. In reprinting these books (with only a handful of additional “Poems & Documents”) Blaser’s *Collected Books* carries out Spicer’s wishes as expressed “Admonitions,” in which Spicer advises Blaser not to “send the box of old poetry to Don Allen. Burn it or rather open it with Don and cry over the possible books that were buried in it.” Donald Allen would go on to edit the first collection of Spicer’s individual poems, released in 1980 and appropriately titled *One Night Stand and Other Poems*.

⁶ Bill Brown, “Materiality,” *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 49.

⁷ See Peter Shillingsburg’s “Text as Matter, Concept, and Action” for a detailed taxonomy of the material text and its relationship to the literary work.

and price that impact how the linguistic code is read. For Brown, “materiality” describes an object’s “look and feel, not just its physical existence as an object,” and bibliographic code is essentially what gives a book its “look and feel.” Bibliographic code often operates in concert with paratexts, which, although they are linguistic rather than bibliographic, are occasioned by the book’s production as a material object and arranged spatially on its surfaces.⁸ They are, as Gérard Genette puts it, “what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers.”⁹ The combination of bibliographic code and paratexts generates an aesthetic sensibility and contextual framework for a material instantiation of a text.

Spicer’s critics agree that his publication practices are an important component of his poetics, and certain bibliographic and paratextual features of Spicer’s books receive frequent mention. In a succinct account of existing criticism of Spicer’s work, John Emil Vincent observes two major threads. Philosophically oriented approaches tend to focus on the theories of language and poetics as expressed in Spicer work, treating Spicer’s claim that “there is really no single poem” as an injunction against close reading his texts. Biographically centered approaches emphasize the mythologies of Spicer and his circle, and in so doing construct Spicer’s work as being “about the immediate community he was building while reading his poetry aloud or discussing it in North Beach bars” rather than the poetry as such.¹⁰ Vincent calls instead for attention to Spicer’s poems as textual performances.¹¹ This chapter proposes that the task of attending to Spicer’s poetry as poetry necessitates an understanding of how his work is impacted

⁸ Brown, “Materiality,” 49.

⁹ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

¹⁰ John Emil Vincent, *Queer Lyrics: Difficulty and Closure in American Poetry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 151.

¹¹ See also Vincent’s introduction to *After Spicer* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011).

by the material forms in which it first appeared. Spicer's printed books constitute an important component of his theories of language and poetry, and these material objects can also be understood as vital contributions to, and records of, the community with which he surrounded himself.

The nature of language, and of poetry in particular, is a persistent concern of Spicer's oeuvre. In "The Practice of Outside," a lengthy essay appended to the *Collected Books*, Blaser proposes that Spicer's work centers on the belief that "poetry is necessary to the composition or knowledge of the 'real'" and that poetry constitutes "an act or event of the real, rather than a discourse true only to itself."¹² In his first volume, *After Lorca*, Spicer claims that "words are what sticks to the real. We use them to push the real, to drag the real into the poem. They are what we hold on with, nothing else. They are as valuable in themselves as rope with nothing to be tied to." He proposes that he "would like to make poems out of real objects. The lemon to be a lemon that the reader could cut or squeeze or taste—a real lemon like a newspaper in a collage is a real newspaper."¹³ Faced, however, with the impossibility of importing "real objects" into a poem, Spicer opts to foreground his poems' status as performances in language. In so doing, he makes evident the materiality of language itself, a complicating factor in its relationship to the "real." For Spicer, the material possibilities of the book are rooted in the resolute physicality of language, which manifests in his work through strategic use of graphemic features such as orthography, capitalization, punctuation, line breaks, and letterforms.

At the same time, Spicer's books use the framing gestures of bibliographic code and paratexts to signal participation in a specific time and place. As Michael Davidson has argued,

¹² Spicer, *My Vocabulary*, 133.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Spicer was committed to poetry as a form of live public exchange and a basis for relationship. He was a major presence in the literary scene of the San Francisco Renaissance: he ran a “Poetry as Magic” workshop whose participants included Helen Adam, Robert Duncan, Joe Dunn, Jack Gilbert, and George Stanley; he published these and other writers in the mimeograph magazine *J*; he gave spirited readings of his work, including poems that addressed (and sometimes attacked) writers in attendance; he also regularly held court in North Beach bars, gathering around him a group of writers, many of whom like Spicer were openly gay.¹⁴ With what Davidson calls an “almost medieval sense of poetic trothes and fealties,”¹⁵ Spicer drew firm boundaries between his circle and the larger poetry world, reserving special vitriol for the Beats, whose popularity he resented and presumably envied. At worst, Spicer’s divisions between insiders and outsiders could be catty and a touch paranoid. However, in mid-century American culture, when the social marginalization and persecution of queer individuals bore particular intensity, Spicer’s tightly knit community positioned against a hostile world became a way of reserving space outside of the mainstream for friendship, sexuality, and artistic production. His insistence on publishing his books within and for this social context registers materially on his texts, and in a larger sense his printed books use bibliographic code and paratexts to make evident the mechanisms of production, distribution, and reception that shape literary value.

As this chapter shows, Spicer’s print productions engage materiality at the level of language through graphemics and at the level of the book through bibliographic and paratextual

¹⁴ For an examination of Spicer’s involvement with the early gay liberation group the Mattachine Society, see Kevin Killian’s “Spicer and the Mattachine.” Maria Damon and Catherine Imbriglio address the relationship between Spicer’s work and camp, and Vincent’s “The End of the Line: Spicer in Love” proposes that Spicer’s poems are not “about” homosexuality but that for Spicer homosexuality creates “difficulties in meaning making” that form part of the vexed relationship to language in his work.

¹⁵ Davidson, *San Francisco Renaissance*, 153.

choices. Spicer was attuned to the communicative power of textual objects, and he built a self-reflexive engagement with poetry's materiality into the reading experience of his printed books. He was also keenly aware of the stakes for circulating poetry in print—whether that circulation would occur during his lifetime or in a posthumous future.

Spicer's Graphemic Poetics

Attention to Spicer's material texts may at first seem to go against the grain of his investment in poetry as a basis for interpersonal interaction. Davidson makes a compelling argument that Spicer's work centers around dialogue—not only as a context for poetic production and reception, but as a mode of writing. Davidson notes that over his career Spicer “develops more and more strategies for engaging dialogue, whether it is between living poet and dead poet...between poets and friends...between text and commentary...or between pronouns.”¹⁶ Even when written down as poetry, dialogue for Davidson is primarily aural. “For Spicer, listening is everything,” he writes, invoking a 1949 *Occident* symposium in which Spicer asks “Why is nobody here? Who is listening to us?” and a complaint in his 1965 *Language* that “No one listens to poetry.”¹⁷ These examples stand in for an ongoing engagement in Spicer's work with voice and spoken, heard, and overheard language.

The significance of the aural to Spicer's work is further reinforced by his professed method of composition by dictation. In a series of lectures given in Vancouver shortly before his death, Spicer links the serial poem to the practice of dictation, in which poetry comes from

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

outside the poet. In his lectures Spicer refers to this source as “Martians,” but he explains that “Martian is just a word for X.”¹⁸ Although Spicer sidesteps the exact nature of the source, he is clear that the source is external to the poet—as well as foreign, secular, and not necessarily benevolent. Spicer’s conviction that he was not ultimately the source of his poems emerges in his avoidance of copyright; of the eight books he saw to press, only three make a claim to copyright in the front matter. In Spicer’s often-invoked metaphor the poet becomes a radio receiver, “something which is being transmitted into.”¹⁹ The radio receiver seems to construe the poem’s source as audio, but the relationship between what the poet hears and what he writes is far from simple. Spicer advises poets to “keep as much of yourself as possible out of the poem,” but in spite of such attempts on the poet’s part to get out of the way, the message from outside “comes distorted through the things which are in you.” In this formulation, “you are stuck with language, and you are stuck with words, and you are stuck with the things you know,” although “the more languages you know, the more building blocks the Martians have to play with.”²⁰ In Spicer’s rendering, then, the dictated poem exists prior to and outside of language, and poetry becomes an ethereal, otherworldly message that can only reach us through the constraints of the material.

In a letter to the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca drafted for but not included in his 1957 debut volume *After Lorca*, Spicer begins with what sounds like an absolute disavowal of print as a mode of inscription for poetry in favor of sound, but he quickly shifts to musing about the possibilities of print in comparison with recording:

¹⁸ Peter Gizzi, ed., *The House that Jack Built: The Collected Lectures of Jack Spicer* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7, 8.

A friend asked me the other day if I didn't think that the printing of a poem helped to complete it, to make it actual when before it was only potential. I answered no, that to me print was irrelevant, that it was merely an inefficient way of recording the sound of the poem and that, if I had my choice, I would publish my poems alone by tape recording. This has always been the line I have taken, but I wonder now. I could not have translated your poem from a tape recording of your voice.²¹

Spicer doesn't elaborate on why he couldn't have translated Lorca's poetry on the basis of an audio recording, but by the end of his letter, Spicer appears to have come around to print and voice as equally flawed: "The sight and the sound of the poem is the poem. Your voice, my voice, your page, my page, your language, my language—they all get in the way if we let them. They do not matter. Only what we transfer matters, only what we make appear."

As a trained linguist,²² Spicer understood the complex relationship between speech and script, and he took up this issue explicitly in his 1965 book *Language*. Three of the book's sections are named after linguistic terms: "Morphemics," "Phonemics," and "Graphemics"; respectively, the study of "the smallest identifiable grammatical unit," "one of the basic sound units of a language," and "a single character in a recognized writing system."²³ In the first of these sections Spicer begins, "Morphemes in section. / Lew, you and I know how love and

²¹ Spicer, *My Vocabulary*, 448.

²² Spicer pursued a doctorate in Old Norse and Anglo Saxon at the University of California Berkeley, breaking off his studies in 1950 after refusing to sign the state-mandated anti-communist Loyalty Oath. From 1950-1952 Spicer taught at the University of Minnesota and continued linguistics research with his Berkeley mentor David Reed; the two published an article in the journal *Language* in 1952. Spicer returned to Berkeley in 1952 to continue work on his doctorate but never finished the degree.

²³ R. L. Trask, *Key Concepts in Language and Linguistics* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2007), 176, 108.

death matter / Matter as wave and particle—twins / At the same business.”²⁴ Spicer declares a wave-particle duality for love and death, “twins / at the same business” that may be identical but can only be experienced as one or the other at a given time. Formally, though, the quantum mechanics of these lines centers on the morpheme “matter,” which changes across a line break from a verb to a noun. Invoking wave-particle duality in the context of morphemes, Spicer also points to each morpheme’s double identity as acoustical events and graphic ones.

The following section, “Phonemics,” focuses on how speech constructs meaning. “On the tele-phone (distant sound),” an incoming voice sounds as close to the speaker as if the two people were “talking...in San Francisco on the telephone or in a bar or in a room.” The speaker notes that “Long / Distance calls...break sound / into electrical impulses and put it back again” and informs the interlocutor, “Your voice / consisted of sounds that I had / To route to phonemes, then to bound and free morphemes,²⁵ then to syntactic structures.”²⁶ In this poem all speech becomes a kind of long-distance call that must be “routed” through linguistic structures of increasing structural complexity: sound to phoneme to morpheme to syntax. By breaking down aural speech processing in this manner Spicer differentiates between sound as electrical impulse passed along a wire and the cognitive frameworks that allow these sounds to be spoken and heard as language. Spicer thereby reminds his readers not to mistake the ephemerality of spoken language for immateriality.

A later section further explores the perils of speech, distance, and love, with linguistic structures that disintegrate rather than build:

²⁴ Spicer, *My Vocabulary*, 391.

²⁵ Morphemes are either “free,” in which case they are stand-alone words, or “bound,” meaning that they come connected to other morphemes (as in prefixes and suffixes).

²⁶ Spicer, *My Vocabulary*, 394.

The emotional disturbance echoes down the canyons of the heart.
 Echoes there—sounds cut off—merely phonemes. A ground-rules double. You
 recognize them by pattern. Try.
 Hello shouted down the canyon becomes huhlulh. You, and the canyons of the
 heart,
 Recognize feebly what you shouted. The vowels
 Are indistinguishable. The consonants
 A pattern for imagination. Phonemes,
 In the true sense, that are dead before their burial. Constructs
 Of the imagination
 Of the real canyon and the heart's construct.²⁷

Here the echoes produced by shouting into the “canyons of the heart” garble the message so that “hello” becomes “huhlulh.” Even the speaker can only “recognize feebly” what was shouted by relying on a combination of patterns and imagination. At least where the canyons of the heart are concerned, sound and meaning quickly become separated and must be reconstituted through interpretation. “Merely phonemes,” these sounds die out quickly but become unintelligible before they are inaudible, making them “dead before their burial.” Spicer invokes as a comparison baseball’s “ground-rules double,” the rule whereby all runners are awarded two bases when a fairly hit ball goes out of play (for instance, bouncing under a fence) so that the fielder can’t get to it. The poem’s phonemes may begin in the realm of fair play with a possibility of being understood, but become irretrievable as they “double” and otherwise multiply through echo, and their meaning cannot be reconstituted from this dispersion. At the same time, the phrase “ground-rules double” invokes the “ground rule” of language whereby each morpheme has a double identity as phonemic and graphemic.

When it comes to interpretive difficulties, graphemes do not fare much better than phonemes in *Language*. The ten poems that make up the section “Graphemics” feature a number of non-linguistic signs of varying degrees of ephemerality and intelligibility that the speaker

²⁷ Ibid., 396.

is at pains to decipher. For instance, the speaker asserts that “The tracks in the snow and the rabbit’s motion which writes it is quite legible” even if the tracks do not constitute language, and although “The sun-dial makes a grapheme I cannot understand,” “Even in winter it is accurate.”²⁸ A grapheme can therefore be “legible” or “accurate” without being interpretable; that is, reading does not have to produce understanding. Nor does interpretation guarantee legibility or accuracy; one section of “Graphemics” reports that a new German postage stamp “shows a chapel and an oak tree / And the oak tree looks like a picture of Hitler.” Advising that “graphemes should not be looked at so minutely,” the poem has the “Bundespost Reichsminister” saying, “I know what I designed and it’s not a countenance of Hitler. It doesn’t speak very well for the German people if they see Hitler everywhere.”²⁹ Whether this image is or is not “a countenance of Hitler” depends as much on how viewers regard it as on the intent of the creator. The postage stamp’s imperiled meaning does not reflect optimistically on the stability of graphemes or on the recipient’s ability to interpret the message on whose envelope the stamp appears. By directly contemplating how morphemes, phonemes, and graphemes interact in order to create meaning, *Language* indicates that for Spicer graphemes are not “merely an inefficient way of recording the sound of the poem” but rather one permutation of poetic language with its own rules and possibilities.

The significance of graphemes to Spicer’s work is reinforced by language games throughout his oeuvre that rely on graphemes for their effects. Homophonic puns, for example, gain their humor in part through the tension between similar sound and different spelling. One such pun in *Language* asserts that “Shot / In the back by an arrow, President Kennedy seemed to stiffen for a moment before he assumed his place in history. Eros / Do that.”³⁰ “Stiffen” invokes

²⁸ Ibid., 397, 399.

²⁹ Ibid., 401.

³⁰ Ibid., 386.

rigor mortis on one hand and sexual arousal on the other, explained by the pun's "arrows" and "Eros" respectively. Spicer's irreverent coupling of Kennedy's assassination and libido is flanked by commentary on Eros—preceded by lines about Orpheus and Euridice and followed by the speaker and addressee joining "imaginary hand[s]."

A higher-stakes pun in *The Heads of the Town Up to the Aether* exploits the similar sounds of "Logos" and "Lowghost." Drawing heavily on the Gospel of John, Spicer construes logos as Christ "the Word" who becomes "the Lowghost when He is pinned down to words," with the idiom "pin down" suggesting crucifixion along with fixity of meaning.³¹ In light of the work's deep engagement with ghosts—a point to which this chapter will return—the "Lowghost" is not as much a falling-off from the ideal as either "low" or "ghost" might imply. Instead, the near-identical names suggest the small but significant margin between Logos and Lowghost. A pun, Spicer claims in his Vancouver lectures, "has to do with the magic of words," and it can "bring you closer to the nature of reality as well as being quite funny." The Logos/Lowghost pun reminds us that the phonemic and graphemic games of Spicer's work are, if humorous, also participating in a more serious exploration of the nature of language.

Spicer's texts also exploit the meaning-making capacities of silent capitalization, punctuation, and line breaks. Even more so than puns, these strategies depend on the visual use of graphemes. Expanding on the Lowghost pun in a Vancouver lecture, Spicer notes that the difference between "Word" and "word" "is impossible to read out loud...the word is half time with capital *W*, uppercase, and half the time with the lowercase *w*...In other words, the words which are being used are simply a reflection of the Word, with the capital."³² Here Spicer

³¹ Ibid., 308

³² Gizzi, *House that Jack Built*, 25.

explains to his live audience what readers can easily deduce, that “Word” and “word” are meant to be read as distinct, with “Word” bearing Christian overtones.

In *Language*, Spicer uses the line break and hyphenation of “Re- / Membering his body”³³ to imagine “remember” as antonym to “dismember.” This line is embedded in a reimagining of Psalm 137, which in Spicer’s close paraphrase reads, “Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I forget you Zion.” In this context, “re-member” construes memory as a means of physical (not just psychological) reconstruction. Although “his body” initially appears without specific referent, the section concludes with Osiris, the Egyptian god whose body was cut into pieces, “[coming] up dancing.” Such a resurrection is made possible by the “Re- / Membering” of earlier lines. Similarly, in the first poem in *Language*, the confident assertion “No one listens to poetry” is at once affirmed and undermined by a line break in the final lines: “No / One listens to poetry” can be read as repetition of the earlier assertion, or, with the line break acting as a period or comma, a direct contradiction. This strategy is at work, too, in Spicer’s 1964 book, *The Holy Grail*, in which the grail “Is a hoax, a hole / I see it dis- / Appear.”³⁴ The line break and capitalization of “dis- / Appear” allows the elusive grail to be simultaneously visible and invisible. The grail seekers are later condemned to “No rest- / Titution,” neither able to halt the search nor retrieve the grail.³⁵

Letterforms—the specific shapes used to represent abstract graphemes—become an explicit subject in “Graphemics” when the speaker declares, “*Œ* am I—both script i and cursive i. Rolled into one rug, one grapheme from whose colors stem, phonemes, morphemes, unusual

³³ Spicer, *My Vocabulary*, 391.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 343.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 357.

birds.”³⁶ Here Spicer underscores the malleability of graphemes: as signs, each letter has an uppercase and lowercase shape that can change within certain limits (as in different typefaces). These letters can then be used to build words as well as the imaginative effects represented by “unusual birds.”

In his 1964 *The Holy Grail*, Spicer uses letterforms to call attention to the historical transmission of written language. *The Holy Grail* is divided into “books” based on different Arthurian characters, with each book beginning with a separate title page conveying the name of the book in calligraphic script with a rudimentary illuminated letter in black and red. These quasi-medieval letters, used as well for the title on the cover, gesture toward the manuscript transmission of Arthurian legends (fig. 1). Graham Macintosh designed the original cover in purple and yellow—“royal colors for a magisterial book”—but Spicer rejected the design. Macintosh explains that, for Spicer, “there are only two colors, red and black. There’s white paper, which represents purity of soul. There’s the black ink, and type, which represent certain forces which are at work, evil forces... And the red, which is allowable, because it’s Christ’s blood.” Macintosh makes clear, however, that Spicer’s insistence on these colors was about printing, not religion: “It’s a metaphor that goes back to Gutenberg... It wasn’t that Jack believed in Jesus Christ, or believed in the Devil, or believed in the purity of the soul. But it was a convention, that sounded right to Jack. Jack would not allow any deviation.”³⁷ Spicer also borrowed the convention of closing each book with the formula “End of Book of Galahad,” “End of Book of Percival,” etc. In each case “End” uses a tiny “illuminated” “E.” This manner of formally closing texts links to the medieval practice of binding multiple works—often

³⁶ Ibid., 400.

³⁷ Ellingham and Killian, *Poet Be Like God*, 242.

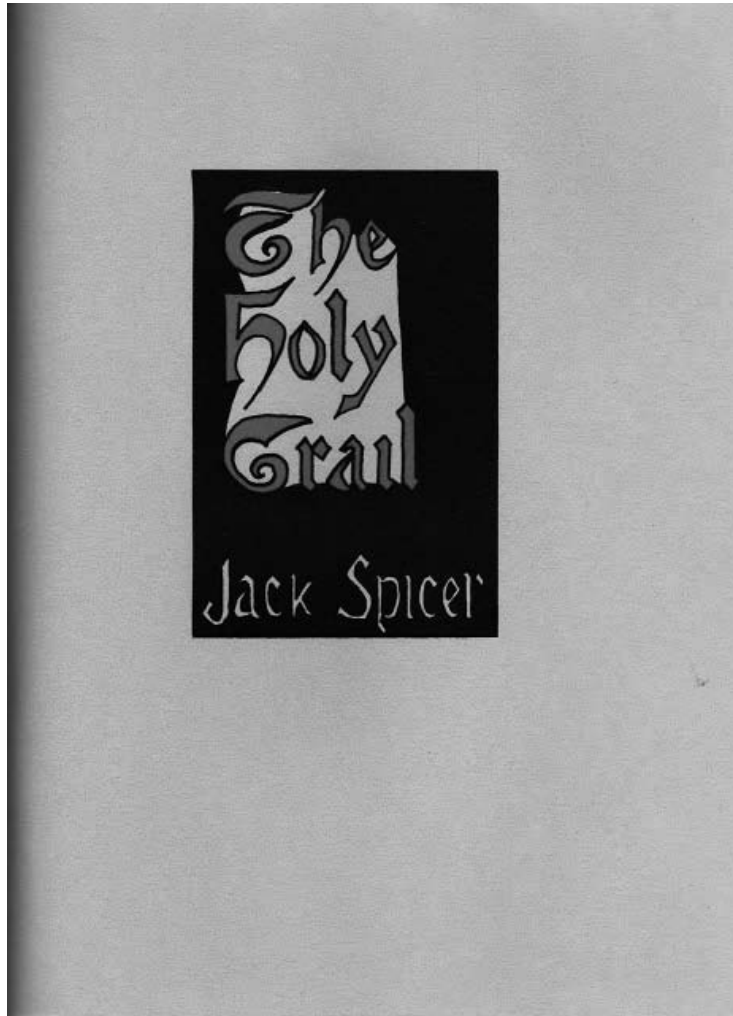


Figure 1. Cover of *The Holy Grail* (1964)

unrelated to one another—in a single volume, a convention that dropped out of use long before the twentieth century. The material and paratextual strategies pointing back to manuscript culture and the early days of the printing press stand in stark contrast to the mimeograph features of *The Holy Grail*, a saddle-stapled pamphlet so thick it practically bursts the binding. The illuminated initials similarly conflict with the typewriter font of the text proper.

Such manuscript/mimeograph tension in the lettering and paratexts corresponds to the strategy of blending historical periods in a poem Kevin Killian describes as a “combination of quotes from legend, song, pop tune, hymn, martial music, bawdy joke song, and nursery

rhyme.”³⁸ Twentieth-century references—among them the Tin Man, Dada, the Monopoly board game, Sacco and Vanzetti, and Marilyn Monroe—abound, so that King Arthur can describe himself as “Rex quondam et futurus with a banjo on my knee.”³⁹ As one speaker in the poem puts it, “Plainly we are dealing with materials distorted from their original form.”⁴⁰ Spicer’s rewriting of the grail legend blurs historical periods just as the material book of *The Holy Grail* mixes manuscript and print conventions, but *The Holy Grail* does not attempt to replicate the bibliographic features of a medieval manuscript any more than it attempts to replicate the Arthurian legends it narrates. Instead, the text uses letterforms to amplify the poem’s engagement with temporality, and the medieval-inspired lettering only serves to counterpoint the text’s production by typewriter.

An extreme instance of the visual use of typewriter letterforms occurs on the covers of *J*, the mimeograph magazine that Spicer edited for its first five (of eight) issues in 1959. The primary feature of all of the covers for *J* printed during Spicer’s editorship is the typographic use of the letter “J.” The two earliest issues create their visual effect using only this character: strings of capital typewriter “J”s are used for shading and the negative space at the center of the page forms a single large “J”: the main “J” of the image is created by the blank space not filled in with smaller “J”s. Embedded in the typewriter “J”s is bare-bones information about the issue, using “J”s instead of spaces, i.e. “JNUMBERJONEJ,” and JMANUSCRIPTSJAND JDRAWINGSJSHOULDJBEJSUBMITTEDJTOJTHEREJBOXJMARKEDJJJINJTHEREJPLACE J1546JGRANTJAVENUEJ.”⁴¹ All of the issues of *J* with which Spicer was involved use a

³⁸ Kevin Killian, “Jack Spicer’s Secret” *Jacket 2* no. 37.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 336, 341, 346, 348, 355, 356.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁴¹ The Place was a bar Spicer and his literary circle frequented.

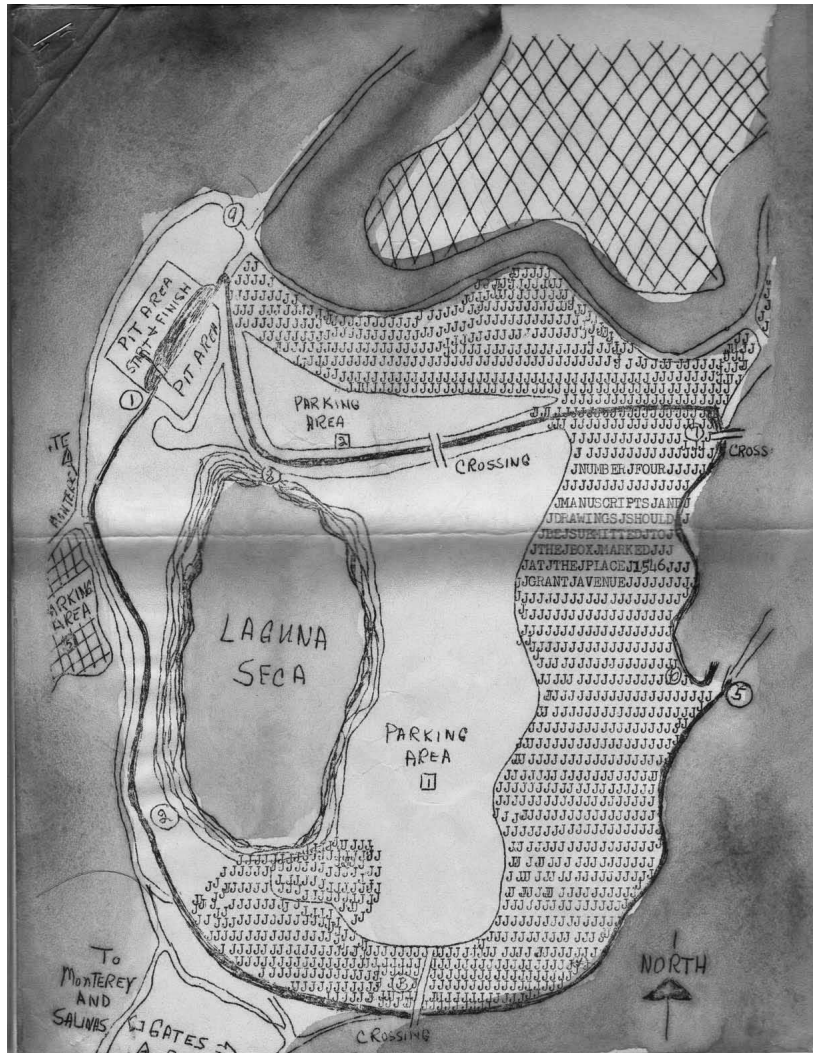


Figure 2. Cover of *J* number four (1959)

variation on this strategy, including the more elaborate designs of the fourth and fifth. *J* number four’s cover featured a drawing of a map by the Bay Area artist Fran Herndon⁴² watercolored in multiple shades of green and blue (fig. 2). The map includes a dark blue “LAGUNA SECA,” a large “PARKING AREA,” a road “To Monterey AND Salinas” and the direction “NORTH” with an arrow. Typewriter “J”s fill in the main landmass in the form of a “J.” *J* number five features the classic blank “J” moved over to the right and swirling at the bottom into a large design by

⁴² Herndon was a friend of Spicer’s; she also did the lithographs that accompanied the first edition of *The Heads of the Town Up to the Aether*.

Herndon in which robed figures hold up a handwritten banner that says “Seasons Greeting to Readers.” The edge of the page is painted with a ¼-inch gold border. Even these more elaborate images retain the visual strategy of using typewriter “J”s as fill. These covers of *J* alternately treat letters as shapes and as signs; repeated again and again, the “J” becomes shading rather than text.

At the same time, because *J* is the magazine’s title, the letter never completely loses its meaning. Aside from alerting readers to the location of the submission box, the magazine is otherwise silent as to its production: no masthead, no press name or location, no indication of the title beyond the cover. The magazine leaps from cover to first poem with no fanfare, and ends just as abruptly. The lack of paratexts reinforces Spicer’s embargo on circulating the magazine outside of the Bay Area, assuming as it does a reader already familiar with the magazine and its context, but it also puts extra emphasis on the “J”s of the cover that both convey the title and point by initial to Jack Spicer as the magazine’s source.

The cover of *J* offers a vivid example of how written language can create meaning that is impossible to capture in speech. Throughout his poetry, and particularly in *Language*, Spicer exploits these aspects of written language for poetic effect. Spicer’s graphemes serve as a reminder that language is a complex of conceptual, audible, and visual features, and written language is not subordinate to speech so much as distinct from it. As we will see, Spicer’s consciousness of the visual capacities of written language is coupled with an attention to the ways printed poetry interacts with the bibliographic and paratextual frames in which it appears.

Convention, Imitation, and Parody in Spicer's Material Books

In 1946, Jack Spicer gave his mentor Josephine Miles a Christmas gift of a typewritten group of poems playfully titled "The Collected Poems of Jack Spicer, 1945 1946." The text ended with a colophon: "This book, designed and executed / by hand in Berkeley, California, / is strictly limited to 1 copy / on American Watercolor M Paper / and signed by the author."⁴³ Spicer's colophon gently mocks fine press colophons by insisting on the limitedness of the edition, and the phrase "designed and executed / by hand" achieves its humor by being technically accurate (as the poems were hand-typed) but running counter to the difficult labor on antiquated machinery that "by hand" signifies in the context of many fine presses. The colophon's joke relies on interplay between paratext and the bibliographic features of the edition, suggesting that, a decade before the appearance of his first published book, Spicer was attuned to the communicative power of the book-object. Although Spicer did not produce any more books "by hand" following his one-copy run of "Collected Poems," he remained aware of the power of paratexts and bibliographic code to mark a volume of poetry with the context of its production.

