VISUALITY AND FREE VERSE

by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of English
and the Division of Graduate Studies of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

March 2023

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

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Title: Visuality and Free Verse

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Degree awarded March 2023

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

March 2023

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More than a hundred years after Whitman, *vers libre*, and the Imagist movement, many poets still have a remarkably indistinct understanding of what it means to write in free verse, as the form is too often defined by what it is not rather than by what it is. In this dissertation, I examine work by Sadakichi Hartmann, Marcel Broodthaers, Philip Metres, and Derik Badman at the limit of what we might consider free verse poetry to argue that free verse is not just a linguistic form but a visual construct that must be "seen" in those terms to be understood.

Following my Introduction, Chapter Two examines the early and nearly unclassifiable *vers libre* of Sadakichi Hartmann, a Whitman acquaintance and early adopter of French Symbolism whose characteristic line in 1898's *Naked Ghosts* combines elements of prose poetry, free verse, meter, and rhyme in a package explained as much by his interpretation of Japanese painting as by Whitman or the Symbolists. Even before Imagism, Hartmann wrote verse that functioned, in some ways, like an image itself. Chapter Three investigates the groundbreaking museum installations of Belgian visual artist Marcel Broodthaers, which some critics consider a form of three-dimensional free verse. Broodthaers's installations encourage a multiperspectival approach to "reading" that consistently breaks its own protocols, shedding light on itself and other linguistic systems to expose the insufficiency of the signifier/signified chain. This chapter also examines the more recent verbal-visual poetry of American poet Philip Metres, who applies

Broodthaers's techniques to page-based free verse. Finally, Chapter Four examines the hybrid form of contemporary American comics poetry, with emphasis on Derik Badman's *Colletta Suite*, to argue that comics poetry may be a new form of Charles Olson's "Projective Verse" and possibly the revitalized dramatic poetry Olson anticipated at the end of his 1950 essay.

In each case, free verse steps into the realm of a visuality that was always there ahead of it, waiting for the linguistic elements of the prosody to catch up. By examining these works, we may begin to perceive a more positive than negative definition of the form.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express sincere appreciation to Dr. Paul Peppis, who advised my work at every stage of this dissertation and during the years leading up to it. I am a better scholar and writer for his patience and perspective. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the other members of my committee, Dr. Tara Fickle and Dr. Karen Ford of the Department of English and Geri Doran of the Creative Writing Program. Their care and feedback have helped to make this dissertation stronger than it would have been otherwise.

Additional thanks are due to Dr. Lara Bovilsky, Dr. Elizabeth Bohls, Dr. Mary Wood, and Dr. Stacey Alaimo for their assistance as Directors of Graduate Study for the Department of English, and to Kathy Furrer for the hours of administrative assistance spent on my behalf. Gratitude also goes to Dr. Kate Mondloch of the Department of the History of Art and Architecture, in whose class the idea for this dissertation first developed, and to Erika Mueller, whose friendship and commentary helped get this work back on track at its lowest point.

This investigation was supported by a Graduate Assistantship from the University of Oregon.

For Jenn and Georgia, always.

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CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

What is free verse? According to R. S. Gwynn in his introduction to *Poetry: A Pocket Anthology*, “Nothing has been so exhaustively debated in English-language poetry as the exact nature of free verse” (35). Yet despite this, and despite the form’s ubiquity, many artists still have a remarkably indistinct understanding of what it means to write this way. Even Gwynn, an accomplished formal poet, does little more than throw up his hands when pressed. “The simplest definition may be the best,” he writes: “free verse is verse with no consistent metrical pattern. In free verse, line length is a subjective decision made by the poet, and length may be determined by grammatical phrases, the poet’s own sense of individual ‘breath units,’ or even by the visual arrangement of lines on the page” (35). In effect, free verse is often whatever one wants it to be, for whatever reason or no reason at all. “Clearly,” Gwynn concedes, “it is easier to speak of what free verse is not than what it is” (35). The predicament of the poet-editor tasked with explaining the constraining qualities of a form more often described as a flight from constraint is a hard one, and Gwinn deserves consideration on that front. However, we should not let consideration disguise the fact that, for many intents and purposes, free verse remains in need of better exegesis.

Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. In *Tradition and Innovation in American Free Verse: Whitman to Duncan*, Enikő Bollobás writes about the difficulty of understanding free verse as a meaningful presence in American poetry when he imagines the form caught in the “black hole” of free verse as an “anti-poetry” (9). Those whose idea of free verse comes mostly from negative admonishments like those in Ezra Pound’s “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” could

certainly be forgiven for thinking that free verse is little more than what Pound later, in "Canto LXXXI," called the "heave" that "broke" the pentameter (518). This belief is all the stronger for the way it has been amplified by free verse luminaries like William Carlos Williams, who in his 1948 lecture "The Poem as a Field of Action" proclaims so forcefully that "we are *through* with the iambic pentameter as presently conceived . . . through with the measured quatrain, the staid concatenations of sound in the usual stanza, the sonnet" that it can be difficult to remember what he says beyond the dismissal (281). Yet free verse, as Bollobás and others have demonstrated, is more than a reactive "breed of literary counter-culture" (9). It is, as Williams goes on to say, "a new way of measuring . . . commensurate with the social, economic world in which we are living" (283). My dissertation participates in this reevaluation of American free verse, also defining the practice as something with a life beyond the gravity well of poetry without meter.

The bibliographic record on which this claim rests is robust yet demonstrates clear fluctuations in opinion as to what that livelihood might be. Poets and scholars from Bollobás, to Charles O. Hartman, H. T. Kirby-Smith, and Marjorie Perloff have all devoted time to the subject, many of them looking back at the terms of the debate as construed by early free verse poets like Amy Lowell and T. S. Eliot. In broad terms, Lowell and Eliot simultaneously supported the notion of free verse as more than the space where meter and rhyme used to go, both emphasizing free verse's difference from metrical poetry as a matter more of degree than of type. Beyond this, however, poets like Lowell and Eliot diverge markedly. While Lowell extends Sidney Lanier's emphasis on musical isochrony (division into "same time" units), charting the free verse poem's position on a spectrum moving from prose to metrical verse (Hartman 39-42), Eliot interprets the difference in literary-historical terms, writing in *To Criticize the Critic* that "the ghost of some simple meter should lurk behind the arras of even the 'freest' verse; to

advance menacingly as we doze, and withdraw as we rouse. Or, freedom is only truly freedom when it appears against the background of an artificial limitation" (185). The idea of "haunted" verse, which Eliot borrows from Mallarmé, is not so much a rejection of meter as it is a well-tethered step beyond meter into differently regulated but still recognizable linguistic territory (Kirby-Smith 10).

Other free verse scholars tend to sort themselves out along these lines. Kirby-Smith, for example, is Eliotic in his belief that "the indivisible unit for free verse is the line, and that in good free verse the entire line plays against expectations implicit in an entire metrical tradition" (6). In essence, Kirby-Smith normalizes the argument surrounding what free verse is not, making the black hole's reciprocal comment on positive space the entire point and viewing the free verse of Whitman, the Objectivists, the Beats, the Projectivists, and "any current form of antiacademic poetry" as a natural reaction to periods of excessive metrical discipline in American poetry (23-24). Marjorie Perloff, on the other hand, seems to view free verse along a poetry-to-prose spectrum more in line with Amy Lowell. Though it is difficult to see beneath her decades-long argument against "chopped" prose in essays like 1981's "The Linear Fallacy," Perloff's chapter on "Ezra Pound and 'The Prose Tradition in Verse'" from *The Futurist Moment* suggests that the real sin of such free verse is that it doesn't go far enough. Truly freed verse, in the sense of the Futurist *parole in libertà* (words in freedom), would not submit to the convention of lineation without reason. Instead, it would "destroy . . . the poem object," even to the point of becoming the poetic prose she sees in Pound's essay "The Prose Tradition in Verse" and the manifesto genre as a whole (Meschonnic qtd. in Perloff 190).

Against these degree-based interpretations of "positive" free verse rest the arguments of critics like Charles O. Hartman who emphasize free verse as different in type. Hartman starts off

sounding much like Kirby-Smith, agreeing that free verse is a reaction to prior prosodic norms and that free verse's lineation plays against those expectations. For all this similarity, however, their critical trajectories are quite different. Where Kirby-Smith focuses on the Eliotic "arras," the liminal point where past and present prosodic systems meet, Hartman focuses much more, to my reading, on free verse as a forward-thinking prosody that controls reader attention in any number of non-metrical ways, often by dint of syntactical counterpoint or symmetry. For Hartman, lineation is also the only bedrock convention left (once meter has been abandoned) capable of differentiating poetry from prose (52). Yet, he seems less interested in free verse as a specifically rhythmic proposition, opening the way for other sorts of line-centric interpretations.

While granting the brilliance and utility of all these views, this dissertation hews closer to Charles O. Hartman's thinking in the sense that it, too, views free verse a tool for controlling reader attention by nonmetrical means, holding that we have much to gain by looking forward toward new understandings of the form. Rather than retread Hartman's discussion of syntactical counterpoint in the poetry of William Carlos Williams, however, I have elected in what follows to move more toward the fringe of the discipline to consider work by writers like Sadakichi Hartmann, Marcel Broodthaers, and Derik A. Badman that tests the limit of what we can even consider "free verse," or "poetry" for that matter. These works, which stray more into Perloff's territory than that of the other critics mentioned above, suggest that rhythmic analyses of free verse will often fail to produce the positive definitions their writers seek because they do not recognize fully that free verse is more than a linguistic form. It is also an intensely visual construct representing the logical continuation of page poetry's journey away from orality since the advent of written language and the printing press. I argue that its form must be "seen" in this context to be understood.

Each chapter in this dissertation tests the visual limit of free verse in a different way, diving into the sort of verse and verse-adjacent material that one hopes would not be classed by Marjorie Perloff as too timid to justify its lineation. In Chapter Two, for example, I examine the early and nearly unclassifiable *vers libre* of Japanese German American poet Sadakichi Hartmann, a Whitman acquaintance and early adopter of French Symbolism whose characteristic line (and/or stanza) in his 1898 volume *Naked Ghosts* combines elements of prose poetry, lineated free verse, accentual-syllabic meter, and end rhyme into a historically misunderstood package explained as much by his interpretation of the Japanese Kanō school of painting as it is by the example of Whitman or the *vers librists*. The chapter argues that even before Imagism, Hartmann wrote free verse poems that not only included vivid imagery but functioned, in important ways, like images themselves.

Recognizing, however, that the delicate, calligraphy-like "touches" of Kanō painting infuse Hartmann's line more by analogy than they do in fact, Chapter Three investigates the groundbreaking and archly physical museum installations of Belgian poet/visual artist Marcel Broodthaers in the 1960s and early 1970s. In gallery exhibits such as *Le Corbeau et le Renard* (The Crow and the Fox) and *Marcel Broodthaers à la Deblioudebliou/S, Exposition littéraire autour de Mallarmé* (Marcel Broodthaers at the WWS, Literary Exhibition Concerning Mallarmé), as well as the series of iterative plastic plaques now known as the "Industrial Poems," Broodthaers pursued what some contemporary critics consider to be a successful form of three-dimensional poetry—a kind of material free verse juxtaposing words, objects, and images in an omnidirectional field whose segments pull variously on one another until a mutual warping occurs. Like many free verse poems, Broodthaers's installation work encourages an unbounded, multiperspectival approach to "reading" that consistently makes and breaks its own

protocols, shedding light on itself and other linguistic or cultural systems in a way that exposes what Broodthaers saw as the insufficiency of the signifier/signified chain. This chapter also examines the more recent verbal-visual poetry of American poet Philip Metres from his book *Sand Opera*, which demonstrates the applicability of Broodthaers's techniques to the sort of page poetry we usually mean when we talk about free verse.

In Chapter Four, we continue pulling back from the three-dimensional reality of the art gallery, examining another form of page poetry that is, in its way, just as committed to the omnidirectional juxtaposition of verbal and visual materials as Broodthaers. In this case, the hybrid form is contemporary American "comics poetry," with emphasis on several sections from Derik A. Badman's sequence *Colletta Suite*. It has long been conventional wisdom that free verse's loss of accentual-syllabism and rhyme obliges it to replace those lost communicative structures with others that might do similar work. Comics poetry, I argue, replaces these lost features with the now well-developed visual language of comics, emphasizing its construction in discrete "segments" (or "measures") and proceeding in a way that essentially makes it a new form of Charles Olson's "Projective Verse." This groundbreaking verbal-visual poetry may even be a version of the new dramatic poetry Olson anticipates at the end of his famous 1950 essay, an identity that would, according to Olson, give it a unique claim on "reality" both inside and outside the poem despite remaining fixed in its two-dimensional field. As I note at the end of this chapter, the projective potential of contemporary American comics poetry finds its first clear expression in 1964 and 1965 in the zine-based collaboration of New York School poets like John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, and Barbara Guest with illustrator Joe Brainard, furthering the notion that visual art has been important to new forms of free verse all along.

In each of these cases, what free verse does, positively speaking, is step into the realm of a visuality that was always there ahead of it, waiting for the linguistic elements of the prosody to catch up—the way Cubism, for instance, ran ahead of other "simultanist" forms in the work of Guillaume Apollinaire and others. Like the earliest works of free verse, these visually astute poems from the edge of poetic practice retain their capacity to surprise us, a vital consideration given that surprise is often seen as one of free verse's main prosodic features (Dobyns 55-59). By following each set of works as they run, the hope is that we may achieve enough distance from the loss of the accentual-syllabic norm to allow formally inclined writers to cease mourning, on the one hand, and pretending as though this race has not brought us somewhere concrete and actionable on the other.

CHAPTER II:

NAKED GHOSTS: THE EARLY VERS LIBRE OF SADAKICHI HARTMANN

To whom do we owe the free verse almost universally practiced by contemporary American poets? Many histories of the form, like the one suggested by Stephen Dobyns in his chapter "Notes on Free Verse" from *Best Words, Best Order*, suggest a by-now familiar cast of characters. Walt Whitman in the mid-19th century with his Bible-inspired verset, the symbolist *avant garde* in France of the 1880s and '90s with their *vers libre*, and the imagists in London with their manifestoes and anthologies of the 1910s all make appearances, and rightly so. Yet, this narrative of free verse's evolution gains its clarity only by leaving aside much else about the context in which the form evolved. Among the things too often left for another day, I would argue, are the real contributions made to free verse during its early development by little-remembered artists such as the Japanese German American poet Sadakichi Hartmann, who brought to the American practice of free verse trailblazing aesthetic theories from across both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. An exceptional figure in American art and letters, Hartmann may have been the first writer to practice and promote French Symbolism in the United States. Hartmann also helped introduce and popularize Japanese haiku and tanka form in America in essays like "The Japanese Conception of Poetry" (1904) and poems from the 1900s and 1910s. He befriended (then scandalized) Walt Whitman, was one of the first authors to write seriously about photography in Alfred Stieglitz's *Camera Notes* and *Camera Work*, penned monographs on Whistler and the history of Japanese art, cofounded Emma Goldman's anarchist magazine *Mother Earth*, drank with John Barrymore and W.C. Fields, and once acted in a Hollywood film starring Douglas Fairbanks. Yet we do not, for the most part, recall him. Why is this, and what

might the act of pulling him back into the spotlight for a time teach us about the nature of free verse in the late 1800s—after Whitman but before Imagism and outside of Gustave Kahn's *La Vogue*?

One of the chief reasons that we do not remember Hartmann has to do with racial deflection in the prevailing story of free verse. In *The Origins of Free Verse* (1996), for example, H.T. Kirby-Smith, writing on Pound's ideogram, allows that "the earliest meetings of the Poets' Club and of the Imagists" tell us that "motifs and forms from Chinese and Japanese [sources] had been eagerly discussed" (244). Yet, in the book, these Chinese and Japanese influences are rarely connected to the real people outside the Poets' Club who might have suggested them in the first place, leaving readers to infer that perhaps there were no such individuals. This omission is amplified elsewhere in *The Origins of Free Verse* by things like a list of poets writing Whitmanesque free verse, drawn for convenience's sake from the second edition of *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* (1988). In confirming the already canonized inheritors of "biblical-anaphoric free verse," Kirby-Smith effectively sidelines the idea that there might be other legitimate, non-canonical lines of influence in the generation between Whitman and the Imagists (174-75). More recent studies like Chris Beyers's *A History of Free Verse* deflect that possibility in much the same way. Despite admitting that many critics (even the Imagists) pointed to Japan as a source of free verse, Beyers quickly dissolves the importance of this admission by viewing it as a symptom of free verse's rhetorical relativity (172). The free verse line "seems Oriental because Stevens used it," Beyers writes, "just as it seems Greek when H.D. used it, and American when Williams used it" (173). Beyers claims that we have been determining free verse's qualities based more on the author using it than on qualities inherent to the verse. This is true to an extent. At the level of the individual poem, free verse is, indeed, whatever the poet has

or has not made of the form. Unfortunately, emphasizing this relativity also obscures, even further, the place of writing by authors like Hartmann in what is now American literature's most dominant poetry.

Together, these deflections sketch the edges of a peculiar blind spot in the prevailing narrative of free verse. This blind spot is the implication that nothing worth talking about on the subject comes from Asian American sources between *Leaves of Grass* and Imagism, when in fact there were multiple well-traveled free verse poets of Japanese descent alone publicly interpreting Japanese poetry, drama, painting, and printmaking in ways that were not lost on luminaries like Pound and Yeats. Dobyns's selective leaping back and forth in his account of free verse (from Whitman to Verlaine, then Whitman to Imagism) makes it easy to ignore that Hartmann knew both Whitman and Verlaine personally and shuttled between them in the U.S. and Europe as early as 1885 or 1887, depending on the account (Fowler 77). It obscures that, while doing so, Hartmann wrote free verse poetry drawing by turns on the Whitmanian line, Symbolist soundscapes, and, according to Floyd Cheung, the Japanese aesthetic concept of *mono no aware* (the transience or ephemerality of all things) long before these lineages found Ezra Pound—who also knew Hartmann and mentioned him explicitly in both *A Guide to Kulchur* and Pisan Canto LXXX (Cheung 10, 13-14). In this chapter, I aim to recover something of Hartmann's reputation and place in the sweep of free verse's development, arguing that his early, idiosyncratic approach to *vers libre* is important because it helped invest the form with Euro-American interpretations of the Japanese pictorial line (and its attendant "suggestiveness") in the decades just before Imagism would carry that mode of poetic composition to European and American audiences as a signal part of transatlantic literary modernism. This was fortunate timing, as transatlantic audiences of the day were primed to accept transpacific additions thanks

to Orientalist trends ranging from *Japonisme* to "Omar fever." The Kanō era painting he would later detail in his book on *Japanese Art* (1904) allows us to see more clearly how this verse heralded qualities soon embraced by Imagist verse and midcentury American poetry of the Pound-Williams line, while his *vers libre* in 1898's *Naked Ghosts* yields insight on his poetry's broader relation to cubist painting, an *avant garde* visual form that Hartmann wrote about as an art critic and came to value alongside his love of traditional American painting.

Carl Sadakichi Hartmann was born in 1867 on Dejima Island in Nagasaki harbor, the second son of German businessman Carl Hermann Oscar Hartmann and his Japanese wife Osada Hartmann. Following his mother's death in 1868, Hartmann's father relocated both boys to Germany, where they grew and adapted as much as possible to European society. Though this relocation was partly the work of Hartmann's mother, who asked that Sadakichi and his older brother Taru receive a Western education, it came also, and in no small part, from Osada's lack of options, having been disowned by her family two years prior for marrying a foreigner and giving birth to a biracial son (Cheung 29, Fowler 50-51). According to Hartmann, after his mother's death, these relatives had her body cremated in Kobe and, "still scandalized by her marriage to an Occidental, strewed her ashes along the dusty road for donkeys to walk over" (qtd. in Fowler 51). Too German for his Japanese relatives, Hartmann also proved too Japanese for his fellow students at the German naval academy in Kiel, which his father forced him to attend at the age of fourteen. The following year, in 1882, Hartmann's father shipped fifteen-year-old Sadakichi off even more definitively to America (Fowler 53-54). There, he lived in Pennsylvania with his granduncle's family, a "plebeian, philistine" people who, according to Hartmann in *Conversations with Walt Whitman*, owned but a single book of poems: a gold-embossed edition of Charles Warren Stoddard more for display than reading (3).

In Philadelphia, Hartmann spent most of his meager income on books, reading his way through several bookstores while virtually starving himself. At one of these stores, a Quaker acquaintance eventually suggested that he travel across the river to Camden, New Jersey, to visit the aging free verse poet Walt Whitman, who it was said liked to see “all sorts of people” (Hartmann, *Conversations* 6). In November of 1884, two years before Gustave Kahn’s French *La Vogue* began publishing the original poems and Whitman translations that would become *vers libre*, Hartmann did just that. According to Hartmann, Whitman’s frank racial identification (“You are a Japanese boy, are you not?”) was the second thing the poet remarked upon, after his acknowledgement that he was, indeed, Walt Whitman (*Conversations* 6). Whitman invited Hartman in, whereupon the pair had the first of several meetings, some later of which involved Hartmann translating Whitman’s German correspondence and newspaper write-ups. Their first discussion, Hartmann says, ended with Whitman giving him a proof of the typical Whitmanian free verse poem “After all Not to Create Only” (now “Song of the Exposition”) to peruse (8). “Read it over six or eight times and you may understand it,” Whitman challenged, somewhat condescendingly, and it is likely that Hartmann did, for he appeared in Camden on a subsequent visit with the proof “handsomely bound” (13).