In its playful invocation of fine press printing practices, the colophon of "The Collected Poems of Jack Spicer, 1945 1946" signals the strategies of imitation, parody, doubling, and mirroring that appear in his published books' paratexts and bibliographic code. Peter Gizzi goes as far as to argue that "mirroring is the most pervasive device of Spicer's poetic practice." In addition to citing numerous places in which mirrors appear in Spicer's poems, Gizzi collects under the rubric of mirroring a number of practices of "simultaneously borrowing, copying, critiquing, and adoring the living, the dead, peers, and legends."⁴⁴ Gizzi notes that even the most

⁴³ Jack Spicer, *The Collected Poems of Jack Spicer 1945 1946* (Berkeley: Oyez, 1981).

⁴⁴ Peter Gizzi, ed., "Afterword: Jack Spicer and the Practice of Reading," *The House that Jack Built: The Collected Lectures of Jack Spicer* (Hanover: University Press of New England,

exact mirrors depend on reversal, and Spicer's books do not "present a unified image or reading of any of the text they mirror; instead, they are faceted, difficult, diamond-like, refracting each text against many others, activating them within a larger poetic tradition, recontextualizing them all within a Spicerian funhouse."⁴⁵ Gizzi points out that Spicer's "last two books mimic covers of the journals *Language...and Poetry*," but he doesn't elaborate as to how this visual mirroring might interact with textual instances. Spicer's paratexts and bibliographic code dialogue with individual authors or publications, but they also point to a mirroring function at the root of literary conventions. Books, Spicer reminds us, become legible in part by replicating received material forms and paratextual genres.

Spicer's investment in the framing gestures of paratexts shows up strongly in his first volume, *After Lorca* (1957), in which Spicer translates poems by Federico García Lorca with varying degrees of fidelity to the original, composes poems in imitation of Lorca, and addresses Lorca in letters interspersed with the poems. No indication is given as to whether a poem is a translation or a Spicer original, a fact made plain in the introduction to the volume, which is ostensibly written by (the deceased) Lorca. Lorca's poetry is double mirrored: directly through Spicer's inexact translations and indirectly through his imitations. The commentary on Spicer's work attributed to Lorca in the introduction also finds a kind of mirroring in Spicer's own commentary on his work in letters addressed to Lorca. *After Lorca* also parodies the prestigious Yale Younger Poets Series, in which an established poet introduces, and thereby endorses, the debut of a younger writer.⁴⁶ This Lorca disavows Spicer's poems—he remains "fundamentally

1998),219,

⁴⁵ Ibid., 220.

⁴⁶ Spicer, *My Vocabulary*, xxi. The Yale Younger Poets series began in 1919, and W. H. Auden judged the contest from 1947-1959.

unsympathetic.” Even so, the introduction gives Spicer the opportunity to alert readers to the game being played while remaining inside the framework of that game. The volume’s cover advertises Lorca’s introduction using his distinctive signature, making a tongue-in-cheek appeal to readers on the basis of Lorca’s fame that lays bare the marketing mechanism at work in a series such as the Yale Younger Poets.

In addition to lamenting the reader’s difficulty in unthreading which writing is his and which is Spicer’s, “Lorca” complains about the letters interspersed in the poems, which he calls “programmatically”: “the letter one poet writes to another not in any effort to communicate with him, but rather as a young man whispers his secrets to a scarecrow, knowing that his young lady is in the distance listening.”⁴⁷ Too, Spicer overtly expresses ambivalence about the letters as he writes them. “These letters are to be temporary as our poetry is permanent” begins the first letter; “Prose invents—poetry discloses” he later claims, and “Invention is merely the enemy of poetry.”⁴⁸ Spicer plays it both ways with the letters, insisting on the primacy of the poetry while at the same time encouraging the correct kind of reception by accompanying the poems with a statement of poetics.⁴⁹ The letters included in *After Lorca* are therefore pre-emptively posthumous, a nod to the fact that a writer’s letters are frequently rounded up, archived, published, and cited as evidence for arguments about the writer’s work.

The Heads of the Town Up to the Aether, published in 1962, similarly dramatizes the relationship between text and paratext in a manner that implicates the mechanisms of literary criticism. In the book’s first section, “Homage to Creeley,” titled poems appear at the top of the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 110-111.

⁴⁹ Many of the most often quoted lines from Spicer’s work come from these letters, suggesting that they are not as ancillary to the poetry as *After Lorca* claims.

page and what Spicer calls “explanatory notes” appear at the bottom, separated by a horizontal line that cuts across the page’s center.⁵⁰ The notes purport to explain the poems hovering above but typically vacillate between stating the obvious (i.e. “Actually, L.A. is Los Angeles”) and projecting dubious interpretations onto the poems. Like “Lorca,” this commentator is skeptical if not outright hostile, asserting at one moment that, “This is a poem to prevent idealism—i.e. the study of images. It did not succeed,” or in another instance pointing out “An obvious attempt of The Poet to bring The Poem to a close” whose “failure is obvious.”⁵¹ At times, the commentator issues reminders to pay attention and read carefully, promising, for instance, that “If you watch closely you will see that water appears and disappears in the poem” but interpretations like “‘That boy’s pants’ is an obvious reference to Euridice” undercut the notes’ capacity to illuminate the poems in any conventional manner.⁵² The notes instead become a ghostly reflection of the poems above. Spicer’s notes comment on the power that critical commentary has to guide interpretation of poetry—particularly in editions where the critical apparatus attaches directly to the poetic text through footnotes.

Susan Vanderborg has stressed the significance of the “divided format” of Spicer’s works such as *After Lorca* and *The Heads of the Town Up to the Aether*, arguing that Spicer’s “prose paratexts” “allow him to stage carefully controlled performances of public exposure, instruction, and coy retreat in formats that he dismisses as inferior writing and yet concedes are essential to

⁵⁰ In reprinting *After Lorca* in their 2008 volume *My Vocabulary Did This to Me: The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer*, Peter Gizzi and Kevin Killian visually interpret the prose as footnotes, printing the it with a horizontal line directly above; they also follow Robin Blaser in printing the prose in grey and the poetry in black. In the first edition of *After Lorca*, however, all text is printed in black and the line separating the poetry from the prose cuts across the middle of every page. Although the prose does resemble footnotes in certain regards, the original layout of the volume suggested a more egalitarian dialogue between poet and commentator.

⁵¹ Spicer, *My Vocabulary*, 256.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 252, 256.

his poetry.”⁵³ Vanderborg rightly emphasizes the dynamic tensions between poetry and prose in Spicer’s work, but her use of “paratext” is troubling: the “paratexts” Vanderborg considers are by her own description exclusively authorial and do not “occupy a secondary status to the text,” so in the case of Spicer’s work Vanderborg collapses paratext and prose.⁵⁴ However, because Spicer composed his books as units and these units sometimes included both poetry and prose, to cordon off the poetry as “text” and the prose as “paratext” is awkward at best. The prose in *After Lorca* and *Heads of the Town Up to the Aether* is better understood as troping the paratextual genres that frame poetry in order to call attention to the work done by these genres. By incorporating introductions, letters, or explanatory notes, Spicer encourages awareness of how context conditions reading. Understood in those forms, the notes in “Homage to Creeley” are not only “a constant reminder of the poet’s failure to isolate the poem from outside readers,” but a reminder of the impossibility—and perhaps undesirability—of a “pure” reading practice that could directly encounter poetry.⁵⁵

By focusing on prose that does not “occupy a secondary status” to the text, Vanderborg also renders invisible the genuine paratexts, many authorial, that serve a crucial role in creating a context for his work and calling attention to the interpretive act of reading. Because Spicer oversaw production of his published books, he had opportunities to influence their paratexts as well as the bibliographic features, and the decision to publish exclusively with small presses also ensured that his poems would be marked by that context whether or not Spicer ultimately made the decisions about the book’s appearance.

⁵³ Susan Vanderborg, *Paratextual Communities: American Avant-Garde Poetry Since 1950* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), 43.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

Publishing with White Rabbit Press put his work in relation to the press's limited list of other authors who formed part of Spicer's immediate poetic community: Helen Adam, Robin Blaser, Ebbe Borregaard, Robert Duncan, Joe Dunn, George Stanley. Colophons allowed Spicer to register the location of production—all of his books were printed in or near San Francisco—as well as the small print runs. Spicer's colophons become opportunities to insist on his commitment to the local community of writers that he was so instrumental in building. In light of Spicer's strong beliefs about how poetry should circulate in local communities, the colophons of his books take on greater significance as declarations of distribution context.

The colophon for *After Lorca* reads, "This book has been typed on an Olivetti Lexikon 80 by Robert Duncan and multilithd [sic] by Joe Dunn for the WHITE RABBIT PRESS, with a cover design by Jess⁵⁶ in November & December of 1957. // The edition is limited to five hundred copies of which twenty-six are numbered A to Z and signed with a drawing by the author." Such specifications of production resemble typical fine press colophons, but by announcing the use of typewriter and Multilith machine, Spicer's colophon lays claim to the kind of printing credentials that matter in the world of 1960s small press printing. The proper names included in the colophon also invoke the strategy of dedication within the book, in which each poem is labeled as "a translation for" someone.⁵⁷ Reserving a smaller subset of numbered and signed copies is a frequent strategy for fine press printing; including drawings by the author is not. In this, Spicer's colophon capitalizes on the value of limited editions while undercutting some of the seriousness these editions produce.

⁵⁶ Jess Collins is best known for his collages and paintings. His artwork is featured in numerous White Rabbit Press publications. He was also partnered with Robert Duncan for almost forty years (until Duncan's death).

⁵⁷ Twice, in fact, this person is the press's founder, Joe Dunn.

The colophon for *The Heads of the Town Up to the Aether* resembles that of *After Lorca*: “This book has been designed and printed from Monotype Cason with a Hartford letterpress by Andrew Hoyem & David Haselwood at The Auerhahn Press, 1334 Franklin, San Francisco, and bound in two editions by the Schuberth Book Bindery: 750 copies sewn in wrappers, and no more than 50 copies handbound in hardcovers, signed by the author & artist, with a crayola [sic] drawing by Mr. Spicer.” Again the proper names and the location situate his work in a specific context. At the same time, the Crayola drawing emphasizes Spicer’s self-awareness of a certain silliness in signed editions: his childlike drawings will potentially be valuable because they are rare, not because they are good. At times, the colophons for Spicer’s books only list publisher and date, or nothing more than a printer’s mark. At very least, these colophons act as a reminder that poems are dependent on the time and place of their production. As Spicer put it in a critique of New Criticism in one of his Vancouver lectures, “Anybody knows that a poem is not something which was written at no particular point in time...and that it was written at some particular time. You have to know that. You’re a fool if you don’t.”⁵⁸

The flipside of Spicer’s strong investment in community was an equally strong capacity for spite if someone broke ranks, and Spicer’s 1962 *Lament for the Makers* registers this spite paratextually and bibliographically. In the front matter of this book Spicer copied—as “a joke” according to Blaser; “wickedly,” according to Gizzi and Killian⁵⁹—the acknowledgements from Robert Duncan’s *The Opening of the Field*, published by Grove Press in 1960. As Lewis Ellingham and Kevin Killian put it, this page “underline[s] *Lament*’s theme of whoredom and sellout”⁶⁰ by drawing attention to Duncan’s publication practices. In a letter to Leroi Jones

⁵⁸ Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 165.

⁵⁹ Blaser, *Collected Books*, 381; Gizzi and Killian, *My Vocabulary*, 451.

⁶⁰ Lewis Ellingham and Kevin Killian, *Poet Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco*

in 1963, Duncan claims, “Spicer has accused me of ‘whoring,’ by which he means reading at universities, printing in Poetry magazine and The Nation, and, further then, writing in order for such markets.”⁶¹ Spicer’s copied acknowledgements page becomes a way of publicly critiquing Duncan for this perceived “whoring” and underscoring his own refusal to sell out by entering the publishing mainstream. Whereas Duncan’s acknowledgements page lists a total of fifteen magazines, several with national distribution (i.e. *Evergreen Review*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, *Chicago Review*), Spicer’s books typically do not list acknowledgements. When in *Language* Spicer does record prior magazine publication he simply states, “Most of these poems first appeared in OPEN SPACE.” Spicer was a frequent contributor to *Open Space*, an in-crowd magazine published by Stan Persky for fifteen issues in 1964. Persky only printed fifty copies of each issue, ensuring a small-scale distribution mostly limited to contributors.⁶² Spicer’s declaration that his poems have only been published in an insular local magazine contrasts with the array of magazines listed in Duncan’s volume and by extension typical commercial poetry books.

The title page of Duncan’s *The Opening of the Field* features a hand-drawn and hand-lettered image by Jess, who had designed the cover for *After Lorca* and illustrated Spicer’s *Billy the Kid*, in addition to providing covers or illustrations for numerous White Rabbit Press books (fig. 3). However, the cover design of *The Opening of the Field* is by Grove’s house designer Roy Kuhlman. That the title page by Jess, which could serve as a cover at a press such as White Rabbit, is covered by Kuhlman’s more polished design literalizes Spicer’s fear of a local artistic community being swallowed up by a New York-centered commercial publishing industry. Even

Renaissance (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 209.

⁶¹ Lewis Ellingham and Kevin Killian, *Poet Be Like God*, 261.

⁶² Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips, *Secret Location*, 61.

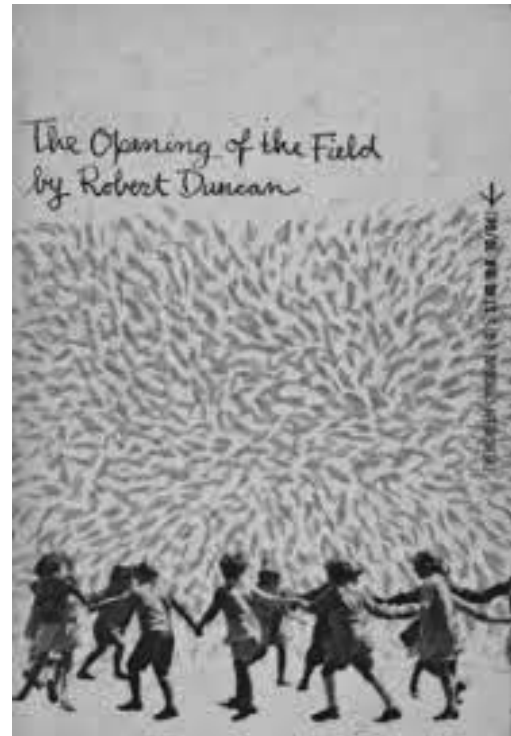
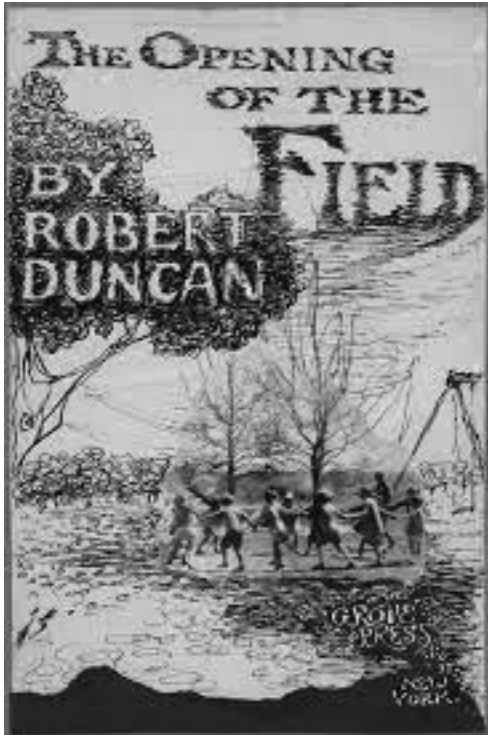


Figure 3. Title page by Jess (*left*) and cover by Roy Kuhlman (*right*) for *The Opening of the Field* (1960)

though Grove Press was dedicated to publishing edgy work by American and European authors, it had been around for over a decade and was a much more official operation than White Rabbit. The differences in budget and aim show up clearly in the fact that Duncan's book is perfect-bound with a glossy cover; on the other hand, Spicer's *Lament for the Makers* is a saddle-stapled pamphlet whose matte covers invite dirt and water damage.

Comparison with Duncan's book also suggests other pointed absences in Spicer's. When Spicer imported the acknowledgments from Duncan's book he did not import the entire page: the Library of Congress Catalog Card Number has been deleted along with the copyright designation. Since Catalog Card Numbers aid in the preservation and appropriate classification of books,⁶³ Spicer's non-inclusion of this information indicates that his primary audience is an

⁶³ Library of Congress Catalog Card Numbers came into use in 1898 to streamline cataloging procedures.

immediate one. His volumes do not imagine their entrance into libraries. Spicer's deletion of Duncan's copyright data is consonant with his resistance to copyrighting many of his texts,⁶⁴ and deleting the copyright information also allowed him to delete Duncan's name from the page.

The back cover of *The Opening of the Field* lists prices for the U.S., the U.K., and Canada, along with the names of distributors in London and Toronto. Perhaps most importantly, the back cover has a publisher's description that emphasizes Duncan's participation in the San Francisco Renaissance even while taking care to portray him as transcending the local or regional. A lengthy quote from Kenneth Rexroth begins, "Of all the San Francisco group Robert Duncan is the most easily recognizable as a member of the international *avant garde*." Spicer's books, with their San Francisco-based production and circulation, reject these kinds of gestures at a wider audience; his books also loudly forgo attached promotional materials. The back cover of *Lament for the Makers*, like the rest of Spicer's books, is pointedly bare; typically, mainstream paperbacks include the majority of the promotional materials there. The significance of a plain back cover is especially pertinent to *After Lorca* and *Heads of the Town*, which rely on the absence of allographic exegetical paratexts for the autographic ones to have their full effect. In any case, the lack of a price and promotional materials de-emphasizes the commercial status of the book, giving it a greater claim to value as an art object.

In his 1965 *Book of Magazine Verse*, Spicer once again uses paratexts to dramatize a conflict between insiders and outsiders, to critique major literary institutions, and to highlight his refusal to "write in order for such markets." The acknowledgements page for this volume reads: "None of the poems in this book have been published in magazines. The author wishes to

⁶⁴ See Gizzi and Killian, *My Vocabulary*, xviii. As Gizzi and Killian point out, Spicer's practice of dictation corresponds to his sense that his poetry did not "belong" to him in the manner implied by copyright.

acknowledge the rejection of poems herein by editors Denise Levertov of *The Nation* and Harry Rago of *Poetry* (Chicago).⁶⁵ The process of magazine submission and rejection—presumed or real—comprises the structure of the book: the title of each sequence of poems indicates a number of poems and the magazine to which they are supposedly intended (i. e. “Two Poems for *The Nation*”), although as the acknowledgements page suggests, Spicer chose these magazines on the premise that they would never accept his poems—whether because his poems fall outside of these magazines’ respective editorial tastes or, in the case of the *Saint Louis Sporting News*, because the magazine didn’t publish poems at all. Spicer’s acknowledgements page therefore frames the rejection of his poetry by magazines as excruciatingly personal at the same time as he gestures toward a more general rejection of poetry by the larger culture.

The book’s “acknowledgements” insist on Spicer’s outsider status, since he only writes poems “for” magazines that will certainly reject them. The drama of rejection that begins this book serves as a reminder that Spicer’s choice to publish with small presses was not only ethical and aesthetic; it was also a recognition of the reality that his work was not likely to find supportive publishers in the literary mainstream. *Book of Magazine Verse* displays some of Spicer’s anxieties about, as Tim Conley puts it, “the very notion of offering up his poetry to an audience, to a commercial market, and what the poem may expect from such a market.”⁶⁶ At the same time, the “acknowledgements” suggest that there is no pure act of composition, and the poet writes with the anticipation of how the poems will be received by publishers. Spicer’s “composition by book” reads, in light of his profound ambivalence about the relationship between poetry and commerce, as an awareness that the poem enters the realm of commerce by way of the material book.

⁶⁵ Jack Spicer, *Book of Magazine Verse* (San Francisco: White Rabbit Press, 1966).

⁶⁶ Tim Conley, “‘A whore’s answer to a whore’: The Prostitution of Jack Spicer,” *English Studies in Canada* 34, no. 3-4 (2008): 81.

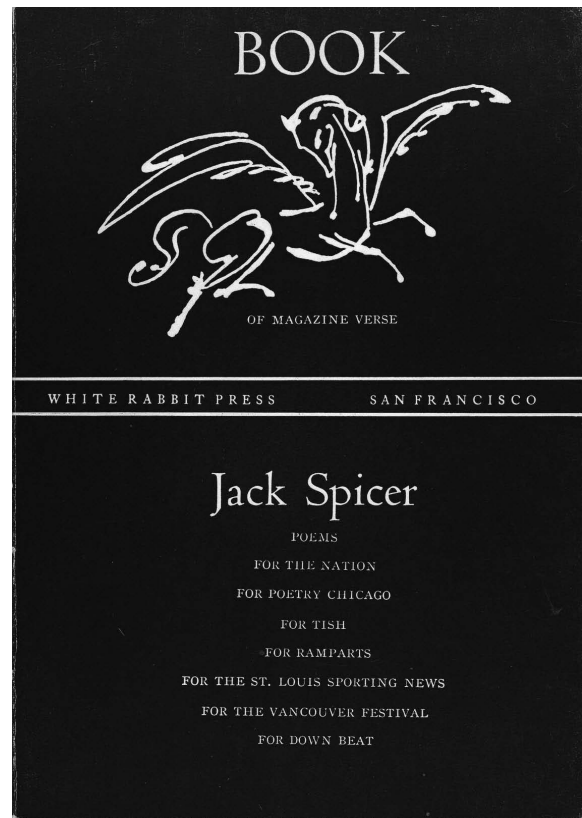
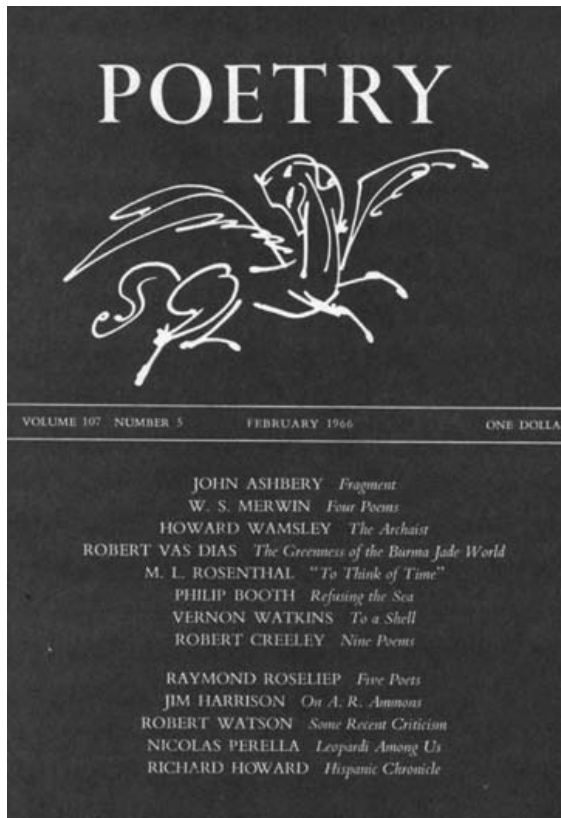


Figure 4. Cover of *Poetry*, February 1966 (left) and cover of *Book of Magazine Verse* (1966) (right)

Graham Mackintosh and Stan Persky's cover design for *Book of Magazine Verse* furthers the premise by imitating the cover of *Poetry*, copying the magazine's Pegasus icon and general layout (fig.4). In place of the issue number, date, and price, Mackintosh and Persky print the press name and location; where the issue's authors and titles appear in the original, they list the poem titles from the volume. Each poem is then printed on paper that imitates that of the publication being addressed: the poems for Vancouver poetry newsletter *TISH* are on blue mimeograph paper, those for the *Saint Louis Sporting News* are on newsprint, and so on. The design for *Book of Magazine Verse* participates in the volume's masquerade, arguing for the considerable power that major magazines have to construct aesthetic parameters for poetry. The volume stubbornly refuses participation in these aesthetic parameters at the linguistic level, playing along only at the levels of paratext and bibliographic code.



Figure 5. Cover of *Language* (1965)

Spicer's book *Language* also uses the cover as a location for dialogue between the book and an existing periodical by using as the basis for its own cover that of the linguistics journal *Language*, specifically the issue in which Spicer's only published work on linguistics appeared (fig. 5). The cover lists the contents of the journal, including "Correlation Methods of Comparing Idiolects in a Transition Area" co-authored by John L. Spicer and David W. Reed.⁶⁷ Over a facsimile of the *Language* cover, Spicer has scrawled the title, his name, and "White Rabbit Press" in red. Poetry, the cover reminds us, is as much a study of language as is linguistics, but poetry is also capable of overwriting institutional knowledge with more local and imaginative knowledge. "John" becomes "Jack," and the regularity of print is answered with the idiosyncrasy of handwriting. Neither a disavowal of his research nor an unequivocal embrace of it, this

⁶⁷ Spicer, *My Vocabulary*, 452.

cover puts Spicer's work in dialogue with the field of linguistics at the same time as it works to legitimate the book's commentary on the more technical aspects of language.

Spicer's books show themselves to be defined by their position in literary tradition and print culture, as well as bound up in the social, political, and economic factors constraining publication, distribution, and reception. When material conventions and paratextual genres mirror one another closely they become naturalized as conventions. Through the curved mirrors of his material and paratextual imitations, Spicer draws attention to these typically invisible forces that generate literary value.

The Afterlife of Print

Spicer's rewriting and overwriting of others' texts point to his participation in a poetic tradition built over much longer time-spans. Even as the material features of his books—typewriter fonts, staple bindings, White Rabbit Press colophons—located his work in the here-and-now of their publication, insisting on poetry as a living, community-oriented practice, persistent references to ghosts, corpses, the dead, and the figure of the reader suggest that Spicer's work concerns itself not only with immediate reception but also with “the afterlife of the poem,”⁶⁸ the ways in which poetry texts persist in the absence of the poet. As Spicer surely understood, the “afterlife of the poem” depends on its survival in some kind of material form.

Specters populate Spicer's work, sometimes appearing in the guise of historical or mythological figures, including Lorca, Billy the Kid, Arthur Rimbaud, Walt Whitman, Orpheus and Euridice, and the Arthurian characters of *The Holy Grail*. Poems also frequently feature

⁶⁸ Spicer, *My Vocabulary*, 301.

the more general “ghosts” or “the dead.” The first “explanatory note” in “Homage to Creeley” warns, “I am the ghost of answering questions. Beware me. Keep me at a distance as I keep you at a distance.”⁶⁹ In *Language*, Spicer writes (of an unidentified “he”), “Ghosts of other poets send him shame / He will be alive (as they are dead) / At the final picking.”⁷⁰ For Norman Finkelstein, “Spicer’s ghosts are a complex trope for the way a poet may write while neither forgetting nor being overwhelmed by the past.”⁷¹ Gizzi notes, however, that poets not only “write backward in response to their deceased predecessors,” they write “forward to the eventual readers of their poems.”⁷² Temporally displaced from the present, “the poet is always posthumous in the act of composition.”⁷³ As Spicer informs Lorca, poetry is “how we dead men write to one another.”⁷⁴

“The Scrollwork on the Casket,” a short prose piece published at the beginning of Spicer’s career in the 1949 *Berkeley Miscellany 2*, gives a sustained, if troubling, account of the relationship between death and writing. The narrator begins with the assertion that while it is “hopelessly eccentric” to publicly converse with a dead man, it is “more easily forgivable” to “entertain a corpse in...the cramped and more frightening privacy of a short story.”⁷⁵ However, “one must maim [the corpse] to fit him in,” and once the corpse has been crammed into the “casket of paragraphs,” the author has to “hammer...in a perfect fury to keep the body from bursting out.” The author ends up with “a small regular box with a corpse inside it, and he can sell it on the market where such boxes are sold.” The “small regular box” of the printed page

⁶⁹ Ibid., 249.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 388.

⁷¹ See Norman Finkelstein’s “Jack Spicer’s Ghosts and the Gnosis of History” for an analysis of how ghosts figure in Spicer’s understanding of his relationship to literary tradition.

⁷² Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 175.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Spicer, *My Vocabulary*, 134.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 24.

represents containment and conformity, but such are the conditions under which writing enters the marketplace.

Although the writer begins safely outside the casket, by the end of “The Scrollwork on the Casket” the narrator claims, “whenever I hammer a nail into the outside of the casket I can hear someone, on the inside, also hammering a nail. That’s the trouble with this burial business: it’s hard to know who’s on the outside and who’s on the inside, whether the living bury the dead or the dead bury the living.” Although the speaker is reportedly hammering the casket of someone named Ken, during the story Ken manages to “look up from his coffee,” “pull his coat tightly around his shoulders and [walk] a few yards ahead” of the speaker. By the end of the piece, the speaker appears to be entertaining a corpse in public, raising the question of whose corpse, if anyone’s, is in the casket, and what function the short story is supposed to serve if it can’t even manage to contain the corpse. Like many of Spicer’s statements about writing, “The Scrollwork on the Casket” is less coherent theory than koan: it presents a scenario in which it is impossible to disentangle the author, corpse, story, and printed page.

A similar strategy implicates the reader in “A Textbook of Poetry,” the third section of *The Heads of the Town Up to the Aether*:

Taught. As a wire which reaches. A silver wire which reaches from the end of the beautiful as if elsewhere. A metaphor. Metaphors are not for humans.

The wires dance in the wind of the noise our poems make. The noise without an audience. Because the poems were written for ghosts.

The ghosts the poems were written for are the ghosts of the poems. We have it second-hand. They cannot hear the noise they have been making.

Yet it is not a simple process like a mirror or a radio. They try to give us circuits to see them, to hear them. Teaching an audience.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Spicer, *My Vocabulary*, 300.

These lines so thoroughly implicate the reader in the poem that the possibility of audience threatens to disappear. The wires of metaphor dance in the poem's noise, but the noise has no audience because the "The ghosts the poems were written for are the ghosts of the poems" and "They cannot hear the noise they have been making." The spectral presence of the reader enters the poem so that although these are "our poems," the ghosts for whom they were written have to "give us circuits to see them, to hear them," to "teach an audience" which is already "Taught." The poet, then, becomes the audience for noise created by ghostly readers from within the poem, and the poet and reader engage in an endless reversal of positions.

There is an imperative in this poem both to hear the ghosts and to see them; they attempt to make themselves present in phonemic as well as graphemic forms. However, Spicer rejects two of his own tropes—the auditory transmission of radio and the visual reflection of mirrors—as too simple to describe the pedagogy of ghosts, which relies instead on "circuits." The mirror and radio remain important to Spicer's understanding of poetry, but it is ultimately the cyclical path of circuits, the endless return to a source-point, that characterizes the relationship between the dead and living.

When these complexities in the relationship between the living, the dead, and poetry that appear in Spicer's work are read with the material features of his texts in view, these material features point to the ghostliness of inscription and the status of language as both concept and matter. Vincent rightly points out that "Ghosts haunt all of Spicer's poetry. Either the immaterial becomes material, as in his theory of dictation in which he receives poems from spirits, or the material becomes immaterial, as when the poet turns into text."⁷⁷ However, Spicer's engagements with written language and the bibliographic code of his books remind us that text

⁷⁷ Vincent, *Queer Lyrics*, 164.

is not exclusively immaterial. The poet may turn into text, but text finds incarnation in the book, rematerializing the poet as a ghostly presence.

In commenting on the spectral existence of the poet in the text, Spicer's work necessarily anticipates a posthumous reception, and the significance of the material and paratextual features of the book as such for Spicer's poetry is reinforced by the ways his poetry circulated in the years following his death. Michael Davidson recalls that in these years "copies of [Spicer's] work were passed around from hand to hand, xerox machine to xerox machine with a quality of internecine seriousness," and he offers the example of his own experience "xeroxing *Heads of the Town up to the Aether* over a period of months from the copy sequestered in the Modern Poetry Room of the Lockwood Memorial Library in Buffalo—three pages at a time while a library assistant looked over [his] shoulder." Davidson notes that "such secrecy and complication would no doubt have pleased Spicer."⁷⁸

Multiple posthumous publications of Spicer's work maintain his investment in the material features of the book and retain the quasi-cultish aspect of the informal circulation Davidson describes. In 1969, White Rabbit printed *A Book of Music* as a handbound pamphlet with visible stitching. The first text to appear on the inside front cover reads, "No Spicer book was ever © Copyright"⁷⁹; this is the only time that Spicer's name appears in the book. The colophon reads: "This edition of 1800 copies designed and printed by Ron & Graham Mackintosh from a typescript made available by Peter Howard. The cover was one decided upon by the author when the book was first going to be published by White Rabbit eight years ago."

⁷⁸ Davidson, "Incarnations," 104.

⁷⁹ Although Spicer resisted copyrighting his work, *The Holy Grail* and *Language*—both published by White Rabbit Press—declared copyright in the front matter. Here White Rabbit recalls the spirit rather than the specifics of Spicer's approach to copyright.

The back, like that of Spicer's other books, is blank. In 1974, Toronto's Coach House Press printed a second edition of the out-of-print *After Lorca*, and this volume begins with a colophon that borrows the exact syntax of the first edition's: "This book has been typed on an IBM Selectric blah, blah, blah, by Robin Cones and printed by Marco Polio for the Government, with a cover from a photo by blah, blah, blah, in March 1974."⁸⁰ In addition to adding a couple "blah blah blahs," the Coach House colophon updates the typewriter model, typist name and affiliation, and date. While perhaps less witty than Spicer's colophon for Josephine Miles, the Coach House colophon similarly calls attention to the circumstances of the text's production while mocking the colophon's pretensions. In both sending the message and jamming the signal, this colophon participates in the complex meaning-making system of Spicer's work.

Small fine presses in various parts of the world also printed or reprinted Spicer's work after his death in extremely limited editions. Perhaps most emphatic in its embrace of Spicer's publication practices is a 1969 reprint of *The Holy Grail* by the Jolly Roger Press, an entity that appears not to have existed save for this one swashbuckling adventure. Billing itself as a "free pirate edition" on the front cover, the edition is bound with staples and mimeographed on colored construction paper with a new color for each book of *The Holy Grail*, a strategy that imitates the incorporation of different kinds of paper in the White Rabbit *A Book of Magazine Verse*. In keeping with the pirate theme, the front matter reads "please help to further in every way, anyone caught selling this book for money will be drawn and quartered." In a prefatory "Pirate's Note," the printer gives the following rationale for the edition:

i only heard Jack Spicer read once, at the berkeley poetry conference in july 65.

an hour after he read THE HOLY GRAIL, the last copy was gone from the avenue

⁸⁰ Jack Spicer, *After Lorca* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1974).

bookstores. within a month, Spicer was dead. most of his books, originally printed in small scruffly editions, have been out of print for awhile now. copies of THE HOLY GRAIL are almost impossible to find, and may command at least \$30. while those who “hold” the copyright speak vaguely of a collected works at some future date, this free pirate edition is distributed to make the poem available to those who need it.

A year later, this publication would be followed by a “Priceless Decadent East Pirate Edition” which borrows most of its material and paratextual features from the Jolly Roger one.⁸¹ The reprint both repeats and responds to the paratexts of the Jolly Roger text: it reasserts the threat that “anyone caught selling this book for money will be drawn and quartered,” with quotations to show that it has been borrowed from elsewhere. Prefatory comments for this edition also engage in direct dialogue by countering the original’s “I only heard Jack Spicer read once” with “I never saw him. no matter. I claim to hear him often.” This formulation echoes Spicer’s famous theory of dictation, in which the poet receives messages from outside sources; now that Spicer is dead, poets can take dictation from him.

Spicer’s work theorizes a spectral form of survival far more contingent and unsettling than the trope of literary immortality. His texts were similarly transient; immediately after his death his poetry persisted through its re-inscription in ephemeral material forms. These texts capture a Spicerian version of the poetic afterlife. As Davidson puts it, “Poetry produced on ditto

⁸¹ No press is listed, but an address in Watertown, Massachusetts headed by “Abyss” is stamped onto the title page. Since the Jolly Roger edition was printed in Berkeley, the “East” in the title of this edition presumably refers to the east coast.

or mimeo machines is not made to last but to circulate quickly. Staples rust, card stock fades, paper yellows and begins to flake. The materiality of ephemerality is a study in ghosts.”⁸²

Conclusion: Editing “the Big Lie of the Personal”

With the 2008 publication of *My Vocabulary Did This to Me*, Spicer’s work has once again achieved national distribution. Unlike Blaser’s 1975 volume, however, Killian and Gizzi’s includes a wealth of material still in manuscript form at the time of Spicer’s death. The gains afforded by this publication are clear. Such a volume makes possible more thorough critical appraisals of Spicer’s work and has the potential to garner him a wide popular readership. However, Killian and Gizzi opt for arranging the work chronologically by composition date, interspersing manuscript and published works, and such an approach focuses on authorship as an individual act of composition, in effect treating Spicer’s critiques of individual, original authorship as a bluff. Their title, taken from what Robin Blaser reports were Spicer’s final words—“My vocabulary did this to me. Your love will let you go on”⁸³—so thoroughly entwines Spicer’s poetry and life that his poems (rather than his alcoholism) read as his cause of death. By contrast, Spicer’s biographical note in Donald Allen’s landmark *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* reads, “Jack Spicer: ‘does not like his life written down. He was born in Hollywood in 1925. Anyone interested in further information should contact him at THE PLACE, 1546 Grant Avenue, San Francisco.’”⁸⁴ This biographical note should by no means stand as the final

⁸² Michael Davidson, *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material Word* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 28.

⁸³ Blaser, *Collected Books*, 325.

⁸⁴ Donald Allen, ed., *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* (New York: Grove Press, 1960).

word on the relationship between Spicer's work and life, but his rebuff of what he called in *After Lorca* "the big lie of the personal" complicates the compositional focus of *My Vocabulary Did This to Me*.⁸⁵

Perhaps more importantly, Killian and Gizzi's editorial strategy minimizes the distinction between what Spicer wrote and what he published. As this chapter proposes, Spicer's publication practices and material texts were integral to his individual books and his theories of poetry; whether a poem was published during his lifetime, by whom, and in what material form matters greatly to the poem's meaning. Spicer clearly understood and resisted the centripetal force of trade publication, which is capable of drawing work that originates in the outskirts of culture toward a more uniform center. Spicer's books also anticipate and undermine the kind of consolidation and commentary represented by a collected works, for two reasons. First, because Spicer uses the material and paratextual features of his books to situate them in precise geographic spaces and historical moments that are impossible to recreate. Second, because Spicer has built exegetical paratexts into his poems that query the effects of criticism on poetry. If we understand Spicer as a poet deeply engaged with the material potential of print, then we do well to keep the densely textual performances of Spicer's first editions in view even as we celebrate Killian and Gizzi's efforts to make Spicer's work more available.

This chapter has argued that for Spicer the unit of the book was never exclusively compositional; it was also a material object whose meanings could not help but crucially impact the poetry it contained. Spicer's printed books foreground the material book as a unit for poetry by manipulating bibliographic code and paratexts in order to call attention to the boundaries of the codex, the ways context impacts meaning, and the stubborn materiality of written

⁸⁵ Spicer, *My Vocabulary*, 150.

language with its uncanny capacity to survive its human source. Spicer, perhaps more so than any poet of his generation, used the materiality of his texts and the contexts of their production and distribution to shape his work's reception. Now that Spicer's star is rising—in large part because his works are available in a conventional format geared toward a national audience—it is all the more crucial to acknowledge that Spicer's publication practices represent more than idiosyncrasy; these practices are a vital component of his poetics and his legacy.

Chapter 3. Susan Howe's Facsimile Aesthetic

Asked in a 1995 interview to discuss the relationship between her work as a visual artist and her career as a poet, Susan Howe narrates the creation of her first book, *Hinge Picture* (1974), from an art installation:

I had started making environments—rooms that you could walk into and be surrounded by walls, and on those walls would be collage, usually found photographs... Then I started using words with that work. I was at the point where I was putting words on the walls and I had surrounded myself with words that were really composed lines when a friend, the poet Ted Greenwald, came by to look at what I was doing and said to me: “Actually, you have a book on the wall. Why don’t you just put it into a book?”¹

As an origin story for her poetics, Howe’s description of *Hinge Picture* is telling. It shows the boundary between textually oriented visual art and visually conscious literature to be extremely porous, and it underscores a homology between the gallery wall or canvas and the rectangular space of the page that operates in Howe’s writing. Still, the reported ease with which *Hinge Picture* could “move around from one medium to another” downplays the significance of the work’s relocation from installation to editioned book.² The experience of viewing and reading in the gallery differs fundamentally in sequence and scale from the experience of flipping through a book, and whereas a traditional art installation takes place in a designated space and time, books are free to travel and may wind up geographically and temporally distant from their point of departure. Perhaps more importantly, editioned books exist as a multitude of copies that can

¹ Lynn Keller, “An Interview with Susan Howe,” *Contemporary Literature* 36, no. 1 (1995): 6.

² *Ibid.*

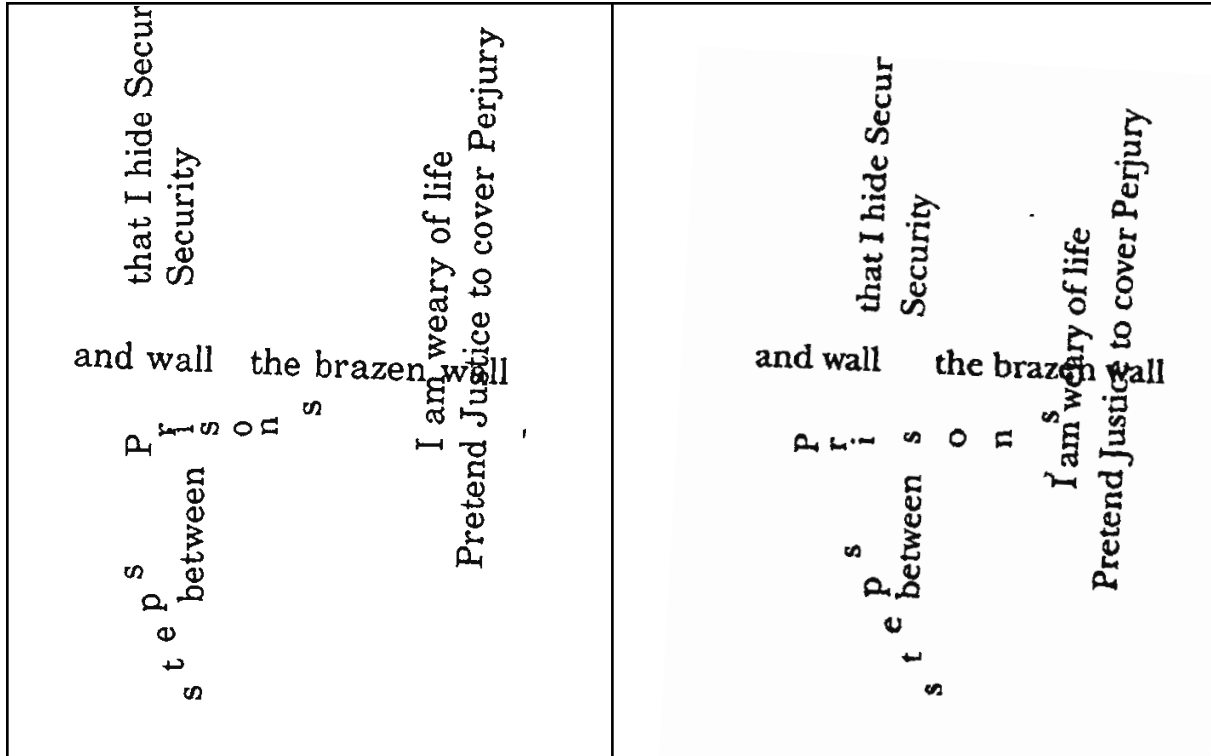


Figure 2. Close-ups from *Eikon Basilike*, Paradigm Press (1989) (left) and “Eikon Basilike,” New Directions (1993) (right)

the Royalist cause” printed on the day of Charles I’s execution and allegedly authored by the king during his imprisonment.³ These pages represent the book’s moment of maximum violence, the execution itself. Much can be said about the literary and visual aspects of this page,⁴ but for present purposes it is most significant that these pages—although they require acrobatic typesetting—can still be transcribed. In fact, although most readers encounter “Eikon Basilike” as a section of *The Nonconformist’s Memorial* (1993), this text was first printed by Paradigm Press in 1989 with a slightly different typeface and layout (fig. 2). This work may push the conventional boundaries of poetry, meditate on the role of bibliography, and try the patience of

³ Susan Howe, *Nonconformist’s Memorial* (New York, New Directions, 1993), 55.

⁴ See, for instance, Craig Dworkin, “‘Waging Political Babble’: Susan Howe’s Visual Prosody and the Politics of Noise,” *Word and Image* 12, no. 4 (1996): 389-405; Mandy Bloomfield, “Aftershock of Iconoclasm’: Ambivalence of the Visual Page in Susan Howe’s *Eikon Basilike*,” *Textual Practice* 23 no. 3 (2009): 417-437; Will Montgomery, *The Poetry of Susan Howe: History, Theology, Authority* (New York: Palgrave, 2010).

the typesetter, but it still complies with a commonsense understanding of textuality that allows linguistic code to be re-inscribed and reprinted in new editions.

More recent developments in her visual prosody, however, resist transcription—which is often taken to be a defining feature of textuality—in favor of photographic reproduction. There are many possible itineraries whereby a visual-artist-turned-poet could arrive at a visual aesthetic that refuses the conventions of typesetting in favor of textual images. This chapter argues, however, that Howe’s swerve toward reproduction is routed through bibliography and textual criticism as constructed by the debates about how to represent Emily Dickinson’s manuscripts. Howe argues in her 1993 critical-creative work *The Birth-Mark* that Dickinson’s manuscripts “should be understood as visual productions” and that “the best way to read Dickinson is to read the facsimiles.”⁵ This chapter proposes that in her subsequent work Howe explores the conceptual, technological, and aesthetic possibilities of the facsimile through visual strategies that rely on photographic reproduction. *Pierce Arrow* (1999) exploits these possibilities literally by incorporating facsimile manuscript pages by Charles Sanders Peirce and Algernon Charles Swinburne. *The Midnight* (2003) emphasizes the slippage inherent in visual reproduction by including numerous photographs of open books whose pages are partially obscured. The visually dense “type-collages”⁶ included in *Souls of the Labadie Tract* (2007) and *That This* (2010) are forged through xerographic reproduction and the visual traces of their composition process are inextricable from the works themselves; facsimile reproduction becomes the only viable way

⁵ Susan Howe, *The Birth-Mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 141, 153.

⁶ “Type-collage” is the term used in the publisher’s description for *That This* to describe the text of “Frolic Architecture.” Since Howe’s earlier work relies heavily on literary collage, I follow New Directions Press in using “type-collage” to refer to Howe’s poems that reproduce the visual specifics of cut-and-pasted typographic elements.

to reprint them. This chapter argues that Howe's type-collages not only represent a facsimile aesthetic that develops in her later work, they are in effect the quintessential object imagined by facsimile reproduction: a textual image that can be easily lifted from its material support.

The relationship between the look of Howe's pages and the concerns of her oeuvre has received considerable critical attention. In an early attempt to grapple with Howe's visual prosody, Craig Dworkin distinguishes her use of typography and layout from that of other poets: Howe's strategies are not a notational system for a vocal performance of the poem; they do not "exploit the 'expressive' potential" of typefaces; and her work is not "shaped, pictorial, or even schematic."⁷ Dworkin argues instead that "visual surface of her pages illustrate at a literal, physical, spatial level the much more complicated lessons of the texts' thematic, semantic, and conceptual planes."⁸ As Rachel Blau DuPlessis notes, by upsetting deeply entrenched typographic conventions Howe's spatial arrangements remind us that "the page is not neutral. Not blank, and not neutral. It is a territory."⁹ DuPlessis links Howe's use of the page to a feminist practice of "the critique of centers, hierarchies, authorities" and "the suspicion of dominant meaning."¹⁰ The decentering DuPlessis describes is often literal because, as Alan Golding puts it, in Howe's most radically disrupted pages "it is hard to know either where to begin or in what direction to proceed."¹¹ As such, Howe's pages "deny the possibility both of an authoritative point-of-view

⁷ Craig Dworkin, "'Waging Political Babble': Susan Howe's Visual Prosody and the Politics of Noise," *Word and Image* 12, no. 4 (1996): 392, 393.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 396.

⁹ Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 131.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Alan Golding, "'Drawings with Words': Susan Howe's Visual Poetics, *We Who Love to Be Astonished: Experimental Women's Writing and Performance Poetics*, ed. Laura Hinton and Cynthia Hogue (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 152.

within the text or an authoritative movement through it.”¹² For Michael Davidson, the troubled legibility of these unruly textual scatterings and overprintings “implicates the reader in the tasks of archival recovery, interpretation, and revision that preoccupy the author.”¹³ These tasks are often politically charged and inflected by gender, and Howe’s pages record in their layouts the many forms of omission, error, and overwriting that take place at the margins of history.

As Davidson suggests, Howe’s political project is inherently bound to textuality. Dworkin catalogues the numerous forms of bibliographic details that Howe incorporates: “conventions of capitalization, abbreviation, spelling, and alphabet”; “remnants or evocations of inscriptions, dedications, colophons, and printer’s advertisements”; “signatures and the stamps of borrowers, pagination, watermarks, the frontispiece and flyleaf, the cropping and binding, all manner of codicological measurements and descriptions: condition, copy, edition, provenance.”¹⁴ Dworkin argues that Howe’s visual pages “amplify the noise accumulated in her source texts” and point to the “parasitic” effects of textual transmission.¹⁵ In so doing, Howe’s visual strategies draw attention to the “intertextual and material character” of her writing, foregrounding her own texts’ status as written.¹⁶ Howe claims to have “never really lost the sense that words, even single letters are images,” and the same visual strategies that emphasize the fact of her texts as written artifacts also work to restore a sense of the intrinsic visuality of written language.¹⁷

Howe’s background as a visual artist is often offered as a commonsense explanation for why her work has consistently pushed the visual boundaries of poetry, but the effects of

¹² Ibid., 161.

¹³ Michael Davidson, *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material Word* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 86.

¹⁴ Dworkin, “Waging Political Babble,” 399.

¹⁵ Ibid., 404

¹⁶ Davidson, *Ghostlier Demarcations*, 9.

¹⁷ Keller, “Interview with Susan Howe,” 6.

Howe's artistic training on the specific forms her writing has taken remain underexamined. Brian Reed's analysis of Howe's "word squares"—comprised of "words, partial words, nonce words, numbers, punctuation marks and/or letters arranged into more-or-less rectangular shapes"—demonstrates how much can be gained by such inquiry.¹⁸ While most critics have focused on the more disruptive strategies of textual overlap and scattering, Reed shows that even Howe's less ostentatiously visual word squares exist within a dynamic network of influence and allusion that creates multiple layers of meaning for the device. Reed observes that, while her word squares "have few or no obvious literary precedents," they visually resemble her installation art, which relied heavily on grid patterns and white space; Reed links this visual device to the work of minimalist artists Ad Reinhardt, Agnes Martin, and Robert Ryman.¹⁹

This chapter pursues two strategies that continue Howe's engagements with visual art but that shift the terms of visibility: the first juxtaposes photographs of manuscripts and books with typeset text, and the second renders typeset text as an image through collage. As this chapter argues, these strategies develop out of Howe's argument that Emily Dickinson's manuscripts—"singular objects [that] balance between poetry and visual art"—are best represented through facsimile reproduction.²⁰ Howe's recent work, however, is less engaged with the specifics of Dickinson's manuscripts than with the aesthetic possibilities presented by facsimile reproduction. The facsimile foregrounds the ontological status of the copy qua copy, the mediation of reproduction technologies, the coincidence of intention and accident in textual artifacts, and

¹⁸ Brian Reed, "'Eden or Ebb of the Sea': Susan Howe's Word Squares and Postlinear Poetics," *Postmodern Culture* 14, no. 2 (2004): par. 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11. Kaplan Harris elaborates on the relationship between Howe's painting and poetry with emphasis on Reinhardt. See Kaplan Harris, "Susan Howe's Art and Poetry, 1968-1974," *Contemporary Literature* 47, no. 3 (2006): 440-71.

²⁰ Marta Werner and Jen Bervin, eds. *The Gorgeous Nothings* (New York: New Directions, 2013), 6.

the continuity between literature and visual art. In Howe's work, these aspects of the facsimile become the basis for a poetics that takes her investments in bibliography and the visuality of language into new terrain.

My Emily Dickinson Facsimiles

Since her death in 1886, Emily Dickinson's manuscripts have provoked controversies of ownership and interpretation that make virtually all editorial work on these manuscripts polemical. Dickinson published only a handful of poems, but she circulated her work widely in letters and sewed hundreds of poems into a series of fascicles; as such, textual-critical debates about her work center on the distinction between manuscript and print circulation on one hand and between calligraphy and typography on the other. Because she offered no real model for how—or even if—she might have wanted her work to appear in print, editors have been forced to speculate as to why she chose not to publish her work, which texts are meant to be read as poems and which are more properly considered letters, whether the ordering of the poems in her fascicles is poetically significant or merely circumstantial, and which features of her orthography, spacing, capitalization, punctuation, lineation, and calligraphy are meaningful to her poetics. Dickinson's first editors infamously organized her poems thematically and regularized the unconventional punctuation and capitalization that are now taken as signature facets of her poetry. The editing of Dickinson's manuscripts has therefore frequently been a process of un-editing, of returning to the documents themselves in an attempt to better represent the texts Dickinson left behind.²¹

²¹ Betsy Erlikka gives an overview of "The Dickinson Wars" in a chapter of that name in

R. W. Franklin's 1981 facsimile edition of *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* had a profound effect on Dickinson scholarship since it enabled many readers to see for the first time Dickinson's dramatic handwriting and spacing, and to encounter the variants that she included in even her bound fair-copy poems. Susan Howe begins her 1993 critical-creative work *The Birth-Mark* by asserting that "these essays are the direct and indirect result of my encounter with *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*."²² Although Howe lauds Franklin for making the first facsimiles of Dickinson's manuscripts available, she is troubled by his assurance that certain visual features are not meaningful and his resultant choice to follow "standard typesetting conventions...in regard to spacing and punctuation" and to ignore "stray marks" in his transcriptions.²³

For Howe, Franklin's refusal to imagine any significance for Dickinson's visual pages is representative of a masculine system of editorial control that has "domesticated and occluded" the more radical components of these manuscripts.²⁴ Instead, Howe proposes that "in her carefully handwritten manuscripts...[Dickinson] may have been demonstrating her conscious and unconscious separation from the mainstream orthodoxy in letters."²⁵ Howe understands "the

The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson, ed. Wendy Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Lena Christensen's *Editing Emily Dickinson: The Production of an Author* (New York: Routledge, 2008) gives a thorough historical account of the editing of Dickinson's manuscripts.

²² Howe, *Birth-Mark*, 1.

²³ Quoted in Howe, *Birth-Mark*, 132.

²⁴ Howe, *Birth-Mark*, 131. Feminist interventions have also impacted the biographical mythology surrounding Dickinson, which Howe describes as "a legend of deprivation and emotional disturbance" in which Dickinson is totally isolated from her historical moment. Martha Nell Smith and Ellen Louise Hart have also attempted to correct the strong tendency on the part of Dickinson's biographers to ignore or suppress the erotic overtones of her copious correspondence with her sister-in-law Susan, who exerted an immense influence on Dickinson's poetry. In the most egregious cases, these biographers instead fabricate heterosexual romance out of posterously scant evidence.

²⁵ Howe, *Birth-Mark*, 1.

issue of editorial control” to be “directly connected to the attempted erasure of antinomianism in our culture.” Antinomianism—the belief that “the moral law is not binding upon Christians, who are under the law of grace”²⁶—corresponds for Howe to the ways Dickinson’s manuscripts resist “canonical social power” in favor of “writing as a physical event of immediate revelation.”²⁷ “In spite of the zealous search of editors, authors, and publishers for the print-perfect proof of intellectual labor,” Howe writes, “the heart may be sheltering in some random mark of communication.”²⁸

Howe’s arguments about the visual significance of Dickinson’s manuscripts focus on the notion that print editions of her poetry obscure certain forms of meaning that are conveyed through calligraphy, spacing, and the recording of variants. This sentiment has been echoed by scholars including Marta Werner, Martha Nell Smith, Ellen Louise Hart, and Jerome McGann. Like Howe, these scholars promote the “un-editing” of Dickinson’s manuscripts and favor facsimiles and diplomatic transcriptions; they too propose a radical Dickinson whose visual-material practices and avoidance of print stand at the core of her poetics. Howe’s version of these arguments is most provocative in its claim for what she terms the “visual intentionality” of the manuscripts.²⁹ Howe argues that Dickinson’s manuscripts “should be understood as visual productions” and proposes that “maybe [Dickinson’s] poems must really be experienced

²⁶ David D. Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 3. Through antinomianism, Howe links Dickinson to another key figure in *The Birth-Mark*, Anne Hutchinson, who was at the center of the Antinomian Controversy of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the early seventeenth century.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁹ Susan Howe, “Visual Intentionality in Emily Dickinson,” *HOW(ever)* 3, no. 4 (1986): 11-13. The phrase “visual intentionality” drops out of this material when Howe incorporates it into *The Birth-Mark* but remains pertinent to her argument.

as handwritten productions—the later ones as drawings.”³⁰ Although she acknowledges that Dickinson’s poems “need to be transcribed into type” (in part because of the expense of the facsimiles), Howe “increasingly . . . wonder[s] if this is possible.”³¹ In spite of her criticisms of Franklin, Howe proposes that, “in the long run, the best way to read Dickinson is to read the facsimiles, because her calligraphy influences her meaning.”³²

Not all Dickinson scholars have been convinced that Dickinson’s refusal of print is radical, or that her manuscripts evidence “visual intentionality.” Betsy Erlikka argues that “Dickinson’s mode of manuscript production did not represent some distinctive manifestation of pure artistic creation ‘untainted’ by the social”; by contrast, it fits neatly within a “residual mode of aristocratic production and circulation.”³³ Even as Dickinson’s manuscripts marked “her resistance to the commodification of art. . . in the capitalist and patriarchal marketplace,” they also stand as a “refusal of the democratic possibilities of public and mass circulation.”³⁴ Domhnall Mitchell, who seeks to historicize both Dickinson’s manuscripts and recent responses to them, asks,

Do Dickinson’s autographs anticipate the attention given to the meaningful potential of writing’s graphic dimension in modernist writers, or does modernist writing create a lens through which such an image of Dickinson is projected? Does the attention paid to the manuscripts mean that ‘the work can now, more than a hundred years later, finally speak for itself,’ or is this to confuse contemporary taste with the author’s?³⁵

³⁰ Howe, *Birth-Mark*, 141, 157.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Erlikka, “Dickinson Wars,” 23.

³⁴ *Ibid.* It is worth noting that Dickinson’s poems, unlike the published works of her contemporaries, are not currently in the public domain.

³⁵ Domhnall Mitchell, *Measures of Possibility: Emily Dickinson’s Manuscripts* (Amhurst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 3.

As his questions imply, he suspects that fine-grained attention to the visuality of Dickinson's manuscripts remakes her work in the image of later literary experiments.³⁶ Cristanne Miller likewise argues that "in the United States, nineteenth-century readers tended to perceive poetry aurally more than visually and poets wrote more for the ear than the eye," and she suggests that the current readings of Dickinson's manuscripts are heavily influenced by a modernist emphasis on the visual attributes of language.³⁷

In an unflattering review of *The Birth-Mark* in 1997, Mutlu Konuk Blasing accused Howe of "reading Dickinson into her poetic program" and "writ[ing] a typological literary history, in which Dickinson is the precursor or type of Susan Howe."³⁸ Howe overtly identifies Dickinson's work as a major influence on her work, and scholars have detailed the numerous ways that Howe extends concerns of Dickinson's, but Blasing is apprehensive about influence that goes in the opposite direction—the tendency for Howe to view Dickinson through the prism of her own work. Howe does, after all, find in Dickinson several of the key features of her own poetics. Against the tendency to read Dickinson as isolated from her historical moment and the literary culture of her time, Howe sees her as "pull[ing] text from text" and spinning the "straws" gathered from her reading "into gold"; in this reading Dickinson begins to sound like a collage poet.³⁹ Furthermore, Howe advocates for reading the fascicles as units that transcend the

³⁶ In a glaring instance of such retrospective interpretation, Jerome McGann asserts that, "Franklin's edition makes it clear that Dickinson's texts are what would later be called (by Charles Olson) 'composition by field.'" Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 27.