Humble though it may be, this episode and others like it are worth remarking upon, for they demonstrate that neither free verse, nor Whitman, nor the poets in Whitman’s orbit sat around waiting for *La Vogue*, or Imagism, or literary modernism to get started. Free verse continued to propagate through then-contemporary social networks in the twilight of Whitman’s career, long after he had ceased being at the absolute cutting edge of English verse, though very much in recognition of the fact that the edge had once been his. While there is much to be skeptical of in Whitman’s claim to Hartmann that “There are so many traits, characteristics,

Americanisms, inborn with us, which you would never get at," and that "one can't grow roses on a peach tree," the real question about Hartmann was not whether he could grow the old rose or peach but how he might fuse the blossoming free verse models available to him (Hartmann, *Conversations* 8). According to Hartmann scholar Floyd Cheung in the introduction to his edition of Hartmann's collected poems, the question of what might result from such hybridization was partly answered when Hartmann uniquely "married [the Symbolist] poetic and philosophic stance with Whitmanian imagery and Japanese aesthetics" (13).

This marriage would begin in earnest over the next several years, during which time Hartmann made several trips back and forth from Europe, encountering firsthand the Symbolist poetry and poetics that Cheung sees in works like "Drifting Flowers of the Sea" and "Cyanogen Seas Are Surging." In Cheung's view, "Drifting Flowers" demonstrates Hartmann's Symbolist-inflected "use of an image to enable transport to an alternate state of being," while "Cyanogen Seas" indulges the Symbolist penchant for synesthesia and lush soundscapes included almost for their own sake (Cheung 11-14). Cheung is correct in this, yet it is worth emphasizing to an even greater degree than he does in his introduction that Hartmann's connection to Symbolism was not incidental. He was not introduced to the movement by a copy of Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), as W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Wallace Stevens were (Dobyns 85). Rather, Hartmann wrote Symbolist-influenced free verse, in part, because he was in Paris in the years both before and after Symons's book was published, carousing with the movement's creators and inserting himself into the more complex story of free verse's origin. He brought Symbolism back to the U.S. so early for the same reason.

In an encounter with Hollywood biographer Gene Fowler in 1940, Hartmann dated his personal connection to prominent Symbolist authors like Mallarmé and Verlaine as early as 1885

(his first trip back to Europe since being shipped off), approximately a year after his first meeting with Whitman and at a moment when their association still had months of steam left in its bellows. According to Fowler in his memoir-slash-Hartmann-biography *Minutes of the Last Meeting*, the elderly Hartmann (who may have been conflating the trip with another in 1887, or an even later one in the winter of 1892-93) would occasionally name drop to get out of answering difficult questions—as in this Bohemian gem, which mentions Mallarmé, Verlaine, and Hartmann's poetry in one fell swoop:

> "When in Paris in eighteen eighty-five," he said, "while writing my erotic poem 'Naked Ghosts,' I met Paul Verlaine for the first time at the Café François Premier. The poet was waiting to be treated to pure green absinthe, a drink he liked to take one after the other. One night when leaving Mallarmé's I met him again, and we wandered all about the strange places of Paris. The next morning, in some little restaurant on the outskirts of the city, we drank wonderful white wine as the laborers were going to work. One of the incidents that make life worth living at all." (Fowler 77)

Given this proximity to Mallarmé and Verlaine, or at least to their milieu, it is no wonder that Hartman's first book of poetry, *Poems* (published in 1889, a full decade before Symons's anthology), contained work described by Cheung as having been "inspired by Whitman and the Symbolists," for both were active, personal influences on his work at the time (30). This continued into the publication of Hartmann's second collection, *Naked Ghosts*, in 1898 (still a year before Symons), as he remained a point of connection between two of the great, early strands of the traditional free verse narrative.

Unfortunately, evidence that Hartmann's association with Whitman influenced the Symbolists is scarcer than the evidence that both Whitman and the Symbolists influenced him. When Dobyns returns to Whitman's influence on the Symbolists, it is to point out that a full French translation of *Leaves of Grass* did not appear in Europe until 1909, well after Jean Moreas's "Symbolist Manifesto" and *La Vogue's* moment of championing *vers libre* (both in 1886), and to claim that Laforgue's translations of Whitman are no proof that the good gray poet's technique actually mattered to the *vers librists* (Dobyns 86). Dobyns quotes P. Mansell Jones to conclude that Whitman's "importance for the French must not be fixed at too early a date. It would be safer to say that when the first *vers libres* were being written, the poets who knew Whitman, and they were few, were attracted mainly through the appeal made by his brusque originality to their pronounced taste for literary novelties" (qtd. in Dobyns 91). This poses something of a problem for those who might like to view even the standard tale of free verse's development as an unbroken flow of influence back and forth across the Atlantic, abetted by mutual acquaintance with Hartmann. If Whitman's praxis did not factor for the French Symbolists, then the strength of Whitman's influence on the London Imagists through *vers libre* becomes more complicated and less attributable to Hartmann, at least along this path.

Even worse, critics like Floyd Cheung believe that we cannot place as much pressure on Hartmann's biographical connection to Whitman as might be convenient, considering that Hartmann did not usually write like Whitman when he wrote free verse (though there are exceptions). How, then, are we to substantiate Allan Burns's description of Hartmann as a "missing link" in American poetry, a claim that Cheung repeats in his introduction to Hartmann's collected poetry (Burns 437, Cheung 183)? If the link were purely social, it would be important, certainly, but of less immediate consequence to the story of how free verse

technique came to be practiced in European and American circles. Where did Hartmann's free verse come from, if not Whitman, considering that he wrote so much of it so many years before it took off in English? What did he feel this new poetic technique accomplished, and how did it fit his understanding of the many other art forms he wrote about as a critic?

One compelling and little remarked upon answer to this question reaches back to Hartmann's role as a Euro-American interpreter of Japanese visual art and aesthetics—a service, dubious in some circles, that he performed for white audiences even though he could not claim experience from an adolescence in-country. In fact, according to Floyd Cheung, Hartmann could not read or speak Japanese (Cheung, "Introduction" 7) and may first have learned about Japanese poetic forms including the *haiku*, *tanka*, and *dodoitsu* from books like *In Ghostly Japan* by Anglophone scholar Lafcadio Hearn (Cheung, "Sadakichi Hartmann"). Though part of the Japanese influence on Hartmann's free verse undoubtedly came from reckoning with the form and meaning of the *haiku* in English translation, the remainder of this chapter contends that much of it may also have had to do with the influence of Japanese paintings and prints. Many such images, especially *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, had by that point been circulating throughout Europe and North America for years as part of the *Japonisme* fad that informed most Westerners' understanding of Japan. If more than a hundred years has not dulled the popularity and ubiquity of *ukiyo-e* images like Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, we can only imagine the power and novelty these images would have held for contemporaries like Pound, who drafted "In a Station of the Metro" around the time he and fellow Poet's Club members like Richard Aldington were studying *ukiyo-e* prints by Haronobu and others at Laurence Binyon's British Museum Print Room, or on Amy Lowell, who wrote *haiku* and named a volume of her poetry after *ukiyo-e* (Arrowsmith 29-36, Hakutani 33, 46, 50). In what follows, I argue toward

the notion that Kanō era painting, a precursor to *ukiyo-e*, explains something of Hartmann's willingness to adopt analogous free verse techniques, and that this work folds into larger ideas about art and the use of artistic materials across mediums that are made even clearer in his criticism of American and European painting elsewhere. This makes sense if Hartmann was compelled to actively study Japanese art, as an outsider, to write and lecture on the subject.

Strangely enough, the writing that typifies Hartmann's work in his second collection, *Naked Ghosts* (1898), includes both rhyme and identifiable meter. Far from being clear traditional verse, however, Hartmann's usual *Naked Ghosts* line (or stanza) is a nonce form always and purposefully in flux between formal poetry and free verse, making it an even newer and more vital form of *vers libre* than something like the outright free verse of "Oh, Miasmic Swamps" with its rare imitation of Whitman. Looking at two of these shifting "ghost line" poems back-to-back will strengthen our impression of Hartmann's nonce formality as a new type of free verse, while pointing to poetic hallmarks that will crystalize even more clearly elsewhere:

A Strain in Red (1882)

An eager tongue between parted lips, a garnet
glow within argent hips, the blood of roses
whose thorns pierce my heart, as I sip love's
wine over the senescent embers of art, where
ruffians scoff the hierophant's robe in fire
sunsets of dying globes. (50)

White Lady of My Desires (1892)

Sleep on and smile thy radiant smile amid

> dawn-flowers, frail and white, while naked
> ghosts kiss thy body's soul as they pass in
> their magic flight, and I stand lone and
> shivering in the white and withering night. (52)

Both poems appear exactly as they do in Cheung's *Sadakichi Hartmann: Collected Poems, 1886-1944*, awkward line breaks and all. The longer we look at them, however, the more difficult it is to ascertain their form. One reading, drawing on Hartmann's exposure to French literature, might interpret this as prose poetry descended like Rimbaud's free verse from Baudelaire. For instance, only the first letter of the first line in each poem is capitalized, suggesting grammatical subordinance and the word-wrapping qualities of prose. The sense of prose is especially powerful given that Hartmann wrote in an era that still tended to initial cap the first word of each new verse to emphasize its integrity as a poetic sub-unit. Lack of subsequent verse integrity, in this case, suggests lack of subsequent verses—as though lines 2-6 of "A Strain in Red" and lines 2-5 of "White Lady of My Desires" were all extended drop lines without the customary indentation. Meanwhile, on the right margin, these poems' tendency to split adjectives and head nouns (like the awkward "fire / sunsets" in "A Strain in Red") and place low-value words in the line's most prominent spot ("in" and "and" in lines four and five of "White Lady of My Desires") also indicate a rupturing of traditional lineation more characteristic of prose in this period than poetry. As if this were not enough, "A Strain in Red" dribbles to a close in a sixth line half as short as any other line in the piece. The premature stop implies not an intentional poetic unit equal in weight and importance to the others but, rather, a single-sentence unit that ends when it ends, as would be the case for the last line of any prose paragraph.

In perceiving the case for prose poetry, however, we may also perceive an equally persuasive formal case for intentionally lineated free verse—the integrity-retaining units of which simply eschew verse initial caps in the way of much modern and contemporary poetry. What appeared at first to be the unjustly abrupt separation of adjectives from their head nouns now, as in the case of "A Strain in Red's" "garnet / glow within argent hips," seems strataegic (1-2). What the poem separates, it separates in the name of surprise and the delicate layering of imagery typical of lyric poetry (55-59). The eager reddish tongue of the first line becomes, in a figurative leap, a small blood red jewel set within the lover's mouth, and then, on the other side of the line break, not a tongue or a jewel but a glowing sexual desire, itself set like a garnet between the lover's (or lovers') hips. Given the poem's immediate move toward "the blood of roses" at the end of line two and Hartmann's fascination with female virginity in many poems in the volume, it is likely that the hips belong to a female lover in the process of losing her virginity—though whose tongue readers are meant to imagine and what Hartmann means by "lips" remains a provocatively open question. Regardless of the gender of the actors here, however, or whether this is about kissing, oral sex, penetrative loss of virginity, or all of the above, the care Hartmann takes to stage his first figurative transformation over the first line's comma and his second over the line break cuts against the idea that this is prose poetry where the sentence wraps randomly in response to an unnecessarily restrictive page margin. The equally careful linking of alliterative hard "g," assonant "a," and near-consonant "-net / -ent" sounds (in "garnet" and "argent") also reinforces the notion of deliberate lineation here, as the triple pairing works in a reasonable way to balance (or heal) the rupture between lines which allows for this transformation.

A similar thing occurs in “White Lady of My Desires” when the book’s title, “naked / ghosts” splits across the break between lines three and four. Contemporary readers of lineated free verse would likely not bat an eyelash at this division, which leaves the poem’s focus on the lover’s moonlit body intact until the following line reveals that “naked” modifies not that body but the immaterial “ghosts” that appear to kiss this lover’s equally ephemeral “soul.” Whether accidental or purposeful, the alignment of the line break with this shift between embodied and unembodied elements generates meaning through its separation of adjective and head noun, even as it interrupts the sentence’s syntax in a way that might have been considered jarring and unusual in the 1890s.

Finally, there are the embedded formal structures arguing that this is rhymed and metered poetry—exactly the sort of thing against which many writers of free verse set their pens. Though the rhymes do not land at the end of each line, they insist upon their presence. For example, “A Strain in Red” shows a rhymed couplet structure in its most prominent sonic echoes (lips/hips, heart/art, robe/globes), often placing these rhymes at the end of syntactical units, as we might expect.

> An eager tongue between parted **lips**, a garnet
> glow within argent **hips**, the blood of roses
> whose thorns pierce my **heart**, as I sip love’s
> wine over the senescent embers of **art**, where
> ruffians scoff the hierophant’s **robe** in fire
> sunsets of dying **globes**.

There exists, also, a metrical pulse which becomes more recognizable once the rhymes are marked. The first couplet's material, rearranged into traditional poetic format, for example, clearly registers as iambic tetrameter (with a rising rhythm in the third foot):

An eager tongue between parted **lips**,	x / x / x x / x /
a garnet glow within argent **hips**	x / x / x x / x /

Though the poem breaks with this general metrical pattern in lines three and four ("as I sip love's / wine over the senescent embers of art"), the move seems more like the prototype for a jazz solo than a definitive break with the poem's verse structure. The meter stretches languidly to accommodate the speaker's savoring of love's delicately sipped wine and art's "senescent" (long-in-aging, smoldering) embers. Yet this digression ultimately folds back into the generally iambic, generally tetrameter pulse, as one might expect. Similar rhyme and meter patterns are observable in "Maiden, I Know the Sorrow" (1892).

The usual course in Hartmann criticism, for critics like Cheung, Harry Lawton, and George Knox, is to downplay these messily placed but predictable rhyming units and the existence of this audible metrical pulse. It is also to downplay the existence of free verse and prose poetic form in the work, though they all know it is there and spend the obligatory moment marking its presence. The odd simultaneity of form is never remarked upon, however, and so the possibility that Hartmann has something unique to contribute to free verse goes unobserved. This is largely because it is not Hartmann's place in the history of free verse that matters to them so much as Hartmann's early familiarity with European Symbolism and his role in helping to bring what was then a cutting-edge style of writing to America. For this purpose, Lawton and Knox find Hartmann's Symbolist dramatic cycle about world religious figures far more useful—a fact which led to their republication of Hartmann's work in *Buddha, Confucius, Christ: Three Prophetic Plays* in 1971. Of *Naked*

Ghosts, they say little, and nothing positive. Instead, their focus is on whether Hartmann was the first American Symbolist or the second:

> Hartmann's first literary efforts in the symbolist genre are a group of poems dated 1887 which make up part of a collection titled *Naked Ghosts*. Several of these prose-poems were privately printed by the author in about 1890 on a broadside of which only two or three copies exist today. Depending on priority of publication, which has yet to be determined, these poems—actually very poor poems—compete with Stuart Merrill's *Pastels in Prose* as the first published symbolist work in America. Whether Hartmann was in 1887 aware of symbolism as a movement or simply imitating tendencies he had observed in French poetry is unclear.
>
> An article "Celebrities of the Day: Sadakichi Hartmann, Art Critic," published in *Romance* (June, 1896) refers to Hartmann as "the first prophet of symbolism in America" and asserts that he was writing on this subject as early as 1887. The statement is significant for modern studies into the transmission of symbolist aesthetic doctrines to the Anglo-Saxon world. (xxiii)

In a similar vein, when Lawton and Knox mention Hartmann's "A Strain in Red," it is only to note that Hartmann dedicated it to his famous Symbolist friend, Mallarmé (xxxi).

Cheung also downplays the formal qualities that might make Hartmann's poetry relevant to discussions of free verse in his quick dismissal of any formal connection to Whitman's technique, preferring connection at the level of Whitman and Hartmann's shared use of nautical imagery. Like Lawton and Knox before him, however, Cheung moves on to treat the importance of Hartmann's Symbolism. "Whereas [Whitman's] 'As I Ebb'd' might be termed Transcendental in its monism

regarding the speaker's unity with nature," he writes, "Hartmann's 'Drifting Flowers' can be considered Symbolist in its use of an image to enable transport to an alternate state of being" (13). Cheung then transitions to discuss synesthesia in "Cyanogen Seas are Surging," a poem in which, I argue, the off-kilter crash of sonic breakers inundates, but does not drown out, the ring of couplet rhyme (emphasis mine):

> Cyanogen seas are surging over fierce
> cinnabarine **strands**, where white amazons
> are marching in the radiance of the **sands**.
>
> Oh, were my lambent love flame but like
> the surging **sea**, deluge the red of the
> desert and drown the white virgins in **me**. (59)

Cheung, likely, does not consider this poor poetry, as Lawton and Knox do. Yet his emphasis on synesthesia again promotes Symbolism at the expense of the other, overlapping forms on the page—forms that coalesce into a nonce stanza so typical of *Naked Ghosts* that we may even call it the book's normative line/stanza. Eight poems in addition to "Cyanogen Seas are Surging," including "Signs of Virginity," "Maiden, I Know the Sorrow," all four sections of "Hours of Midnight," all four sections of "Poems to Eva," "Mysterious Flirtation," "Melody in Black and White," "The Wanton Rose," and "Broken Lily," present in tercets with the first tercet's couplet rhymes socked away in the middle of line two, usually before a comma (as in "Cyanogen Seas," above). Just under half of *Naked Ghosts* invests itself in this one iteration of Hartmann's indeterminate ghost line. If we add poems that accomplish the same delicate indeterminacy with different internal rhyme schemes and stanza forms beyond the tercet, this jumps to 68% of the

book. All that remains are two noticeably Whitmanian free verse poems, two unambiguous prose poems with no overt internal rhyme, and two poems with end rhyme, one of which, “Prostitute Flowers,” is taken from Hartmann’s Symbolist drama *Christ*.

Lawton and Knox, critical of a Hartmann they felt had been “defeated in almost everything he set out to achieve—defeated by the breadth of his many interests, defeated by an inability to discipline and refine his unruly talents, defeated by his own immense vanity and stubborn arrogance, defeated by his too early precocity and far-flung erudition” (xi), could do little but conclude that Hartmann’s *Naked Ghosts* line was more evidence of “the author’s slipping back and forth from prose to *vers libre* and rhyme whenever he feels so inclined. Is Hartmann serious?” they ask—before declaring, in momentary exasperation, “Sometimes—sometimes not!” (xxxviii). In this case, however, we are in the presence of Hartmann at his most serious and deliberate. The old poet and art critic would go on to compliment American painter John Decker in terms that speak with eerie precision to this searching line from *Naked Ghosts*. In a letter dated 30 January 1944, regarding a sudden, late-in-life shift in Decker’s creative output, Hartmann wrote that “What I admire first of all is the vigorous groping for a new technique—fluency of expression and a devil-may-care nonchalance toward he medium. What I like best is the row of houses in the ghost town; the distortion and strange combination of anatomical structures . . . Yes, John Decker, you are a great painter—if you can keep it up” (qtd. in Fowler 239). This certainly rings a bell regarding the “strange combination of anatomical structures” in Hartmann’s *vers libre*.

This emphasis on visual art in writing cannot be understated: art criticism was a considerable portion of Hartmann’s literary output, and his skill in the field was well established. Hartmann wrote important professional criticism of early art photography under his own name

and the pen name "Sidney Allen" and was, in this capacity, both a member the Alfred Stieglitz circle in New York and a frequent contributor to Stieglitz's groundbreaking photography journals *Camera Notes* and *Camera Work*. Hartmann knew Stieglitz's Photo Secessionist group well enough in 1903 to author the satirical poem "A Monologue," in which a fellow circle member, the painter and photographer Edward Steichen, utters a mock version of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy about whether it is better to paint or photograph. After considering the merits of each, Hartmann has Steichen declare:

> Photography turned painting ;
> Paintographs or photopaints ; a sad plight,
> Which makes me rather bear (at times) the painter's ills
> Than turn entirely [photo] secessionist.
> Thus prudence makes chameleons of us all ;
> And thus my native store of 'faky' talents
> Is sicklied o'er with scarcity of tricks (175-6)

The mock monologue takes place, per Hartmann's stage directions, on "*Fifth Avenue, between Thirtieth and Thirty-first Streets*," the location of Stieglitz's famous 291 art gallery, sometimes referred to as the Photo Secession gallery, and Hartmann has "*Hamlet-Steichen*" enter "*wearing a Japanese obi* [sash] *as a necktie*" (175). The Japanese obi has little to do with Steichen, however, and everything to do with Hartmann, who ventriloquizes his own ideas and the difficulty he had inhabiting Japanese culture through Hamlet-Steichen. Together, we might take these ideas as a vivid statement that "prudence," not sloppiness, is what compels someone like Hartmann to wear many skins in public life: a kimono to lecture on Japanese topics and a suit in situations requiring a greater show of Western assimilation, for example (Cheung 7, Lerman-Tan

9). The prudence that makes it unwise for Hamlet-Steichen-Hartmann to take sides between painting and photography also makes it unwise to choose just one form of poetic lineation in *Naked Ghosts*, which Hartmann published an expanded edition of in 1903, the year he wrote "A Monologue." Like the Yoshiwara pleasure-seekers in *ukiyo-e* art, Hartmann and his poetry had their feet planted in multiple worlds because there was nowhere and no way else for a German Japanese American transplant to stand. This poem also introduces us to Hartmann's belief in an equivalence between different forms of artistic media that is characteristic of his art criticism.

"A Monologue's" 1903 origin pins it to a date just ahead of one of the busiest years in Hartmann's career as a writer. According to Cheung, 1904 saw publication of a major collection of Hartmann's poetry, *Drifting Flowers of the Sea*; his influential essay on *haiku*, "The Japanese Conception of Poetry"; and his monograph on the history of *Japanese Art*. In the latter, Hartmann wrote that his "sole aim was to show what the leading schools and their foremost exponents," including those of the Kanō school, "have actually accomplished, with particular stress on those of their accomplishments which appeal most strongly to our Western sense of æsthetics, and to also give the layman an opportunity of coming into touch with the infinite variety and grace of Japanese pictorialism" (vii). This trans-Pacific art influence, which would have been building in Hartmann for years leading up to the actual publication of *Japanese Art*, retroactively explains his approach to free verse in *Naked Ghosts* while providing a window into his understanding of the way this technique bridged the trans-Atlantic visual art influences that drove other *avant garde* literary styles in Europe and America.