³⁷ Cristanne Miller, "The Sound of Shifting Paradigms, or Hearing Dickinson in the Twenty-First Century," *A Historical Guide to Emily Dickinson*, ed. Vivian R. Pollack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 202.

³⁸ Mutlu Konuk Blasing, review of *The Birth-Mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History*, *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 6, no. 1 (1997): 109.

³⁹ Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1985), 29.

individual lyric, which makes Dickinson's fascicles resemble Howe's own book-length works. In Dickinson's refusal of print, Howe sees a program of resistance against convention and authority that closely mirrors the political bent of her own oeuvre, and in Dickinson's pages Howe sees a corollary to her own visual experiments.

Of course, Howe's choice of title for her 1985 *My Emily Dickinson* indicates she is well aware of the ways in which all readers, including critics, reconstruct authors according to their own priorities and perspectives. In an interview with Edward Foster included in *The Birth-Mark*, Howe admits that, "[Dickinson's] poems and her middle and later letters encompass whatever I want to bring to them. Need to bring to them. I often worry that I may be imposing my particular obsessions on her."⁴⁰ Although much can be and has been said about the validity of Howe's reading of Dickinson's manuscripts, this chapter is interested in how, in advocating for facsimile reproduction as a means of preserving the visual integrity of Dickinson's manuscripts, Howe is able to envision new possibilities for her own visual practices.

The question of facsimile reproduction is crucial to Howe's approach to Dickinson. As Mitchell notes, "in combination with modernist and postmodernist experiments with visual form," "the emphasis on Dickinson's manuscripts may be a function of technological advances in the media of textual reproduction."⁴¹ Lena Christensen similarly observes that attention to Dickinson's visual texts "appeared more or less at the same time as developments in digital media have made it easier to 'reproduce' a handwritten manuscript for general perusal."⁴² In other words, the potential for reproducing the visual features of Dickinson's manuscripts is a precondition for imagining that they might be "visual productions" in the first place.

⁴⁰ Howe, *Birth-Mark*, 155.

⁴¹ Mitchell, *Measures of Possibility*, 327.

⁴² Lena Christensen, *Editing Emily Dickinson*, 173.

Although facsimile is a common editorial tool, the facsimile edition has received scant attention in textual criticism.⁴³ Walter Benn Michaels' reaction to *The Birth-Mark* in the opening of his 2004 *The Shape of the Signifier* offers a useful point of entry for considering the theoretical underpinnings of the facsimile edition and the role of facsimile reproduction in Howe's arguments about Dickinson. Michaels construes Howe's investment in Dickinson's manuscripts as making the text "identical to the 'material object.'"⁴⁴ This poses a problem because "the very idea of textuality depends upon the discrepancy between the text and its materiality, which is why two different copies of a book (two different material objects) may be said to be the same text."⁴⁵ For Michaels, when the text is equated with the material object "it ceases to be something that can be edited and thus ceases to be a text at all."⁴⁶ The only option for re-inscribing the text then becomes a facsimile, which Michaels idiosyncratically considers "a reproduction instead of an edition."⁴⁷ He points out that "even a facsimile of Dickinson's poems will reproduce only the shapes of the marks she made; it won't duplicate the ink she made them with," and he concludes that "the facsimile is not more committed to the material object than is the Johnson edition; it just has a different set of criteria for

⁴³ Individual facsimile editions regularly outline their editorial rationales, but more sustained attempts to theorize the facsimile edition have mostly been limited to a special issue of *Textual Cultures* in 2011 based on a panel from that year's Society for Textual Scholarship International Interdisciplinary Conference.

⁴⁴ Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 3. To find the phrase "material object" in *The Birth-Mark* Michaels is forced to leave her chapter on Dickinson and pluck it from a comment about the notebook of Puritan minister Thomas Shepard, who began one work from each end of his notebook, upside-down in relation to one another, and left eighty blank pages between them.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* Michaels' critique of Howe proceeds without reference to the field of textual criticism more generally, and as such it is unclear exactly what he means by "text." In this sentence, he seems to be using "text" to refer to the literary work, which he does not necessarily distinguish from the linguistic text (the sequence of signs that appears in a given document).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

determining which aspects of that object count as the work of art. To be truly committed to the materiality of the object would be to suspend all such criteria.”⁴⁸

In spite of Michaels’ suggestions to the contrary, the facsimile edition does not naively attempt to become the material object it reproduces. An open acknowledgement of the difference between original and copy, in fact, serves to distinguish facsimile from forgery. Even in the unrealistic case of a perfect facsimile, the new object’s existence is necessarily of a different order than that of object on which it was modeled. To illustrate this point, Joseph Grigely imagines a scenario in which one might “stumble upon a press operation locked away in a forgotten warehouse” and find Ernest Hemingway’s *Torrents of Spring* “still set up in type, with original inks, paper, and binding equipment.”⁴⁹ Grigely declares that any new copies of *Torrents of Spring* produced as the result of this discovery would not, even if they were physically indistinguishable, be identical to those texts from the original imprint. “One may just as well make a killing selling them at book fairs,” but the historical displacement and the altered circumstances of production render the newly printed books fundamentally distinct.⁵⁰

When textual scholars have grappled with the facsimile they have been quick to point out the facsimile’s complex relationship to the text it represents. “The facsimile cannot pretend to be the original,” writes George Bornstein, “rather, it proclaims itself as an imperfect copy, perhaps an imitation or homage.”⁵¹ James West concedes that all facsimiles, “to one degree or another,

⁴⁸ Blasing similarly argues that “the ‘aura’ of handcrafted artifacts attracts Howe, but she forgets that facsimile editions also produce textual changes. Manuscripts—their feel, paper color, size, ink color, smudges, pinholes, and whatnot—are not reproducible.” Howe doesn’t “forget” that facsimiles are imperfect reproductions; rather she argues that facsimiles are better at reproducing important features of the text than printed transcriptions. Blasing, *Birth-Mark* review, 109.

⁴⁹ Joseph Grigely, *Textuality: Art, Theory, and Textual Criticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 109.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵¹ George Bornstein, “Facsimiles and their Limits: The New Edition of Yeats’ *The Winding Stair*

are misleading simulacra.”⁵² Meg Roland proposes cartographic projection as analogy: “Just as maps are a spatial and mythological picture of the world, facsimiles propose a spatial and mythological map of a literary text.”⁵³ Imitation, simulacrum, map—these ways of understanding the facsimile all emphasize not only the ontological difference between original and reproduction but the interpretive layer that intervenes between them.⁵⁴

While the facsimile edition is predicated on the impossibility of exact reproduction, it is still motivated by an impulse to reproduce non-linguistic features of a text. The facsimile therefore argues, whether implicitly or explicitly, for the significance of those non-linguistic features to an interpretation of the work. In Michaels’ rendering, the text must be totally dissociable from the material object or else equivalent to it, but this binary radically oversimplifies the relationship between the linguistic text and its material features. To maintain that certain non-linguistic features of the text impact its meaning is not necessarily to say that the text is “identical to the ‘material object’”; to argue that material features matter to how a work is understood is not to maintain that they *are* the work. Michaels therefore helps to show the complex terrain that the facsimile navigates in its proposal that material features, while ontologically distinct from the work, can contribute to its meaning. A given facsimile edition may argue explicitly for the specific reasons that the features it replicates are worth replicating, but by its very existence a facsimile argues for an understanding of materiality as crucial to meaning.

and Other Poems,” *Textual Cultures* 6, no. 2 (2011): 104.

⁵² James West, “Are Manuscript Facsimiles Still Viable?,” *Textual Cultures* 6, no. 2 (2011): 108.

⁵³ Meg Roland, “Facsimile Editions: Gesture and Projection,” *Textual Cultures* 6, no. 2 (2011): 53.

⁵⁴ Joseph Grigely, *Textuality: Art, Theory, and Textual Criticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 109-110.

Although in theory a facsimile could attempt to reproduce any or all of the material features of the original, in practice the reproduced features are often limited to the visual. This chapter proposes that the facsimile's most significant gesture is to pry apart materiality and visibility—to reproduce visual features of a text in a new material form. In so doing, the facsimile calls attention to the complex relationship between text, visibility, and materiality: text is necessarily visual,⁵⁵ and visual features are necessarily material, but the material exceeds the visual just as the visual exceeds the textual. In other words, a text's material features include visual as well as tactile aspects, and its visual features include linguistic and non-linguistic elements. The facsimile is striking in its emphasis on visibility. It insists on the visibility of language by reproducing the text in a specific visual form while making no distinction between marks that are linguistic or non-linguistic, legible or illegible, deliberate or incidental. The facsimile also subordinates the original's materiality to its visibility by reproducing tactile features visually, if at all.

Michaels therefore misreads Howe in attributing to her an absolute investment in the material object; Howe's investment in Dickinson's manuscripts is ultimately in their visibility rather than their materiality generally. Howe's reading of Dickinson's manuscripts is routed through her reading of Franklin's facsimile edition, and Howe proposes that reading the facsimile, rather than the manuscripts themselves, is ultimately "the best way to read Dickinson" because it replicates the visual features of Dickinson's calligraphy. As Michaels himself points out, the facsimile reproduces "the shape of the marks" but not the ink, and the shapes are what Howe is most concerned with. To argue, as Howe does, that reproducible visual features are integral to a text is a far cry from arguing that the text is equivalent to the material object.

⁵⁵ Braille is a notable exception, since it uses tactile rather than visual characters.

Michaels' attempt to pin Howe down as a thoroughgoing materialist in the end works to highlight Howe's commitment to precisely those aspects of the text that can be dissociated from the material object of the manuscript and rendered through facsimile.⁵⁶

This is not to say that for Howe the material dimensions of texts do not matter at all. Her endorsement of the facsimile suggests that visual features are more crucial than material ones and that for practical purposes it is better to capture the visual and lose the material than to sacrifice both to retranscription. On the other hand, however, the reality of the facsimile is that the material *is* present in a visual form. Marta Werner and Jen Bervin's luxurious color facsimile *The Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson's Envelope Poems*, for which Howe has written the preface, demonstrates that visual reproduction can go a long way toward representing important tactile features. *The Gorgeous Nothings* presents in full color a series of Dickinson's late fragments written on the surfaces of envelopes. Some of these texts are drafts of poems that exist in more finished states while some are unique jottings, generically ambiguous but poetically resonant. The facsimiles are extremely detailed, capturing folds, glue, puckering, and

⁵⁶ Michaels' disagreement with Howe and his critique of the facsimile edition are ultimately founded in the question of where textual meaning is located, and a central premise of *The Shape of the Signifier* is that "texts can mean only what their authors intend them to mean" (10). For Michaels, "anyone who thinks the text consists of its physical features...will be required also to think that the meaning of the text is crucially determined by the experience of its readers" to the exclusion of authorial intention (13). While the assertion that meaning and intention are equivalent is philosophically powerful, it is ill suited to the messy realities with which textual criticism must contend. Even editors who appeal to "final authorial intention" as the basis for authority must cope with the fact that intention develops dynamically over the course of a drafting process, and in many cases continues to change after publication. Only in the rarest cases do authors write and print work in complete isolation, and the intentions of editors and publishers frequently interact with authorial intention in ways that are difficult to tease apart. If intention were static and individual, readers (including editors) would still have no access to intention outside of its manifestation in material documents that are prone to error, whether authorial or otherwise. As such, Michaels' idealized notion of intention quickly becomes unstable, contingent, and inextricable from materiality when it plays out on the ground.

discoloration in addition to differences between pencil and pen, a variety of envelope colors, and stamps. The editors' choice to use envelopes as a unifying feature amplifies the visual interest of the fragments, since used envelopes, when unglued and flattened, create irregularly shaped surfaces that are far more visually interesting than rectangular stationery. The fragments are reproduced to scale, and since many are small they float in the large page dimensions (12.7" by 11.8"). The high quality of the reproductions folds back into the argument that these were visual artifacts in the first place, indicating that, as in the cases of ready-mades and found poems, art can be a direct product of curation. As scraps kept in folders in a library these are historical documents, but presented in Werner and Bervin's edition they become poetry and visual art.

When Howe attests in her preface that "this edition itself is a work of art," she not only pays the volume a much-deserved compliment, she lays the conceptual foundation for what this chapter terms her facsimile aesthetic.⁵⁷ In her work after *The Birth-Mark*, Howe draws on several of the facsimile's most significant features, including its allowance that a work of art be equally literary and visual. Howe makes use, too, of the facsimile's tensions between similarity and difference, and between singularity and multiplicity—the facsimile's ability to closely resemble an original while foregrounding its own status as a copy, and its insistence on the specificity of a textual object while enabling certain of details of that object to become widely accessible. Howe's later visual strategies therefore strive toward what she claims Werner and Bervin have accomplished: the creation of art out of acts of facsimile reproduction. The facsimile becomes generative rather than derivative, and as Howe proposes in *The Birth-Mark*, "the physical act of copying" can be "a mysterious sensuous expression."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Werner and Bervin, *Gorgeous Nothings*, 7.

⁵⁸ Howe, *Birth-Mark*, 141.

Illustrative Pages

I reached Peirce's existential graphs through my interest in Emily Dickinson's late manuscripts. I felt that his logical graphs were poetry and drawing at the same time they were logic, and that they need to be seen in facsimile rather than transcription....I feel that the same editorial approach should be taken to Dickinson and Peirce, and I would like to see some of their manuscripts displayed as art objects in a gallery.

—Susan Howe, “An Exchange between Joan Jonas, Susan Howe, and Jeanne Heuving”

Pierce-Arrow (1999), the volume that directly followed *The Birth-Mark*, shifts focus from Dickinson's manuscripts to those of the American logician and philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. Howe's interest is in what Peter Nicholls calls the “unofficial Peirce,” “whose papers frequently have an unexpectedly graphic and comic quality.”⁵⁹ The book's first section, “Arisbe,” begins by narrating the “many hours” Howe passed “in the bowels of [Yale's] Sterling Library” viewing the thirty-eight microform reels of Peirce's papers.⁶⁰ “Arisbe” is primarily devoted to an exploration of Peirce's life, with attention to the ambiguous origins of his wife Juliette, his dismissal from Johns Hopkins University, and the dire financial circumstances in which he and Juliette spent their later lives. Howe returns to the question of his manuscripts at the section's end, echoing an observation by Mary Keeler and Christian Kloesel that that while “his work in unpublishable in printed form,” Peirce's manuscripts have been consulted by “only the hardest scholars” and often only in photocopy.⁶¹ Howe's inclusion of pages from Peirce's manuscripts in her work is therefore in part a recuperative project aimed at garnering attention for these documents.

In a prefatory statement, Howe writes that “these graphs, charts, prayers, and tables are free to be drawings, even poems,” and “perhaps the Word, giving rise to all pictures and graphs,

⁵⁹ Peter Nicholls, “‘The Pastness of Landscape’: Susan Howe's *Pierce-Arrow*,” *Contemporary Literature* 43, no. 3 (2002): 445.

⁶⁰ Susan Howe, *Pierce-Arrow* (New York: New Directions, 1999), 5.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

is at the center of Peirce's philosophy. There always was and always will be a secret affinity between symbolic logic and poetry."⁶² Peirce forges his own connection between symbolic logic and poetry in a manuscript page titled "The First chapter of Logic," which proposes that "the earliest occupation of man is poetizing, ~~The infant is~~ Feeling and delighting in feeling. That is what the infant in his cradle seems ~~to be doing~~ mainly to be about."⁶³ The links Howe asserts between "the Word" and "pictures and graphs" is also apparent in the book's first set of facsimiles, from Peirce's "Existential graphs: A System of Logical Expression" (fig. 3). These facsimiles feature a page of notations for expressions that are listed on the facing page. Peirce's system—of which Howe presents only figures 99-122—offers an exhaustive method for visually conveying logical expressions that can be built from the verb "praises," i.e. the page begins, "Somebody praises somebody to his face," and by the end has morphed into the strange assertion that "There is nobody whom all men praise within themselves."⁶⁴ The combination of language and visual symbol that characterizes the notations demonstrates the visual quality of Peirce's thought and harkens back to Dickinson's use of punctuation and dashes.

As *Pierce-Arrow* progresses, the textual components of Peirce's manuscripts give way to drawings that would be impossible to transcribe. The introductory image for the book's second section, "The Leisure of the Theory Class," signals the section's lighter tone through a Peirce drawing of figures with ludicrously distended noses and feet. A later spread shows what Howe called "assorted pages of calculations," followed on the next spread by "doodles" that include an anchor, a key, a teapot, a chair, several vases, fish, birds, and human figures.⁶⁵

⁶² Ibid., ix.

⁶³ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid., xiii.

⁶⁵ Ibid., viii.

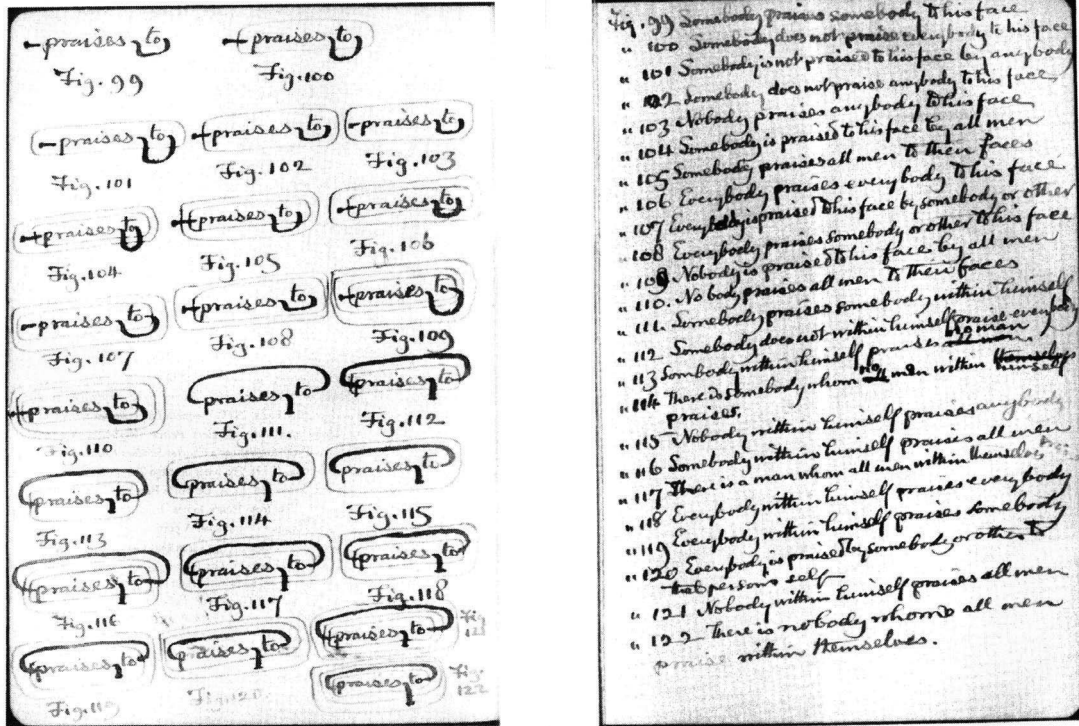


Figure 3. Manuscripts in the hand of Peirce shown as facing pages in *Pierce-Arrow* (1999)

As with Dickinson's, Howe sees Peirce's manuscripts as integral to his intellectual work and impossible to fully represent except in facsimile. Or, as Howe puts it, "all his / handwriting to me shows / logic of this poetic tradition."⁶⁶ Howe's choice of the verb "shows" is telling, as is her use of the label "illustrations" to describe the manuscripts in the front matter of her book. Both words span literal meanings related to vision and figurative meanings related to thought. "To show" is "to cause or allow to be seen or looked at," but it is also to "present to (physical or mental) view," and can include the display of qualities or feelings that cannot be seen directly with the eye.⁶⁷ Likewise, "illustration" can refer to a pictorial representation that accompanies a text—a visual image—as well as "that which serves to illustrate or make clear, evident, etc.; an

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁶⁷ "show, v." OED Online. December 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/view/Entry/178737> (accessed January 30, 2014).

elucidation, explanation; an example, instance.”⁶⁸ Peirce’s manuscripts present illustrations of his thought in both senses; they “show logic” in ways that print cannot.

Although the volume focuses on Peirce, the manuscripts included in “The Leisure of the Theory Class” are often those of the English poet Algernon Charles Swinburne. These manuscripts show poetry in the process of composition; as Peter Nicholls argues, in *Pierce-Arrow*’s manuscript pages “deletions and corrections emphasize the temporality of writing, making it a ‘living fact’ rather than a dead letter.”⁶⁹ This temporality comes through in a passage that moves among thought, manuscript, print, and poetry:

Though the essay was never
completed only a rough draft
I can still see the room those
unmeant thoughts composed
in sleep now first printed on
four sides of double-octavo
sheet black-border notepaper
Never yours—Most sincerely
From the confines of poetry⁷⁰

The passage begins with an essay that, because it was “never completed,” exists as both a draft and a mental construct. The ambiguous phrasing of “I can still see the room / those unmeant thoughts composed / in sleep now first printed” allows the “unmeant thoughts” to be seen as part of the room as well as to be pinned down by print. These “unmeant thoughts” can then equally be unrecorded stray thoughts, accidents of composition, or printing errors. The passage

⁶⁸ “illustration, n.” OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/view/Entry/91580> (accessed December 1, 2013).

⁶⁹ Nicholls, “Pastness of Landscape,” 445.

⁷⁰ Howe, *Pierce-Arrow*, 123.

moves swiftly to the print shop with the mention of “four sides of double-octavo”—a sheet of paper large enough to accommodate two octavo printings on each side (i.e., a sheet sixteen times the final page dimensions of the book). At the word “sheet,” though, the poem shifts abruptly to private correspondence on “black-border notepaper.” In the nineteenth century it was customary for senders to use stationery with black borders while in mourning, so in their swerve to the private letter these lines add personal loss to the process of writing. The manuscripts in *Pierce-Arrow*, including the Swinburne draft on the facing page, are photographed on a black background and cropped just beyond the page-edges so that they appear to have a black border; these lines, then, locate the manuscript affectively in the realm of grief. The black border around Swinburne’s poem draft also frames the page as “the confines of poetry,” and Howe’s reader is warned that, as near as the draft may seem, it is “Never yours.” Swinburne’s draft stands beside these lines as an illustration of the drafting process they describe, and it similarly wavers between incompleteness and the printing press since the poem it records will eventually be finished and published.

Will Montgomery rightly notes that in this volume Howe foregoes the “typographical experimentation” of earlier works in favor of “a visual aesthetic that depends on actual reproductions of the books and papers of others.”⁷¹ The effect is that, as in the above example, “prose and poetry of relatively even texture is counterpointed by the visual dynamism of the manuscript facsimiles.” The unruly calligraphy of Peirce and Swinburne stands in marked contrast to the “exploded pages” and “unsettled grids” of Howe’s earlier poetry. Even the most radical uses of typography enforce certain regularities of letterforms and limits to spacing, but

⁷¹ Will Montgomery, *The Poetry of Susan Howe: History, Theology, Authority* (New York: Palgrave, 2010), 132.

the manuscripts Howe includes are free to range over the page-surface. Montgomery understands Howe's inclusion of manuscript pages in *Pierce-Arrow* as "a new form of visual citation that is distinct in important ways from the modernist tradition of textual citation" and "an original form of collage in which printed word, handwriting, and drawing are imbricated."⁷² Although he doesn't elaborate on the "important ways" Howe's citation method differs from those of modernism, in terming Howe's citation strategy "visual" he suggests that the key distinction lies in the look of the borrowed text. Although textual citations can be woven into a writer's own language with varying degrees of coherence and rupture, the facsimiles Howe reproduces have clear boundaries. The manuscript pages differ in color from the Howe's pages, and they appear with a black border that emphatically delimits their edges.

To treat the inclusion of manuscript facsimile pages as a form of collage runs the risk of ignoring the extent to which these facsimiles function as illustrations. Howe, after all, refers to these pages as "illustrations" in the book's front matter, and her decision to segregate the manuscript facsimiles from the text proper by placing the facsimiles on their own pages further prevents continuity between the linguistic code of the manuscripts and the printed text. Howe's placement of the facsimiles gives them an ambiguous status in relation to the volume's linguistic code since illustrations are regularly used to ornament a literary text for a particular edition. Howe's "illustrations," though, also capture the word's meaning more generally. Peirce's "existential graphs" are themselves illustrations of logical phrases, and in *Pierce-Arrow* these manuscripts serve as examples, and perhaps elucidations, of the process whereby thought becomes text. In Howe's use these illustrations are never far from the word's obsolete sense

⁷² Ibid.

of “illumination” or “enlightenment.”⁷³ This chapter proposes that *Pierce-Arrow*’s illustrative manuscript pages, although they do share with collage an impetus toward direct reference, are better understood in the context of textual criticism’s conventions for presenting facsimile manuscripts. In other words, rather than inventing a new mode of collage, Howe invents a poetic use for the trappings of the facsimile edition.

Howe’s next volume, *The Midnight* (2003), leaves the realm of authorial manuscripts for the printed books of her family library, but it remains invested in the use of reproduced texts as illustrations. *The Midnight* is in part an elegy for Howe’s mother, Mary Manning, but it ranges over an array of private and public source material. The volume’s five sections—“Bed Hangings I,” “Scare Quotes I,” “Bed Hangings II,” “Scare Quotes II,” and “Kidnapped”—put Howe’s meditations on her Anglo-Irish heritage and her mother’s theatrical career into dialogue with material drawn from *Bed Hangings: A Treatise on Fabrics and Styles in the Curtaining of Beds, 1650-1850* and the captivity narrative *The Lost Sister of Wyoming*.⁷⁴ As Marjorie Perloff puts it, “in the assemblage that is *The Midnight*, everything is at once separate and interwoven.”⁷⁵ Books are a crucial component of this interweaving. As Susan Barbour maintains, Howe’s elegy is inextricable from its engagements with the books inherited from her mother’s family, and *The Midnight* is crucially invested in “the elegiac potential of the book as object.”⁷⁶ After all, Howe claims in an interview that, “archives, the material—the fragment, the piece of paper—is all we

⁷³ “illustration, n.” OED Online.

⁷⁴ *The Midnight* gathers together material from three prior publications, “Bed Hangings I” reprints the text from the 2001 *Bed Hangings*, published by Granary Books and illustrated by Susan Bee, but omits the illustrations. Both *Bed Hangings II* and *Kidnapped* were published as separate volumes by Coracle in 2002.

⁷⁵ Marjorie Perloff, “‘The Rattle of Statistical Traffic’: Citation and Found Text in Susan Howe’s *The Midnight*,” *boundary 2* 36, no. 3 (2009): 227-228.

⁷⁶ Susan Barbour, “‘Spiritual Hyphen’: Bibliography and Elegy in Susan Howe’s *The Midnight*” *Textual Practice* 25, no. 1 (2011): 134.

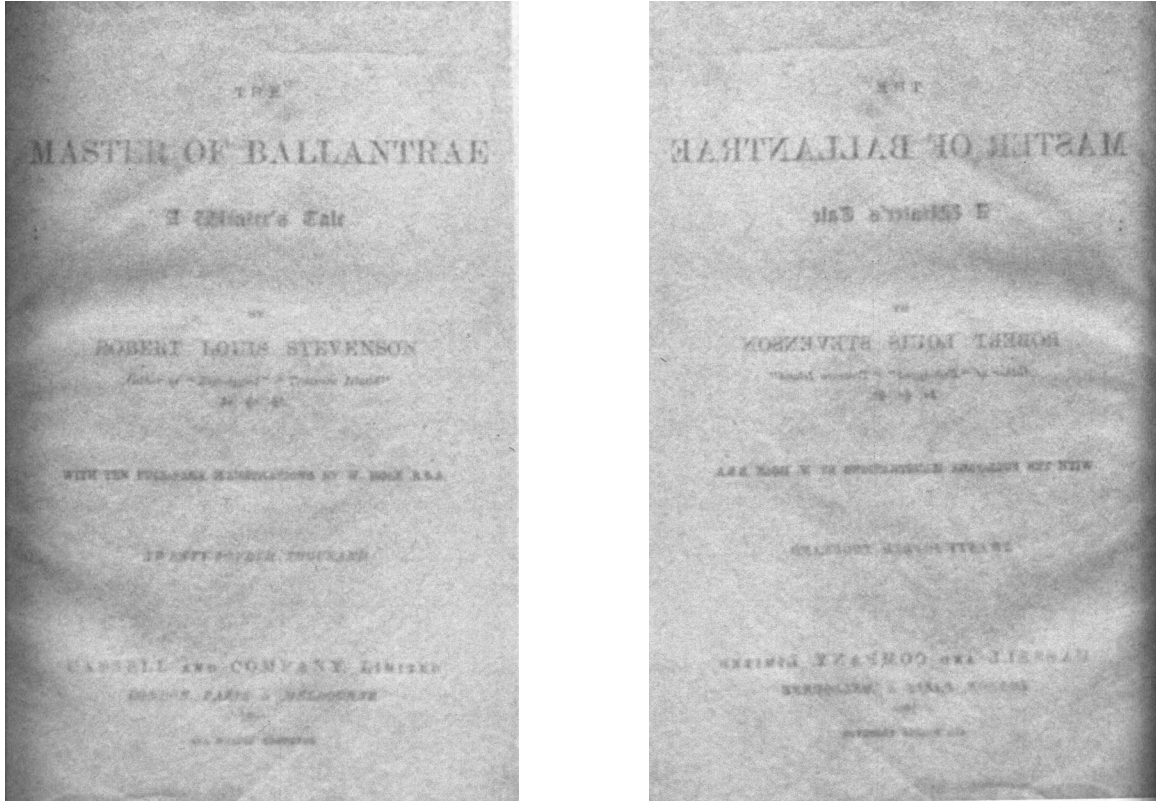


Figure 4. Recto (left) and verso (right) images of the title page of *The Master of Ballantrae* featured in *The Midnight* (2003)

have to connect with the dead.”⁷⁷

The volume begins with a facsimile—a greyed-out, ghostly image of the title page of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Master of Ballantrae* (fig. 4). The verso of this leaf offers a mirror image of the recto. In the brief prose piece that follows Howe explains, “there was a time when bookbinders placed a tissue interleaf between frontispiece and title page in order to prevent illustration and text from rubbing together” but “after 1914, advances in printing technology rendered an interleaf obsolete.”⁷⁸ The faint, blurry quality of the recto image captures the layering of the interleaf over the title page. Still, the verso remains enigmatic. It’s possible to interpret

⁷⁷ Maureen McLane, “The Art of Poetry No. 97, Susan Howe,” *The Paris Review*, <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6189/the-art-of-poetry-no-97-susan-howe>.

⁷⁸ Susan Howe, *The Midnight* (New York: New Directions, 2004), n.p.

the second interleaf image as Susan Barbour does, as “the back of the interleaf onto which the reversed image of the title-page appears to have transferred”; however, a closer examination unsettles this conclusion.⁷⁹ The text of Stevenson’s title page appears equally dark on both sides of the interleaf, whereas set-off ink should appear darker on the inked side. A photograph of the same copy of *Ballantrae* that occurs later in the volume shows no evidence of set-off on the interleaf, and toward the end of *The Midnight*, Howe writes: “When I grasp the interleaf in Uncle John’s copy of *Ballantrae* between my thumb and forefinger, in one position the filmy fabric takes on the properties of the title page, in another the properties of the frontispiece.”⁸⁰ Howe’s facsimile interleaf does not waver between these possibilities since the frontispiece is not depicted at all. Howe’s image turns out to be impossible; in Sam Rowe’s phrasing, it “adopts a perspective that doesn’t exist within the physical architecture of the book.”⁸¹ The pair of facsimile title pages therefore serves as a warning about the distortions introduced, whether accidentally or deliberately, in any attempt to visually convey a material book.

In this opening passage, Howe also declares that “Word and picture are essentially rivals. The transitional space between image and scripture is often a zone of contention.”⁸² This rivalry may be well represented by the original tissue interleaf’s imposition between title page and frontispiece, but the facsimile interleaf’s conjunction of text and image instead undermines the purported opposition between word and picture, proposing that word and picture are at times impossible to separate. Numerous photographs in the volume bear out this difficulty of

⁷⁹ Barbour, “Spiritual Hyphen,” 137.

⁸⁰ Howe, *The Midnight*, 144.

⁸¹ Sam Rowe, “Fantasies of Contact: Erica Baum, Susan Howe, and the Poetics of Paper,” *Full Stop*, 27 June 2012, <http://www.full-stop.net/2012/06/27/features/essays/sam/fantasies-of-contact-erica-baum-susan-howe-and-the-poetics-of-paper/>.

⁸² Howe, *The Midnight*, n.p.

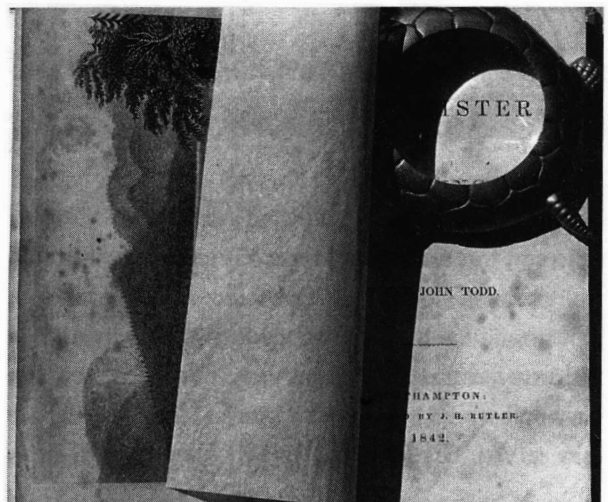
segregating text from image by visually representing pages from books. According to Stephen Collis, *The Midnight* is “the most textually normative in appearance of Howe’s books to date,” but it also includes the largest number of illustrations; “thus, to the eye, the separations between image and text are clearly demarcated; however, the actual contents of the book’s ‘illustrations’—often themselves photographs of texts—undercut such distinctions.”⁸³ The two “Scare Quotes” sections contain the bulk of the volume’s images, some of which are strictly visual—a map, a painting, reproduced family photographs, or family photographs that have been re-photographed at new angles and/or distances. Other images, such as those of frontispieces partially obscured by interleaves, offer no text but nevertheless conjure up textuality since they are clearly part of a book. Many images, though, capture open pages of books with legible or partly legible text, echoing the facsimile interleaf’s uneasy alliance of word and picture.

Certain books are photographed several times over the course of *The Midnight*, among them *The Lost Sister of Wyoming: An Authentic Narrative*. The book is first represented by its frontispiece, with the interleaf obscuring the bottom half of the image (fig. 5). The book is turned so that the spine is the bottom edge of the image and the landscape portrayed is right side up. The next time the book appears, the entire opening is shown and the interleaf is arranged so it covers the title page without blocking the frontispiece. A brass magnifying glass in the shape of a turtle sits on the left side of the book, roughly centered on the gutter. A light source from the right causes the magnifying glass to cast shadows across the book, and the portion of the inside of the glass that isn’t covered in shadow shows a small figure in the landscape. The next image of the book shows the page spread of frontispiece and title page with the interleaf again obscuring

⁸³ Stephen Collis, “Drawing the Curtain on *The Midnight*,” Review of Susan Howe’s *The Midnight*, *Jacket* 2 25 (2004), <http://jacketmagazine.com/25/collis-s-howe.html>.



Figure 5. Three photographs of the frontispiece for *The Lost Sister of Wyoming* featured in *The Midnight* (2003)



the frontispiece, which is now turned so the book is right-reading and the image is on its side. The magnifying glass has been moved, and now sits on the top of the title page; it seems as though the magnifying glass could be propping up the interleaf. These three images underscore the interleaf's liminal position since they dramatize the difficulty of photographing both the title page and frontispiece at the same time. Through their sequencing, the images also point to an act of reading, and while the reader, presumably Howe, is physically absent from the images she is present through the movement of the objects and the perspectives of the photographs.

Still, even if *The Midnight's* photographs of books suggest a kinetic reading process they are obdurately two-dimensional, and can only hint at the whole book through images of individual page spreads. Peter Stoicheff and Andrew Taylor explain that “the book itself is never fully encountered except as an expectation or recollection or closed volume. The page, by contrast, is seen in its entirety, simultaneously.”⁸⁴ This distinction goes a long way toward articulating the differences between the images incorporated into *Pierce-Arrow* and those in *The Midnight*. The manuscript facsimiles included in *Pierce-Arrow*, even when copied from a bound notebook, emphasize the two-dimensional page-surface. They approach the text head-on and crop the image at or near the page-edge, giving the effect of one page transposed on another. The photographs in *The Midnight* are often taken at raked angles, in extreme close-up, and/or with objects (a magnifying glass, paper bookmarks) layered on top. The result is that the illustrations in *The Midnight* foreground the gap between the sculptural book-object and the flatness of photographic reproduction. These images allude to the unseen parts of the book—those parts of the page that exist outside the frame, or those pages that are stacked beneath the one in view—but we are

⁸⁴ Peter Stoicheff and Andrew Taylor, eds., *The Future of the Page* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 3.

always turned to the page of Howe's choosing, permitted to see only what she uncovers.

The refusal of these books to become fully readable suggests the opacity of history and memory at work in *The Midnight*, and this fraught legibility factors into Howe's elegy for her mother. Howe notes in the book's opening passage that "today each spectral scrap intact in a handed down book has acquired an enchanted aura quite apart from its original utilitarian function," and these "spectral scraps" offer a small window into history and the trace of absent loved ones.⁸⁵ The elegiac dimensions of the book come to the fore in *The Midnight*'s treatment of copy of the *Later Poems* of W. B. Yeats that belonged to Howe's mother. We learn that "six Irish actors have inscribed her copy of *Later Poems*," and "inside, five narrow strips of what looks like wrapping paper, once meant to serve as markers, are still intact."⁸⁶ The first image of the book shows the front flyleaf containing the inscription, and the following page shows the book opened to the table of contents with all the names of the poems obscured by the stacked bookmarks (fig. 6). Below the image, Howe writes of the bookmarks, "Each one has a faded title in pencil at the top so all these years later I can just make out in her handwriting" the titles of the Yeats poems the papers were meant to mark.⁸⁷ Howe reports that "sometimes I arrange the four snippets as if they were a hand of cards"—the third image of *Later Poems* shows the bookmarks fanned out across the book in such a manner—and "I like to let them touch down randomly as if I were casting dice or reading tea leaves."⁸⁸ These scraps are both "utilitarian" in their function as bookmarks and "enchanted," treated almost as sources of augury. Like the interleaf of *The Lost*

⁸⁵ Howe, *The Midnight*, n.p.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* Howe originally writes that there are five before changing the number to four. Only four are represented in the photographs and only four poems are named in the text as having had bookmarks.

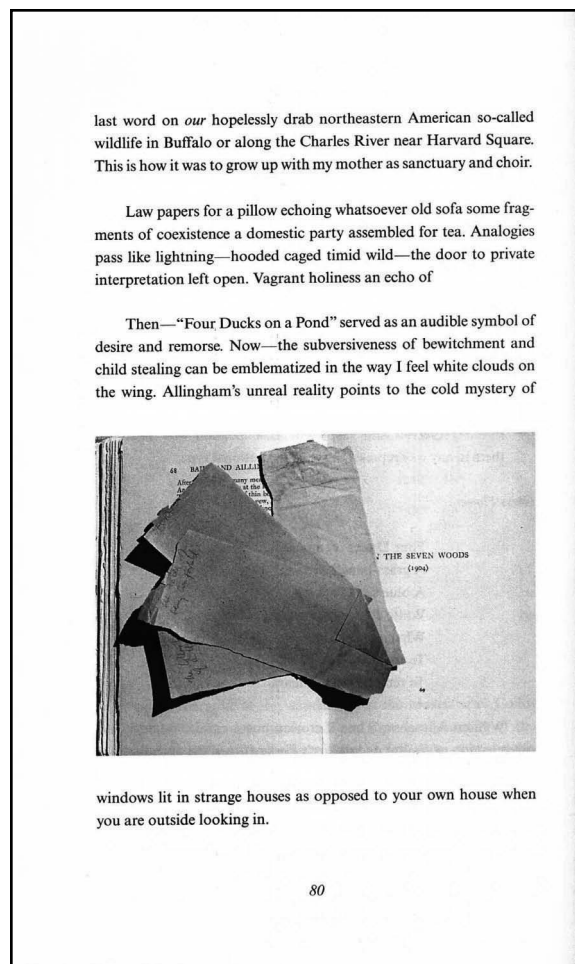
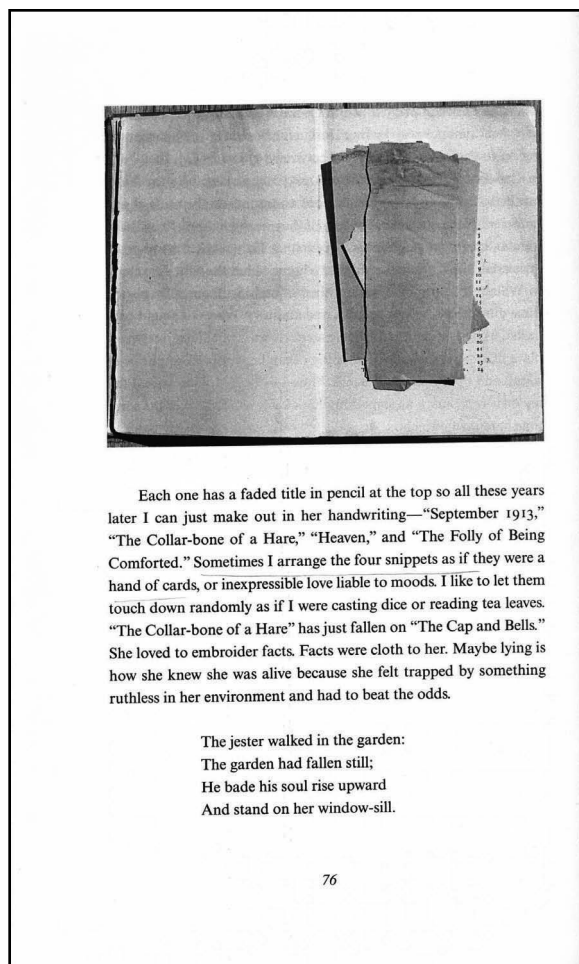


Figure 6. Non-consecutive pages from *The Midnight* (2003) featuring photographs of Yeats' *Later Poems* overlaid by bookmarks

Sister of Wyoming, the movement of these bookmarks through space are represented by multiple photographs in different positions, and although the images of the bookmarks, like many of the images of books in *The Midnight*, draw close to an "enchanted aura," these textual objects remain resistant to photographic capture.

The trouble in photographically reproducing these books is amplified by the tendency of Howe's family members for inscription, alteration, and the liberal insertion of "spectral scraps." Howe writes that

My mother's close relations treated their books as transitional objects (judging by a few

survivors remaining in my possession) to be held, loved, carried around, meddled with, abandoned, sometimes mutilated. They contain dedications, private messages, marginal annotations, hints, snapshots, press cuttings, warnings—scissor work.”⁸⁹

John Manning’s copies of *Ballantrae* and *Alice in Wonderland* are rife with such alterations and Howe’s volume displays several photographs of “material pasted into” each of these volumes. In one of the more striking examples, large sections of newspaper pasted into the front of *Alice in Wonderland* are unfolded so that they cover most of the book and stretch beyond the book’s boundaries. These same pages are later shown carefully folded back into place.

The addition of newspaper clippings renders these printed books as unique, personalized works, and in this regard the books handed down to Howe resemble scrapbooks. As Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia Buckler note, “Scrapbooks represent a mass-cultural form, but individually each is unique, authentic, and not easily reproducible.”⁹⁰ *The Midnight*’s invocation of the scrapbook creates a link between this private, feminized practice and the public, masculinized avant-garde practice of visual collage.⁹¹ Tucker, Ott, and Buckler argue that this link is already present historically, since the invention of collage in the early twentieth century occurred at a time when scrapbooks “first enjoyed great popularity.”⁹² Scrapbooks, these authors contend, resemble modernist collage in that they “rel[y] on the assemblage of images borrowed from diverse origins, often discovered by chance and reconstituted to create an entirely new context and meaning.”⁹³

⁸⁹ Ibid., 60.

⁹⁰ Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia Buckler, eds., *The Scrapbook in American Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 12.

⁹¹ Bartholomew Brinkman uses the example of inveterate literary collagist Marianne Moore to argue for the impact of scrapbooking on modernist textual collage. See “Scrapping Modernism: Marianne Moore and the Making of the Modern Collage Poem,” *Modernism/modernity* 18, no. 1 (2011): 43-66.

⁹² Tucker, Ott, and Buckler, *Scrapbook*, 16.

⁹³ Ibid.

In evidencing the “scissor work” of Howe’s relatives, *The Midnight* presents the scrapbook as an alternate, or at least parallel, genealogy for her literary collage. Howe argues for the domesticating and homogenizing power of print in *The Birth-Mark*, and her “scissor work,” particularly when read in light of the interventions of scrapbooking in personalizing mass print products, becomes a way of repurposing print for wilder and more original ends. The simultaneous reference to scrapbooking and avant-garde collage takes on added significance in Howe’s next two volumes, which move from documenting the cutting and pasting strategies of her relatives to making her own composition by “scissor work” more visually apparent.

Scissor Work and Scraps

Howe’s 2007 *Souls of the Labadie Tract* is punctuated by two brief prose sections, each titled “*Errand*,” that frame writing as the production of scraps. In the first, Howe portrays Jonathan Edwards riding between parishes on horseback and “as an idea occurred to him, he pinned a small piece of paper on his clothing, fixing in his mind an association between the location of the paper and the particular insight.”⁹⁴ At home, he would remove the pieces of paper and write down the corresponding insight. The second “*Errand*” finds Wallace Stevens walking from home to office each morning or taking a lunchtime walk through the park, “observ[ing], meditat[ing], conceiv[ing], and jott[ing] down ideas and singular perceptions, often on the backs of envelopes and old laundry bills cut into two-by-four-inch scraps he carried in his pocket.”⁹⁵ After having office stenographers transcribe these “miscellanies” he would transmute them into

⁹⁴ Susan Howe, *Souls of the Labadie Tract* (New York: New Directions, 2007), 9.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

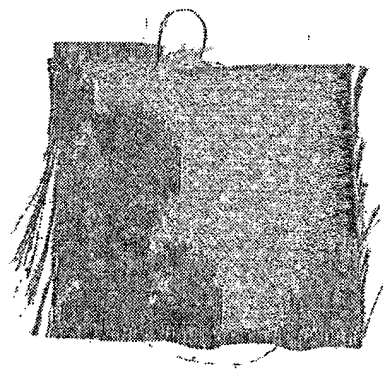


Figure 7. Facsimile of the fragment of Sarah Edwards' wedding dress featured in *Souls of the Labadie Tract* (2007)

poems. The narratives of Edwards and Stevens beginning their work with bits of paper resonate with the final section of *Souls*, which takes as its point of departure a small swatch from the wedding dress belonging to Edwards' wife Sarah. In this section, "Fragment of the Wedding Dress of Sarah Pierpont Edwards," the book's rectangles of single-font text give way to a series of type-collages built from scraps of language on scraps of paper.

"Fragment of the Wedding Dress of Sarah Pierpont Edwards" begins with a grainy greyscale facsimile of the eponymous piece of fabric (fig. 7). The actual fragment is Prussian blue, but what comes through in reproduction is a sense of shape and size, the fabric's frayed edges, and texture rendered through densities of grey. The image of the fabric takes on multiple resonances; for instance, it invokes the etymological derivation of *text* from *textile* and the production of paper from rags. Within the framework of *Souls*, this swatch recalls the blank pieces of paper carried by Edwards and Stevens. Read against Howe's oeuvre, which relies on extensive quotation of archival source documents, the image of the fragment becomes a visual corollary for textual strategies of copying. At the same time, the image serves as a parable for the perils and potential of facsimile reproduction. In translating a highly tactile, wholly unique fabric swatch into a multiplied two-dimensional image, this page stages the facsimile's failure to

provide a satisfactory substitute for the original and lays bare the facsimile's sleight-of-hand in replacing an object with an image.

The facsimile image of the wedding dress fragment appears on the verso of "Fragment"'s first page spread and thereby acts as hinge between the previous text and the type-collages. The dress fragment is represented textually on several pages of this brief sequence. One such page reads,

[and confined beauty. the little indication that discrete]
is a small gift card size envelope
[not just our planet is so finite and infinite Pallid distance our]
*"A Piece of the Wedding Dress of A Piece of the Wedding Dress of Sarah
Pierrepont. Sarah*
that. slipping the fragile fragment from its first folder.⁹⁶

Here the title framing the dress fragment blends with phrases like "is a small gift card size envelope" and "slipping the fragile fragment from its first folder" that describe interacting with the fragment in the space of the archive, so the poem conjures a scene in which the text "A Piece of the Wedding Dress of Sarah Pierrepont" is being read from a catalogue or label. Although the fragment of itself is wordless, its identity is preserved by the information attached to it. The fabric is also associated with strings of words whose letters seem to have been poorly printed or partially erased, and these words may be from an unannounced source text. The phrases "confined beauty" and "so finite and infinite" easily operate as commentary on the fragment itself, as do words like "discrete" and "distance": the fragment is confined in an envelope, a folder, and an archive, and its finite and singular existence has been shown to resonate in ways that transcend the material. As it has been archived, the object is separate and it speaks to the distance between the present and past. The layering of text from different time periods and

⁹⁶ Howe, *Souls*, 116. In transcriptions of Howe's type-collages, I use brackets to indicate that a letter is incomplete but identifiable; marks not identifiable as specific letters are omitted.

authors makes the act of reading the poem resemble what the poem describes—the removal of folders and envelopes to access the fragment itself.

Several of the type-collages in *Souls* add multiple fonts to the strategies of quotation, overprinting, and breaking the grid that are hallmarks of Howe’s earlier typographic experiments. However, the first and last texts in the sequence hint at a more radical visual potential by using visual strategies that appear in Howe’s work for the first time. On the page facing the dress fragment, what might have otherwise been a square of text is stretched toward the bottom right corner; words are pulled out of alignment and letters break off. Next to this text that seems to bend and move in three-dimensional space, the dress fragment appears inert. The fragment is fixed on the page as a text and the text beside it flexes as though written on fabric. At the same time, both evince a radical incompleteness. The text reads: “the past whose / wing int of meta[m] ble / [b]ecoming / Soul winte [c]onv[i] [w]alker / Snow[s]lant th[at] lea[d] [it].”⁹⁷ Letters must be scrutinized to be read, and in the case of “meta[m]” the entire word “metamorphosis” has to be deduced from fewer than half its letters. Tentative connections can be made from the broken pieces of language. The first words—“the past”—tie the text tentatively to the accompanying fabric fragment. Other words pair with one another: “metamorphosis” with “becoming” and “winter” with “snow.” Both “slant” and “wing” begin to describe the look of the text on the page. Such reading practices replicate those required to engage with many of Howe’s works, but the distortion of the text’s letterforms moves beyond the layout options allowed by standard typesetting, moving the text into a new realm of visual significance.

The final page of “Fragment,” which features a vertical sliver of text whose tapered edges suggest a slit in the paper, similarly exceeds the conventions of typesetting (fig. 8). The

⁹⁷ Ibid., 113.

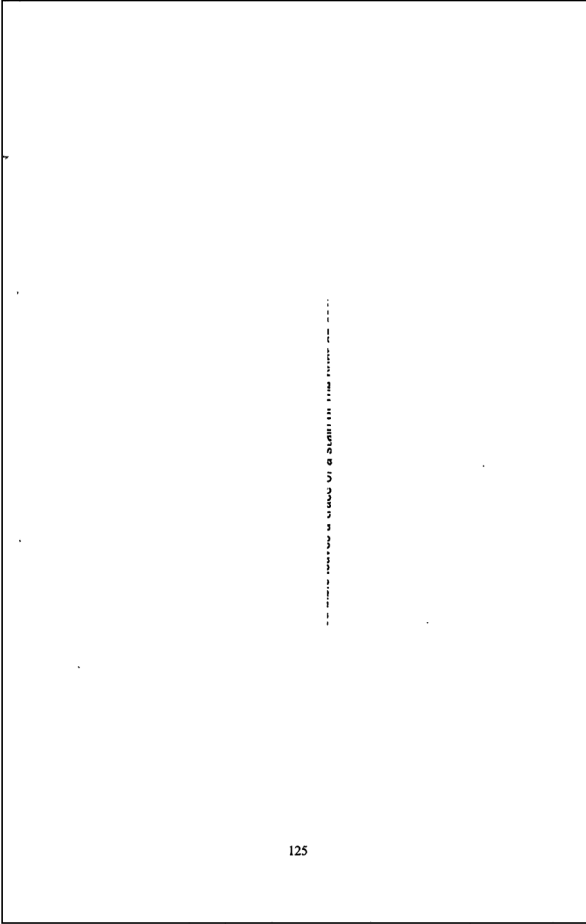


Figure 8. Final page of “Fragment of the Wedding Dress of Sarah Pierpont Edwards” from *Souls of the Labadie Tract* (2007)

text is so thin that the most complete letters are less than half visible. The interpretable text reads “leaves a trace of a stain of the,” a self-referential phrase that points to the sliver of text’s status as an incomplete trace and a “stain” on the otherwise blank page.⁹⁸ The “trace of a stain” suggests a deliberate or accidental act of erasure that nevertheless leaves evidence behind. The fabric fragment is itself a trace of the complete dress, the wedding ceremony, and the marriage it represents. Through the facsimile, it leaves a trace of its material presence. “Trace” and “stain” are similar to but distinct from two of *Souls*’ other key words, “scrap” and “fragment”: the former pair describes marks left on a surface, and the latter describes leftover pieces of an object. These pairs therefore serve as a framework for understanding Howe’s collages, in which material manipulations of textual objects leave visual evidence on the page. In addition to reflecting on

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

the thematic constellation of the work itself, this final page foreshadows some of the ways in which Howe's next volume, *That This* (2010), will extend and complicate the visual strategies with which Howe experiments in "Fragment."

That This announces its connection to *Souls* by displaying a blue version of the wedding dress fragment facsimile on the cover against a bright-white background. The volume continues *Souls*' exploration of the Edwards family archive as well as its visual experiments, and the bulk of the volume devoted to a visually dense sequence of collage poems drawn from the diary of Hannah Edwards Wetmore. The publisher's description on the back cover of *That This* claims that "Frolic Architecture" "presents haunting, oblique type-collages of Hannah Edwards Wetmore's diary entries that Howe (with scissors, 'invisible' Scotch Tape, and a Canon copier) has twisted, flattened, and snipped into inscapes of force." Howe's own mention of the work's composition in "The Disappearance Approach" is more philosophical: "Even the 'invisible' scotch tape I recently used when composing "Frolic Architecture" leaves traces on paper when I run each original sheet through the Canon copier."⁹⁹

Howe's version frames the material production of her text in terms of the traces left by the process of reproduction, but the "original sheet" that she runs through the copier is only "original" in relation to the resultant copies. To produce this sheet of taped-together fragments, Howe viewed copies of Wetmore's diary (sometimes in the hand of Wetmore's daughter), had these photographically reproduced, created her own transcriptions or used those by Edwards scholar Kenneth Minkema, rendered the transcriptions in different typefaces, printed them out, and cut and taped the printed text into collages. Even after the "original sheets" are copied, to become a book they need to be digitally scanned and, in the case of the Grenfell Press edition,

⁹⁹ Susan Howe, *That This* (New York: New Directions, 2010), 31.

turned into photopolymer plates and hand-printed; for the New Directions version these files would be the basis for offset printing.

The section called “The Disappearance Approach” underscores the layers of copying involved in the text’s production when it details the process of digital photographic reproduction in the Beinecke Library’s “windowless room downstairs”:

Here objects to be copied according to the state-of-the-art North Light HID Copy Light system are prepared for reproduction. Each light is packed with 900 watts of ceramic discharge lamps and requires a typical 15-ampere, 120-volt outlet. The lamps are doubly fan-cooled, with one chamber for the hot (lamp) side and one fan for the electronic side. A diffusion screen spreads light evenly onto the copyboard while protecting the art object or manuscript from heat...Black curtains surrounding the copy table protect the photographer’s vision and at the same time prevent light intensity from bleeding. One or two stuffed oblong cloth containers, known in the trade as snakes, hold the volume open. Facing pages are held down with flat transparent strips.¹⁰⁰

After this prolonged explanation of the technological procedures, Howe goes on to cite a brief passage of Hannah Edwards Wetmore’s diary in which Hannah Edwards is “remembering her delirium during an illness in 1736.” “Under the fan-cooled lights” of the photographic apparatus “she speaks to herself of the loneliness of being Narcissus.”¹⁰¹ Howe’s passage ends here, with Edwards’ diary facing its own reflected image through the camera lens in the fashion of Narcissus. Narcissus becomes relevant not for his self-fixation, but because he is in thrall to a copy, unable to distinguish between the image and the reality to which it refers. In a text

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 31.

comprised of many-layered reproductions, the figure of Narcissus warns against the error of mistaking the reproduction for the original.

“Frolic Architecture”’s explorations of copying and legibility also surface in the full-page black and white photograms by James Welling that punctuate the text. Some images have an out-of-focus quality and seem as though they could be capturing water or clouds; others have well-defined patterns and appear to register folds and the accumulation of dust. The photograms are, like Howe’s type-collages, evocative but evasive. What they might represent or how they might have been created is all but impossible to determine by studying them. Grenfell Press, however, explains in promotional materials that Welling created these works by painting “a thin-enough-to-fold sheet of clear mylar” and setting the painted mylar sheet on eight-by-ten-inch photographic paper.¹⁰² Once he had processed the image, Welling “added paint to the mylar to make additional unique photograms,” using a total of three mylar sheets for *Frolic Architecture*.¹⁰³ Welling’s process mirrors Howe’s in that it involves layering and re-copying; the prints represent stages of an ongoing process. Just as Howe’s collages repeat fragments of text in new contexts, Welling’s photograms revise and add to earlier photograms.

Welling’s use of photogram is itself significant, since this process results from direct contact between the object and the photographic paper. The camera works at a distance, but the photogram produces a ghostly negative image that registers an encounter with an object, flattening the object into shape and transparency. In an analysis of Welling’s close-up photographs of, for instance, aluminum foil and drapery, Walter Benn Michaels argues that Welling “deploys the shape of the photograph against the shape of the objects photographed

¹⁰² “Frolic Architecture,” *Grenfell Press*, <http://www.grenfellpress.com/books/susan-howe-james-welling-frolic-architecture.html>.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

in order to defeat the camera's ability to let us see objects in the world and to employ those objects instead in the making of photographs (to use them like paint)."¹⁰⁴ The photograms of "Frolic Architecture" take this method of "asserting the primacy of the photograph over the object" to extremes by abandoning the camera altogether and, rather than using objects as paint (in Michaels' formulation), using paint as an object. The result is that the main subject of these photograms is the photographic process in its etymological sense of writing with light.

Furthermore, unlike film negatives from which multiple prints—potentially quite different from one another—can be made, photograms are unique in that each print must be individually exposed to light in the presence of the object. The images that appear in Howe's book are, of course, only copies of the original prints, and Welling's process resembles Howe's in combining physical immediacy with the distance and possibility for distortion introduced through reproduction.

Copying pervades the text of "Frolic Architecture," as nearly all of these poems are visual reproductions. The work begins, however, by taking up copying conceptually through an initial typeset poem that doubles and redoubles at every turn:

That this book is a history of
a shadow that is a shadow of

me mystically one in another
another another to subserve¹⁰⁵

The first two words of this poem provide the title for the volume, and isolated as the title they

¹⁰⁴ Michaels, *Shape of the Signifier*, 100.

¹⁰⁵ Howe, *That This*, 39.

read as a pair of deictic pronouns whose referents are wholly dependent on context. *That This* emphasizes proximity and distance since the words diverge in their expression of relative nearness. Modifying “book,” “That this” may be a correction (that—no, this—book) that moves the book a step closer. Perhaps it is a way of indicating that there are two “this books,” *that* this book and *this* this book, a reminder that an edition creates many versions of any given book. The ample leading used here (and in much of Howe’s poetry) allows lines to float independently on the page, but each pair of lines is firmly linked by repetition of the construction “a [noun] of” in the first stanza and the word “another” in the second. Read as a self-contained unit, the first stanza points to a book that may be the source text or the current volume. The book is “a history of / a shadow that is a shadow of” an unstated noun, suggesting recursion that can go on indefinitely. These lines perform the iterative process of copying an in so doing emphasize the distance created from the original.