Historically speaking, the influence that Japanese and Euro-American forms of art had on one another was reciprocal. Late in *Japanese Art*, for example, Hartmann demonstrates an awareness of the way Western artistic styles influenced the linework of various Japanese artists,

and how, in turn, Japanese visual art came to influence groundbreaking European artists like Whistler, Manet, Degas, and Monet:

> Everybody seemed surprised at the variety and richness of these "novelties ;" even the faults in perspective and modeling enchanted the enthusiasts, as a protest against the too rigid rules exacted in Western art. A perfect furor for everything Japanese swept over European countries ; Paris in particular went mad with Japomania. There was hardly a house in the Monceau Park district, which had not furnished some rooms with Japanese lacquer-work, bronzes, and tapestries. (158-59).

It is possible that Hartmann speaks from personal experience about Monceau Park and similar homes, having visited Europe and floated through a great many London, Parisian, and other salons in 1885, 1887, and 1892 (roughly the time he would have been composing poetry for *Naked Ghosts*). However, even at the level of general observation, his comments are perceptive. As *Japanese Art* is quick to point out, the European public's introduction to Japanese art dated from many years earlier, beginning with the art collecting habits of Louis XIV and exploding after public exhibits like the London exposition of 1862, the Paris Exposition of 1867, and the Vienna *Weltausstellung* of 1875 (154-57). Hartmann notes that the expositions in Paris and Vienna even had the backing of the Japanese Satsuma government, which at first "yielded up its ancient treasures with a readiness which was afterward repented of" (157-58). The European cultural market was thus glutted with examples of Japanese visual culture during this period, to such an extent that Amy Lowell's free verse in *Pictures of the Floating World* seems less a miracle of creative cross-pollination than a frank acknowledgement that *Japonisme* had already gripped Western visual culture for decades by the time her book was published in 1919.

The case was similar for American painters of the day, many of whom Hartmann knew socially and wrote about in publications including his own *The Art Critic* (1893-94) and *Art News* (1897). These painters, too, had already absorbed a great deal of Japanese art, a fact that could not have escaped Hartmann as he visited their studios gathering material for his writing. Returning to Boston after an eventful 1892-93 trip to Paris, for example (one that included visits to Mallarmé's salon, encounters with Symbolist poets Gustave Kahn and Jules Laforgue, and meetings with Japan-inspired painters J.A.M. Whistler and Claude Monet), Hartmann traveled up and down the Atlantic coast collecting subscribers for *The Art Critic*, eventually acquiring commitments from seven-hundred and fifty artists representing a murderer's row of American art talent. According to Jane Calhoun Weaver, editor of *Sadakichi Hartmann: Critical Modernist*, a collection of Hartmann's art writing, this list included "many of the best known artists in the United States: Albert Bierstadt, William Merritt Chase, August St. Gaudens, Childe Hassam, Thomas Dewing, Albert Pinkham Ryder, George Inness," and the famed Orientalist critic, collector, and promoter of traditional Japanese art, "museum curator Ernest Fenollosa from Boston" (2). Add to this Hartmann's association with personalities like John La Farge (1835-1910), "a distinguished American [stained glass] artist whose travel tales of Japan captivated the art public . . . [and] were of special importance in the growing emphasis on oriental art (especially in Boston)," and there can be little doubt that Hartmann knew a great deal about Japanese painting prior to the publication of *Naked Ghosts* in 1898 (Weaver 19). By October of 1895, Hartmann was ready to claim that Japanese art had, "in recent decades . . . taken the place occupied at the beginning of this century by Grecian and Roman art," a bold point of view on the tectonic shifts he saw occurring in the field of American painting. "If our artists believe in Japanese art," he advised, clearly believing that they did, "they should also endeavor to

understand its spirit and not be so shortsighted as to overlook the causes of its rigid laws" (qtd. in Weaver 250). *Japanese Art*, published a little less than a decade later, is an attempt to practice what Hartmann had already been preaching as one of the most notable American art critics of the 1890s.

What *Japanese Art* might have to say about Hartmann's ghost line, however, develops by degrees in the book's history of painting schools and styles. In his discussion of the Kanō school of Japanese painting (ca. 1400-1750), for example, Hartmann writes about the "line" of artists like Saitoshy as a thing of calligraphic dexterity congenial to Japanese artists as an outgrowth of their linguistic script and the tools with which children were traditionally taught to write it:

> The child, learning to write, draws these pictorial signs with a brush, holding the paper, which is absorbent, in his hand. Thus, the whole arm works, motion being got from the shoulder, the elbow, and the wrist alike. One can readily imagine what influence this method of writing has in fostering the power of a child to seize the outlines of natural form. It learns unconsciously to draw with a free hand. Our [American and European] children learn to write with a hard pen or pencil ; and with the same hard point they make their first attempts at drawing. The young art student suddenly finds a yielding brush placed in his hand. No wonder that he is awkward, and in its manipulation absolutely incapable of competing with a Japanese, who already as a child has learnt the value of touches. (61-62).

While the imaginary Japanese child, here, is not naturally more predestined toward linear dexterity and nuance than children elsewhere, a combination of historical, linguistic, and material factors combined, Hartmann felt, to make Japanese artists and writers particularly responsive to the management of contours—which, given the nature of ink bleed on absorbent paper and the flexibility of the brush, are more organic than schematic. According to Hartmann, Japanese children paint and write with a "free hand," understanding the value of momentary "touches." This sounds like the beginning of a description of free verse as an act of embodied poetics "in which the whole arm works" to produce a line that expresses its content in a manner unavoidably unique to the artist. In fact, it hews quite close to one of the primary claims about free verse made by later writers like Dobyns: in this case that "free verse develops out of the idea of organic form—that the true poet's rhythms are always personal—an idea that we have seen evolve from Coleridge, through Whitman and the French Symbolists and wind up a Pound's idea of absolute rhythm. The extreme effect," Dobyns says, "is to make a different prosody for every poet," or a different line, in this case, for each Japanese artist handling a brush (Dobyns 105). Hartmann reinforces this when he writes about the painter Kanō Masanobu (fig. 1), holding that

Figure 1. Kanō, Masanobu. *Plum Tree and Waterfowl*. Early 16th century. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/845133.

"there is no doubt that, without the Chinese influence, that vigour of lines, that spontaneity of touch, which reveals the painter more plainly than the object painted, . . . would have been dwarfed in the Japanese painter" (Hartmann, *Japanese Art* 71-72). This is as true of poetry as it is visual art, a connection Hartmann encourages in this part of the Kanō chapter by referring to *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, then available to English speakers in an incredibly popular (and freely translated) version by Edward Fitzgerald from 1859 (72).

Hartmann goes on in the chapter to describe other noteworthy artists of the Kanō era, including Ogata Kōrin (1661-1716), who studied with Kanō practitioners before blending that school's influence with Rinpa nature abstraction, painting around the time of Bashō in a manner similar to a modern free verse poet (fig. 2-3). Kōrin, Hartmann writes, "was one of the first to break away from the classical ideals. There was about him not a trace of arbitrary rules or traditions. Whatever he imagined he produced immediately in a wild improvisatore fashion without troubling himself how it was done, as long as it produced an effect" (96). Hartmann notes that Kōrin was also a skilled lacquerer, a distinction which caused him to conclude that Kōrin was best "classed in the list of those eccentric geniuses who, by the very excess of their individuality, fail to put their real talent at its full value" (97).

These comments are of interest to students of Hartmann's work for several reasons. First is the eerie sense in which Hartmann's comment about the undervaluation of "eccentric genius" seems not just a description of Kōrin but of himself. *Japanese Art's* 1904 publication date places its composition very close to that of the Hamlet-Steichen poem "A Monologue," in which

Hartmann identifies himself as an artist with a similar store of talents, later undervalued (or deemed "faky") by critics like Lawton and Knox due, in part, to their variety. However,

Figure 2. Ogata, Kōrin. *Rough Waves*. 1704-1709. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/Search/44918.

Hartmann's descriptions of Kōrin also resonate in literary-historical ways with the practice of certain modernist poets in the first half of the twentieth century. Kōrin's turn away from what were then the classical ideals of Japanese painting resonates, for instance, with the modernist free verse poet's turn away from classical poetic models, as for example when W. C. Williams turned from the sonnet in his 1948 essay "The Poem as a Field of Action" (281). It also shares a great

deal with Pound's dictum to "make it new" as interpreted by Charles Olson's concepts of "proprioception" and "projective verse," in which sensory detail and impulse, taken in at the fingers and sent by nerves to the brain, ideally travel back out the hand again, into the typewritten page, with minimal mental interference (Olson, "Projective Verse" 240, 246, "Human Universe" 160-61). "From the moment he enters into FIELD COMPOSITION—puts himself in the open—he can go by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself. Then he has to behave, and be, instant by instant, aware of some several forces just now being examined," Olson says at one point, referring to the act of typewriter composition almost as though he were a painter bringing all his muscle memory to bear on in-the-moment, organicist touches (240).

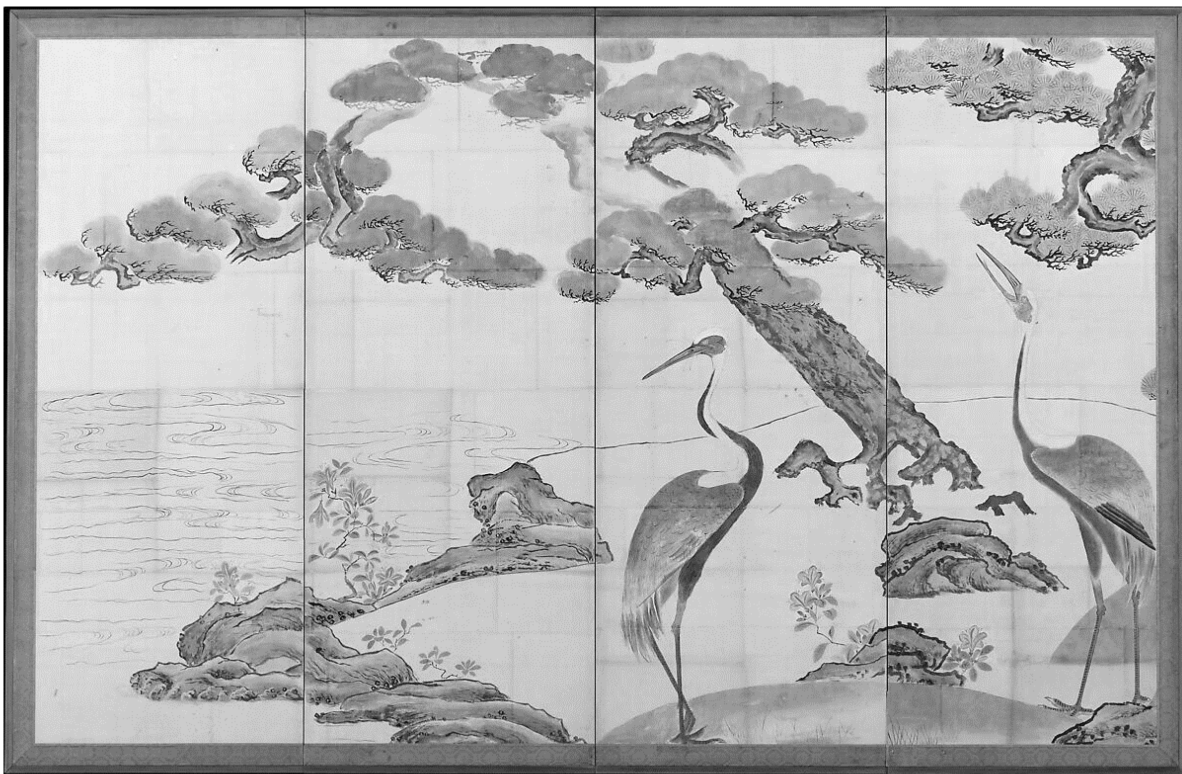


Figure 3. Ogata, Kōrin. *Cranes, Pines, and Bamboo [Right Screen]*. Early 18th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/44896. The floating elements and texture of the mark making in some ways anticipate Charles Olson's theory of "projective verse."

Hartmann continues to establish links between painters and poets in subsequent treatment of the later, Kanō-adjacent Shijō painter Maruyama Ōkyo (1733-1795), "a great stickler for truth, [who] resolved to paint directly from nature, without trying to embellish his work. But he could not escape his genius," Hartmann writes. "[H]e was a poet by nature, and his interpretations became poetical even against his will" (97). Though Hartmann criticizes Ōkyo for a failure to "represent the inner life, or profound character of the subjects" he produced, he nonetheless praises Ōkyo's "naturalness of attitude," (97) a nod to the increasing influence of Western realism in Japanese art (in this case Ōkyo's attempts to imitate Dutch engraving) (105). This increased "naturalness" links Ōkyo, however obliquely, with the similar surge in arguments about the importance of natural as opposed to high poetic diction put forward by American poets like Williams in his emphasis on authentic American dialect and, before him, William Wordsworth in his "Preface" to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, a work released just five years after Ōkyo's death. What Ōkyo blended, Hartmann reimported to America and Europe via art criticism. Artistic imports like Ōkyo's are valuable to our understanding of free verse as they provide additional historical and aesthetic context for the "verisimilitude" critics like Dobyns feel to be another essential quality of that poetry (106).

Though it may, at first, be difficult to see what Japanese visual art of the Kanō school might have to do with modern free verse poetry in Europe and America, between them these visual and poetic forms produced a kind of artistic and cultural nexus—a transpacific line of aesthetic influence available to Hartmann in his role as an artistic interpreter that came to influence not only European visual art but European and American free verse of the post-Whitmanian variety as well. From the Kanō school's emphasis on a calligraphic line of subtle "touches," free verse inherited a visual analogy for the organic subtleties of the nonmetrical line.

For Hartmann, however, this connection between the line in painting and the line in writing went well beyond analogy to operate in the manner of a fully transferrable, transmedial fact. In an unpublished manuscript circa 1940 titled “A Contrubution to the Technique of Draughtsmanship: The Relation of Drawing to Handwriting,” for instance, Hartmann returns to the notion of calligraphic Japanese brush work discussed above, to the point of reproducing his paragraph comparing Japanese students’ use of the brush to Western students’ use of the pencil (Weaver 222). While much of the essay is an unconvincing attempt to adapt Fenollosa’s flawed argument in “The Chinese Written Chracter as a Medium for Poetry” to Japanese, other portions of the work are less Orientalist in nature and perhaps more persuasive with regard to Hartmann’s view of the overlap between verbal and visual lineation. Reproducing, “a fragment of a [modern American] fashion page illustration,” Hartmann focuses on the artist’s rendering of two women’s high heeled shoes, the profiles of which the artist had drawn in similar fashion, with cursory little flourishes that belied the complexity of the object (fig. 4) (Weaver 224). “Shoes are always diffiicult to draw,” Hartmann writes. “In this case the illustrators used the fewest lines possible and almost made unconsciously an imitation of ‘sign’ writing. If he was versed in that kind of thing it would be no conquest, or difficulty overcome, but just the opposite: a technical device that could be expressed with nonchalant ease . . . two or three ordinary touches like lines of a

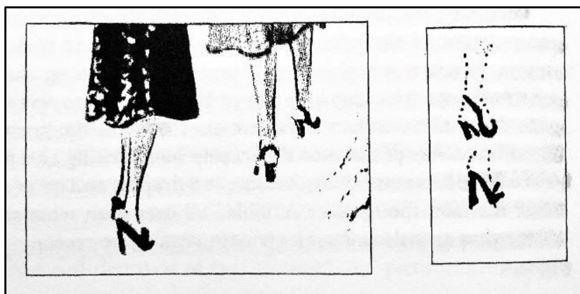


Figure 4. Fragment of a modern American fashion page with iconic, script-like marks in place of shoes.

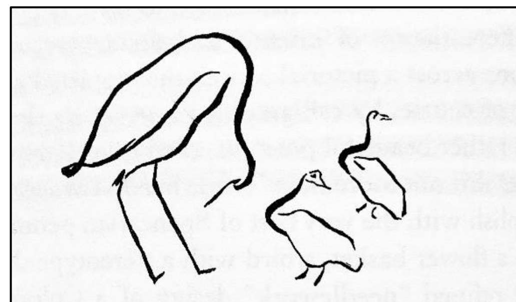


Figure 5. Saitoshi. “Crane and Geese,” demonstrating his calligraphic line. Note the script-like goose necks.

letter" (Weaver 225). Hartmann's implication is not simply that "Japanese writing is itself a sort of painting," a notion he felt confirmed by Japan's reverence for "*scription*, [or] individual expert handwriting" on the order of brushed calligraphy, and the related work of Saitoshi (fig. 5) (Weaver 222-23). It is that every writer "draws syllables" or syllable-like objects, and that every painter essentially writes their way across the canvas mark/letter/line by mark/letter/line. In this way, a visual shortcut like the high heel icon (or Saitoshi's goose neck), which took "conscious effort at the start," might "become just as intuitive" or "instinctive" a way of writing *high heel* as any abstract linguitic script (Weaver 225-26). We do not need to agree with Hartmann's explanation of the way national character folds into all of this to acknowledge the provocative, generative way that he, like Ōkyo and others, equates the language and lineation of poetry to that of visual art (fig. 6). Hartmann is exactly the sort of writer who would have seen his free verse in *Naked Ghosts*, whether before or after the fact, as a style of painterly brushwork.

Figure 6. Maruyama, Ōkyo. *Eight Views of Xiao and Xiang Rivers*. Late 18th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/44899. Eight-panel screen, poems and ink wash painting in the style of calligrapher Shōkadō Shōjō over Ōkyo's grasses. Linking calligraphy, poetry, and painting was not original to Hartmann.

Hartmann's arguments a bit deeper into *Japanese Art* are also worth reproducing for the way they sometimes sound like the rhetoric of free verse casting off the old, moribund traditions of European classicism in favor of new, modernist values. Of Japanese visual art's "unlimited suggestiveness," Hartmann says:

> It came at the right time. Too much philosophy had been written in Europe : everything, from the most commonplace to the most sublime, had been collected, catalogued, commented upon, raked up merely for the sake of raking up barren knowledge. It now became necessary to remove the dust and cobwebs that had settled on it, and infuse new life by purifying, remodelling and developing that heap of knowledge. And what could accomplish this better than Japanese art? Its influence was everywhere felt. It called forth, for instance, the short story literature, in which Andersen, Turgenjew, Verga, and the modern French and Scandinavian writers are masters,—a tendency toward brevity and conciseness of expression, which suggests a good deal more than it actually tells. Its law of repetition with slight variation, we can trace in Poe's poems, the work of the French symbolists, and, above all else, in the writings of Maurice Maeterlinck, that quaint combination of Greek, mediæval, and Japanese art reminiscences.
>
> Its influence is also palpable in the descriptive music of to-day, in the composition of the Neo-Wagnerian school, which prefers tonal impressions to theoretic development, and does away with the finished forms of classic masters, with conscientious treatment of counterpoint, graceful codas dying away in clear sounds, or pedal notes with correct harmony. The younger composers, affecting grotesqueness, which is natural to the Japanese, endeavour to surprise their

> listeners by introducing a dissonant interval when a consonant interval is most expected, or breaking a phrase which is supposed to end in an easily eligible cadence, in the midst of a bar. Polyphony calls attention to four or five different sides at once, an impression such as one received looking at a Japanese colour print, in which half a dozen different colours strike the retina simultaneously. (160-62)

This portion of the chapter does not address the importance of Japanese visual art's influence on American and European visual art but, rather, as we now expect from Hartmann, its influence on Western literature and music as it "infus[ed] new life by purifying, remodelling and developing that heap of knowledge" which had previously expressed itself in lengthier, "philosophical" (or didactic) Western forms like the full-length novel and scholarly criticism. This infusion of *élan vital*, Hartmann says, prompted the more circumspect short story work of 19th Century writers such as Hans Christian Andersen in Denmark, Ivan Tergenev in Russia, and Giovanni Verga in Italy, among others. The Japanese visual art rationale that informs the short story's notelike brevity also echoes Hartmann's earlier claims about the place of Japanese art in the home and that art's general resistance to framing, either within the composition or as a matter of decoration. "The Japanese," he says, essentializing again,

> never uses solid, elevated "boundary lines" to isolate his picture, but, on the contrary, tries to make his picture merely a note of superior interest in perfect harmony with the rest of the kakemono [silk painting], which, again, is in perfect harmony with the wall in which it is placed. He simply uses strips of beautifully patterned cloth to set off the picture, and endeavours to accentuate its lines and colour notes by the mounting and the momentary environments, for the Japanese

> does not understand our way of hanging pictures in inadequate surroundings. He subordinates everything to his inherent ideas of harmony. (44-45).

This lack of framing is one of the features which makes painted Japanese scenes seem to "float" in empty space. Hartmann scoffs at calling such painting "decorative," a term which would imply that the art was meant to show off the home in which it hung, rather than the other way around, which he felt was more characteristic of the way Kanō school paintings and others were displayed (45-46). The analogy to interior design is archly relevant. Rather than assuming a secondary position, as a scene decorating the larger and more important mansion of a Russian novel (or as a picture decorating a house), the vignette of the short story assumes primary importance, reversing the paradigm. Given only the "note of superior interest," the reader must extrapolate outward from that point, constructing a kind of phantom home from the dictates of the perfect moment. In this way, Hartmann believed, the Japanese painting "suggests more than it actually tells." What sort of room, for example, might the brocaded gold and blue mounting of Masanobu's *Plum Tree and Waterfowl* (viewable on The Met's website) suggest, even if it does not tell us directly—and how might similar questions play out in other media?

Just as the short story is a briefer, more concise, more purified "note of superior interest" compared to the novel, the poem for Hartmann is a briefer, more concise, more purified version of the short story, though with the same reverse decorative impulses at play. The reverse decorative impulse applies even more powerfully to free verse than traditional rhymed and metered poetry, however, as free verse's organicism leaves it no choice but to construct its formal abode from content, reversing the temptation to let content decorate, say, the august literary edifice of the sonnet. This is as true of Hartmann's rhymed, quasi-metered ghost line poetry as it is of the wildly projective poems Pound-Williams descendants would come to write,

and it is one powerful reason for considering Hartmann's *Naked Ghosts* work not just *vers libre* but free verse in full. The work is free because of its formal ambiguity rather than despite it.

Take, for example, Hartmann's poem "Maiden, I Know the Sorrow," again from *Naked Ghosts*, in which I have marked the embedded rhymes:

> Maiden, I know the sorrow that haunts thee
> with sleepless **nights**, when thy midnight life is
> illumined with imagination's vagrom **lights**.
>
> Thy gentle dream of desire woos a flower
> among the **dead**, Lord Byron, thy phantom lover,
> strews roses, red with fire, upon thy lonesome **bed**.
>
> And rain pearls dim with passion anoint thy
> throbbing **breast**, thy virgin dream of beauty sounds
> the song of danaidel **unrest**.

This poem once again presents all the hallmarks of Hartmann's normative *Naked Ghosts* line (or stanza). Both the verse paragraph indentations and the presence of low-value words like "is" and "thy" at the ends of lines two and seven mark the piece as prose poetry—which, if Hartmann's description of the purification-through-brevity holds up, makes "Maiden, I Know the Sorrow" an even purer, poetic version of the theme that runs also through Sherwood Anderson's short story "Adventure" from *Winesburg, Ohio*. The context that makes the Anderson different, most notably Alice Hindman's youthful loss of virginity to a local newspaperman and despair at finding love once he leaves, boils away in Hartmann's poem, leaving the poet's virginal proto-

Alice to float alone, also on her bed, thinking of her more idealized phantom lover, Byron (Anderson 59-64).

At the same time, Hartmann's line endings intensify "surprise" as a prosodic feature and often terminate the line in ways that are syntactically pat (with or without rhyme), suggesting the presence of lineated verse. This feature is clearest in the poem's second stanza, where the dream of desire seen as a beautiful flower turns suddenly, after the break, into the deceased Lord Byron—one dead man blooming in a field of dead men (lines 4-5). Line five, meanwhile, neatly separates "Lord Byron, thy phantom lover," the subject of the stanza's latter half, from its complete predicate after the break:

. . . Lord Byron, thy phantom lover,

strews roses, red with fire, upon thy lonesome bed. (5-6).

Finally, rhymed and metered poetics show themselves in an ABCB quatrain on the order of hymnal verse. Heard this way, the final stanza (or prose sentence, depending) breaks neatly into four lines:

And rain pearls dim with passion	x / x / x / x
Anoint thy throbbing **breast**,	x / x / x /
Thy virgin dream of beauty sounds	x / x / x / x /
The song of danaidel **unrest**.	x / x x / x x /

The rhythmic discomfort of the final line is warranted by its alignment with the adjective "danaidel," after the Danaids, the Greek water nymph sisters of myth, forty-nine of whom slew their freshly minted cousin/husbands on their wedding night rather than consummate their relationships and were condemned to forever fill a leaky cauldron in the afterlife. The French sculptor Auguste Rodin had created a sculpture of one of the Danaids face down in anguish,

partially merged with her marble plinth, for his *Gates of Hell* series in 1888. Publicly displayed in Paris in 1890, Hartmann may have known the work and been referring to it in this 1892 poem, which corresponds with his third major European visit.

Lawton and Knox felt that the parts of this poem projecting lineated free verse and rhymed/metered poetry were weaknesses in Hartmann's technique: evidence of how he slid back and forth between forms in a sloppy, undisciplined way. But again, the three things are so well balanced with one another that it seems more likely that this is a verse example of Hartmann "remodelling and developing that heap of [formal] knowledge" he had been left with by generations of prose writers and traditional English poets, as well as Whitman and the French Symbolists. Indeed, it "suggests more than it actually tells" since the combination of all three verse forms into a composite that is actively all and neither leaves the whole greater than the sum of its parts. Put another way, poems like "Maiden, I Know the Sorrow" do not fit neatly in any room of the poetic mansion that might have been made up to receive them. Instead, they project themselves outward, forming a new, organically concrete but definitionally hazy poetic abode—just as Hartmann claimed the floating-edged but otherwise perfect "notes" of the painted Japanese scene had been doing for centuries.

Hartmann continues in the same vein later in the excerpt, writing that in contemporary music, "Polyphony calls attention to four or five different sides at once, an impression such as one receive[s] looking at a Japanese colour print, in which half a dozen different colours strike the retina simultaneously" (162). This visual way of talking about music is suggestive, summoning up comparisons to Amy Lowell's polyphonic prose, the multiperspectival approach of cubism (still two years away when *Japanese Art* was published in 1904), and subsequent notions of "simultanism" familiar to readers of modernist poems like Guillaume Apollinaire's

"Voyage," which according to Willard Bohn "juxtaposed the poet's visual perceptions . . . to form a psycho-visual collage" analogous to the Cubist / Futurist *quatrième dimension* (45).

All that these artists and authors did later, Hartmann did first with reference to Japanese Kanō painting, creating an early form of free verse poetry that incorporated this art's values without falling prey to "the valueless production of an excellent" but ultimately sterile "imitation" (*Japanese Art* 173). In the end, what Hartmann may have wanted from Kanō painting and from *Japanese Art* was simply "to enrich his own style by borrowing certain qualities" from this source—but not to adopt the aesthetic completely "for [complete] adoption is utterly impossible" both in art and life (173). In the introduction to *My Rubaiyat* (1913), Hartmann maintained, similarly, that his poetic lines "have one quality which is generally overlooked. They possess pictorial harmony," he claimed. "My long association with art makes me not only see but think things in pictures" (93). This is Hartmann at his most direct about a visual line of influence that many scholars have ignored in his *vers libre*, but which takes on added significance when we factor it into his wider views on modernist painting—which he wrote about more and more frequently as small exhibitions at Stieglitz's gallery and larger ones like the New York Armory Show (also in 1913) demanded his attention as a critic.

The "suggestivism" that Hartmann sees in Kanō era painting is an apt point of entry into this wider discussion, as it is a key critical term not only in 1904's *Japanese Art* but Hartmann's contemporaneous discussion of American painting in *A History of American Art* (1902) as well. In this two-volume work stitching together writing done for other publications, Hartmann marked the presence of a suggestive, distinctly Orientalized form of beauty in the work of "New School" American painters such as Thomas Dewing, Pinkham Ryder, Arthur B. Davies, John Twachman, Childe Hassam, and Whistler, among others (Weaver 25-26, 28). Their incorporation

of this quality marked what Hartmann saw as a sea change in American painting, a move away from the Western realist tradition of past masters like Winslow Homer into territory we might now recognize as a precursor to modernism. If Hartmann desired a symbolist poetry that "adhered to the dreamlike metaphorical approach of painters who adapted new techniques of painting to produce the suggestive style," a poetry featuring modernist "ambiguity of intention [where] image is the immediate message," as Weaver writes, then Hartmann's evaluation of suggestivism in Kanō and New School American painting is the nexus within which that desire grew (28-29). The new American poet would merge William Merrit Chase's use of techniques from "all the European masters" with John Twachman's impulse to "invent his own" impressionism, and like William Davies introduce a "psychological interpretation of love, maternity, and childhood in ways so individual as to be 'absolutely meaningless' to all except the artist" (Weaver 31). From this notion of psychological interpretation, it is but a short step to the painterly, "ultra-individualist" free verse of Hartmann's *Naked Ghosts*, which did seem meaningless to later critics, and to the organic ultra-individuality of modern and contemporary free verse more generally. If suggestive art was, as Hartmann claimed, the American strain of symbolism, then his suggestive bending of French *vers libre* into an even stranger American free verse prosody was an early application of symbolism as worthy of comment as the soundscape of "Cyanogen Seas" (Weaver 31). This would have been especially true for an author like Hartmann, who often conflated poetry with painting and painting with photography in his criticism.

Thanks to Hartmann's extensive art writing, we may be even more specific than this about the purpose of the free verse line/stanza in *Naked Ghosts*. For such explanation, however, we must venture beyond Kanō painting and even the New School of American painters to

consider Hartmann's view of European cubism. In a 1914 *Reedy's Mirror* article titled "The Esthetic Value of Cubism" (initially submitted to Stieglitz in 1913 following the New York Armory Show), Hartmann makes sense of Picasso, Braque, and Duchamp's new style by claiming that that both cubism and impressionism have the same goal, though they emphasize different things. Weaver, summarizing Hartmann, writes that "while the impressionists, translating nature by means of a scientific method, sought to paint the sensations they received from color, the cubists were seeking to 'take the same liberty' with form" (Weaver 40; Hartmann, "Esthetic Value" 218). Echoing his comment from *Japanese Art* about the effect of multiple hues striking the viewer's retina, Hartmann wrote further that he considered cubism "the development of a thought or actual motion, by a medium that bars motion . . . to produce a mentally perceived unit from its actual compounds, not unlike the several colors which call forth a tone of reflection which in turn becomes the dominating one" (qtd. in Weaver 41). In this respect, cubism was of an accord with the more traditional painting of American artists like Marsden Hartley, who accomplished texture (a prime indicator of individuality for Hartmann) and movement in his still medium by leaning into "the plastic aspects of color" application and brushwork (Weaver 41). Whereas the Old Masters of realist painting strove for a smooth "illusion" of reality uninterrupted by the distraction of their actual technique, "the main object of the impressionist," and by extension the cubist (and thus the painterly free verse writer), was "to create an impression by suggestion," for which "he asks assistance from the very medium he employs . . . to help physically . . . construct the image in the eye" (qtd. in Weaver 41). The suggestiveness of pictorial sign writing and use of the poetic medium to create verbal-visual textures from a variety of angles, for example, is certainly part of what is on display in

Hartmann's much later "'Typewriter Designing' for Wistaria" (1931) (fig. 7), which approaches his subject as both word art and free verse poetry.

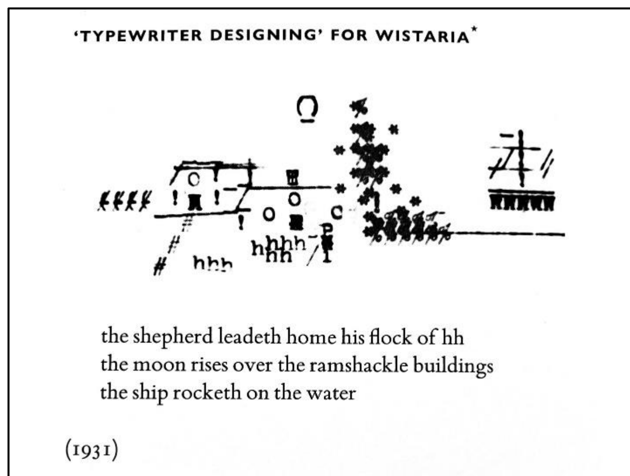


Figure 7. Hartmann, Sadakichi. "'Typewriter Designing' for Wistaria." *Sadakichi Hartmann: Collected Poems, 1886-1944*, edited by Floyd Cheung, Little Island, 2016, pp. 180. From the holdings of Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside. An example of Hartmann "painting" with the physical aspects of his language.

In her introduction, Weaver marvels that Hartmann was able to come to these conclusions so early in cubism's critical history, well before most commentors of the day. Reading this evaluation backward into Hartmann's nearly unclassifiable free verse technique from *Naked Ghosts*, however, one gets the sense that Hartmann was able to come to these conclusions so quickly because he was already there with his modernist free verse, painting Kanō-inflected impressionist and/or symbolist poetry not just with color and sound but with the all the formal features available to poetry as a still medium. Poetically speaking, Hartmann was a cubist decades before cubism existed, a poet reaching after what we may safely assume were the same art references that helped Picasso, Braque, and Duchamp become what they became. Like Marsden Hartley, Hartmann accomplished this visual-poetic feat by highlighting the plastic, highly visible, even jagged qualities of free verse form, denying the polished surfaces of the Old Poetic Masters even as he continued, like William Merrit Chase, to use their techniques of meter and rhyme as one element in his ultra-individualist texturing. "Through his sensitive eye," Weaver concludes, "Hartmann seems finally to accept the new painting as an extension of the painterly tradition that he loved for so long, even while regretting the loss of the 'older arts that, alas, are ingrained an inch deep in all of us'" (42). The "mentally

perceived unit" produced from *Naked Ghosts's* "actual compounds" may therefore be viewed as a painterly renegotiation of the book's free verse measure—something like William Carlos Williams's "new way of [poetic] measuring . . . commensurate with the social, economic," or in this case artistic "world in which we are living" (283). By association, we might also say that Hartmann's "nearly unclassifiable approach to *vers libre*," or "ghost line" as I have called it, is his own much earlier version of Williams's "variable foot," a concept that also looks back toward meter and forward toward free verse, and which in Hartmann's case deserves more attention from scholars than it has received.

Admittedly, paying this sort of attention to Hartmann's poetry faces headwinds, not just because Hartmann's poetry has been treated dismissively in the past but because opinions differ on how to respond to his penchant for Orientalist thinking. Despite Hartmann's inclusion in important anthologies such as David Hsin-Fu Wand's *Asian-American Heritage* (1974) and Juliana Chang's *Quiet Fire* (1998), equally important voices within the field of Asian American literature have sometimes opposed the notion that it is positive to dwell on him at length. Perhaps the most famous claim along these lines comes from the editors of the groundbreaking Asian American literature anthology *Aiiieeeee!* who wrote that Hartmann and fellow authors Yone Noguchi, Lin Yutang, and C. Y. Lee "said nothing about Asian America, because, in fact, these writers weren't Asian-Americans but Americanized Asians" (Chin et al. xv). The first real work of Asian American writing, they argue, did not arrive until 1946, in the form of Mine Okubo's *Citizen 13660*, after which flowed a growing stream of credibly Asian American work including Toshio Mori's *Yokohama, California* in 1949. Hartmann's poetry, by contrast, succeeded only in establishing "the tradition of Japanese-American verse as being quaint and foreign in English"—

a negative assessment also among the reasons that we do not remember Hartmann very well today (xv).

On the surface, this estimation of Hartmann can be puzzling. If inclusion in *Aiiieeeee!* hinged on the "birth of a sensibility" (Chin et al. ix) that the editors describe as "distinctly not Chinese or Japanese and distinctly not white American," forged from the feeling that one was stuck between an Asian past that one could not (or did not want to) claim and an American present where no amount of assimilation could overcome the barrier imposed by a nonwhite appearance, then Hartmann's virtual exile from Japan, inability to speak Japanese, and brittle American citizenship (since 1884 but nearly ending in internment) seem like they should qualify him (vii). Why didn't "A Monologue's" expression of being pulled in multiple directions do enough to warrant his inclusion? One answer is that while Hartmann was indisputably Asian American, he was not among the ranks of *Aiiieeeee!* contributors because he did not fit the construction of Asian American literature as a discipline, which was a much more specific thing.

Josephine Nock-Hee Park's *Apparitions of Asia: Modernist Form and Asian American Poetics* helps put the reason for this into perspective. According to Park, Japanese Americans like Hartmann had long been tied to the "alternately desired and despised economic modernity" that undergirds American capitalism—to a construction of race, in other words, that fetishized Japanese Americans as rich market and labor opportunities on the one hand and vilified them as greedy "economic animals" on the other. Asian American literature, as a discipline, was born as a reaction to the "tenuousness" of Asian American civic status that resulted from this condition (17). Thus:

> In the late 1960s, ethnic activists created Asian America, a panethnic coalition in the service of radical political aims modeled on the tenets of black nationalism.

> Against a history of condescending and pejorative popular figurations of Asiatics, the movement created an Asian American past by enshrining two monuments of Asian American experience: the Chinese railroad worker and the interned Japanese American. The most significant document of the literary movement, the 1974 anthology *Aiiieeeee!*, presented a primer for creating Asian American literature, in which activist artists culled together a literary past and suggested the kind of work that could eventually find its way into the canon. From its inception, Asian American literature limited the kinds of expressions that could be accommodated under its banner: Chinese and Japanese American experience took precedence, and left out from the canon were all those works which did not strike a note of defiance and whose literary expressions were illegible to the stated aims of the movement. (Park 17)

Though Hartmann's work does push against racial boundaries in terms of sexual partnership (as in the suggestive title of "White Lady of My Desires" and the ending of "Cyanogen Seas," where he promises to "drown the white virgins in me"), his is not poetry that otherwise fits the political fight *Aiiieeeee!* saw at the heart of Asian American literature. Rather, in his poetry and critical work, Hartmann participates in the same cultural essentialization of Japanese people and art typical of the white Euro-American writers then controlling and constructing the "West's" view of the "Orient." Edward Said's argument that "the Orient was a creation of the Western observer" is relevant here, as is his concept of "othering," in which "the self discovers its own constitution by discerning the 'not-I'" (qtd. in Park 6). When it came to interpreting Japanese art, Hartmann (who did not speak Japanese, was raised in Germany, and spent his life bouncing

between America and Europe) was perhaps unavoidably a Westerner addressing the Japanese "not-I."

Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), who like many Americans first encountered Japanese art at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876 (held just six years before Hartmann arrived in 1882), is an important example of such interpretation and particularly relevant to this chapter in that his primary subject was Japanese painting (Fischer 63). Park discusses Fenollosa, who traveled to Japan in 1878 and stayed for over a decade, at length in her introduction, writing that "in the tumult of Japan's new [economically open, modernizing] era, Fenollosa saw an opportunity to cultivate an appreciation for traditional artistry threatened by the juggernaut of progress" (8). Fenollosa was particularly successful in his cultivation efforts due to an overlapping set of artistic credentials that other interpreters could not match. For one thing, Fenollosa was a government employee at Tokyo Imperial University, Japan's first national university, then only recently established. This position of official trust opened many doors to Fenollosa despite his initial lack of knowledge about Japanese visual art, literally in some cases, as these introductions allowed him to view original Japanese masterworks, such as those by Kanō Tan'yū, in places he would not have known about or been able to go otherwise. Vitally, it also gave him access to contemporary artists from the Kanō school, which was then in the last years of its over 400 year existence.

According to Felice Fischer in *Ink and Gold: Art of the Kanō*, Fenollosa began studying painterly brushwork in 1879 or 1880 under the supervision of school head Kanō Eitoku Tatsunobu and former Kanō student Sumiyoshi Hirokata, an official painter of the late Tokugawa Shogunate. Thereafter, he became friends with other artists such as the Kanō painter Tomonobu, as well as Kanō Hogai and Hashimoto Gahō, the latter two of whom shared

Fenollosa's desire to merge Japanese and Euro-American styles of art (Fischer 64-65). Fenollosa's brushwork and artistic connections were, Park writes, a determining factor in his promotion and "reinstitution of the brush over the Western pencil in Japanese elementary schools," a promotion that, as we have seen, Hartman amplifies in *Japanese Art*.

As Park also notes, this experience led to a pair of rare cultural privileges for Fenollosa: first his formal adoption into the Kanō painting lineage under the workshop name Kanō Yeitan Masanobu and, second, the official art regulatory powers that came along with such membership. Fenollosa's Kanō post even included the Chinese characters and official seals needed to accomplish this certification, a rarity among rarities (Park 11). With such authority, Fenollosa launched a stunningly successful (if by no means exclusive) campaign to interpret Japanese art to itself and to cultivate in the Japanese government and public a new, Euro-American appreciation for art they had long taken for granted. His project included "a massive cataloging effort to create an official record of Japan's art and architecture" sponsored by the Japanese government as well as his role in establishing the Tokyo School of Fine arts, which opened in 1889 under the stewardship of Hashimoto Gahō and Kanō Tomonobu (Park 9, Fischer 66). Fenollosa capped this remarkable run with a triumphant return to the United States in 1890, where he became the first curator of Japanese Art at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the city where he most likely met Hartmann during the latter's 1893 subscription drive for *The Art Critic*.

Fenollosa's Orientalism would posthumously slip into the world of modernist poetry even more famously in Ezra Pound's 1915 collection *Cathay*, which advertised itself even on the cover as a series of translations "for the most part from the Chinese of Rihaku" (the Japanese name for Chinese poet Li Bai) "from the notes of the late Ernest Fenollosa." However, his work also slips in via the Japanese visual art-associated free verse of Sadakichi Hartmann, following

Hartmann's strongly Fenollosa-like work of cultural interpretation in *Japanese Art*. To have made money from this type of Orientalist writing (and related lecturing) would have been a grievous fault in the eyes of authors like *Aiiieeeee!* editor Frank Chin. Add this to Hartmann's lack of political fervor and his lucky escape from the foundational wound of Japanese internment, and it is no wonder that he seemed more like an Americanized Asian than an Asian American to some. After all, the title of Chin, Chan, Inada, and Wong's anthology (*Aiiieeeee!*) was the sound of screaming racial stereotypes in the movies, and here was Hartmann, who once costarred as the evil "Mongol Prince's Court Magician" in Douglas Fairbanks's 1924 silent film *The Thief of Bagdad* (vii-viii). That is, until he absconded from set with his most recent payment and a studio-sponsored crate of whiskey in the middle of shooting his scenes, scandalizing the production and looking for all the world like the despised "economic animal" that *Aiiieeeee!* wanted to combat (Fowler 41-42). They could not have included him, even though he was a more sympathetic figure than his *Aiiieeeee!* sobriquet suggested.