More likely, though, “that” is a conjunction beginning an unfinished grammatical construction. If the two stanzas are read as a continuous but incomplete statement, the book in question becomes “a history of / a shadow that is a shadow of // me.” The “original” is then not a text but an originating consciousness refracted in the book. “Me” can refer equally to Howe, whose autobiographical prose begins the book, or Hannah Edwards Wetmore, who is a likely referent for the first-person statements in the material that follows. In either case, the “me” is in turn “mystically one in another” in a relationship of subservience, perhaps with the added sense of “furthering or assisting.”¹⁰⁶ By leaving ambiguous the referent of “me” and repeating “another / another another,” these lines leave open who “subserves” whom—an important but

¹⁰⁶ “subserve, v.” OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/view/Entry/192983?> (accessed December 1, 2013).

perhaps unanswerable question in the relationship between poet and source text, since the poet is bound by the specifics of the text at the same time as the text is made to serve a purpose beyond its author's original intent. This relationship is crucially circular but also crucially "mystical," a word that recalls her claim that "copying is a mysterious sensuous expression."¹⁰⁷ In Howe's formulations, copying is not merely a mechanical method; it is an embodied process that has potential to generate spiritual experience.

"Frolic Architecture"'s type-collages convey this complex dynamic between the material and spiritual by presenting text that emphasizes the body, death, imagination, and religious experience alongside and overlapping with text that refers to the documents themselves. Some fragments of text clearly come from cataloguing data and emphasize the status of Wetmore's "private writings" as archival objects. One collage includes "han[d] of Lucy Wetmore Whittelsey"; another includes "[in small hand on p]" "aper band/n.d. Folder 13[76]" and [s]"tray pencil commonplace."¹⁰⁸ Interwoven in other collages are "Box 24 Folder 1377," "1208 EF G 3 of 3 folders," the years 1713-1773, and "comm[e]n[tary/n.d.]."¹⁰⁹ The fragment "lac[un]"—presumably "lacuna" or "lacunae"—also appears along with "e[li]p[ses]," a standard way of registering lacunae in transcription.¹¹⁰ Further language referring to material features of texts appears but is more ambiguous in origin. In one fragment an unstated action or object "over the surface would / erase the lett[ers]," an observation that could come from Wetmore's writings or be a description of these documents' fragility.¹¹¹ The phrase "[c]hi[ng] for the pieces of / paper,"

¹⁰⁷ Howe, *Birth-Mark*, 141.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 49, 54. No "s" appears at the beginning of "tray" in this collage, but the typeset poem "That This" later transcribes the line as "stray pencil commonplace" (101).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 49, 51, 65, 67.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

with “[c]lot[h]” and “[p]attern” nearby in different typefaces, might once again be from within Wetmore’s writings or be Howe commenting on the experience of searching through the archive for traces of Wetmore.¹¹²

These descriptions of textual objects in turn blend with references to processes of reading that cannot but comment on the process of reading required to interact with the collages themselves. One collage presents the fragment “[v]er parch-” which might be “cover parchment” since “[c]ove” appears elsewhere in the collage (fig. 9).¹¹³ Another strip running diagonally through the same composition contains the phrases “little Fol[d] / ink has”; below, a right-reading strip reads “thin fan / paper in- / side.”¹¹⁴ Below appear the phrases “[o]ut one out the last word on th[e]” and “but one word Hark! I cant m[a].”¹¹⁵ Recomposed in reverse order, these last two lines seem to read “but one word Hark! I cant make out one out the last word on the.” Many of Howe’s cut-off words can be deciphered, or at least guessed at, with careful reading, but others remain just out of reach, typographic marks too partial or ambiguous to function as language. These marks, however, are linguistic even if they are not legible, so they still ask to be read rather than just seen.

On the following page another scene of deciphering appears, but here the attempt to read becomes an occasion of psychic intensity, perhaps a visionary experience. In a collage comprised of four rectangular swaths of text whose intersections are marked with additional thin strips of text layered on top, the bottom right rectangle reads:

[one chain of thought, I saw]
an image of i[t] on my mind as

¹¹² Ibid., 48.

¹¹³ Ibid., 51.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

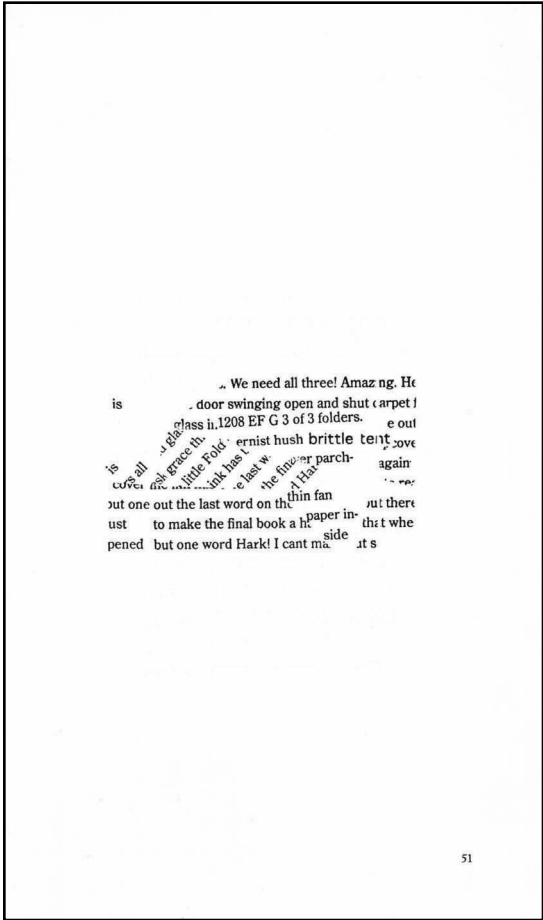


Figure 9. Page from *That This* (2010) (above) and close-up of type-collage (below)

.. We need all three! Amaz ng. He
 is - door swinging open and shut (carpet f
 class ii.1208 EF G 3 of 3 folders. e out
 ernist hush brittle tent
 is all u glad grace th. little Fold ink has L e last w. the fine er parch- again
 out one out the last word on the thin fan out there
 ust to make the final book a h paper in- that whe
 pened but one word Hark! I cant ma side at s

but I attem[p]ted to read, but
intercepting [an]d covering the
[s]ible, and did not seem to be
abruptly and [s]o strong that it
to look upo[n] it as supernat-
ower of imagination, and that¹¹⁶

This passage confounds the distinction between reading tangible pages—a later collage completes the phrase “intercepting and covering the” with “pages”—and “reading” mental images conjured through imagination. The event described is “abrupt,” “strong,” almost supernatural in its power, even though its legibility is thwarted. The illegibility encountered by the speaker is compounded by the repetition of “it” without a referent. Howe’s reader is left with the forceful psychological consequences of attempted reading without a clear sense of what is being read and whether it originated on the page or in the mind. Such passages dramatize the process of making meaning from incomplete or illegible text, and they suggest that the payoff for engaging in this difficult activity may be nothing short of transcendence.

Howe’s type-collages—with their ragged edges, radically incomplete texts, broken-off words, and snipped letterforms—resemble in some ways the fragments of medieval manuscripts that have regularly been found in the bindings of later printed books. They are gestures toward documents and historical circumstance that remain inaccessible, but as with manuscript fragments they contain a density of information that will reward the careful reader. A small strip of letters that cannot be read as text can provide important insights about the manuscript from which it was cut, and Howe’s type-collages demonstrate just how much meaning a fragment can generate. Howe’s iterative acts of copying, cutting, and reassembling also expedite the processes

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 53. Words from this rectangle are repeated in the rectangle to the left, opening the possibility that these are two copies of the same transcribed language of which we are shown different parts.

of textual transmission that her earlier works recount; these collages therefore represent a kind of future of their sources, subject to repeated permutation and consequently, loss. They stand as an acknowledgement that the law of textuality is change.

In the type-collages of “Fragment of the Wedding Dress of Sarah Pierpont Edwards” and “Frolic Architecture,” Howe creates what she claims Dickinson has created: a form of poetry in which the act of composition is materially and visually present, and crucial to the work’s meaning. Facsimile offers a way of preserving the visual details, whether intentional or not, that shape the reading experience of a text. At the same time, facsimile lets go of the singularity of the document and avoids fetishizing the “original.” Howe’s trade editions do not strive for aura, but like the facsimile they trade in aura nonetheless. From within the context of ordinary trade publication, they offer a window onto the powerful meanings that can inhere in textual objects.

Conclusion: A Portable Ocean

Interviewer: If you had to paint your writing, if you had one canvas on which to paint your writing, what might it look like?

Howe: Blank. It would be blank. It would be a white canvas. White.

—Susan Howe, “Speaking with Susan Howe”

The upper floor of the Yale Union—a converted laundry in Portland, Oregon with high ceilings and sizeable windows—is mostly empty. In the northwest corner are long white tables, about a meter high, arranged in the outline of a square. Letter-sized sheets of paper letterpressed in black ink with a deep impression are embedded in the tables and covered with glass. When afternoon light cuts at a certain angle the glass rectangles seem to disappear entirely into the

smooth surface of the tables; at other angles the sun highlights the glass. On each sheet of paper a type-collage takes up a negligible amount of space so that the blank space of the page seems to extend into the surrounding table, and then further into the empty space of the gallery. Susan Howe's first solo exhibition, *Tom Tit Tot*, thus goes a long way toward enacting the poem-as-blank-canvas that Howe described in a 1986 interview. It also echoes Howe's early installation art as described by Brian Reed: "From any distance greater than arm's length, one would have experienced these installations as fields of whiteness, interrupted by images too small to identify and short pieces of writing too distant to read."¹¹⁷

Visually these type-collages closely resemble those in *That That*, but the reading experience is transformed by the spatial arrangement. The table nearest the entrance, at the far end of one arm of the square, has a blank section, suggesting a beginning that could lead in either direction. It might make sense to move in the reading direction of English, to go left to right down the first table and proceed counterclockwise. However, the page that borders the blank space in the other direction is the only one without a pair, a layout that resembles the convention for starting a work on the recto and leaving the facing page blank. An order is clearly established by the arrangement, but with apparent indifference to forward and backward. Under glass, Howe's type-collages appear as valuable, fragile documents, akin to the archival texts and rare books from which they regularly borrow. The experience of viewing these texts thus resonates with the descriptions in Howe's work of visits to various archives to view the preserved and well-guarded manuscripts of writers such as Dickinson. In their size and manner of occupying the page, these type-collages also resemble the envelopes of *The Gorgeous Nothings*.

Even as these works ask to be viewed as visual art, the specter of the printed book

¹¹⁷ Reed, "Eden or Ebb of the Sea," par. 27.

hovers over the exhibition. Sheets from the Grenfell Press “Frolic Architecture” hang on a nearby partition, suspended in a state just prior to binding. More importantly, the type-collages are displayed in pairs that imply page spreads. The placement of the work on tables requires a body position more akin to the norms for reading than for viewing drawings or paintings. The printed curatorial statement that accompanies *Tom Tit Tot* presents the exhibition as “a hesitation toward the imminent fact of publishing,” since this work “was commissioned for our little way station, but with the foregone conclusion that it would later be paginated, printed, and published in quantity.”¹¹⁸ The curatorial statement also declares that, “this is not a moment for making analogies—Howe’s poems are like drawings are like notations are like collages. No. They are poems.”¹¹⁹

Howe’s pages announce their intent to be read as poetry in part through their repeated references to canonical poets, acts of writing, and the material conditions of documents. “Tom Tit Tot” is an English variant of the German folk-tale “Rumpelstiltskin,” and the work’s gathering of sources include, according to the curatorial statement, “Coleridge then Browning then Yeats.... Then a slice of Spinoza, a folk tale, some children’s babble, Paul Thek, a definition, a gap, some eccentric punctuation.” On one page we find a poet and playwright reflecting on composition:

ring finish my p[lay]. [Triumphant],
[e]rpiece. That night, sleeping draft
. Next morning began ballad about
nt. Bad night. Next morning finish
[n]t; believe I have written a master—
[e]ach. Will take a whole Broadside
e]ct my wife’s suggestions for nex
over press. She explains that m[y]
[n] capable of facing practical life. Ill

¹¹⁸ Andrea Andersson and Robert Snowden, “Tom Tit Tot” curatorial statement, n.p.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Good night. Then on Wednesda[y]
[a]nd decide to do no serious wor[k]
and this morning perfectly well
[INCIDENTAL FEATURES]
Move with “green radiance”¹²⁰

This fragment compresses multiple days of writing into a small space, and the quotidian details of how the writer slept and what he worked on coexist with the “Triumphant” belief he has “written a masterpiece.” Following a long fragment that seems to be taken from a single source, this page inserts “INCIDENTAL FEATURES,” a phrase that point to the materiality of Howe’s sources and the materiality of her own texts, which feature “incidental” marks from the tape used in their production. In a different typeface, and smaller, “Move with ‘green radiance’” follows, and although the typefaces imply discontinuity the phrase “INCIDENTAL FEATURES / Move with ‘green radiance’” suggests the poetic effects of the “incidental features” that, by creating beauty, are both secondary and meaningful.

Tom Tit Tot does more visually with unreadable textual marks than *That This*. It is also includes crossed-out text and insertions marked with carets, and makes many direct references to documents, sources, pages, and text. These become moments of self-reflection:

ff words from images tw[i]
om their original source
history scattered to the fou
a page it was *you* playi[n]¹²¹

The phrase “words from images” reverses the operation of Howe’s type-collages, which is to create images out of words. There is an “original source” and “history scattered,” as in Howe’s textual borrowings and dispersals, which is in turn conveyed as a form of play on the page.

¹²⁰ Susan Howe, *Tom Tit Tot*. The Yale Union. Portland, Oregon. 23 November 2013.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Another moment of *ars poetica* in *Tom Tit Tot* reads:

*A document. the parasiti[c]
nvolve a structure of layer
age placed on top of anoth
[o]m its other, as if to infinit*

PORTAB[LE OCEAN]¹²²

Here we find key elements of Howe's composition methods that come to the fore in her type-collages: the "parasitic" use of documents as source material, the palimpsestic layering of pages, and the gestures toward the "infinite." We find, too, the ocean, which Reed has shown to be a key theme of Howe's and an essential one for understanding the precise visual forms her poetry takes. Reed argues that from the Scottish poet Ian Hamilton Finlay Howe acquires "an association between the page and ocean, and, further, the sense that words float upon, or emerge from, the ocean-page."¹²³ Howe both uses "the open ocean as a figure for the creation, or emergence, of art from the matrix of infinity" and "expose[s] that primordial nothingness as... a 'fiction' arising from a certain use of words."¹²⁴ The gallery exhibition is public, located in a specific place and time. It is a trip to the shore. The book, by contrast, is a "portable ocean."

The "portable ocean" appropriately modifies Lucy Lippard's designation of the artist's book as a "portable exhibition." Howe's books, especially those that require photographic reproduction, do land in the wide terrain of the "democratic multiple" artist's book in that they are verbal-visual works that make self-reflexive use of the mass-produced book format. *Tom Tit Tot*, displayed in a gallery and destined for a book, might in fact seem to be a prime example of the artist's book's ability to function as a "portable exhibition." However, the space of the page

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Reed, "Eden or Ebb of the Sea," par. 45.

¹²⁴ Ibid. par. 47, par. 53.

in Howe's work is not just a substitute for the canvas or gallery wall, and it is not just a way for textual-visual art to enjoy the democratizing effects of mechanical reproduction. As this chapter has argued, Howe's poems are invested in a visuality particular to textuality, a visuality that owes as much to the "driest facts / of bibliography" as it does to art history or art theory.¹²⁵ As does "her" Emily Dickinson, Howe writes poems whose material composition is inextricable from their meaning. Understood in relation to Dickinson's manuscripts, the model of the facsimile edition offers a way for Howe to navigate the complex desire for a poetic immediacy that can be widely shared—because, as Howe writes in *That This*, "even if ideas don't exist without the mind, there may be copies or resemblances."¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Susan Howe, *The Nonconformist's Memorial* (New York: New Directions, 1993), 64.

¹²⁶ Howe, *That This*, 22.

Chapter 4. Handcraft and Handle in Anne Carson's Visual-Haptic Trade Editions

Action

Mobility: [] stiff [] mechanical [] tumbling and wily
Transmission of leverage: [] inert [] crippled [] gymnastic
Opening: [] docile [] cranky [] springy
Leafing: [] syncopated [] sporadic
Closing: [] conclusive [] tentative [] given to gape
Tossing: [] bounce [] no bounce

Handle

Evidence of hand craft: [] lean [] moderate [] rich
Evidence of use: [] pristine, un-touched [] read, habituated to use [] possessed,
consumed by passionate use
Evidence of function: [] bewildered [] vernacular or liturgical [] poised, practical

—Gary Frost, “Reading by Hand: The Haptic Evaluation of Artists’ Books”

“Artist’s book” has proved a difficult category to delimit. In her foundational study *The Century of Artists’ Books*, Johanna Drucker argues for understanding the artist’s book as “a zone of activity, rather than a category into which to place works by evaluating whether they meet or fail to meet certain criteria.”¹ This zone includes such diverse practices as

fine printing, independent publishing, the craft tradition of book arts, conceptual art, painting and other traditional arts, politically motivated art activity and activist production, performance of both traditional and experimental varieties, concrete poetry, experimental music, computer and electronic arts, and last but not least, the tradition of the illustrated book, the *livre d’artiste*.²

Independently, none of the above activities qualify as artist’s book production; rather, artists’ books incorporate these activities into works that are “self-conscious about the structure and

¹ Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists’ Books* (New York City: Granary Books, 1995), 2.

² *Ibid.*

meaning of the book as a form.”³ Book artist and conservator Gary Frost observes that “the peculiar essence of the book as hand held art” makes haptic⁴ features crucial to “the often unconventional and experimental formats of artists’ books.”⁵ However, as Frost observes, existing criteria for evaluating artists’ books tend to evade descriptions of tactile and kinetic qualities, and he offers a “proposed standard recording card” that could begin to account for these features. The lively descriptors in Frost’s proposed taxonomy attest to the difficulty in rendering such tacit information in language: the difference between a “docile,” “cranky,” or “springy” opening may be readily apparent to the hands, but when written down these categories border on absurd. Still, even if “stiff,” “mechanical,” or “tumbling and wily” are not the first words to everyone’s lips in order to articulate the “mobility” of an artist’s book, Frost rightly emphasizes the foundational role played by features such as shape, weight, texture, and motion in the meaning of artists’ books.

This chapter argues for the significance of haptics to Anne Carson’s *Nox* (2010) and *Antigonick* (2012)—trade editions that, in spite of their mechanical production, emphasize the hand of the writer and engage the hand of the reader. *Nox*, an elegy for Carson’s brother Michael, began as a blank codex that Carson filled with pasted-in text, family photographs, scraps of letters, occasional painting and pencil marks, and cut pieces of translucent plastic. The trade edition reproduces page images from Carson’s book in an accordion format—a long strip of paper folded back and forth to create panels—housed in a grey drop-spine box. Her *Antigonick*,

³ Ibid., 4.

⁴ Haptic perception is most often equated with touch and tactility, and therefore with the skin; however, the term “haptic” also encompasses proprioception or kinesthetics, a sense of the body’s position in space founded in musculo-skeletal feedback, and the vestibular sense, a sense of balance reliant on the mechanism of the inner ear.

⁵ Gary Frost, “Reading by Hand: The Haptic Evaluation of Artists’ Books,” *Bonefolder* 2:1 (2005): 3.

an imaginative translation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, is hand-lettered by Carson and features ink and watercolor illustrations by Bianca Stone printed on translucent vellum interleaves that overlay the text. Both *Nox* and *Antigonick* demonstrate handiwork through high-quality full-color reproductions; that is, these books visually represent processes of handcrafting whose tactile markers are otherwise absent in the reproduction. Both books, however, compensate for these "missing" haptic qualities by introducing alternate forms of kinetics and tactility for the reader. In *Nox*, these forms include the hand motions specific to the box-and-accordion format, and in *Antigonick*, they include the distinctive texture of the vellum pages and the process of lifting these pages to read the text beneath them.

Each of these books falls into the terrain of the artists' book as a category, and each draws on longstanding traditions of bookmaking while also existing comfortably within the production, distribution, and reception contexts of mainstream literary publishing. As a result, Carson's texts navigate the tension in artist's book production between auratic original and democratic multiple at the same time that they point to possibilities for trade publishing to create objects that, in an age of ubiquitous electronic textuality, work to justify their existence as paper and ink.

Part of the difficulty in defining what constitutes an artist's book is that, as Drucker argues, this "field...emerges with many spontaneous points of origin and originality."⁶ Artists' books have an array of precedents in literature, visual art, and the craft traditions of bookmaking: William Blake's self-published "illuminated books" from the long eighteenth century, the fine printing of William Morris's Kelmscott Press in the late nineteenth century, early modernism's typographic literary experiments of Stéphane Mallarmé,⁷ the ephemeral pamphlets of the Russian

⁶ Drucker, *Century of Artists' Books*, 11.

⁷ See Anna Sigrídur Arnar, *The Book as Instrument: Stéphane Mallarmé, the Artist's Book, and the Transformation of Print Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

Futurists⁸ and the collage books of Dada and Surrealist artist Max Ernst. Artist's books came into their own as a genre in the 1960s as a component of a wider attempt to imagine alternative modes of production and reception for visual art. The definition of "artist's book" developed in this context emphasizes the capacity for the ordinary object of the book to subvert the elitist production and distribution mechanisms of the art establishment. By contrast to traditional artwork such as paintings or sculptures, mass-produced books can be affordable and accessible outside of gallery and museum circuits.

Lucy Lippard's definition of "artist's book" in her 1976 "The Artist's Book Goes Public" is exemplary of this moment's investments. It is

[n]either an art book...or a book on art...the artists' book is a work of art on its own, conceived specifically for the book form and often published by the artist him/herself. It can be visual, verbal, or visual/verbal. With few exceptions, it is all of a piece, consisting of one serial work or a series of closely related ideas and/or images – a portable exhibition....Usually inexpensive in price, modest in format, and ambitious in scope, the artist's book is also a fragile vehicle for a weighty load of hopes and ideals: it is considered by many the easiest way out of the art world and into the heart of a broader audience.⁹

Lippard's definition assumes the artist's book creator to be an artist (as opposed to a writer or craftsman) and emphasizes the artist's role in publication. She also constructs an ideal that combines low price with large audience. The type of books Lippard imagines are often

⁸ See Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

⁹ Joan Lyons, *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook* (Rochester: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1985), 45.

designated as “democratic multiples” since they are mass-produced objects that strive to democratize the consumption of art. Indeed, Lippard ends her essay by stating, “one day I’d like to see artists’ books ensconced in supermarkets, drugstores, and airports, and, not incidentally, to see artists able to profit economically from broad communication rather than from lack of it.”¹⁰

Although partisans of the democratic multiple insist that these are the only “true” artists’ books, the initial criterion Lippard gives in her definition—“a work of art on its own, conceived specifically for the book form”—does not necessarily imply that a work will be mass produced, inexpensive, or oriented toward a large general audience.¹¹ Alongside the democratic multiple’s exploration of the artistic potential of the “ordinary book,” artists have experimented with structures that extend, exceed, and subvert the conventions of the codex. These artists tend to work within a longer view of the history of the book, incorporating craft traditions of papermaking, letterpress printing, and bookbinding. Such books can be produced as originals or in editions ranging from a handful to a hundred, but because they often involve one or more intensive handcrafting processes they rarely exist in runs of more than 150. Freed from certain mechanical constraints, they also tend to focus to a greater extent on the sculptural and kinetic possibilities of the book.

Reading *Nox* and *Antigonick* in the context of the category of the artist’s book contextualizes their visual-haptic experiments, linking them to longer and larger trends in exploring the printed book’s textual, visual, and structural possibilities. The framework of the

¹⁰ Ibid., 48.

¹¹ Drucker observes that the emphasis on affordability in the mythology of the democratic multiple favors affordability for the consumer, obscuring the considerable up-front cost of setting up an offset printing operation. By contrast, even though handmade artists’ books are often expensive for the consumer, it can often be far more affordable for an artist to start up a studio using craft methods (72).

artist's book also foregrounds these works' engagements with the concept, history, and form of the book, including their interest in the role of the human hand in production and reception. At the same time, however, these books depart sharply from the tendency for artists' books to be produced by artists themselves or by small, specialized presses. *Nox* and *Antigonick* stand out in that they are high profile trade editions, written by an author with a well-established career as a poet and translator, published by New Directions Press, shelved in bookstores as poetry, and reviewed prominently in major newspapers and literary outlets. While these are certainly not the first books to effect a crossover between artists' books and the mainstream press, in exploring the textual, visual, and haptic possibilities of literary publishing *Nox* and *Antigonick* ask what it might mean to write poetry in the twenty-first century that is designed specifically for the printed book.

A Historical Attitude

In surfaces, perfection is less interesting. For instance, a page with a poem on it is less attractive than a page with a poem on it and some tea stains. Because the tea stains add a bit of history. It's a historical attitude. After all, texts of ancient Greeks come to us in wreckage and I admire that, the combination of layers of time that you have when looking at a papyrus that was produced in the third century BC and then copied and then wrapped around a mummy for a couple hundred years and then discovered and put in a museum and pieced together by nine different gentlemen and put back in the museum and brought out again and photographed and put in a book. All those layers add up to more and more life.

—Anne Carson, interview with Will Aitkin in the Paris Review

Following the title page, *Nox* presents a square of paper the color of a tea stain, torn at the edges, on which the Latin text of Catullus 101 appears in water-blurred ink (fig.1). This textual object announces the interrelation between elegy, history, and translation that underlies *Nox*. The act of translating Catullus's elegy becomes the occasion for Carson's own elegy for her estranged

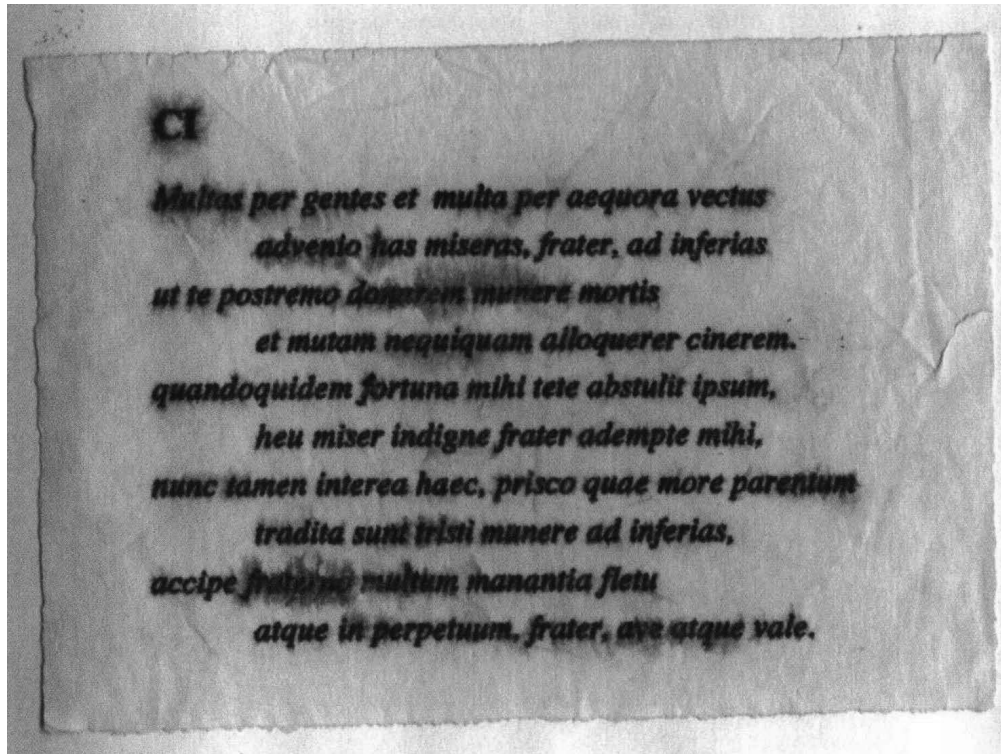
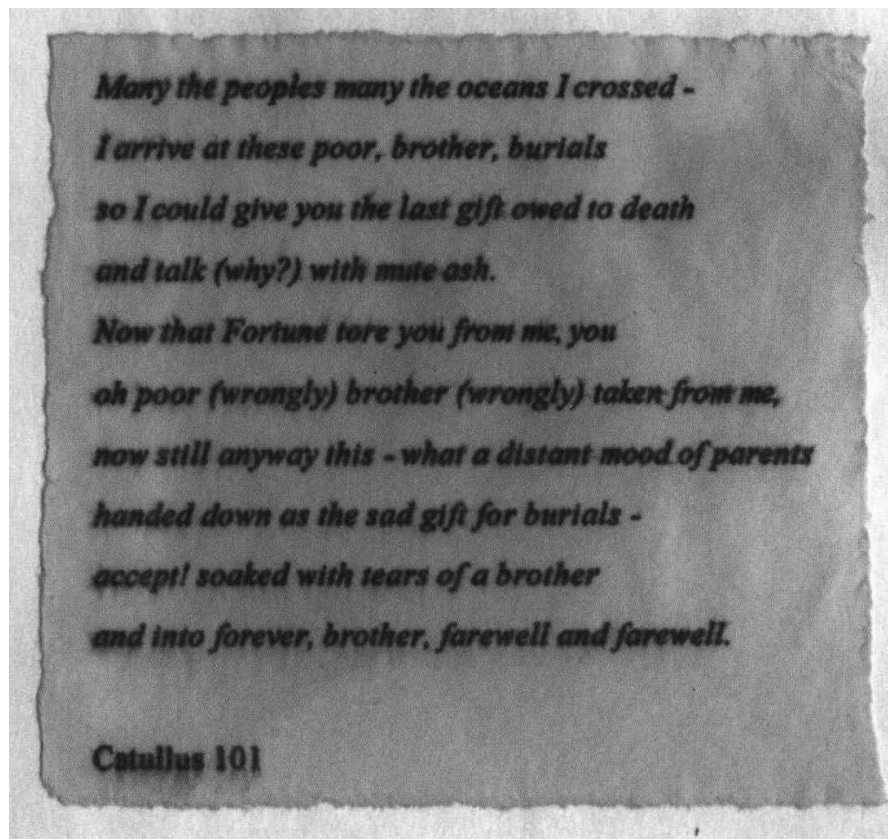


Figure 1. Latin text of Catullus 101 (*above*) and Carson's translation (*below*) from *Nox* (2010)



brother Michael, who she reports “ran away in 1978 rather than go to jail,” sent intermittent postcards and a single letter, and “die[d] in Copenhagen in the year 2000 a surprise to me.”¹² *Nox* includes a lexical entry for each word of the Catullus poem at the same time as it compiles a miniature archive of objects and language surrounding Michael. As a classicist, Carson approaches Catullus 101 as both translator and historian, and these roles serve as models for her attempt to make sense of her brother’s life. “Because our conversations were few,” she writes, “I study his sentences the ones I remember as if I’d been asked to translate them.”¹³ Carson likewise treats Michael’s life as a historian might, piecing together information about him from secondhand stories and a small number of artifacts. The necessity of Carson acting as translator or historian of Michael doubles back to elegy, since in *Nox* these roles are both predicated on Michael’s absence—first through his disappearance and then through his death.