For example, though Hartmann worked for Fairbanks, he was not beholden to either the man or the job when long hours on set and heavy costuming aggravated his medical conditions enough that he demanded (and received) what his friend, the actor Matt Moore, believes to have been the first Hollywood stand-in. When the stand-in was not enough, he quit, lessening his status as an "economic animal" considerably (Fowler 42). Also, while it is true that the U.S. government never interned Hartmann, the possibility of internment still weighed heavily upon him, as it did others. As Park notes in *Apparitions of Asia*, and as Lawton and Knox detail in their introduction to Hartmann's *White Chrysanthemums*, the singular nature of Hartmann's literary and critical reputation evaporated almost overnight after the attack on Pearl Harbor, at which point he became just another suspicious Japanese man on American shores (Park 98,

Lawton and Knox xv). Later in 1942, a young man from U.S. military intelligence would appear unannounced on biographer Gene Fowler's doorstep asking about the old poet's patriotism, suggesting that the question of internment was, for a time, as chillingly open for Hartmann as it was for anyone of Japanese descent (206-216).

Hartmann's "ghost line," therefore, emerges within a very specific set of literary-cultural brackets. I do not mean to finalize any conclusions about the essential, monolithic qualities of Japanese painting or printmaking; there is no such thing as an essential, monolithic form of Japanese art or identity. But I do contend that Sadakichi Hartmann, leaning on a then-common brand of Orientalism suited to his experience, viewed Japanese visual art of the Kanō school in this way, and that this view influenced his practice of an early, American free verse that deserves more attention than it has gotten (particularly for the way it presents not simply "with" but "as" imagery).

Whether Hartmann belongs in the lists of Asian American poetry beyond that is not for this essay to determine—though there is growing evidence that a more central place may exist for him, if not now then at least some day. Though Park writes that "we may read the literary shaping of Asian America in the last forty years as a dialectic of exclusion and inclusion," she is quick to mention that "periodic delineations" continue to "inspire new entries" in the field. "Asian America has a heritage," she continues, and that heritage is still "emphatically not Orientalism" (157). Yet, if books like Jessica Hagedorn's *Charlie Chan Is Dead* have proven anything, it is that great "artistic riches . . . [have also come] from grappling with [this] Orientalist heritage" (157-58). If Hartmann's art criticism and approach to *vers libre* have a positive role to play in the creation of such work, then Park is right to argue that we must "reopen" for examination "a past of literary Orientalism which has long been walled off from

Asian American literature" (158). This is even more vital, she says, when we consider that Orientalist blame and Orientalist praise may require a different response in either case. While instances of racial blame "provide fodder for combat," she writes, "altogether different maneuvers are required to negotiate [the] legacy of haiku and scroll painting"—both of which Hartmann popularized in the U.S. (158). To call for an end to combat on that front would be to end most hostilities with Hartmann moving forward.

For these reasons, and because Hartmann is undoubtedly a player in the story of American literary modernism (which took its cues from visual art in many areas and featured free verse as one of its hallmarks), he deserves all this notice and more.

CHAPTER III:

READING THE ROOM: FREE VERSE, LANGUAGE, AND DÉCOR IN THE VISUAL POETRY OF MARCEL BROODTHAERS AND PHILIP METRES

In the previous chapter, I argued that the formally varied free verse line of Sadakichi Hartmann's *Naked Ghosts* acts much like the touch-driven line of Japanese painting, causing the poems in that volume to become something like Japanese pictures themselves: capable of reformulating poetic space from the inside out rather than simply adorning some part of a preexisting metrical edifice. Yet, for all that Hartmann's "ghost line" may draw on Japanese visual art, and for all that its free verse lineation cuts textured shapes across the page, there remains an important sense in which Hartmann's line is not the graphic mark from which it draws such power and identity, nor the physical, room-like space invoked by his description of Japanese home décor in *Japanese Art*. Rather, it is something analogous to that space.

This chapter examines the work of two artists, Belgian poet/visual artist Marcel Broodthaers (1924-1976) and American documentary poet Philip Metres (1970-), whose poetry and visual adaptation of poetry more fully bridge the gap that Hartmann's work cannot cross and who do often render the free verse line as a literal graphic mark or artefact of room décor capable of great intellectual subtlety. In the hands of these authors, free verse can become associated with real life rooms or gallery spaces, even becoming part of those rooms in a way similar to what Hartmann wrote of when he discussed the art of organizing a dwelling around a work of Kanō school art. However, the "black line" and room-based poetics of visual artists like Broodthaers (in his Literary Exhibitions) and Metres (in the "Black Site" series from his Abu Ghraib book *Sand Opera*) are not just important because they offer a glimpse of Hartmann's visual analogy in

extremis. Their use of a graphic, even three-dimensional poetic line is important to our understanding of free verse because it offers us a new chance to confront what that line might organize, or "measure," if it is not syllable counts, stress profiles, or even words. As this chapter will argue, free verse prosody becomes, in these situations, a device allowing the poet to effectively organize space, measuring not only physical distances but the relative, mutually transformative effect of each line, formal technique, or art object on all the others in its field of influence. This approach to verbal/visual prosody allows Broodthaers and Metres to question the priority of forms and other constraints in any act of communication and to trouble the tidy linguistic relationship of the signifier to the signified—a project that takes on particular significance when applied to the words, bodies, and physical spaces inhabited by political detainees in Metres's "Black Site."

Before we discuss Metres, however, we must account for the tremendous, interrelated set of intellectual projects that constitute Marcel Broodthaers's visual art, as this work provides a theoretical frame within which certain aspects of Metres's work become more legible. This is no small challenge, as work from almost any period of Broodthaers's visual *oeuvre* could be relevant to our discussion of poetic visuality. As it would be impractical to focus on Broodthaers's entire career in the space of this chapter, however, and as even the artist's most intriguing poetry-adjacent works (like his multiply mediated "original edition" of Mallarmé's, *Un Coup de Dés*) do not exist in isolation from the other items in a given installation, this chapter will focus mainly, if not entirely, on Broodthaers's "Literary Exhibitions," the two installations in his career that focus most explicitly on language as fable or poetry. Appearing in 1968 and 1969, near the end of the first half of Broodthaers's life as a visual artist, these projects

arrive late enough in the overall sweep of his development that many of the ideas and visual forms which characterize his mature work make themselves available.

The first Literary Exhibition, 1968's *Le Corbeau et le Renard* (The Crow and the Fox) takes its title and a good deal of its inspiration from Jean de La Fontaine's seventeenth-century fable of the same name. To understand the implications of the exhibit's staging of La Fontaine, it is important to keep in mind that, earlier in his life, Marcel Broodthaers had been an aspiring Symbolist poet working in the realm of language as opposed to visual art. It was not a successful venture. Though Broodthaers published several volumes, including *Mon livre d'ogre* (*My Ogre Book*) in 1957, *Minuit* (*Midnight*) in 1960, *La Bête noir* (*The Black Beast*) in 1961, and finally *Pense-Bête* (*Memory Aid*) in 1964, scholars including Sam Sackeroff have been quick to point out that these books were largely "self-published, often financed by the author, in small print runs that circulated mainly among a close circle of literary peers" (136). Broodthaers himself lamented their insularity and lack of wider success, claiming that during their production he "lived practically isolated from all communication" with other people, and that the readership these poems courted was essentially "fictitious" (Broodthaers, "Dix Mille" 417). While Sackeroff points out that this insularity was par for the course in the tradition of French Symbolism descending from early Symbolists like Mallarmé, Broodthaers was not satisfied with the school's inability to reach outward and envelop audiences that were "real, on that level where it is a matter of space and conquest" ("Dix Mille" 417). To reach that audience, Broodthaers felt, his entire approach to poetry would have to change, as it did when he radically transformed his remaining copies of *Pense-Bête* into statue form by encasing them in plaster (fig. 8). That sculpture (part interment of Broodthaers's old career, part announcement of his new visual direction, and part meditation on the hermetic seal killing his Symbolist poetry) was displayed at

the Galerie Saint Laurent in Brussels later in 1964 for a very real, very public audience that took to the work more quickly than they had taken to the poetry itself.

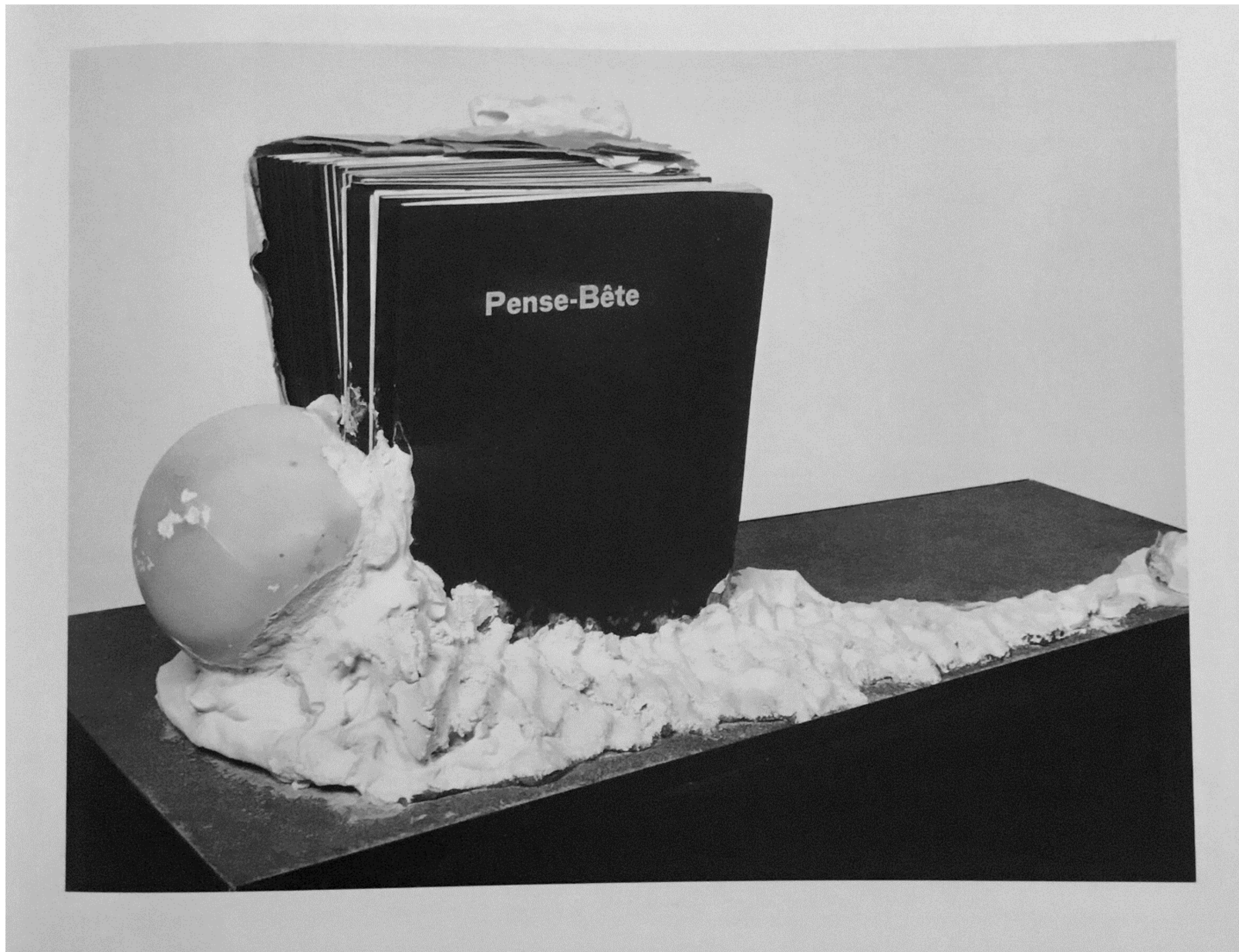


Figure 8. Broodthaers, Marcel. *Pense-Bête (Memory Aid)*. 1964, Flemish Community/S.M.A.K. *Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective*, Edited by Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Christophe Cherix, The Museum of Modern Art and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, p. 83.

Though it is tempting to read Broodthaers's *Pense-Bête* statue as representing a clean break with his old life, it is important to recognize that this is not entirely what he accomplishes with the work. For all that the plaster cast may be an act of casting out old, unsuccessful hermetic strategies, the lingering presence of *Pense-Bête* inside the work speaks with equal power to the notion that this more linguistic work never really disappeared. Instead, Broodthaers achieves what we might arguably call poetic success by rendering his unsuccessfully hermetic French

Symbolist poetry hermetic in visual terms, turning what had been a bug in the writing into a feature for serious contemplation in the visual artwork. This leads us to an important truth about Broodthaers, which becomes relevant in *Le Corbeau et le Renard*: that for all his poetic failure, Broodthaers was not a failed poet. Rather, he was a frustrated poet who went on to achieve great poetic success on vastly altered, visual terms. It is not overselling Broodthaers's work or even departing from today's critical consensus to claim that Broodthaers remained a poet his entire life and that his installation work may justly be considered a kind of three-dimensional poetry.

Sackeroff expands the latter argument in his essay about the Literary Exhibitions for Manuel Borja-Villel and Christophe Cherix's *Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective*, the art book produced for the Museum of Modern Art, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, and the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen's traveling Broodthaers exhibition in 2016-2017. In the essay, Sackeroff claims that the literary exhibitions "marked a fundamental breakthrough in which Broodthaers transformed poetic text into something that could be pushed past the page into the physical space of the gallery and beyond" (136). That aim, he writes, is confirmed even on the cover to the exhibition announcement for *Le Corbeau et le Renard*, which described the installation as "an environment," but which created that environment in large part by immersing visitors in text. According to Sackeroff, "Broodthaers had continuous lines of an original poem printed in large block letters on sheets of photographic canvas; the poem comprised excerpts from La Fontaine's fable mixed with phrases adapted from elementary-school writing manuals" (136). The word canvases were then attached to every conceivable surface until "[w]alking among the text-covered objects, viewers would feel like they were walking into a poem" (137). Sackeroff interprets this move as one "that allowed Broodthaers to move poetry decisively into the public realm. As texts and walls mingled and merged," he writes, "the exhibitions created

new kinds of poetic space that were large enough to accommodate several people at once" (137). Here, finally, was the public space needed for the public audience that Broodthaers's early poems lacked (fig. 9).

Figure 9. Broodthaers, Marcel. *Exhibition View of Le Corbeau et le Renard* by R. Van Den Brempt. 1968, Wide White Space Gallery. *Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective*, Edited by Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Christophe Cherix, The Museum of Modern Art and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, p. 141. Note the film projector and screen at the far left and right.

Le Corbeau et le Renard's literalization of poetic space was not the end in itself, however. Rather, the point of it seems to have been to author what Gloria Moure, in her introduction to *Marcel Broodthaers: Collected Writings*, calls "*l'espace de l'écriture*," a space or "volume" of writing (in the sense of a three-dimensional zone rather than a collection of poems) inside which Broodthaers could stage confrontations with the nontransparent, non-dialectic

nature of language and meaning—in other words, with the obscurity of the signifier and the signified, as the Saussurian language of the 1960s held. The muddling of clear connections and stable linguistic hierarchies necessary to attempt such a confrontation came in large part from the care Broodthaers took to arrange his exhibitions in a way that subverted traditional lines of demarcation: for example, those surrounding what was or wasn't poetry or visual art, what should or shouldn't appear in a museum, and what museum display even means in the first place.

The intensely relative nature of everything in the free verse-like field of a Broodthaers exhibit took many shapes during his career, but in *Le Corbeau et le Renard*, it is best summed up by the fragmentary, nonlinear ordering of the adapted La Fontaine fable, the heterogenous approach to word/canvas placement (some suspended from the ceiling, others on the sides of boxes or trunks, with no apparent structure), and the pairing of this placement technique with what Sackeroff calls "broad zones where daily habits could themselves become literary" (137). This third exemplification was most evident, Sackeroff writes, in the exhibition's centerpiece: a 16mm film played on continuous loop where, "[i]n a series of still and panning shots cut together in varying rhythms," Broodthaers depicted everyday objects posed on shelves with the La Fontaine swatches behind them (137). The effect, Sackeroff claims, was a feeling that the material objects were about to be swallowed by the poem—a feeling Broodthaers then intensified by projecting the film onto specially prepared screens that also contained versions of La Fontaine's text. In some ways, the special projection screens are disorienting in their own right, consisting of what appear to be two levels of photographic canvas affixed to wooden panels: both with different versions of the La Fontaine printed on them. The first panel, closest to the audience, contained photonegative cursive handwriting while the second, farther away from

the audience and visible through a cutout in the cursive frame, featured the fable in black capital letters on a white background (fig. 10).

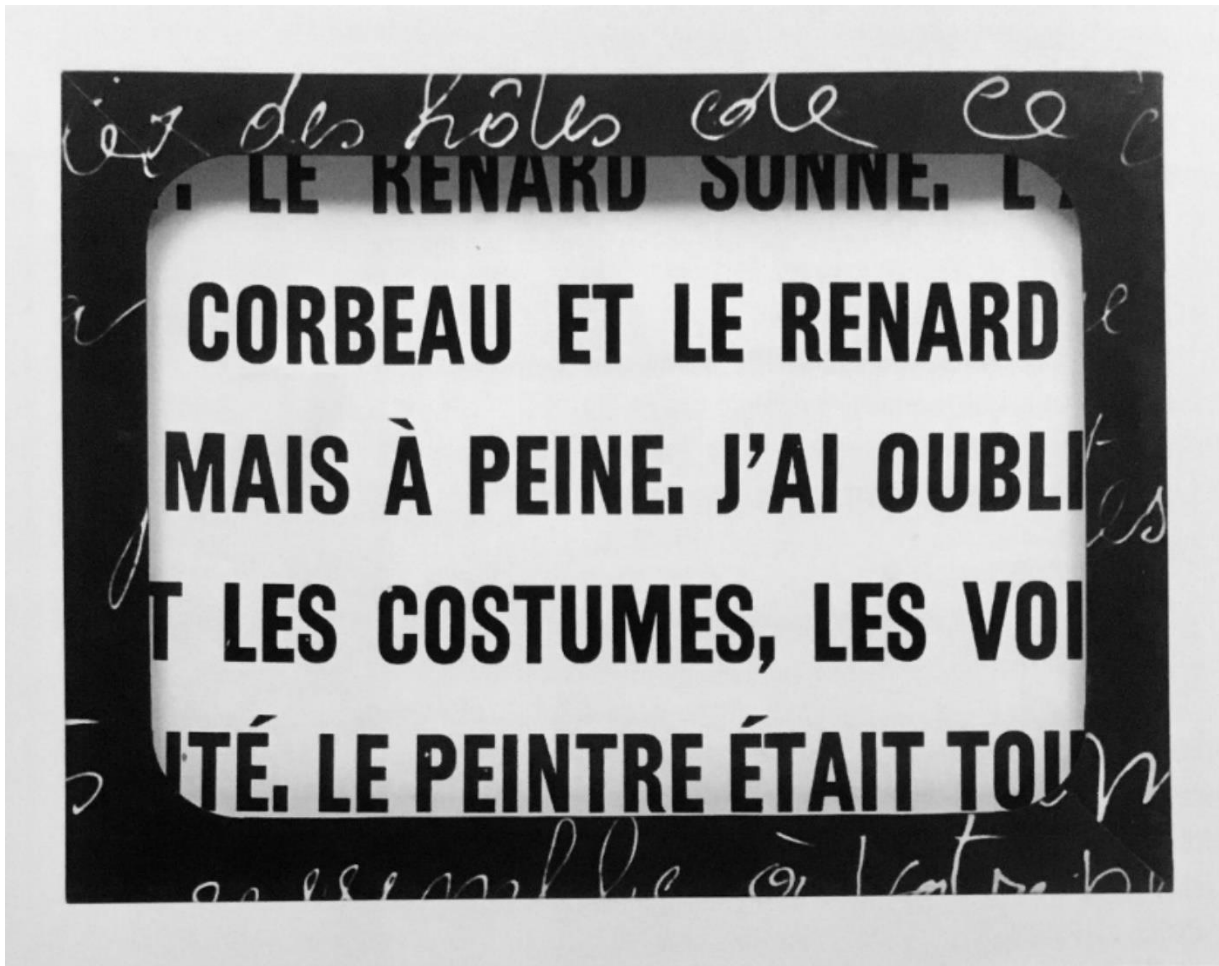


Figure 10. Broodthaers, Marcel. Projection Screen for *Le Corbeau et le Renard*. 1968, Wide White Space Gallery. *Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective*, Edited by Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Christophe Cherix, The Museum of Modern Art and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, p. 146.

In a 1968 interview, Broodthaers told *Trépied* magazine that the film was designed to produce “personal writing (poetry)” that could “deny as fully as possible the meaning of the word and that of the image” (qtd. in Sackeroff 137). “The result,” Sackeroff explains, quoting Broodthaers, “would be a confrontation between texts and objects in which the former would overtake the latter, incorporating them in to an all-encompassing ‘exercise in reading’” (fig. 11)

Figure 11. Broodthaers, Marcel. *Le Corbeau et le Renard* film projected on edition screen. 1968, Wide White Space Gallery. *Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective*, Edited by Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Christophe Cherix, The Museum of Modern Art and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, p. 147.

(137). By splitting the La Fontaine fable so brutally into fragments spread across the exhibition, Broodthaers ensured that the text would be used not as an indicator of the fable's meaning but as a series of "markers" that would "designate spaces where a less precise kind of reading, one not bound to any particular content, could take place (Sackeroff 137). In effect, *Le Corbeau et le Renard's* meanings remained "protected by a purely visual layer" that made them every bit as hermetic as a French Symbolist poem, even as that poem was being projected in an intensely public space where the ability of even the clearest writing to do better was in question. It is not so great a stretch to imagine that similar logic might apply to some free verse poems—poems in which formal cacophony and heightened verbal/visual relativity subsume many of the traditional English poem's received hierarchies and established meanings, leaving in their wake a veritable waste land of fragments that the reader must address as their own new, all-encompassing exercise in reading.

As with *Le Corbeau et le Renard*, the contemporary free verse poem holds within itself the ability to cloak its more public, easily available meanings in an individual, often inscrutable approach to form which, in turn, muddies the otherwise clear path from the signification of the

poem's words to what those words purport to signify. This is vital, as familiar poetic environments inevitably prompt "precise" (which is to say learned) reading procedures too often "bound to [a] particular content" and, therefore, particular sorts of meaning. Broodthaers argues that the communication of truly new thought may require the artist to force viewers to inhabit strange new reading protocols—strictures that, as Ezra Pound wanted, make it new, but not simply because free verse discards accentual-syllabism. Rather, free verse "makes it new" because, as a prosody, free verse is always and as a matter of course sabotaging its own reading protocols. Though free verse may, of course, be used in ways that copy or at very least shore up the basic reading procedures of earlier free verse poetry, the prosody's inherent instability, its tilt toward inefficiency and confusion, renders it, pound for pound, more capable of resisting ossification than accentual-syllabism (which readers and writers can, over time, learn to read for standard subtextual meanings). Active, intelligent work in the form, then, may demand that poets think not only about the way lack of meter and rhyme make the poem more colloquial (*i.e.*, easier for readers to consume) but the ways free verse makes colloquialism less interpretable, and therefore open to meanings that colloquialism might not have encouraged.

Ultimately, the approach seen in *Le Corbeau et le Renard* is of a piece with Broodthaers's belief that "[s]ince no one form is intrinsically superior to another, the artist can use any form whatsoever—from literary expression, either written or spoken, to physical reality—in equivalent fashion" (*Collected Writings* 367). This was not simply a statement of Broodthaers's belief in a literalized collage poetics where elements from different matrices of production are brought under the aegis of a visual artwork but a broader statement of his belief in the essentially porous nature of formal distinctions. We see this also in Broodthaers's poem/statement "What is Painting? . . ." from 1963, wherein he asks:

What is painting?

Well, it is literature.

What is literature then?

Well, it is painting.

What is the rest?

What's left is a reform.

Like the moon when she is full,

when she is a slender crescent,

when she is black theoretical night. (*Collected Writings* 128)

In other words: poetry, equivalent to painting, is also equivalent to 16mm film projection on cleverly designed screens, and to the everyday objects displayed in that film—and what is true at the level of genre and mediation, here, remains true at all scales, even at the level of the individual free verse line, where the most heterogenous techniques become all of a piece. Just as the poetry in *Le Corbeau et le Renard* was not the meaning of the words from La Fontaine but Broodthaers's in-gallery painting with light and words that had lost their link to the fable they signified, so is it in the free verse poem, where the point of the prosody is to render all formal strategies equivalent and relative, stripping them of their prior significations before entering them into a new prosodic "environment" where readers must rebuild their reading praxis from scratch. This procedure asks us to reevaluate our conception of what a free verse poem—and free verse prosody in general—can be, as it provides us at long last with a positive intellectual and artistic project to which the collage-like relativities of the form might cater. Free verse, to this

point of view, is no longer simply a giving away of old prosodic conventions from a vague sense of impatience with their datedness but a matter of epistemic difference. Broodthaers's free verse installations *must* express themselves in a way that requires readers to continually rebuild their reading practice because they cannot, at the level of prosodic logic, launch an effective critique of the signifier/signified from within a system that presupposes clear, hierarchical relationships between elements and the transparency of meaning.

We see similar strategies at work in Broodthaers's second literary exhibition, *Marcel Broodthaers à la Deblioudebliou/S, Exposition littéraire autour de Mallarmé* (Marcel Broodthaers at the WWS, Literary Exhibition Concerning Mallarmé), originally held at the Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerp in 1969. This show, which carries interest for scholars of verse due to its engagement with the work of early French Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, continues Broodthaers's meditation on the non-transparency of language and the problem of the signifier/signified but does so using a set of additional presentational strategies that anticipate aspects of Philip Metres's documentary poetry in *Sand Opera*.

At first glance, Broodthaers's Mallarmé installation (fig. 12) appears more sedate and minimalist than *Le Corbeau et le Renard*, which debuted at the WWS gallery ten months earlier. Part of this, certainly, has to do with the absence of photographic wording stuck to every available surface and the lack of an analogous film, yet the effect also owes much to the exaggerated art gallery treatment Broodthaers achieved in contrasting the venue's standard white walls with a newly painted black floor. This single alteration had the simultaneous effect of amplifying the whiteness of the display space and of shattering the implicitly sacrosanct integrity of the modernist "white cube," a gallery format that rose to prominence in the early twentieth century in response to the difficulties of displaying abstract expressionist art. This encounter

between white and black, between things that both are and are not what they advertise themselves to be, would extend itself to every other item in the gallery, rendering the environment itself just as integral to the three-dimensional poetic field (and just as much a work by Marcel Broodthaers) as anything he hung on the walls or placed on shelves. Like *Le Corbeau et le Renard*, Broodthaers's Mallarmé exhibition was once again the sort of public-facing poem in which viewers might immerse themselves.

Figure 12. Broodthaers, Marcel. *Exhibition view of Marcel Broodthaers à la Deblioudebliou/S, Exposition littéraire autour de Mallarmé (Marcel Broodthaers at the WWS, Literary Exhibition Concerning Mallarmé)*. 1969, Wide White Space Gallery. *Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective*, Edited by Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Christophe Cherix, The Museum of Modern Art and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, p. 157.

This new exhibit also approached its confrontation with the non-transparency of language through the fragmentation and layering of a source text, as well as through multiple mediation. Nowhere in the exhibition is this more evident than in Broodthaers's *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'abolira le Hasard: Image*, a mostly visual work based on a poem of nearly the same name by Mallarmé (fig. 13). The Broodthaers version, which exists in many forms (including a set of twelve engraved aluminum plates and two kinds of artist's book) features horizontal, variably sized black bars in place of Mallarmé's variably sized French text. As Henry Weinfield notes in his analysis of Mallarmé's "Un Coup De Dés," "[w]hat is most innovative about the poem, from a formal point of view, [has always been] the way in which the conception has been *materialized*—in a manner that makes the physical layout, the spacing, and the typography not merely a representation of the poem but an integral aspect of the poem itself" (265).

Figure 13. Mallarmé, Stéphane. Excerpt from *Un Coup De Dés Jamais N'abolira Le Hasard*. New Haven, 1949, pp. 9-10.

Broodthaers's innovation is to carry Mallarmé's visual/material procedure to its logical conclusion, presenting the work not as a spatially inventive set of lines in French but as a constellation of lines, full stop (fig. 14). This has the virtue of allowing viewers to experience the freshness and audacity of Mallarmé's work even though the innovation itself has long been a staple of postmodern poetics, losing much of its ability to surprise in return for that prestige. Though it is understandably the practice of critics like Craig Dworkin to figure Broodthaers's *Un Coup* as "the most famous artistic work to evoke the chillingly beautiful aesthetics of censorship," Broodthaers does not efface the poem so much as reveal, to a greater extent, the visual linearity and movement despite stillness that has always been there, clarifying the formal levels which most contribute to the fame and relevance of the Mallarmé (150).

Figure 14. Broodthaers, Marcel. Excerpt from *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'abolira le Hasard: Image*. 1969, Wide White Space Gallery. *Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective*, Edited by Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Christophe Cherix, The Museum of Modern Art and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, p. 160. One of Broodthaers's engraved aluminum plates.

Broodthaers's history with "Un Coup de Dés" bears out the notion that many readers' association with the poem is primarily visual. That history, repeated in one of several interviews broadcast by the *Atelier de Création Radiophonique* between 1970 and 1975, focuses on the artist's first encounter with René Magritte and reveals the biographic and theoretical reasons for the emphasis on form in his adaptation. "When I met Magritte," Broodthaers says, "I was 17 or 18 years old":

> I was fascinated by his painting, and all he said to me was "Read Mallarmé and think about it." He gave me a present, "Un coup de dés," which I carried round with me for twenty-five years because at first of course I didn't have a clue what the poem was about. The poem obsessed me for twenty-five years. Now that Magritte is dead, I felt that, to free myself, I needed . . . to redo the "Un coup de dés" but with the notion of the image.
>
> To clarify this project, in fact, my aim, which I think I achieved, was to change the signs of reading a poem, and therefore to draw attention to the form, exactly as museums do. . . . My experiment consisted in changing the seeing signs of the museum, just as I tried to change the reading signs for Mallarmé. What for? To create a relation that I think is vital to make in our times and is not made enough, which is the relation between an image and a sign, but in a practical way.
>
> I took the Mallarmé poem with an ordinary typography and . . . I copied the form of the poem, exactly . . . to show how much the word is carried by the form. (Broodthaers, *Collected Writings* 462-63)

The difficult opacity of Mallarmé's poem, then, leads in a fairly direct way to Broodthaers's meditation on the difficult opacity of all language in his own version (which he called an

"original edition" of the Mallarmé). As with *Le Corbeau et le Renard*, the exhibit is also an exercise in reading, but a strange one as it, too, is extremely distributed in character.

To get a sense of what moving through this altered reading space or "volume" of poetry would have entailed, consider the dilemma of the Wide White Space viewer who might have arrived at the exhibition looking (as suggested in the show's advertisements) for the literary author Mallarmé. As this viewer entered the gallery, several signs of the famous Frenchman would have been in evidence, though few so clear as the black and white photographic portrait of the poet that adorned both sides of the postcard invitations sent prior to the show (*A Retrospective* 156). On the right side of the gallery, the viewer might have noticed a small, dark tape player on a black plinth playing a continuous recording of the original "Un coup de dés," but as read by Broodthaers, not Mallarmé (*A Retrospective* 157). According to notes on the exhibition contained in Moure's *Collected Writings*, the "height and duration" of the recording altered "as a function of the volume of the typography" in Mallarmé's original (238). Walking deeper into the space through this logical extension of Mallarmé's claim that "Un coup de dés" was to be understood as a musical score, the viewer would then have encountered the full set of twelve engraved and painted aluminum plates on a long shelf beside the tape deck. This, as Broodthaers claimed, was Mallarmé's poem, too, copied out exactly—but as a form or an image rather than a text, and so, again, not the Mallarmé artefact the viewer would have expected (MB 138).

Despite this, altered traces of Mallarmé still abounded throughout the gallery. On the left wall, for example, roughly even with the tape deck, hung two black shirts onto which Broodthaers had copied the text of Mallarmé's poem in thin white chalk and which, in an open letter dated 2 December 1969, he said he had acquired from the Dallas police (*Collected Writings*

216). Thus, viewers could technically encounter the actual printed text of Mallarmé's poem, but only with a lingering social/political valence that the original's consideration of shipwrecks and poetic failure did not contain. For his part, Mallarmé believed that poetry had little to no traction on social or political occurrences, a view espoused in his essay *"L'action restreinte"* ("Restrained Action") (Sackeroff 138). This must be taken as an indicator that "exact" copying, in Broodthaers's hands, did not amount to exact replication of meaning or social/political ambivalence.

Just down the wall from the hanging shirts, roughly even with the first of the aluminum plates, was another, slightly higher shelf with the two printed versions of Broodthaers's artist's book. The title pages of these works echoed Mallarmé in the sense that they recreated the design of the 1914 Librarie Gallimard edition of the poem (the first standalone version). Yet they once again muddled the feeling of having a true artifact by substituting Broodthaers's name, subtitling the effort "Image," and presenting printed versions of the black bars from the aluminum plates rather than Mallarmé's wording. Though a full printed version of Mallarmé's poem did appear, in French, following the "Introduction" to one of the books, it too was not itself. Pushed into a word-wrapped block of prose with forward slashes to denote line breaks, this language-only version was as free of spatialization as the black bar version was free of language, a fact rendered invisible as it was hidden by the pages of its own book. Following standard gallery practice, the book had already been opened to another two-page spread and, therefore, could not be changed. This was likely on purpose. Yet what, the viewer might have wondered, could it all mean?

One conclusion we might draw from these portions of the installation is that there was no such thing as a coherent Mallarmé or *"Un coup de dés"* on display. In fairness to Broodthaers, these things may never have existed—at least not in the sense a hypothetical viewer would have

expected. Museums and art galleries, as Broodthaers knew, are not value-neutral spaces for the exhibition of value-laden art. Rather, they are historically, culturally, and aesthetically conditioned spaces that also function as protocols for reading the artists and objects therein. The expectation that one would find a singular, idealized, broadly representative Mallarmé artifact (or even a singular, idealized, broadly representative idea of Mallarmé) enshrined in the Wide White Space gallery is not inherent to the experience of viewing or thinking about Mallarmé and his work but, rather, something created by institutions in the habit of selecting artists and items so that they might craft representative narratives about those subjects. Such curation theoretically leads to knowledge but also establishes relational hierarchies between the signifying object and the signified artist, trend, or culture that, often as not, benefit the institution holding the object as much as the authors, works, or cultures exhibited. This is also true of career retrospectives, which seek to define the "essential" identity of artist from a collection of ephemera. As the Mallarmé literary exhibition partly suggests, this emphasis on coherence, hierarchy, and transparent meaning is often misplaced. Though there certainly was a man named Stéphane Mallarmé who did, in fact, write a poem called *"Un coup de dés Jamais n'abolira le hasard: Poéme,"* that poem was never entirely singular. Rather, it existed in several successive, competing forms that, taken together, rendered the sum truth of *"Un coup de dés"* a distributed, multiply mediated affair as multivalenced as the sum truth of Mallarmé, who remains frustratingly beyond reach no matter how many throws of the dice we place beneath glass.

It is clear that Broodthaers knew about the different versions of *"Un coup"* and that he is using them, in some sense, to resist the implication that the 1914 Librarie Gallimard edition is the singular, idealized, representative artifact that a gallery or museum wants to display. We know this because the two separate artist's books and the sets of aluminum plates produced for

the exhibition mediate their black-bar poetry in ways that echo the mediations of the first several editions of Mallarmé's poem, and because Broodthaers had them printed in quantities that reproduce the original ratio of one book to the next. According to Sackeroff, Broodthaers's artist's books were "printed on thirty-two sheets of opaque paper in one edition (issued in three hundred copies), and on thirty-two sheets of mechanographic transparent paper in another (issued in ninety copies)" (138). The aluminum plates on the other side of the room, meanwhile, had been "announced as an edition of ten," though only one copy appeared in the show. These editions mirrored their Mallarmé's counterparts: "one printed on standard paper in three hundred copies; another on Holland paper, in ninety copies; and yet another on Japan paper, in ten copies" (Sackeroff 138). These are the same numbers, with Broodthaers's printing press-like aluminum plate version corresponding to Mallarmé's Japan paper edition. Thus, when Broodthaers calls his editions of "Un Coup" an "original edition" of the Mallarmé, he is in dead earnest, for the black bars are, at very least, different from Mallarmé's text. Yet he is also picking at the sore of signifier/signified link. Despite his claim to have produced an "exact" copy of Mallarmé's poem, and despite having produced his editions in exactly the same ratios as Mallarmé in 1914, all three fail spectacularly at being the "original" Mallarmé artifact expected by gallery goers, or even "the" original version of his own black-bar adaptation. There were too many Broodthaers editions and too many copies of each artist's book, for that. The "original" adaptation, ironically, lacks a defined point of origin, taking shape, rather, as a cloud or field of possibilities, a hermetically self-referential constellation of art objects that the museum patron may approach from any direction and within which no one object has priority over the others.

In the end, Broodthaers's "*Un coup de dés*" is a good example of free verse visuality precisely because, like free verse, it refuses to be pinned down to any one form of presentation

and because the constellated push/pull effect is an apt way of describing the manner in which free verse line-artefacts operate on one another, both in the abstract and, as we shall see, in Philip Metres's *Sand Opera*. As in the original Wide White Space exhibition, subsequent shows like the 2016 Broodthaers retrospective at MOMA traditionally display the different versions together, allowing viewers to contemplate them separately and as parts of a larger, more complex work. Individually, all three versions of Broodthaers's *"Un coup"* reveal the inner, linear constancy of the Mallarmé free verse poem on which they are based. The twelve engraved aluminum plates accomplish this serially, the overall effect being of a long, horizontal line of horizontal plates, each containing its own assembly of horizontal lines. The artist book on transparent paper, meanwhile, stages the same process in an even more surprising, ethereally beautiful way. While each double page spread works in the same manner as its corresponding engraved plate, and while page by page readers gain a similar aggregate sense of the work's open field prosody, the transparent paper allows viewers to see previous (and future) pages even as they bear witness to the gallery's chosen spread. These deeper lines hover behind the top image like variously hazy bars of smoke, receding into the distance of memory or riding in on vectors of anticipation, depending where one looks. Since there is essentially no text to the text—just arrangements of black lines which may slant subtly one way or another to represent italics—the sense is overwhelmingly of reading the whole poem in its correct orientation even when that is not technically the case (*A Retrospective* 159). This ghostly, palimpsestic vision becomes its own little art gallery where the viewer's gaze is invited to stroll not simply up, down, and across the page, but three-dimensionally through its ruffled depths, each successively hazy page and its lines pulling at the others just as they pull, *Le Corbeau et le Renard*-like, at the viewer's equilibrium and depth of focus.

This push/pull effect is even stronger in the final part of the exhibit: the four vacuum-formed plastic plates titled *Quatre pipes alphabet* (Four pipes alphabet) (fig. 15) mounted at the far end of the gallery. Each plaque features a heavy border around sans-serif capital letters (usually alphabetical), both painted black to differentiate them from the plate's white plastic body. In the center of each is an outline of Magritte's pipe from *La Trahison des Images* (*The Treachery of Images*), the 1929 painting also known as "This is Not a Pipe." Each pipe contains a separate letter on its bowl, labeling it, with the bowl/letter complex separated from the stem by a gap. Though this gives the illusion of a contiguous pipe, the two elements do not connect except in the sense that the entire sheet is a solid, undifferentiated mass of plastic. The quartet furthers Magritte's "*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*" by presenting not an image of a pipe but, rather,

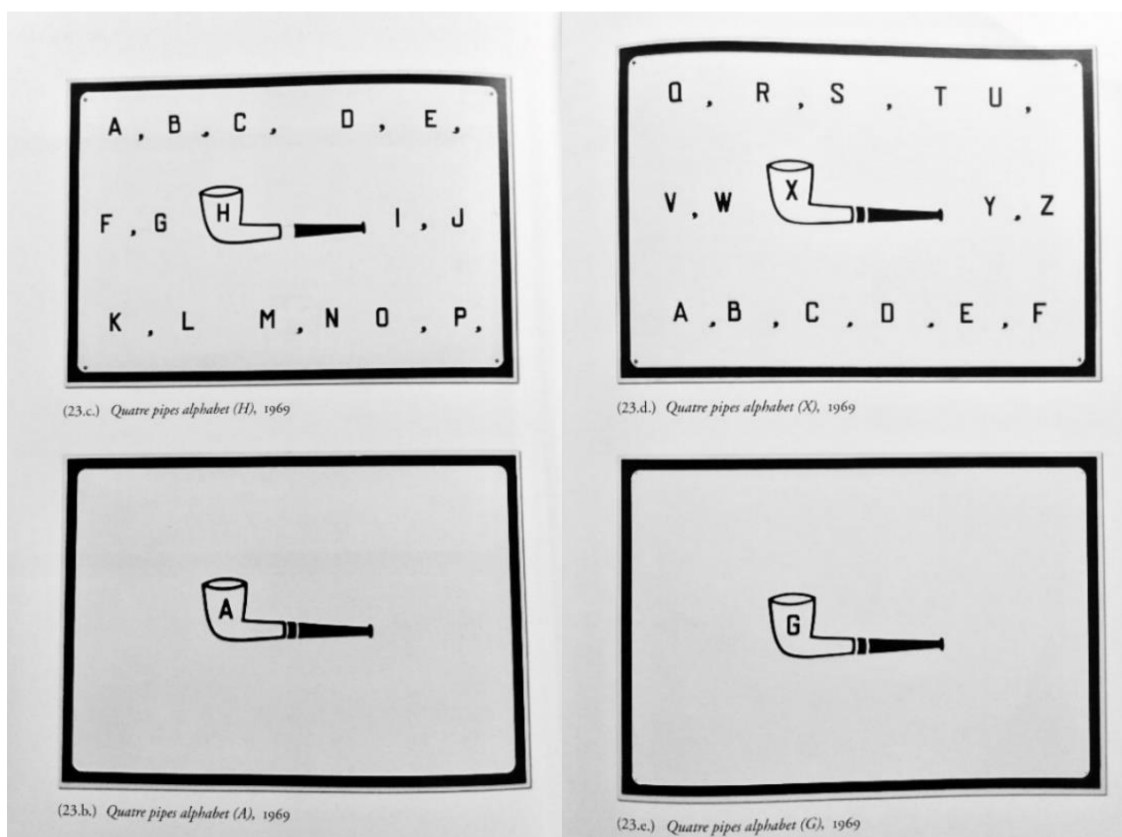


Figure 15. Broodthaers, Marcel. *Quatre pipes alphabet (Four pipes alphabet)*. 1969. *Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective*, Edited by Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Christophe Cherix, The Museum of Modern Art and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, p. 162-63.

labeled images of Magritte's image of that pipe—which, by virtue of their medium, end up having more real-world volume than the work they refer to. Here, Broodthaers plays once again with signifier/signified and foreground/background elements, giving the signifier a tactile presence normally unavailable to the word-as-sign.

For our purposes, the key feature of *Quatre pipes alphabet* is not Magritte but the means of their production. These plates are part of larger group of works in Broodthaers's visual corpus, which scholars call the "Industrial Poems." The industrial poems comprise thirty-six "subjects" spread across a handful of general categories (pipe plaques, alphabet plaques, museum plaques, etc.) in dizzying variation. For instance, Broodthaers often had the same plaque thermoformed from different colored plastics (black, say, then white), only to have the raised elements painted in reverse color (black to define white letter volumes, white to define black). In other instances, he left the raised volumes unpainted, making them virtually impossible to "read" at a distance, muddling the supposed distinction between word and image, between the signifying sign and the signage signified. In a move echoed by Metres, Broodthaers even chose to paint only the punctuation marks on plaques like *Académie I* and *II* (fig. 16), leaving the rest to recede into background.