Early in *Nox* Carson offers an etymological link between history and elegy via “autopsy,” which she notes “is a term historians use of the ‘eyewitnessing’ of data or events by the historian himself, a mode of authorial power.”¹⁴ Carson adds that “to withhold this authorization is also powerful,” giving the example of Herodotus who “carefully does not allege to have seen a phoenix” even though he repeats the legend, and who “likes to introduce information with a word like *légetai*: ‘it is said,’ as one might use *on dit* or *dicitur*.”¹⁵ Carson maintains a similar distinction in *Nox* between her firsthand experience of Michael and what she has learned about him from his widow. In the above passage on autopsy, for instance, she incorporates the phrase “it is said” into a brief anecdote about her brother’s funeral, which took place before she received

¹² Anne Carson, *Nox* (New York: New Directions, 2010), 2.2, 3.1.

¹³ Carson *Nox*, 8.1.

¹⁴ Carson, *Nox*, 1.2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*



Figure 2. Photograph from *Nox* (2010)

word of his death.¹⁶ Eyewitnessing occupies a privileged position in *Nox*, and the book is careful to differentiate between primary experience, secondary information, and the unknown.

We see this in its use of photography. Photography is ostensibly the medium of eyewitnessing, offering the promise of a visual record of a moment in time. *Nox* features a series of black-and-white photographs that interfere with this documentary function by incorporating signs of mediation into the scene itself. One such photograph presents a house and snow-covered yard with three figures standing in front of the house (fig. 2). In the foreground, the photographer

¹⁶ Ibid.

casts an imposing shadow on the snow. Here the viewer of the scene becomes, in effect, the subject of the image; what was presumably intended as a picture of the figures and landscape becomes a portrait of the act of eyewitnessing.

These photographs of shadows also become a way of visually representing Michael's absence. In the second lexical entry for "frater," Carson simply writes "**frater** // see above *frater fratris*." Directly above this scrap of text is a small cut-out rectangle of the photograph showing the head and shoulders of one such shadow. In literalizing the "see above" instructions of the dictionary, Carson directly links the shadow to Michael. As such, the photographs become metaphorically resonant rather than simply reliable as evidence.

The photographs' capacity for providing evidence is further undermined by the fact that Carson reshapes many of them with scissors. The same could be said for Carson's use of two letters featured in the book. The first is from Michael to Carson's mother, reportedly the only letter that he sent in his time away. This handwritten letter appears in ragged pieces throughout *Nox*, sometimes as only a single word, and at times alongside a transcription of the letter's text (fig. 3). A typewritten letter from Carson's mother to Michael also appears, cut into individual words that in one panel are integrated into Carson's own typescript of the letter. The letter fragments and cut photographs are unsettling in that Carson appears to have permanently damaged the only copies of these objects. As such, she suggests the deterioration over time to which photographs and documents are vulnerable, and she contributes to the material "layers [that] add up to more and more life."¹⁷ At the same time, in rendering these objects as fragments, Carson makes them more enigmatic and difficult to interpret. In compiling the objects closest

¹⁷ Anne Carson, "The Art of Poetry No. 88," interview with Will Aitken, *Paris Review* 171 (2004), <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5420/the-art-of-poetry-no-88-anne-carson>.

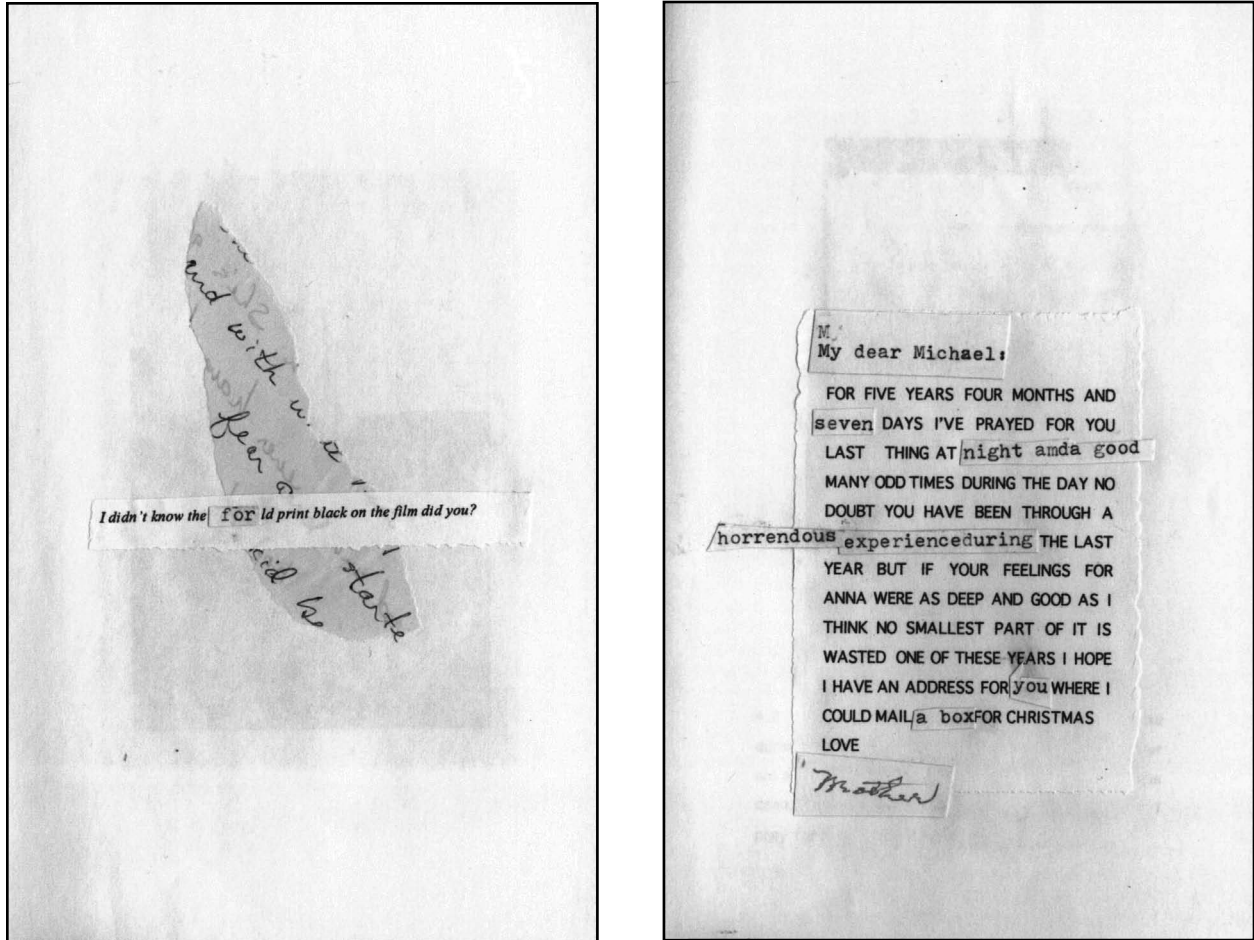


Figure 3. Non-consecutive panels from *Nox* (2010) that incorporate fragments from letters

to Michael in an attempt to better understand, or at least pose questions about, his life, she also actively works to diminish the capacity for these objects to offer straightforward evidence or answers.

Nox's "historical attitude" is epitomized in the strategy of materially altering even those texts—the lexical entries and fragments by Carson—that are easily reproducible. Her rendering of Catullus 101 is an acute example: written in the same italic font used in the dictionary entries, the text is clearly a recent copy that has been altered, but the paper has been made to look hard-worn, as though the document itself has survived history just as the linguistic code of the poem has. Carson states in an interview that she "tried to give the book...a patina of age—because it's

supposed to be an old Roman poem—by soaking the pages in tea, which added a mysterious sepia overtone.”¹⁸ Too, Carson has torn the edges of many of her texts and crumpled the paper. In the case of the papyrus Carson describes—wrapped around a mummy and later reconstructed—the “layers [that] add up to more life” signal a historical process that has marked the text. Similarly, the photographs and letters in *Nox* gain much of their power from their capacity as witnesses of specific historical moments. However, the alterations Carson makes to these objects and to her own texts by staining, crumpling, tearing, and cutting all simulate rather than document history.

The result is that, in *Nox*, we not only see evidence of Michael, we see Carson working with material texts and objects in order to work through grief. Meghan O’Rourke writes of *Nox*, “the reproduction has been done painstakingly, and conjures up an almost tactile sense of the handmade original. A mourner is always searching for traces of the lost one, and traces of that scrapbook’s physicality—bits of handwriting, stamps, stains—add testimonial force: this person existed.”¹⁹ O’Rourke points out that the physical evidence showcased serves a testimonial role that is linked fundamentally to elegy, but even if to “the mourner...searching for traces of the lost one” (i.e. Carson) these traces affirm that her brother existed, they have a very different testimonial effect in reproduction geared toward an audience. In the trade edition, the same traces that testify to Michael’s life also document Carson’s artistic process in creating poetry and art from the act of grieving. The appeal of the published version of *Nox* is grounded not in the evidence itself but in the author’s process of interacting with photographs, documents, memories, secondhand stories, and the Latin text of Catullus’s elegy in order to make sense of the past.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Meghan O’Rourke, “The Unfolding: Anne Carson’s *Nox*,” review of *Nox* by Anne Carson, *The New Yorker*, July 12, 2010.

Through their reproduction, Carson's curation and manipulation of objects is shown to be visual as well as intensely tactile. Even the language included in *Nox* is treated as *text*, inscribed on a material support whose edges are evident. As O'Rourke indicates, the remarkable visual detail of the color reproduction draws attention to the texture of the original: torn edges are clearly delimited, items are layered on one another, staples seem to protrude, and where texts have been crumpled or glue has warped the pages this folding or warping appears in shadow. Tactility, these panels show, is conveyed visually as well as haptically. Vision in itself, however, does not produce tactility. F. D. Martin explains that, for instance, in the case of a stone wall "we do not know about the surface, volume, and mass of these stones by sight alone but by sight synthesized with memories of tactile and kinaesthetic perceptions."²⁰ *Nox* does not provide haptic interaction with the paper, staples, photographs, or other objects assembled in the book, but it draws on memories of how these objects feel and how we might interact with them. The haptic attributes of Martin's stone wall or a sculpture displayed in a gallery could be verified with touch, but the objects in *Nox* are unavailable to haptic inquiry. The gap between the look of texture and the surface of the paper may prompt the reader to attend to the smoothness of the page surface if only to verify that the texture is only visual, but it cleaves visual evidence from the verification of touch.

This tactile quality of the facsimile is, by Carson's description, deliberate, and forged through multiple stages of copying. Carson reports that her collaborator Robert Currie thought of scanning [the book] and then xeroxing the scans. We were in Berlin for a while at a place that had a xerox machine, and he fooled around with it at night, scanning and xeroxing and

²⁰ F. D. Martin, *Sculpture and Enlivened Space: Aesthetics and History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1981), 59.

lifting the cover a bit so a little light gets in, so it has three-dimensionality. The scan is a digital method of reproduction, it has no decay in it, it has no time in it, but the xerox puts in the sense of the possibility of time.²¹ Carson's explanation tellingly links the three-dimensional appearance of the page-images to "decay" and "the sense of the possibility of time." The photocopier is tasked with representing the tactility of the original—which is itself linked to the materiality of history—but this sense of tactility is achieved through the interference of leaked light. The reproduction does not attempt to arrest time, but rather it becomes another stage in the temporal processes of accumulating, writing, and gluing objects that it represents. The aggregation of multiple instances of reproduction becomes a way to get closer to the original instead of a series of steps taking the copy further from it.

The photocopier becomes an explicit subject of *Nox* in two key places where the text calls attention to the material conditions of its own facsimile reproduction. In both cases, the original includes a folded text that could be unfolded in the process of reading—a kinetic element that is tricky to reduce to a purely visual representation. The first instance features a tipped-in strip of Michael's handwritten letter that at full length exceeds the boundaries of the text block, and so is folded in half. There are four ways of viewing this fragment of text: folded recto, folded verso, unfolded recto, and unfolded verso. *Nox* reproduces a version of each, so the panel spread appears four times in a row (fig. 4). In the case of the two unfolded versions, the image cuts off part of the original panel spread and allows the strip of paper to extend into a black margin beyond the book. Because the strip of letter accompanies a square of text in Carson's voice—one beginning "My brother ran away in 1978, rather than go to jail"—the text of this square is repeated four times in

²¹ Quoted in Craig Morgan Teicher, "A Classical Poet, Redux," review of *Nox* by Anne Carson, *Publisher's Weekly*, March 27, 2010, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/print/20100329/42582-a-classical-poet-redux-pw-profiles-anne-carson.html>.

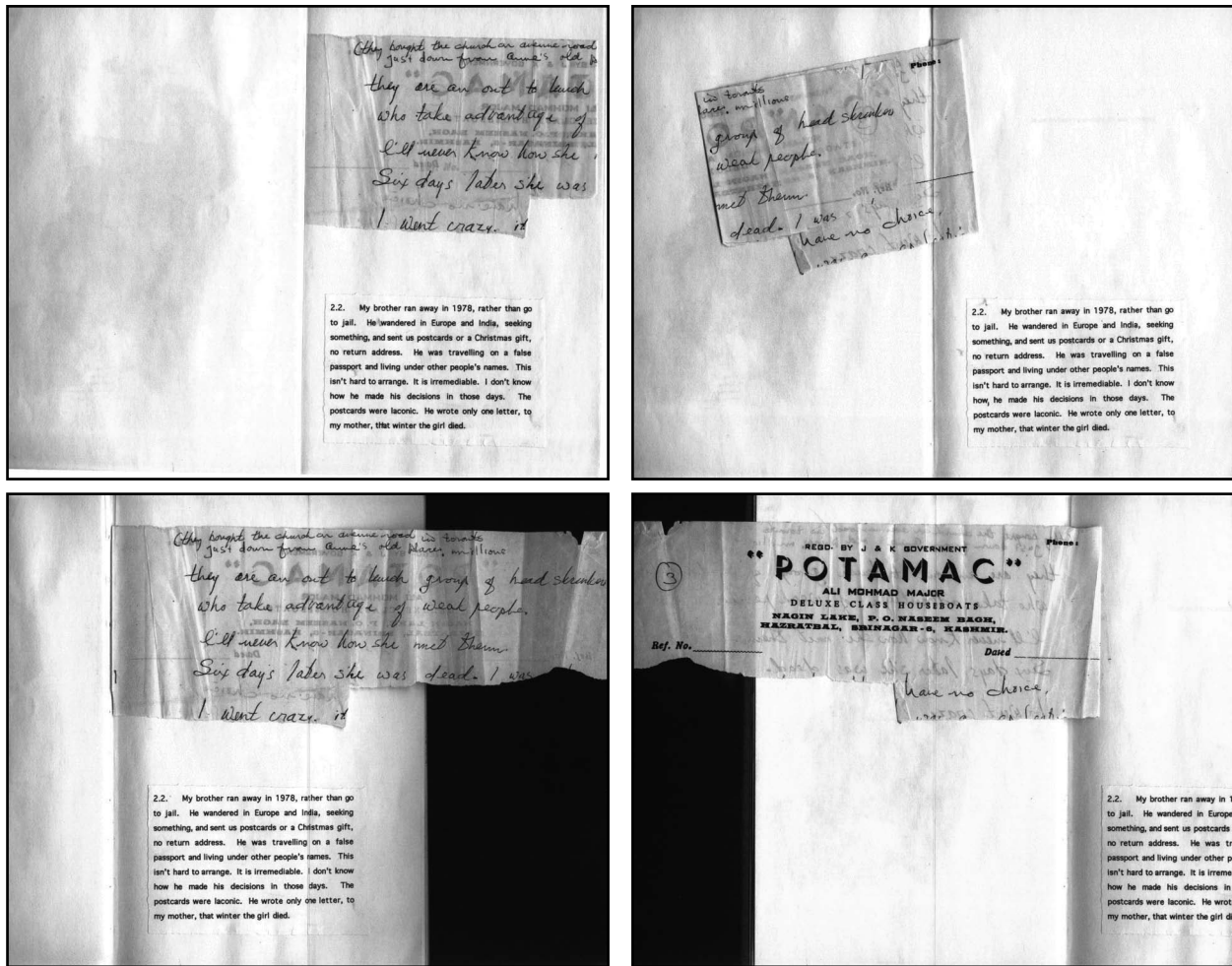


Figure 4. Consecutive panel spreads from *Nox* (2010) showing four positions of a tipped-in letter fragment

a row, creating significant emphasis for these lines.²² The straightforward description of Michael’s departure acquires new emotional weight in the repetition, which by iterating the facts of his disappearance from Carson’s life suggests the ongoing effects of that event.

The second instance of self-consciousness also emphasizes the accompanying text through repetition, in this case, of a pasted-in definition of “atque” (a conjunction translated as “and, as well as, together with”). On the facing page, a folded rectangular strip of paper reads “Or:” and partially cuts off a still-visible quotation from Herodotus: “I have to say what is said.

²² Carson, *Nox*, 2.2.

I don't have to believe it myself. (7.152.3)."²³ In the next version, the "Or:" disappears and the text is fully visible. In the third and final version, the definition of "atque" is half cut-off to make room for the unfolded strip that reads "Love you. Love you. –Michael" and extends again into a black margin. Carson reports on Michael's declaration of his love by including it in his own hand, but, as the text suggests, she does so without necessarily believing it. Michael's "Love you. Love you." is masked by the folded paper so that it can only be accessed through Carson's qualification.

Art historian James Elkins notes the importance of these moments in his analysis of *Nox*, but his account goes awry because he misjudges the material and technological situation they represent. Elkins writes,

Clearly it's only one letter. So if *Nox* reproduces a book that actually exists, is the letter in that book in the form of three copies of a color scan? Or is *Nox* a reproduction of a book that does not contain that letter, and those copies were added for the purposes of publication? The fact that this anomaly exists is evidence, for me, that Carson did not think readers would think about reproductions and originals in that way. Her main concern in those pages was reproducing the stuttering, hallucinatory effect of very powerful emotions (notice the printed text numbered "2.2." also repeats) and the pages work very well in that regard. But the papers numbered "2.2" are computer printouts, and could have been repeated in the original book: the repetition of the unique letter also means I am asked not to consider the original book, or this book as an object, or questions of reproduction.²⁴

Elkin identifies an important contrast between the replicable computer printout and the unique

²³ Carson, *Nox*, 10.1.

²⁴ James Elkins, "On Anne Carson's *Nox*," http://writingwithimages.com/?page_id=286, February 19, 2014.

letter, as well as the aesthetic significance of these pages' repetitions. Still, Elkin's conclusion that *Nox* declines to be read as an object or a reproduction is very odd indeed, and it develops out of a misunderstanding of what the four repetitions of the letter fragment literally represent. The "stuttering, hallucinatory effect of very powerful emotions" created by the repeated copying of a single text fragment is not the "main concern" of the repetition; it is an aesthetic consequence of the pragmatic attempt to represent the physical realities of a tipped-in letter that in the original had four possible positions. Elkins' misreading of these pages rests, too, on an unflattering assumption that, while materiality and reproduction are foregrounded in his own reading, Carson attempts to conceal the book's engagements with materiality and reproductions from readers.

This chapter argues the opposite: that in the process of creating both the original object and the trade edition Carson deliberately directs the ways materiality and reproduction contribute to the meaning of the work, and Carson's choice to show the photocopier at work in the pages of *Nox* is one of a number of textual and visual strategies that draw attention to the difficulty in attempting to access history. The facsimile need not have broken its mode of representation; in each of the above cases the folded paper could have been represented in a single position folded inside the text block, as though it were glued down. The effort to represent the text on all sides of the tipped-in paper emphasizes the importance of that text as well as the importance of its having been glued so as to be manipulable in a certain way. In these places where the original includes a kinetic feature, something to unfold, the facsimile's flatness is most on display. Here *Nox* plays up the paradox of the facsimile, which promises proximity through faithful reproduction but maintains distance because it never delivers the original object in its full materiality. The facsimile is therefore emblematic of *Nox*'s delicate balance between immediacy and mediation, between the possibility of better understanding the past and the impossibility of every directly encountering it.

After all, *Nox* announces its status as inexact reproduction on the back of the box with a quotation from Carson: “When my brother died I made an epitaph for him in the form of a book. This is a replica of it, as close as we could get.” “Replica” is an interesting word here, since a replica is often an attempt to reproduce a three-dimensional object whereas the facsimile typically purports only to reproduce the two-dimensional pages. The box itself signals the trade edition’s simultaneous faithfulness to and divergence from the original object since it is designed to look like a codex. The spine of the box is covered with a visual representation of book cloth, and, as with the reproduction inside, this “book cloth” has the look but not the feel of texture. The drop-spine box, unlike, say, a shoebox or cigar box, is also book-like in its manner of opening: it hinges along one edge and spreads out, as a hardcover book opened at the center, so that the covers and spine all lie flat. A drop-spine box is a common container for protecting and presenting artists’ books, but it need not resemble a book. The fact that it does announces the book’s self-consciousness about its status as a reproduction from the start.

In attempting to articulate the figurative significance of the box, reviewers have compared it to a coffin—and with good reason, since the rectangular shape and hinge opening make the coffin a ready correlate. On the front of the box appears the image of a boy, presumably Carson’s brother, standing in a yard in bathing suit, flippers, and swimming goggles. The boy stands in the photograph with his arms at his sides, so when the book is lying on its back he appears laid out as in a coffin. In the text of *Nox*, Carson retells a story about Michael’s dog—who had been “barking, growling, lashing” since Michael died—going “right up to the front of Sankt Johannes [the church in which the funeral is held] and rais[ing] himself on his paws on the edge of the coffin,” at which point he stopped barking.²⁵ Carson links this moment to “autopsy” as

²⁵ Carson, *Nox*, 1.2.

eyewitnessing; the coffin is the site where death can be concretely experienced through sight and touch. By extension, the coffin-like box of *Nox* stands in as a site for visual-haptic confirmation of Michael's life and death.

Inside this coffin-like box, *Nox* offers a text in place of a body. This is appropriate since, as Alison Muri notes, "our pages and our bodies have long converged in metaphor." The metaphor cuts both ways: Muri lists a number of bibliographic words that have their origins in the human body, among them "header," "footer," "appendix," "index," and "spine," but she also points out the persistent tendency to figure the human body as a page to be read.²⁶ Reading Michael is, along with reading Catullus 101, a core activity of *Nox*. The absent body in *Nox* is also appropriate because the bodies represented in the text are ultimately cremated. Carson writes that she "chose...to burn" her parents' bodies, "then buried the ashes under a stone cut with their names." Michael's widow reports that Michael "wanted to be cast in the sea, so she did this." In his case, "there is no stone."²⁷ The equation of deceased body and ashes also occurs in the Catullus poem: at the gravesite, Catullus speaks to the "mute ash" of his brother. The definition Carson gives for "cinerem" includes "the residue from a fire, ashes," and "ashes as a condition of the body after death (whether cremated or not) (as a stage in existence)."²⁸ The book gives the sense, then, that even when a body is buried it is reduced to ashes, or in the common Biblical rendering, to dust. The transformation of body to ash or dust is significant to *Nox* because ashes are indecipherable; they are material but do not correspond to the deceased person in the way that a corpse does when displayed in, or represented by, a coffin. *Nox*

²⁶ Allison Muri, "Virtually Human: The Electronic Page, the Archived Body, and Human Identity," *The Future of the Page*, ed. Peter Stoicheff and Andrew Taylor (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 235.

²⁷ Carson, *Nox*, 5.6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, n.p.

repeatedly emphasizes the unknowability of Michael, and it does not give a likeness of him in the form of an identifiable body.

Michael Dirda likens the box instead to a reliquary, a comparison that captures the relic's often radical partialness—a piece of bone, a scrap of cloth.²⁹ In Catholicism,³⁰ remains such as bone or hair are designated as first-class relics, and items used or touched by saints, such as clothing, rosaries, or handkerchiefs, are considered second-class relics. Relics are typically housed in reliquaries and made into sites of public veneration; they are displayed in churches or shrines and carried in processions. Third-class relics, however, can be created by touching an object (often cloth) to a first- or second-class relic. The third-class relic is a private object, something that can belong to an individual as a record of contact with a relic. Carson's original text may resemble a reliquary in its effort to contain authentic remnants of her brother's life, but the trade edition of the book is less reliquary than third-class relic—the mass-produced copies gain their ritualistic power through a physical relationship to an original object that is itself already removed from Michael. The trade edition is doubly removed, a copy of an object that could only stand metaphorically for the brother's body, even as the relationship remains potent.

Once *Nox* is opened, the contents can be “unpacked” in multiple ways. For one, an accordion can be read much like a codex: each valley fold can operate as the gutter of the codex, allowing two adjacent panels to be viewed at once, in which case each of the two panels has a mountain fold at what would have been the fore-edge of the codex. Experienced as such, one page-spread at a time, two back-to-back panels can turn as though they are a leaf; nevertheless, the double thickness of the paper and the fact that the valley folds are not anchored to a spine

²⁹ Michael Dirda, review of *Nox* by Anne Carson, *Washington Post*, April 29, 2010.

³⁰ For a brief reflection from Carson on her relationship to having been raised in the Catholic church see her interview with Will Aitkin in the *Paris Review*.

make the kinetic process of turning the page noticeably different. Whereas the leaf of the codex is often pliable and drapes away from the gutter, the doubled-paneled “leaves” of *Nox* are stiff, springing into place as they turn. The accordion can also be spread out so that multiple—or all—pages can be viewed at once and the doubling of page spreads gives way to a longer sequence of individual panels. This way of interacting with *Nox* can involve removing the accordion from the box, at which point the codex no longer serves as a model for how to proceed. In an interview Carson advises, “you can unfold it on your kitchen floor or a better thing to do if you have a multi-story house is to go to the top of a stairway and drop it down because...it unfurls page by page and it makes this wonderful crackly sound as it unfurls.”³¹

The process of unfurling that Carson describes vividly suggests the difference in handle³² between the accordion and codex, and because Carson’s accordion is an adaptation of a work that began in a codex, *Nox* highlights key similarities and differences between the two formats. For instance, the binding thread that appears in the gutter of Carson’s original version registers in the photocopy, so many of the work’s valley folds directly invoke the gutter of the codex even as the two-dimensional images of the thread emphasize that the accordion format is folded rather than sewn. Further, when the accordion is unfolded, panels that were initially back-to-back appear adjacent to one another, simultaneously visible. As a result, in cases where Carson has done something on one side of a leaf that impacts the other side, these two sides appear next to one another as mirror images when the strip of paper is stretched out beyond the two-panel spread.

³¹ Anne Carson, “Poesis with Anne Carson,” interview with Jim Fleming, *To The Best of our Knowledge*, June 15, 2012.

³² Gary Frost uses “handle” as a category heading that incorporates “hand craft,” but this chapter uses the term in the sense offered by the Oxford English Dictionary, i.e. “The way that goods, esp. textiles, feel to the touch when handled.” Handling an object includes touch and manipulation, and therefore both tactility and kinetics.

The flat and crimped sides of staples are especially clear evidence of this, and where Carson has pressed hard with a pencil, the indentation is visible on the other side of the page. In one case, an otherwise blank recto panel features an unidentifiable shape outlined and filled in with pencil. This shape turns out to be that of the photographer's shadow cast on the snow in a family photograph, traced from behind. Carson's act of viewing the photograph through the paper and tracing the outline of the shadow insists on the double-sided leaf structure of the codex, and moments such as this give the accordion's side-by-side pages a mirroring effect.

Historically, the accordion format began as a pre-codex attempt to make the scroll format more amenable to quickly finding a particular passage. It balances between the continuity of the scroll and the discrete leaves of the codex, and artists' books often exploit this tension for aesthetic purposes. In his review of *Nox*, Dan Chiasson considers the temporal effects of the format:

This chain-link form is especially suited to panoramas, alphabets, bestiaries, souvenir books, and almanacs. The format allows for the simultaneous representation of episode and arc, individual and ensemble: stretched out along the length of a table, you can see all at once the succession of English monarchs, or the stages of the evolution of man, or one hundred full-color views of Paris. We use the word "unfold" to describe the passing of time; these books literally unfold over lengths unavailable to conventional books.

The format makes it possible to tabulate the fits and starts of historical or personal time (including those hiccups in time a mourner feels especially keenly) against the steady, regular intervals of months and years.³³

³³ Dan Chiasson, "The Unfolding Elegy," review of *Nox*, by Anne Carson, *New York Review of Books*, October 14, 2010, 63.

Chiasson's account effectively describes the accordion's capacity to convey succession and the unfolding of time. However, the format's "simultaneous representation of episode and arc" is undermined by the scale of *Nox*, which makes it impractical (if not impossible) for the accordion to ever be "stretched out along the length of a table." Craig Morgan Teicher offhandedly estimates the accordion's length at ten feet, but in fact the paper runs almost thirty yards: when spread from end-to-end, *Nox* still can't be absorbed textually or visually in its entirety all at once. Stepping back far enough to see the entire length of the book, one is left with uninterpretable writing and images. The accordion format is generally well suited to display in galleries, and it allows book artists to make an entire work readable even when the book can't be handled. However, the substantial length of Carson's book indicates that it was not destined for a museum vitrine, since even in a vitrine the book would remain only partly visible. Instead, as visual as *Nox* is, the book's length indicates that the work is designed for the hands, whether through the codex-like motions of turning the stiff mountain folds, or through motions of pulling apart multiple panels at a time.