As Dirk Snauwaert notes in his introductory essay on the "Industrial Signs," Broodthaers's original method of producing positive and negative versions of each plaque was "a binary principle which he moved away from in favor of an insistence on the 'plasticity' of the characters and individual forms by inserting slight variations contradicting identical forms of automated 'standardization', sometimes complemented by the colorful enhancement of signage pictorality" (23). In other words, the more colorful, varied signs were ways of preserving authenticity and individuality in the face of mechanical reproduction, but also a way of critiquing

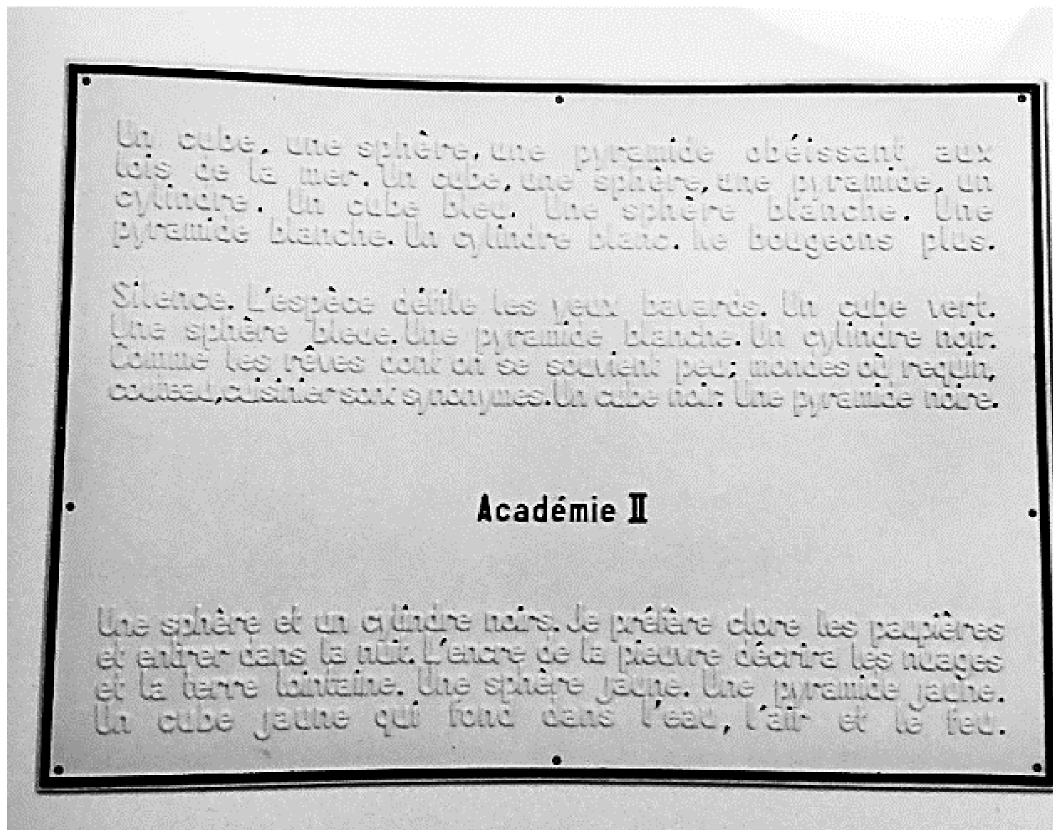


Figure 16. Broodthaers, Marcel. *Académie II*. 1968. *Industrial Poems: The Complete Catalogue of the Plaques, 1968-1972*, Edited by Charlotte Friling and Dirk Snauwaert, Wiels / Hatje Cantz, p. 57.

the essential hollowness of that individuality, given the medium and method of production that inescapably underpinned it. “It is not only the volumetric surfaces of the characters that draw attention,” Snauwaert writes, “but also the suggestion of the emptiness of the signs” (23). In a follow-up essay, “Marcel Broodthaers: In Enemy Territory,” Manuel Borja-Villel agrees, if in a sense more related to the art market. Broodthaers’s work, he writes, “establishes a tension between alleged aesthetic autonomy and the exploitation and commercialization of artistic work, set in motion by an economic system focused on consumerism. . . . Consequently, the artist’s political stance will be defined in terms of his attitude towards both the market and his own theory” (27). Borja-Villel concludes his comments on the industrial poems by noting that “all art, however anti-establishment it may be, surrenders to one sort of institution or another,” but that

"significance" is nonetheless "produced in the encounter between both positions: the affirmative stance of the communication and entertainment industries and the negative stance of a museum in ruins" (27-29). All of this stems from Broodthaers's theorizing about the industrial poems. As Broodthaers later wrote of the "plaques made of plastic" in "*Dix mille francs de récompense*," ("*Ten thousand francs reward*") from *Catalogue-Catalogus* (1974):

> What interested me was the warping of representation when executed in this material. . . . Let's call them rebuses. And the subject, a speculation about a difficulty of reading that results when you use this substance. . . . They are intended to be read on a double level—each one involved in a negative attitude which seems to me specific to the stance of the artist: not to place the message completely on one side alone, neither image nor text. (414-15)

If we extend the argument that Broodthaers's installations are three-dimensional free verse poems to the industrial signs on the theory that they, too, exist as part of Broodthaers's visual poetic career, what we walk away with is another statement of the importance Broodthaers placed on relationality over hierarchy and the mutual warping that comes about when one places different iterations or intellectual aspects of a work in concert with themselves. Just as the different versions of *"Un coup de dés: Image"* deform themselves by their proximity, each inflecting the other in the viewer's mind, so do the positive/negative and variously painted versions of each thermoplastic sign pull on one another while the opaque mess of their signifier/signified equations pull them inside out at the level of language and meaning. The point of the visual "free verse" in Marcel Broodthaers, then, becomes a matter of the mutual attraction and attendant deformation of matter and meaning in its constituent parts—a muddying up of clear communication in service to the critique of language (and other) systems we can neither

abide by nor escape. If one were to search for a meaning or point to free verse that acknowledges its traditionally negative conception (its emptying out of earlier prosodic systems) while leveraging the "positive" materials that remain in each poem to some forward-looking end, one would be hard pressed to do better than Broodthaers in his use of free verse to problematize the very concept of language. "Free Verse: Prosody of Relational, Non-Hierarchical Meaning and the Questioning of All Linguistic and Systematic Givens" is certainly a mouthful, but it is also exciting, as it gives us yet another way to understand the positive, forward-moving aspects of a prosody too often defined in negative terms.

The true test of whether this definition can function as a baseline for certain types of free verse, however, lies in its replicability. What proof do we have that Broodthaers's installation poems represent a durable rationale emanating from within free verse as opposed to an ingenious but idiosyncratic use of free-verse-adjacent materials? As the remainder of this chapter will argue, the praxis of more recent poets like Philip Metres tend to confirm not only the persistence of Broodthaers's techniques but the continuing existence of the rationale toward which Broodthaers bent these things.

Metres, an accomplished political/documentary poet and scholar of war resistance literature, has published many volumes over the course of his career, including five volumes of poetry (*To See the Earth*, 2008; *A Concordance of Leaves*, 2013; *Sand Opera*, 2015; *Pictures at an Exhibition*, 2016; *Shrapnel Maps*, 2020) and two critical books (*Behind the Lines: War Resistance Poetry on the American Homefront since 1941* in 2007 and *The Sound of Listening: Poetry as Refuge and Resistance* in 2018). In this work, Metres often demonstrates a willingness to experiment with poetic form and multiple mediation, readily deploying what poet Marilyn Hacker calls "the techniques of postmodern poetry, interrupted by stunning lyric, to speak the

near-unspeakable" (cover). In Metres's most recent volume of poetry, *Shrapnel Maps*, this experimentation includes the book's norm-defying 160-page length; erasure poetics of several varieties, including but not limited to blackout poetry; regional print ads featuring oranges, including multiple versions of a travel ad exhorting tourists to visit Israeli-held Palestine (one of which features superimposed poetic text); and a collage poem pasted over one of the volume's several maps of the "Holy Land"—to say nothing of primary source materials such as photographs and Israeli military documents, included to give the Israeli-Palestinian conflict greater context. These representational strategies alone could support a chapter's worth of Broodthaers comparison. However, we will confine our attention to Metres's 2015 collection, *Sand Opera*, which in Hacker's turn of phrase concerns "the willed destruction and equally willed survival of those confined and tortured at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo" during the United States' post-9/11 War on Terror, as it is in these poems that Metres's practice is most directly like Broodthaers's in the Literary Exhibitions (cover).

As a collection, *Sand Opera* is essentially an expanded version of Metres's earlier chapbook, *abu ghraib arias* (2011), which won the Arab American Book Award for poetry in 2012. According to Metres's notes, the chapbook, now serving as the longer volume's opening section, is a "dialogue" derived from an array of often documentary sources, including:

> a Standard Operating Procedure manual for Camp Echo at the Guantanamo Bay prison camp (thanks to WikiLeaks); the testimony of Abu Ghraib torture victims found in Mark Danner's *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib, and the War on Terror*; the words of U.S. soldiers and contractors as found in Philip Gourevitch and Errol Morris's *The Ballad of Abu Ghraib*; the official reports on the Abu Ghraib prison scandal (the Taguba Report, the Schlesinger Report, etc.);

> interviews with Joe Darby and Eric Fair (two whistle-blowers); the Bible; and the Code of Hammurabi. (101)

These materials weave together into lyric poems guided as much by Metres's poetic subjectivity as they are, in Hacker's words, "interrupted" by them. This procedure of working out an original poem from found text and then of pasting noncontiguous excerpts of it across a variety of available surfaces, as Metres does in projective-looking poems like those in his "(echo /ex/)" series, bears obvious resemblance to Broodthaers's practice in *Le Corbeau et le Renard*, where excerpts from an original poem Broodthaers made out of La Fontaine's crow and fox fable were similarly mounted. Meanwhile, the several poems appearing under the "(echo /ex/)" banner also share an affinity with the many versions of Broodthaers's *Un coup de dés*. For example, the second "(echo /ex/)" poem, [*In the beginning*], incorporates both the rectangular black bars of Broodthaers's aluminum plates and a printed rendition of the transparent book's frosted text. In this case, the erasure poetics are less about playing up the visual and spatial characteristics of Mallarmé's "*Un Coup*" than they are about representing the muted, even obliterated speech record of the prisoners and the abusive, half-public activities of the military guards who later became embroiled in the Abu Ghraib scandal. Metres's procedure is the same, however, as is much of his intent in this poem, on the question of who may speak clearly, and who or what controls the mediations that allow or deny that speech. These moves render the fiction of clear, efficient communication through language just as suspect at the Abu Ghraib black site as it is in Broodthaers's work.

"[*In the beginning*]," for instance, allows the Judeo-Christian Bible (a text ascribed to the facility's guards) to speak in clear black italics as it delivers power-centric bits of dialogue such as "*In the beginning*," "*our image*," "*dominion*," and "*every creeping thing*" (8). These

pronouncements, which do not receive the pushback seen elsewhere to the Koran (7), stand alongside black nonitalic text rendering the prisoners' story, which frosted and blacked out sections then sanitize for official consumption. Examples of this dialogue include the lines "I saw myself *on the face* / *of the deep . . . And the darkness he called Night*" or the more damning "And Graner released / my hand from the door and he cuffed my hand in the back. / I did not do anything ██████ hit me hard on my / ██████ cuffed me to the window of the room" (8). In the last example, which features everything but the italic Bible text, there are three levels of speech. In black non-italics, we see the minimal, official identification of the camp's most abusive guard, whose full name everyone knew to be Charles Graner but who is often referred to simply as "G." Meanwhile, in light gray text, Metres represents the fuller account of violence at the camp, including material that might be elided (either on purpose or through bureaucratic indifference) in an official report. This, we might say, is the hushed-up reality that only appears in the poor focus it does as the result of whistle-blowing efforts and belated investigations like those that produced the Taguba and Schleshinger Reports. Other hazy details include notes on the time of the abuse ("the first days of Ramadan") and its extent ("came with two boys naked and ███cuffed / together face to face and Graner was beating them") that would reflect poorly on the military if spoken aloud. In both cases, however, the various textual artefacts pull at one another, drawing attention to different but equally significant meanings depending on the combinations considered and putting one on guard about the use and abuse of official language in the description of state-sponsored violence. Finally, there is the absolutely censored black-bar text, secrets unspoken in any version of the record, which remain lost in the black site.

The postmodern visual poetry tool kit, as utilized by Broodthaers, exists elsewhere in the section as well. In two other instances from the "(echo /ex/)" sequence, Metres whittles away at

his documentary transcripts until only a single grammatical or syntactical variable remains. One poem along these lines effaces all but the words "me," "he," "I," and the letter "G," which stands again for Charles Graner (Metres 20). At first, the poem appears little more than a scattering of pronouns stripped of their content, figuring once more the inability or unwillingness of language and its speakers to communicate. Yet, in the wider context of "(echo /ex/)," even these redacted lines sing, refocusing our attention as they do on the fundamental relationship between captor and captive ("he" and "I") that underpins every poem where "G" and this speaker appear. Even without that context, something of this relationship would still appear in the near total silencing of the "I" beyond the fact of their existence and the way the early "he/me" dichotomy yields to a desperate string of "I's" toward the end. Whatever the elided details might have been, the speaker ends by insisting on the personal pronoun—on self-integrity and right to exist, to be heard—outside this poisonous dialectic. The poem even provides a suggestion of why that might be, as the basic grammatical difference between "he" and "me" is the difference between a "subject pronoun" (with all its attendant agency) and an "object pronoun" (the subordinate entity over which that agent holds power, as in the sentence: "He hit me"). The recalcitrance of language, then, is not just an apolitical fact of linguistics but something that can be motivated by human beings and their agendas, a point that also seems to be at the heart of Broodthaers's police t-shirt. Accordingly, the goal of Metres's pronoun poem is to stage a productive artistic encounter between two entities and the systems that enclose them, whether that means "I" and "he," speech and censorship, or the reader and the language they are reading.

The same might be said of the final "(echo /ex/)" poem, which reduces its linguistic field to nothing but punctuation (fig. 17). Here, nested quotation marks, stoic commas, and period after isloated period fleck the page, indicating where the already scant documentary information

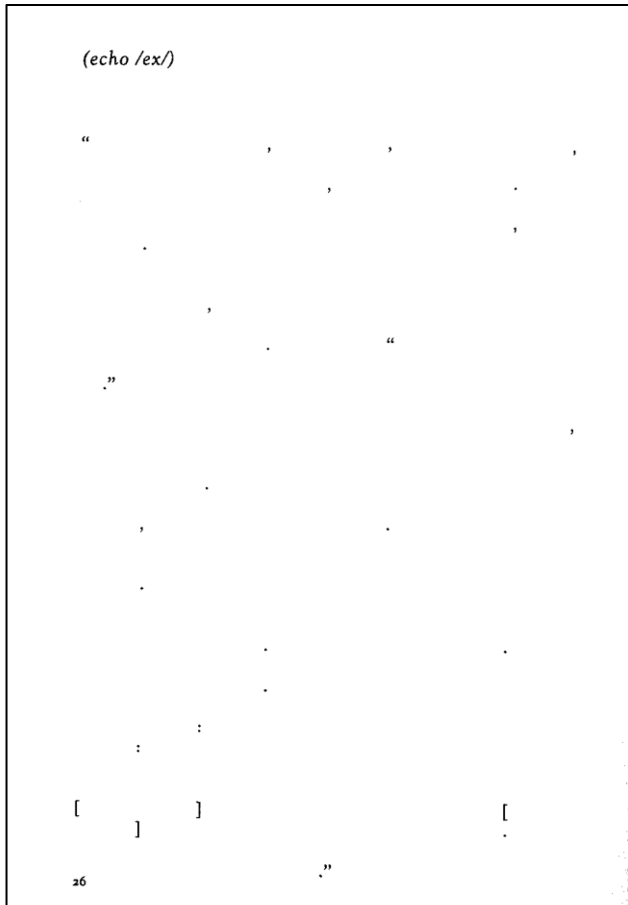


Figure 17. Metres, Philip. "(echo /ex/)" [Punctuation Only]. *Sand Opera.* Alice James Books, 2015. p. 26.

should have gone but giving no clue as to what it would have said (Metres 26). The only break in the monotony comes near the end, where two sets of empty square brackets suggest that even these silences have been redacted. As with Broodthaers's investigation of museum structure in *Musée des Aigles* and the typographical plaques, the point is not simply to stage an encounter with the text but with the setting within which that material is made legible and illegible. In Broodthaers and Metres, that encounter is produced by emphasizing both the space where the encounter takes place and the reader's ability to move freely within it as they make meaning.

No sequence in *Sand Opera* exemplifies this better than Metres's innovative "Black Site" series, which combines the poetically rendered documentary material of *abu ghraib arias* with line drawings of the detention facilities at various U.S. black sites. The merger is facilitated by another classic Broodthaers technique, the use of transparent, vellum-like overlays to allow readers to approach both poem and diagram from several directions. "Black Site (Exhibit M)," for example, is a composite work formed when the sheet of transparent paper with the detention camp diagram is laid atop an adjacent free verse poem where the camp doctor inspects the speaker/detainee's injuries, cryptically informing him that he is "*going / to a better place*" (71-

73). In this case, Metres derives both the line drawing and poem from documents in the legal case of Mohamed Farag Ahmad Bashmilah, a successively rendered black site detainee, against Jeppesen Dataplan, a Boeing subsidiary (Metres 103). The overall effect of "Black Site (Exhibit M)" can be difficult to describe, as much of the poem's power and meaning come from the reader's shifting experience of the work as it is read—as the material, visual, and literary terms of the piece seem to come apart in their hands, only to reform themselves moments later when new viewing options become available. A reading which accounts for the viewer's likely sequence of page turns and Metres's surprising reuse of the non-"Black Site" poem on the facing page, however, comes close enough to demonstrate the continuing potential of the nonhierarchical, multidirectional free verse Broodthaers exhibited in his installations and black-barred artist's books.

To fully appreciate Metres's achievement in "Black Site (Exhibit M)," we must begin with a reading of "Etruscan Cista Handle," the poem (or gallery item) immediately to the left of "Exhibit M." Indeed, considering this poem part of a larger installation including "Black Site (Exhibit M)" is something Metres invites when he notes that the titular "Etruscan Cista Handle" is itself a museum piece (103):

Etruscan Cista Handle

How peaceful he looks, the gates of his face
now shut for good, facing the ground. His body's

hoisted horizontal, his arms embrace
the air, his penis a slack finger of gravity.

Two winged soldier-angels must stoop, stagger
to cradle his naked inhuman weight.

Their heads torqued, as if listening to the lead
of the body, they bear it in bent tender shoulders,

in the balked leaning and strain of their gait,
and struggle against falling. Their maker is dead.

And still the war continues, though it takes
other names. Sarpedon bronzed not breathing, the angels

bronze stumbling, all burned into a single handle.
To open the jewelry box, you have to grasp the corpse. (70)

The lost barrel of this cista was likely cylindrical, made to house jewelry and delicate toiletry items such as scent bottles—though these containers have also served as organ jars and ceremonial props. Cistas were common in the 4th century and afterward, from Egypt to Italy, and many of the specimens that remain bear sculptural handles such as the one described by Metres (Wunderlich 39-40). In this case, Metres writes about a specific artefact known as the *Sleep and Death Cista Handle* (Italy, ca. 400-375 BC) (fig. 18), housed at the Cleveland Museum of Art. According to the museum, the figures on the handle "probably represent Sleep (Hypnos) and Death (Thanatos) holding the body of Sarpedon[, a] son of Zeus who helped to defend Troy from invading Greek forces [and] fell at the hands of Patroclus, as told by Homer in Book XVI of the

Figure 18. *Sleep and Death Cista Handle*. 400-375 BC. Cleveland Museum of Art, https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1945.13.

Iliad." Following Sarpedon's death, Apollo "intervened to protect the body, removing it from danger and entrusting it to the two winged deities, as depicted here and in a number of other ancient artworks, Greek and Etruscan alike." The handle is small, five-and-a-half inches tall and a shade under six inches in length, with the greenish discoloration of oxidized bronze.

For most of the poem's first five stanzas, Metres dwells in ekphrastic description of the handle, dipping frequently but unobtrusively into subjective interpretation—as when he describes Sarpedon's dead face as "peaceful" (l. 1), his limp arms as objects which might "embrace the air" (3-4), and his weight as "inhuman" (6), which being bronze is both technically and figuratively accurate. Hypnos and Thanatos are pictured, in the poem at least, as having a difficult time with their burden, "struggling against falling" (10) as they carry Sarpedon on "bent tender shoulders" (8). All are fair interpretations of these figures' poses.

Metres switches gears near the end of the fifth couplet, however, broadening the poem's temporal and symbolic landscapes. "Their maker is dead," he writes, puncturing the grandeur of Hypnos and Thanatos's struggle with a quick, wedged-in sentence at the end of stanza five. The bluntness reads as understatement, even grim comedy, but its primary goal is rupture. Gone, suddenly, is the relatively seamless overlap of line and syntax that characterized the previous sentence (which took, it should be noted, seven times as long to unfold). Gone, also, is the timeless bubble of ekphrastic description, which cannot sustain the life of the artist into

immortality despite twenty-four centuries having passed since the handle was cast. Nor does the handle's (or the poem's) intense memorialization of Sarpedon's death end death. Instead, as Metres writes, "the war continues, though it takes / other names," fracturing any notion we might have that the pain and suffering of the *Iliad* end with the *Iliad*, or that it may be dismissed as little more than myth (11-12). "The war continues" grafts the prior sixty-nine pages of Metres's poetry about the American War on Terror to this now motive timeline, and to view bronzed Sarpedon and his "angels" as the sculpted, inanimate symbols of human pain they always were (12-13). However deep we may get into the ekphrasis's revivification of the Trojan War, these lines refocus us on the artefact and to the museum as a cultural and spatial context. This last is key, as museums are both places where one might legitimately "open the jewelry box" of human suffering and human beauty by "grasp[ing]" or understanding the corpse handle displayed and placed where, by definition, there are no actual war corpses to be had (just a more or less potent narrative about them, controlled by those who control the museum). It may also be worth remembering that the cista handle Metres treats has broken (or been broken) away from its box, rendering the cista unopenable and leaving the question of whether we can truly achieve empathy with the dead through a culturally excerpted object.