Although the size of *Nox* limits the options for reading the text as a continuous strip, the ungainly proportions resonate with the book's interest in the relationship between grief and measuring. Early in *Nox*, Carson presents Hekataios' description of the phoenix who "makes out of myrrh an egg as big as he can carry. Then he tests it to see if he can carry it. After that he hollows out the egg and lays his father inside and plugs up the hollow....Having plugged it up he carries the egg to Egypt to the temple of the sun."³⁴ Grief in this description is material and somatic, for as Carson puts it, "the phoenix mourns by shaping, weighing, testing, hollowing,

³⁴ Carson, *Nox*, 1.1.

plugging and carrying towards the light.”³⁵ Although the container of *Nox* is rectangular, it nevertheless resonates with the hollowed-out and filled egg carried by the phoenix. *Nox* also tells of the Skythians who, when asked about the size of their population, pointed to a large bowl in which arrowheads—one for each person—had been melted down. “Herodotus tells us that the king made this bowl in order to leave behind a ‘memory’ ...or ‘monument’ of the number,” explains Carson. “The number itself who knows. History can be at once concrete and indecipherable.”³⁶ Carson links this image to her own text later in the book when she proposes, “What if you made a collection of lexical entries, as someone who is asked to come up with a number for the population of the Skythians might point to the bowl at Exampaïos.”³⁷ *Nox* methodically assembles these lexical entries and numbers its fragments of text, but the weighing of grief remains inexact, affective, not readily assimilable. If Carson’s accordion is too much material for a single person to stretch out to its full length, this fits with the unwieldy task of managing, carrying, or measuring grief, and rather than passively viewing the accordion, the reader of *Nox* is involved in actions akin to “shaping, weighing, testing” that partially mimic the haptic processes Carson underwent to create the book.

The visual-haptic aspects of the box and accordion take on figurative significance as components of Carson’s elegy, and in their insistence on the materiality of *Nox* they amplify the facsimile’s capacity to re-project aura in the absence of the auratic original. As we have seen, the facsimile provides visibility in the absence of tactility, and *Nox* partially compensates for this loss by reconstructing the facsimile in a more intensely haptic form. At the same time as *Nox* produces a literal translation of a literary work from one language to another, it serves

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Carson, *Nox*, 1.3.

³⁷ Ibid., 7.1.

as a material translation of an original codex into a mass-producible boxed accordion. Like translation, facsimile reproduction strives for fidelity to an original that it can never wholly capture. In order for the page-sequence of the codex to remain intact, the reverse side of the accordion of *Nox* has been left blank, a glaring indication that this book is not the original and that the original was not conceived for this format. The blank side of *Nox*—visible only when the accordion is read backward or flipped over—remains as a reminder that the work has been constructed around the dual absences of Michael and the original object that *Nox* represents.

The Nick of Time

Billing itself as “translated by Anne Carson” on the cover, *Antigonick* offers a version of Sophocles’ *Antigone* that lies partway between translation and adaptation. The play opens with Antigone’s two brothers “DEAD BY ONE ANOTHER’S HANDS” fighting for the rule of Thebes.³⁸ The new ruler, Kreon, decrees that one brother will be given an honorable burial and the other will be left, by Antigone’s description, “TO LIE UNWEPT AND UNBURIED SWEET SORRYMEAT FOR THE LITTLE LUSTS OF BIRDS.”³⁹ Antigone risks death to bury her brother’s body, and when Kreon finds out that the body has been buried he sends a guard to find out who is responsible. The guard uncovers the body, Antigone attempts to bury it again; she is arrested and sentenced to be buried alive in a cave. After Kreon has sentenced Antigone to death, Teiresius arrives with the prophecy “WATCH OUT KREON WATCH OUT I SEE THE FUTURE PLUNGING TOWARD YOU AND IT CONTAINS THE CORPSE OF YOUR OWN SON.”⁴⁰ Noting that Teiresius’ prophecies are never wrong, the chorus advises Kreon to set

³⁸ Anne Carson, *Antigonick* (New York: New Directions, 2012), n.p.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Antigone free. He goes to release Antigone only to find she has hanged herself, and that his son Haimon has stabbed himself upon finding her body; on hearing this news Kreon's wife Euridike also commits suicide.

Although *Antigonick* is by and large faithful to the plot of Sophocles' play, as the title suggests it also takes a number of liberties. Among these is the insertion into *Antigone's* cast of the character "Nick" whose significance is highlighted by the title's blend of Antigone's name and his. Nick is listed as "a mute part [always onstage, he measures things],"⁴¹ and his role seems primarily to involve taking silent measure of the play's sequence of perfectly ill-timed events. Accordingly, the phrase "the nick of time" also occupies a central position in the text. After convincing Kreon to free Antigone, the chorus meditates on a long list of time markers:

ANOTHER
AN HOUR
AN HOUR AND A HALF
A YEAR
A SPLIT SECOND
A DECADE
THIS INSTANT
A SECOND
A SPLIT SECOND
A NOW
A NICK⁴²

The next page announces, "WE'RE STANDING IN THE NICK OF TIME."⁴³ Although "the nick of time" often means "the latest possible moment," it also refers more generally to "the precise or exact point of time when something takes place... a critical or opportune juncture, a crucial moment."⁴⁴

At this point in the play Teiresius' prophesy has already shown the last possible moment to be

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ "nick, n.1". OED Online. March 2014. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/view/Entry/126760> (accessed March 17, 2014).

over, as once the prophesy is uttered it becomes as irrevocable as the past. This is instead the “crucial moment,” the “nick of time” when the play’s events seem as though they could be reversed by Kreon’s intervention but cannot. After the play’s three suicides transpire, the chorus offers as a final pronouncement: “LAST WORD **WISDOM** BETTER GET SOME EVEN TOO LATE.” “Too late” becomes the space of wisdom, but “the nick of time” is the space of tragedy, the point when an irreversible future has not yet played out.

Antigonick’s engagements with time are not limited, however, to commentary on the timing of the play’s events; the book also incorporates anachronistic references that foreground the interpretive layers that the play has accumulated through its history. Carson signals as much with the first lines of the play: “**ANTIGONE**: WE BEGIN IN THE DARK AND BIRTH IS THE DEATH OF US **ISMENE**: WHO SAID THAT **ANTIGONE**: HEGEL **ISMENE**: SOUNDS MORE LIKE BECKETT **ANTIGONE**: HE WAS PARAPHRASING HEGEL **ISMENE**: I DON’T THINK SO.”⁴⁵ In invoking G. W. F. Hegel, Carson acknowledges how profoundly his reading of the play has impacted subsequent interpretations. Indeed, the back of *Antigonick* wryly quotes Hegel’s claim that “the Antigone [is] one of the most sublime and in every respect most excellent works of art of all time.” Since this quotation appears, alone, in the space normally allotted for attributed blurbs, it jokingly suggests that Hegel is endorsing Carson’s book. At the same time, the book’s back cover uses this quotation to compound the first lines’ insistence on the fact that many contemporary readings of *Antigone* are routed through Hegel.

In a review of *Antigonick*, Michael Miller observes that, while the line may vaguely suggest Hegel, it in fact modifies Beckett’s “birth was the death of him.”⁴⁶ The mention of

⁴⁵ Carson, *Antigonick*, n.p.

⁴⁶ Michael Miller, “A Matter of Time: Anne Carson Re-Writes ‘Antigone,’” *New York Observer*, May 30, 2012.

Beckett recasts Antigone and Ismene as *Waiting for Godot*'s Estragon and Vladimir, who likewise open the play alone on stage. *Waiting for Godot*, structured as it is around interminable waiting, rhymes with *Antigonick*'s emphasis on the temporal structure of *Antigone*. Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* also receives mention in *Antigonick*, during the sole speaking part of Kreon's wife Euridike. Euridike begins her speech, "THIS IS EURIDIKE'S MONOLOGUE IT'S HER ONLY SPEECH IN THE PLAY. YOU MAY NOT KNOW WHO SHE IS THAT'S OK. LIKE POOR MRS. RAMSAY WHO DIED IN A BRACKET OF **TO THE LIGHTHOUSE** SHE'S THE WIFE OF THE MAN WHOSE MOODS TENSIFY THE WORLD OF THIS STORY."⁴⁷ Here Mrs. Ramsay's parenthetical death in the "Time Passes" section of *To the Lighthouse* becomes a correlate for Euridike's role in *Antigone*, which involves only a single speech and a violent death. Significantly, Mrs. Ramsay "dies in a bracket" in a section of the book that is directly concerned with the nature of time.

Antigonick's reference to Bertolt Brecht's 1948 stage production of *Antigone* offers perhaps the most direct model for Carson's own text. Brecht's version of the play adds a prologue that takes place in 1945 Berlin. Emerging from an air-raid shelter, two sisters find their brother "hanging from the butcher's hook" outside the house.⁴⁸ The second sister wants to take down the body and bring it into the house, which the first advises her not to do. The scene ends with an officer confronting the sisters, but we never hear the second sister respond and therefore never learn whether she will take the same stand as Antigone and presumably suffer the same tragic fate. Brecht's play then cuts to the proper beginning of *Antigone*, which replays the same conflict. The playwright's strategy of conveying *Antigone* through the framework of the Nazi regime is, while clearly far more serious and politicized, a model for Carson's own anachronistic rewriting of the play. Within *Antigonick*,

⁴⁷ Carson, *Antigonick*, n.p.

⁴⁸ Bertolt Brecht, *Antigone*, trans. Judith Malina (New York: Applause Theater Book Publishers, 1990), 13.

however, the reference to Brecht's version is more specific: after Antigone has been condemned to death, the chorus in *Antigonick* says to her, "REMEMBER WHEN BRECHT HAD YOU DO THE WHOLE PLAY WITH A DOOR STRAPPED TO YOUR BACK." Here Carson points to Helene Weigel's⁴⁹ 1948 performance of Brecht's version, in which, once Antigone has been captured by Kreon's guards, she carries a door on her back for the remainder of the play.⁵⁰

Just as Nick measures the timing internal to the play, these references to Hegel and Brecht measure *Antigone*'s relationship to historical time by pointing to associations that the work has accrued over time via analysis and staging. By invoking Beckett and Woolf, Carson adds an additional, and more personal, layer of modernist literary associations. All serve to accentuate the temporal gap between *Antigone*'s time and our own, and they also accentuate her presence as translator. As such, they point to the tension between text and work: in reading any one text of *Antigone*, particularly a translation, one reads a projection of the work's meaning that cannot be fully extricated from culture, history, or the individuality of the translator. *Antigonick* subverts the notion that through Carson's translation we might have access to the "original" *Antigone* since this version of *Antigone* loudly announces its status as a copy from the start.

The text's sense of its own history and status as a copy is reinforced at the material level through the book's visual and structural choices. Visually, *Antigonick* evokes temporality through the use of hand lettering—a form of inscription that corresponds to the text's origins in papyrus scrolls (fig. 5). The use of uppercase letters with almost no sentence punctuation mimics the writing of classical Greek texts in majuscule letters in *scriptio continua*. Carson uses word spaces and

⁴⁹ The actor Helene Weigel was Brecht's spouse and frequent collaborator who created key roles in several of his plays, including that of Antigone.

⁵⁰ Olga Taxidou, "Machines and Models for Modern Tragedy: Brecht/Berlau, *Antigone-Model 1948*," *Rethinking Tragedy*, ed. Rita Felski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008) 251.

[ENTER ANTIGONE AND ISMENE] ANTIGONE: WE
 BEGIN IN THE DARK AND BIRTH IS THE DEATH OF
 US ISMENE: WHO SAID THAT ANTIGONE: HEGEL
 ISMENE: SOUNDS MORE LIKE BECKETT ANTIGONE: HE
 WAS PARAPHRASING HEGEL ISMENE: I DON'T THINK
 SO ANTIGONE: WHOEVER IT WAS WHOEVER WE ARE
 DEAR SISTER EVER SINCE WE WERE BORN FROM THE EVILS
 OF OEDIPOUS WHAT BITTERNESS PAIN DISGUST DISGRACE
 OR MORAL SHOCK HAVE WE BEEN SPARED AND NOW
 THIS EDICT YOU'VE HEARD THE EDICT ISMENE: I'VE
 HEARD NO EDICT. THAT OUR TWO BROTHERS ARE DEAD
 BY ONE ANOTHER'S HANDS AND THE ARGIVE ARMY GONE
 FROM THIS CITY IS ALL I KNOW

Figure 5. Carson's hand lettering from *Antigonick* (2012)

apostrophes, but the absence of commas and periods still conveys a sense of breathless continuity for readers accustomed to sentence breaks indicated by punctuation and initial capitalization. Because word and sentence spacing were introduced in the transition to silent reading, Carson's running text also serves as a reminder that this work is not only poetry but drama, and with the exception of a handful of stage directions the book's lines are intended for speech. However, *Antigone*, like the five other extant Sophocles plays, survives primarily through Byzantine manuscripts copied between the fifth to tenth centuries rather than on their original papyrus scrolls.⁵¹ In its pairing of handwritten text and hand-drawn illustrations, *Antigonick* gestures toward the tradition of manuscript illumination, and therefore toward the play's transmission history.

The documents on which current versions of *Antigone* are based have been subject to numerous forms of error and damage, and Carson's text recalls this fact in moments where a small

⁵¹ Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro, eds. *The Complete Sophocles: Volume I: The Theban Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 189.

number of individual words or sentence snippets are spread throughout the space of the page. At these points, the language takes on the elliptical and partial qualities of Carson’s translated fragments from Sappho, *If Not Winter*. In this volume, Carson writes that she uses brackets to give an impression of missing matter, so that] or [indicates destroyed papyrus or the presence of letters not quite legible somewhere in the line. . . . Brackets are an aesthetic gesture toward the papyrological event rather than an accurate record of it. . . . Even though you are approaching Sappho in translation, that is no reason you should miss the drama of trying to read a papyrus torn in half or riddled with holes or smaller than a postage stamp—brackets imply a free space of marginal adventure.⁵²

The brackets create a sense of the spatial dimensions of the papyrus, and the legible pieces of text float in the space of the page. In the most radically incomplete texts all that remain are individual words, as in fragments 74A, 74B, and 74C, which Carson arranges as:

]]]
]goatherd]longing]sweat
]]]
]roses]
]		
] ⁵³		

Antigonick, although it reserves brackets for stage directions, features a handful of pages that “gesture toward the papyrological event” through their generous spacing. For instance, when Kreon first enters, he declares, “HERE ARE KREON’S NOUNS FOR TODAY,” and the following page spreads these nouns across the page: “ADJUDICATE // LEGISLATE // SCANDALIZE // CAPITALIZE // HERE ARE KREON’S NOUNS // MEN // REASON / TREASON / DEATH // SHIP OF STATE // MINE” (fig. 6). (When the

⁵² Sappho, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*, trans. Anne Carson (New York: Vintage, 2003), xi.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 149.

“lacuna” is a textual term, “HERE I POSIT A LACUNA” may also be an interjection of the translator. In this case, the translator proposes that there is a lacuna at this point in the original documents that explains the gnarled syntax, or admits that she has placed a lacuna in the text, neglecting to represent certain lines from the original. As when her characters make references to modern authors, here Carson as translator blurs with the character of Haimon. Carson substantially trims many of the speeches in *Antigone*, so “positing lacunae” is one of the text’s most notable methods of translation. Carson’s willful omissions, then, correspond to the accidental inscription errors and forms of material deterioration that create lacunae in texts.

Although the book’s hand lettering points toward manuscript culture, *Antigonick* portrays Carson as a poor scribe—not only because she deliberately alters the text, but because her lettering is hardly neat. Scribal calligraphy can often rival typography for regularity of letterforms, but the shapes and weights of Carson’s letters are irregular, shaky, at times verging on sloppy. In this sense, *Antigonick*’s lettering is more akin to handwriting, with its associations of informality and uniqueness. In her cultural history of handwriting in America, Tamara Thornton points out that

It was print that endowed handwriting with its own, new set of symbolic possibilities; script emerged as a medium of the self in contradistinction to print, defined as characteristically impersonal and dissociated from the writer. Handwriting thus became a level of meaning in itself, quite apart from the sense of the text, and the sense that it transmitted took as its subject the self.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Handwriting in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), xiii.

The sense of identity and individuality that characterizes handwriting in print culture is important to *Antigonick*'s mediation between translation and adaptation, since it foregrounds Carson's role as poet-translator. As a kind of fair-copy manuscript, the text of *Antigonick* becomes an iconic representation of the writer's process of composition. Although *Antigonick* is far from being a draft, the fact that it is written in Carson's hand suggests greater proximity to the composition process than print can provide.

Antigonick's emphasis on its own production compounded by Bianca Stone's illustrations, which are drawn in a style that accentuates the role of Stone's hand in creating the images. Lines that define figures and objects are noticeably shaky, and shapes are similarly irregular. When drawings are watercolored, the paint does not always fill the space all the way to the edges. The shading done with ink leaves individual pen-strokes visible. The combination of poetry and illustration is a frequent pairing of *livres d'artistes*⁵⁵ and gift books, but the emphatically hand-drawn aesthetic of Stone's illustrations is, especially when accompanied by all-majuscule hand lettering, closer to the conventions of the graphic novel.⁵⁶

Still, Stone's drawings evade the imperative to illustrate the accompanying language in any conventional sense. The subjects of the images include rocky landscapes, domestic interiors, barns, anthropomorphic horses, and human figures with cinder blocks in place of heads. A spool of red thread reappears, twined in one case around a pitcher full of cutlery and in another around the forelegs of a horse. Individual images can be read into the thematic content of *Antigonick*.

⁵⁵ Although *livre d'artiste* translates as "artist's book," *livres d'artistes* in the French tradition are essentially illustrated deluxe books that include original artwork and writing. In Anglophone criticism these are not typically included in the category of "artist's book," hence the term is left untranslated to differentiate.

⁵⁶ Stone has in fact published her own illustrated poetic work under the rubric of "poetry comics." See Bianca Stone, *I Want to Open the Mouth God Gave You Beautiful Mutant*, (Northampton: Factory Hollow Press, 2012) and her website: www.poetrycomics.com.

For instance, an image in which a roughly outlined human figure presides over a banquet table of empty plates, glasses, and chairs evokes Kreon's position at the end of the play; he remains ruler of Thebes, but Antigone, Haimon, and Euridike are all dead, and he wishes for his own death. However, this image appears well before the moment in the play to which it most readily links. The images focus, rather than illustrating, on creating mood, and the mood they create is often eerie. Just as Carson's text makes *Antigone* over for its own purposes, Stone's illustrations depart dramatically from the task of visually representing the events of the book—and the result is that, as in the case of Carson's handwriting, the illustrations show the direct result of a haptic process of creating a visual image.

The visual representation of handcraft in the writing and illustration of this version of *Antigone* finds its counterpart in a heightened sense of the codex as a manual form. The structure of the codex is such that it has to be touched to be seen. Book artist Keith Smith, in his *The Structure of the Visual Book*, describes the interplay between kinetics and visuality in the codex as such:

TURNING the PAGE

- It is a physical movement.
- Turning pages reveals the order of viewing.
- It places the book into time.
- The book is a single experience, a compound picture of the many separate sheets.
- In the codex, this single experience is revealed in slivers. The total is perceived and exists only as a retention of afterimage in the mind. The codex is never seen at once.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Keith Smith, *Structure of the Visual Book* (Rochester: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1984), 42.

Smith's book, directed toward the aspiring book artist, points to several crucial but often unnoticed features of the codex; namely, the codex relies on segmentation and sequence that is only available through motion. Artists' books can deploy the capacities of the codex in multiple ways, but for a codex to function as an artist's book it needs to be at least minimally attentive to how the form organizes a reading and/or viewing experience into ordered page-spreads.

Many artists' books are visually or textually self-reflexive about the form of the codex. Michael Snow's well-known *Cover to Cover* (1975), for instance, uses photography to vividly demonstrate the relationship between the sequencing capacities of the codex and the hand's role in setting that sequence in motion. This highly self-aware and often humorous book makes use of the codex's dualities—facing pages and opposite covers—by having two photographers shoot the same scene from opposite angles; one angle is portrayed on the verso and the other on the recto. (fig.). Hands also enter the frame, so that at certain moments the page appears as a photograph of a held photograph. Midway through the book these hands are shown lifting the pages of the book so that images from earlier (verso) and later (recto) in *Cover to Cover* become partly visible (fig.). Eventually, over the course of several pages, the image turns 180° so the reader has to turn the book upside down in order to see the images right side up. *Cover to Cover* simultaneously shows the photograph to be a photograph, the page to be a page, and *Cover to Cover* to be a book of pages of photographs. Any page could suddenly be turned from “within” the book by the hands that appear in the photograph to make visible the hands making the book. At the same time, the appearance of these hands in the images prompts the reader's awareness of her own hands while reading.

Laurie Anderson's 1974 *Handbook (aka Manual)* uses language to achieve a similar self-reflexivity about the book's material production and the physicality of reading. This large codex

with a short segment of text written across the middle of each recto begins, “this book is hand written § it is also hand operated.” After an assurance that nothing can be learned from analyzing the handwriting, the book describes the actions taken in its own “operation”:

each page is grasped between the thumb and a finger § the paper is lifted and peeled § curling into a roll as it turns § temporarily mimicking its origins § in the scroll § the upper right hand corner of the page § is now on the upper left § this side of the page § is now visible as a mirror image on the left⁵⁸

The black marker in which the text is written bleeds through the paper, so the text is, as promised, partially visible through the page as a mirror image. *Handbook* later describes the traces of the reader’s hand that will be left on the book. As such, it constructs the relationship between hand and book through the author’s hand (handwriting), the reader’s motions (page turning), and the reader’s effects on the object (evidence of handling). The motions required to leaf through *Handbook* are the typical ones used to read codices, and as such this work prompts a larger awareness of what it feels like to interact with a book.

Antigonick does not, as *Handbook* and *Cover to Cover* do, take as its explicit subject its own production and “operation” by hand, but its vellum pages nevertheless create a heightened sense of the role of the hand in reading. These vellum pages engage the hand first by presenting an alternate texture to the coated paper on which the text appears. “Vellum” takes its name from high-quality parchment made from calf skin, but the vellum used in *Antigonick* is more properly “paper vellum,” a durable material made from plasticized cotton that is often transparent or, as is the case with *Antigonick*, translucent. Both the paper and vellum surfaces in the book are smooth,

⁵⁸ “Collected Stories: Books by Laurie Anderson.” Henry Art Gallery. Seattle, Washington. January 18, 2013.

almost slick, but between the fingers the vellum is thinner and more flexible. The most notable change in textual occurs in places where ink has built up on the vellum; in these cases the surface becomes slightly sticky. The tactile differences in the page materials are compounded by visual distinctions. First, the paper is bright white and the vellum is slightly yellow by comparison. More importantly, because the paper is opaque and the vellum translucent, in page spreads that include a vellum leaf this leaf overlays and leaves partially visible the text of the following recto. The illustrations are printed on the recto of the vellum, as evidenced by the texture of the ink and the fact that each image is darker and sharper when it is overlaid on the following page than when it is turned aside against the white verso before it. The illustrations can either be viewed with the ghostly image of the text-to-come beneath the well-defined image, or else as a fainter reversed image beside the clear, uncovered text.

Keith Smith's analysis of the codex space is again useful in understanding the significance of the translucent vellum in crafting a self-conscious reading experience. He explains, "if I use translucent pages, an echo exists on the back as it is turned. A preview of the following page/s can be seen. This lends itself to ideas of afterimage; déjà vu.... Pictures evolve and spatially emerge, like coming out of a fog, on the right hand side."⁵⁹ Visual effects of preview and afterimage resonate with *Antigonick's* relationship to time: in a preview, the future becomes partly visible, as in Teiresius's prophesy; in an afterimage the past remains visible in the present, as it does in the final moments of *Antigone* when Kreon acquires wisdom but too late. The notion of "coming out of a fog" also applies well to *Antigonick*, whose illustrations are surreal and include landscapes that have a blurry or hazy effect. Still, as the vellum is lifted and the text becomes sharper, the accompanying illustration becomes slightly less clear. Text emerges

⁵⁹ Smith, *Structure of the Visual Book*, 47.

from the “fog” of the vellum at the same time as the illustration recedes into it.

The strategy of reading *Antigone* “through” other later texts is rendered materially through the illustrated vellum leaves, which allow portions of the text to be read through the translucent surface of the previous page. The multiple Byzantine manuscript sources on which *Antigone* is based; Hegel’s analysis and Brecht’s staging of the play; *Waiting for Godot* and *To The Lighthouse*; and the process of Greek-to-English translation all become translucent layers through which *Antigone* is partly made visible and partly obscured. The notion that *Antigone* is a palimpsest is vividly conveyed by the vellum leaves, which overwrite the text and reduce it, at least temporarily, to a faint image. Depending on the size, color, and inking of the overlaid illustration, the text becomes more or less easy to read. In cases where the illustration obscures all but a few words, the book again nods toward the “drama of trying to read a papyrus torn in half or riddled with holes or smaller than a postage stamp.”

These effects of the vellum may seem to be primarily visual in nature, but as Keith Smith argues, “it is the process of turning pages that activates the very idea of translucency.”⁶⁰ The vellum leaves use their visual qualities to make evident the haptic conditions of reading: the fact that pages are not only visual, they are material surfaces stacked on top of one another, and the reader is tasked with lifting and moving each page to see the next. The page spread may appear to be a two-dimensional surface, but it achieves this effect only by making invisible the other pages; the vellum, by contrast allows two pages to be seen at once—and seen, therefore, to be three-dimensional. The kinetic exercise of moving a page from recto to verso is, *Antigonick* reminds us, at the heart of reading the codex.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Smith proposes that turning the page “places the book into time,” and as such the reader exercises control, through physical hand motions, over the temporal experience of reading. The reader has much in common, then, with the character Nick, whose job is to silently measure as the play unfolds. “Nick,” Carson’s text reminds us, is also a small dent or cut, a notch used to tally. A form of reading that could remain attentive to “the nick of time” would remain aware of the small or large forms of damage the text endures as well as the tally of translations, adaptations, and references that accumulate around the work *Antigone*. Carson’s use of her own hand in producing the text recalls numerous moments in the history of the book and draws the reader closer—even if only symbolically—to the moment of Carson’s inscriptions. At the same time, *Antigonick* uses its illustrated vellum leaves to make evident the tactile, kinetic, and temporal dimensions of turning pages with the hand.

Through all of these haptic, visual, and literary strategies, *Antigonick* signals the awareness that its text is one layer among many, past and future, to overlay *Antigone*. In abandoning the sense that she can produce a “definitive edition,” Carson allows herself the freedom to make her version a commentary on the accumulation of versions of *Antigone* that now defines the work. This complex awareness of the relationship between *Antigone*, *Antigonick*, the act of writing, the process of reading, history, and time remains present even when the stage is finally bare. The final stage directions—visible through a blank vellum sheet—simply state, “[EXEUNT OMNES EXCEPT NICK WHO CONTINUES // MEASURING].”⁶¹

⁶¹ Carson, *Antigonick*, n.p.

Conclusion: The Future of Reading

Nox and *Antigonick* each explore the intersections of history translation, materiality, and reproduction in ways that implicate the visual and haptic features of the printed book. Their ways of configuring these terms and their overall sensibilities, however, differ widely. *Nox* offers a highly personal form of history, the markers of which are registered on individual material objects that the book presents in facsimile. *Nox* emphasizes its status as a reproduction more forcefully than *Antigonick*, but this emphasis also has the effect of affirming the authenticity of the original on which the trade edition is based. On the other hand, *Antigonick* is effectively a copy without an original, or if it could be said to have an original—the papyrus versions of *Antigone*—it is so far removed that it can be at best a palimpsest. Carson’s mediating role as translator is highlighted in *Antigonick*’s virtuosic combination of scholarly knowledge and creativity, and *Antigonick*’s version of history is manifest not in specific objects but in the combination of anachronistic reference and material conventions for book production.

Visual and haptic features are nevertheless crucial to both books. Because *Nox* deploys an alternate structure to the codex it more obviously engages the book’s kinetic possibilities in ways that fold back into the book’s perspective on elegy. Still, *Antigonick* queries the sequencing and layering effects of the codex from within the form through its use of vellum, linking these to the text’s investments in temporality. Both works use visual-haptic strategies to simulate the mechanisms of history and the impossibility of directly accessing the past. *Nox* and *Antigonick* also serve as a reminder that, although the book can conceivably engage all of the senses,⁶² it is fundamentally a visual and haptic form, designed to be interpreted by the eye and

⁶² See, for instance, Michael Camille’s “Sensations of the Page: Imaging Technologies and Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts,” which argues that a contemporary bias toward visual analysis has obscured the extent to which the medieval manuscript is a “locus of all five senses,”

manipulated by the hand. In this, Carson's texts participate in the artist's book's ongoing attempt to foreground the meaning and potential of the book object, and they do so in ways that break down the common divide between the democratic multiple, with its visual emphasis on the codex form, and the handmade book, with its greater investment in both aura and sculpture. *Nox* and *Antigonick* are not auratic originals, but they stand out among trade editions in their simultaneous attention to the hand of the writer-artist and their own digital-mechanical reproduction, acquiring through their visual-haptic qualities a kind of secondary aura reserved for the well-made copy.

Understood in relation to the historical development of artists' books, the material features of Carson's books are not merely fetishistic, nostalgic, or reactionary attachments to a quickly obsolescing technology. These books are each the product of contemporary technologies that allow for high-quality color reproduction, printing on paper vellum, and the mass-production of an accordion format book. They cooperate with digital technologies in order to rethink the possibilities of the printed book as a material object, and exist in dialogue with the efforts of other artists' books to do the same. The notion that the materiality of texts changes the reading experience has become commonplace in an era of electronic textuality, but, like many artists' books, *Nox* and *Antigonick* remind us that there are certain forms of tactility and kinetics particular to the printed book. Andrew Piper proposes that "to think about the future of reading" in the age of electronic textuality "means, first and foremost, to think about the relationship between reading and hands, the long history of how touch has shaped reading and, by extension, our sense of ourselves while we read."⁶³ *Nox* and *Antigonick* are highly aware of their relationship to history and materiality, and they look backward to the history of the

and would have been experienced as such by readers (38).

⁶³ Andrew Piper, *Book Was There: Reading in Electronic Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 3.

book—including the “long history of how touch has shaped reading”—at the same time that they suggest potential for the printed trade edition to learn from artists’ books as a way of remaining relevant in the contemporary publishing industry. In their haptic specificity, these works offer a print-based form of reading for the electronic age, an interaction with sophisticated book-objects that have the potential to be (in Frost’s terms) not only “read, habituated to use” but “possessed, consumed by passionate use.”

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