One of the conundrums of "Etruscan Cista Handle," then, centers on how to grasp what cannot be grasped and open what cannot be opened. These are potent, relevant concerns to the assemblage of "Black Site (Exhibit M)," which follows on the righthand page and deals with the similar question of how to display what the U.S. government considered undisplayable—how to speak what the U.S. government considered unspeakable in a public setting. In this, the museum context of the previous poem pulls at "Black Site (Exhibit M)" in the same geographic, juxtapositional way that art objects pull on other art objects in a Broodthaers exhibit, calling for

other kinds of institutional framing and clarifying, if we still needed clarification, which war "the war continues" refers to (fig. 19). "Etruscan Cista Handle's" forcibly bronzed bodies and the way those bodies are "burned into a single handle" (here both "handgrip" and "name") links horrifically with "(Exhibit M)," where the bodies of so-called "enemy combatants" are rendered silently to and from black sites for the inflicting of a similar, dehumanizing pain.

Etruscan Cista Handle

How peaceful he looks, the gates of his face
now shut for good, facing the ground. His body's

hoisted horizontal, his arms embrace
the air, his penis a slack finger of gravity.

Two winged soldier-angels must stoop, stagger
to cradle his naked inhuman weight.

Their heads torqued, as if listening to the lead
of the body, they bear it in bent tender shoulders,

in the balked leaning and strain of their gait,
and struggle against falling. Their maker is dead.

And still the war continues, though it takes
other names. Sarpedon bronzed not breathing, the angels

bronze stumbling, all burned into a single handle.
To open the jewelry box, you have to grasp the corpse.

70

Black Site (Exhibit M)

the doctor with the disfigured

hand shined a light on me

noted my marks

on a diagram of the human body

the doctor told me I was going

to a better "place"

73

Figure 19. Metres, Philip. "Etruscan Cista Handle" and "Black Site (Exhibit M)," *Sand Opera*, Alice James, 2015, pp. 70-73. This represents the initial view of these poems, with the vellum page pressed firmly against "Black Site (Exhibit M)."

We know that we are in Broodthaers's theoretical wheelhouse when the title "Black Site (Exhibit M)" presents Metres's poem as clear, documentary evidence only to problematize this evidence by leaving half of it (the poem) obscure, frosted over by the intervention of a partially transparent sheet of paper. This hazy area includes the title of the poem but does not extend to

the transparent overlay's main subject: a labeled line diagram of one of the U.S. military black sites where Bashmilah was held. The building's floorplan stands in sharp relief to the surrounding text, which drifts gradually from top left to bottom right on the page with a break for the diagram between. However, even this has its caveats. For example, the thin text used as labels, and even certain features of the building itself (the guard tower, a metal chair), are rendered in soft gray, confusing background and foreground in such a manner that it is jarring when the transparent page lifts and the almost total split between poem and diagram is revealed. The blueprint elements pull away from the human context of the poetry, insisting on their objectivity and distance from that text but also on their own obscurity. This latter becomes the case when lifting the vellum page removes the diagram's title, obscuring the idea that the building is anything as concerning as a military black site. Though torture and detention are still embedded in the diagram, if one bothers to read individual room descriptions, removal of the mid-2000s War on Terror term "black site" still does great damage to the site's identification (fig. 20). The who, when, and where of the camp dissolve with compartmentalization, hampering the diagram's usefulness as a trial "exhibit."

The purposeful, institutional separation (therefore dismantling) of context in two things clearly meant to go together is a large part of Metres's point in "Black Site (Exhibit M)," at least where the silence of military redaction is concerned, and that point is well supported by his use of both the transparent paper and the confusion of material/textual elements seen in Broodthaers plaques like *Académie I* and *II*. Though Jacques Rancière's reading of the plaques focused, with much cause, on the mutual cancellations of word and image, we see in Metres's handling that the cancellations are not always coequal (61). The cancellation is, rather, a matter of framing and who has the power to set that frame. Beyond the Dallas police t-shirt, this was a point

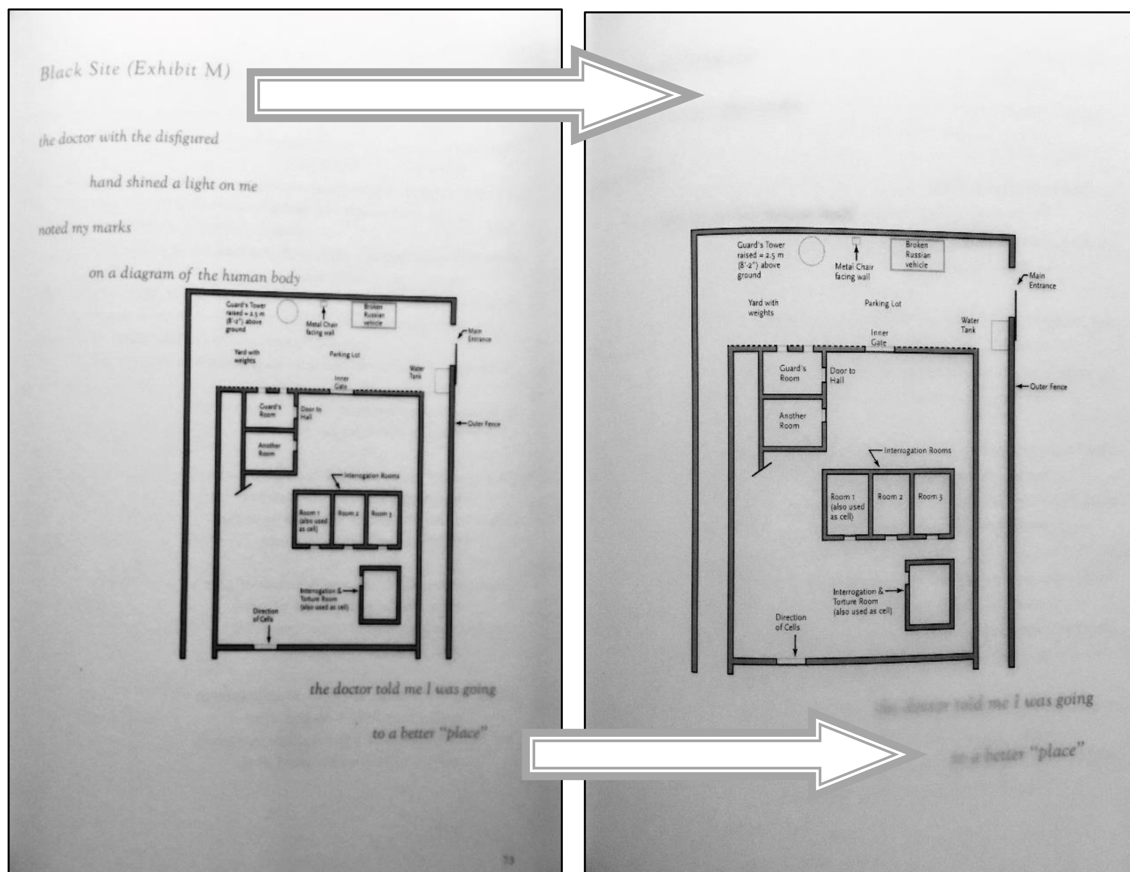


Figure 20. Metres, Philip. "Black Site (Exhibit M)," *Sand Opera*, Alice James, 2015, pp. 70-73. This before and after view shows the vellum sheet coming away from the poem beneath it. Arrows point to disappearing title and text.

Broodthaers also made at Documenta 5 in 1972, when he chained off a square of floor space in his fictional museum, leaving as explanation a floor sign reading "Private Property" in three languages (fig. 21) (*A Retrospective* 210-11). The foreground/background and public/private confusion, along with the arbitrariness of the demarcation, make clear that such lines are always drawn by those with the power to draw the lines, even when the separation seems practical (as between gallery and storage space) at a museum. Public museums are only public when the museums say so.

Surprisingly, these themes are even clearer after turning the semitransparent page, at which point two things happen. The first is that, with the diagram gone, "Black Site (Exhibit M)"

Figure 21. Broodthaers, Marcel. *Exhibition views of Section D'Art Moderne.* 1972, Neue Galerie (Documenta 5). *Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective*, edited by Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Christophe Cherix, The Museum of Modern Art and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, p. 210-11. Photographs by Balthasar Burkhard (left) and Maria Gilissen (right).

finally presents an unfiltered encounter with its poetic text These newly compartmentalized poetic elements open themselves to a more traditional kind of literary analysis where readers may ponder, among other things, what makes the doctor's hand "disfigured" (line 1). Is it a physical injury—a condition which might elicit sympathy from him when it comes to injuries sustained by his detainees? Or is the hand disfigured because it is grotesquely whole in a place dedicated to breaking things? Is it "dis/un-figured" in the sense that it is undrawn, not rendered as "marks" on the clipboard's "diagram of the human body" (3-4)? Is the doctor's hand allowed a wound—allowed an acknowledgement of pain—whereas the speaker's wounded hand exists in the record only as a painless mark/smudge? "Marks" in the sense of grades or evaluations might also turn what looks at first like an accounting of pain and bodily injury into a dispassionate score—as though the detainee were failing because he is not performing in the desired manner, his bodily injury amounting to a particularly harsh schoolmaster's "F." Metres leaves this interpretation to readers, the huge gulf of white space where the detention camp image previously sat becoming a gulf of inscrutable silence, as though the speaker is unsure of what to say about all of this beyond the resonant description already given. In the end, Bashmilah, can

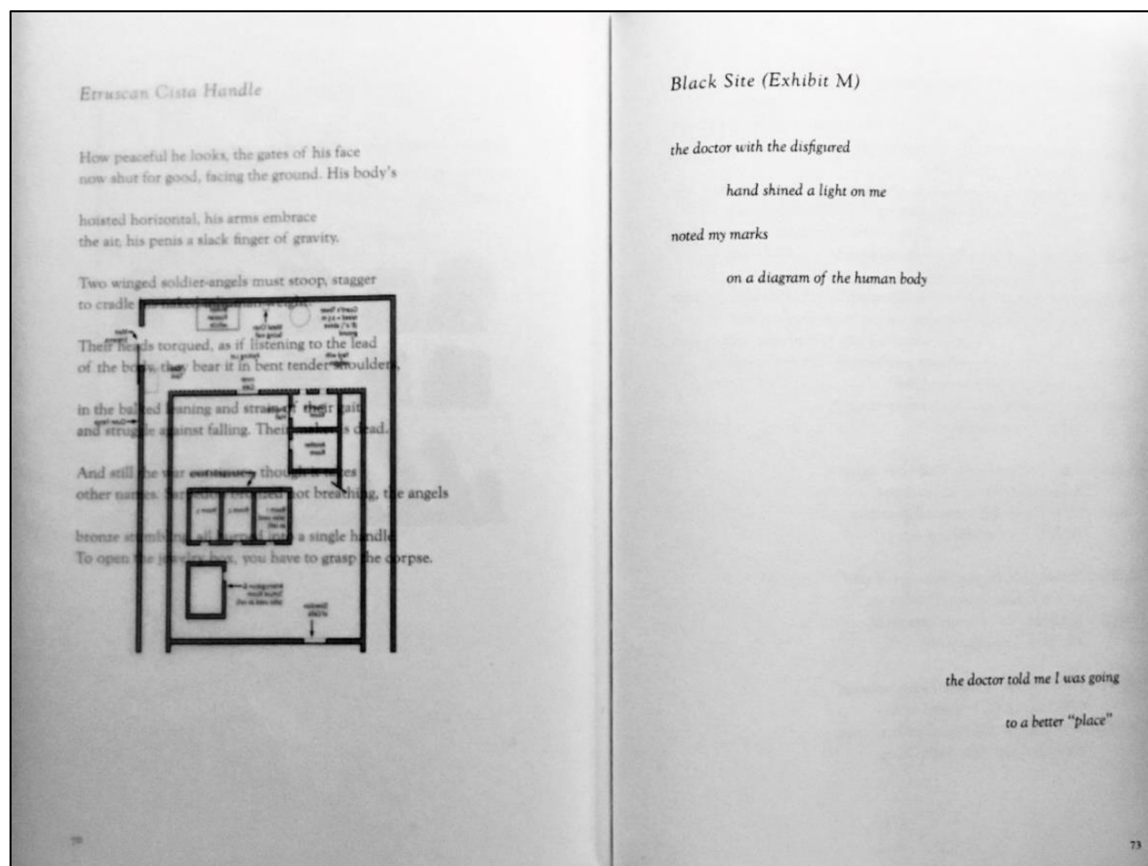
only deadpan that "*the doctor told me I was going / to a better 'place,'*" with scare quotes simultaneously indicating relocation to a better facility, relocation to another black site better only in its ability to twist information out of its subjects, and the obscurity/silence of death (5-6).

The scare quotes also encourage an interrogation of "place" more generally. What is the role of place in Bashmilah's torture? One of the doctor's implications seems to be that location is a prime factor in Bashmilah's treatment. Better places lead to better results (less torture). Yet, a change of venue would not change the racial and ethnic criteria that landed Bashmilah in the black site, nor the American military intelligence system within which sites like the one at Abu Ghraib exist. This is clear for readers who flip between pages, adding and removing the cell diagram, which makes any promise of improvement ring hollow. How can one trust the word of even the most well-meaning doctor when he is complicit in the torture and detention at your current "place?" The frame within which this promise occurs is too obvious and troubling for his claims to be credible. Metres's treatment of the text-only poem encourages similar distrust—not of the truth content in Bashmilah's testimony but of the private interiority and freedom to speak connoted by the lyric poem. Though these reflections may once have been private, they are now subject to public scrutiny, as are the courtroom transcripts Metres drew Bashmilah's testimony from. Further, if there is privacy or interiority here, it is in many ways the forced privacy of black site detention (an interiority with ulterior motives). Despite the appearance of free speech, these words are the result of extralegal confinement and were, for a time, as restricted as words can be. Even calling this portion of "Exhibit M" a "poem" is tenuous, as Metres has shown readers that the work is not as self-contained and self-sufficient as we usually believe the lyric poem to be. The gap in the work screams its now-obscured linkages. And, of course, this was never poetry to begin with. Rather, it is prose testimony "rendered" into verse by Metres's

intervention. None of this takes away from the role "Black Site (Exhibit M)" plays as a poem of witness. It is simply to point out that Metres's deliberate, Broodthaers-like free verse technique calls readers to be even more aware of the terms under which that witness takes place. Fortunately, the protocol-revealing, protocol-busting nature of free verse is uniquely suited to laying bare those terms, when used this way.

In many books, this would be enough. Yet here, the transparent page and the way it allows for reading and interpretation through its opposite (verso) side means there are still several spatial perspectives from which to view the assemblage (fig. 22). Looking at the two-page spread formed by the backward-facing portion of the diagram and the forward-facing poetic text of "Exhibit M," readers may have the sudden feeling of having passed through the looking glass into the black site, where Bashmilah and his suffering wait. Once inside, turning to look through the blueprint's verso is akin to staring through prison bars, which the lines delineating cells and compound walls now seem to be. On this side of the exhibit, the transparent sheet brings us closer to Bashmilah rather than pulling us away and rendering his testimony invisible. As with Broodthaers, the lines of the poem and diagram give us not just one facet of the black site but a multiperspectival view suited to approximating the whole.

Metres has a final surprise in the way his work circles back on itself to round out its gallery of perspectives. Looking through the verso of the diagram, we see that it is now "Etruscan Cista Handle" that is partially obscured (fig. 23). Unlike "Black Site (Exhibit M)," however, which was designed to work with the camp diagram, parts of "Etruscan Cista Handle" nearly disappear beneath the detention facility's walls. This highlights unexpected parts of a poem we thought we knew, torquing its meaning once more from the juxtaposition. For example, line six of "Etruscan Cista Handle" now exists under partial erasure, one side of the compound's



Etruscan Cista Handle

How peaceful he looks, the gates of his face
now shut for good, facing the ground. His body's

hoisted horizontal, his arms embrace
the air, his penis a slack finger of gravity.

Two winged soldier-angels must stoop, stagger
to cradle [illegible]

Their [illegible]ds torqued, as if listening to the lead
of the bo[illegible] bear it in bent tender [illegible]oulde[illegible]

in the ba[illegible]ed [illegible]aning and strai[illegible] [illegible]ir [illegible]ait
and strug[illegible]e a[illegible]inst falling. Thei[illegible]s d[illegible]ad.

And still [illegible]e [illegible]ar [illegible] thou[illegible]es
other na[illegible] [illegible]ot brea[illegible]hi[illegible]g, t[illegible]e angels

bronze st[illegible] a single h[illegible]ndl[illegible]
To open [illegible] you have to grasp [illegible]he c[illegible]rpse.

Black Site (Exhibit M)

the doctor with the disfigured

hand shined a light on me

noted my marks

on a diagram of the human body

the doctor told me I was going

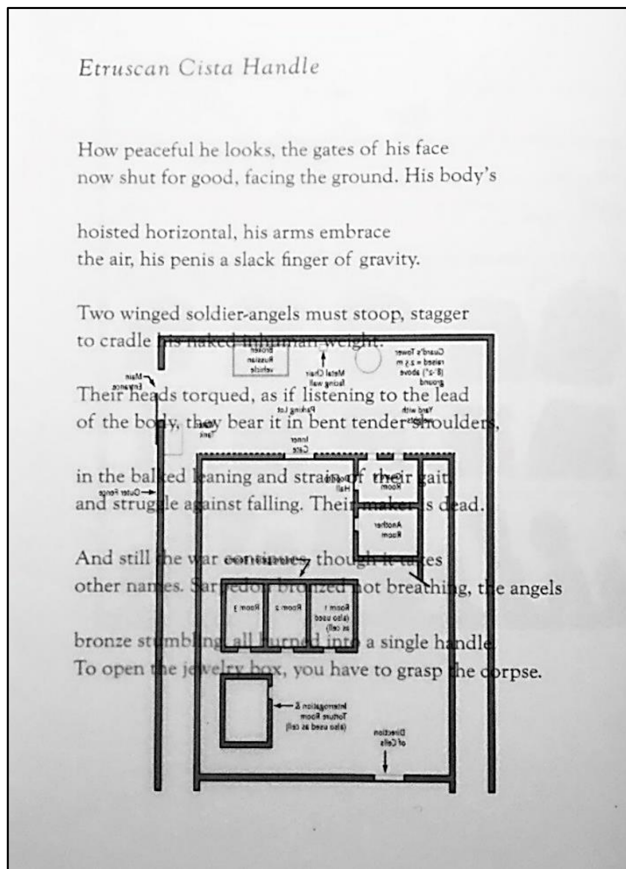
to a better "place"

73

Figure 22. Metres, Philip. "Black Site (Exhibit M)," *Sand Opera*, Alice James, 2015, pp. 70-73. This view becomes available to readers after turning the transparent and un-indexed vellum page.

outer wall interfering with the description of Sarpedon's "naked inhuman weight." Though it is still possible to read these words beneath the blueprint, recognizing Sarpedon's humanity is, nonetheless, more difficult as a result. Thus, what was true of Bashmilah's disappearing text and humanity in "Exhibit M" becomes true here as well. This is not the only example of partial erasure. The "maker" in "Their maker is dead" (10) also gets a strikethrough, as does the torture-adjacent "Sarpedon bronzed not breathing" (12). These moves represent silencing and death, as does "all burned into" when cell doors underline the phrase (13).

The transparent page highlights other things as well. For example, the pronoun attached to "winged soldier-angels" ("their") finds itself boxed in by the site's guard room, giving Hypnos


Etruscan Cista Handle

How peaceful he looks, the gates of his face
now shut for good, facing the ground. His body's

hoisted horizontal, his arms embrace
the air, his penis a slack finger of gravity.

Two winged soldier-angels must stoop, stagger
to cradle his naked inhuman weight.

Their heads torqued, as if listening to the lead
of the body, they bear it in bent tender shoulders,

in the balked leaning and strain of their gait
and struggle against falling. Their maker is dead.

And still the war continues, though it takes
other names. Sarpedon bronzed not breathing, the angels

bronze stumbling all turned into a single handle.
To open the jewelry box, you have to grasp the corpse.

Figure 23. Metres, Philip. "Etruscan Cista Handle," *Sand Opera*, Alice James, 2015, pp. 70-72. This closeup occurs when the vellum page presses against the poem beneath.

and Thanatos a more sinister, political valence than they had. Beyond partisans in the Trojan war, they are also minders of their world's status quo, jailors as much as patrons. The "continues" in "And still the war continues" is similarly worrying, as it receives both strikethrough (from the label for the "Interrogation Rooms") and an arrow pointing to those rooms. The continuation is both a neon arrow and institutionally obscure.

It is not just what is on the page that is concerning. Most times, the guard rooms, cells, and interrogation chambers of the backward diagram do not highlight other words. Rather, they highlight the empty spaces between stanzas or after the poem. As with the mid-poem gulf in "(Exhibit M)," the implication here may be that damage occurs in spaces made invisible through lack of speech. What we do not see between the lines of "Etruscan Cista Handle" calls into question what we have been allowed to see, and vice versa—an effect apropos of Broodthaers, who forced readers to contemplate similar matters with his artist's books and the mean little square of "private" space at Documenta 5.

As Metres demonstrates, this Broodthaers-like free verse is eminently repeatable, a necessary quality in any prosodic system. Yet, even more important than repeatability is the definitional picture that emerges of free verse when these examples are placed beside one

another and taken as visual metaphors for the operation of that prosody. Together, Broodthaers and Metres suggest that free verse is at its most powerful when it structures meaning in the manner of an omnidirectional collage, and when it gives readers room to wander through that assemblage of lines, rhythms, styles, objects, and pages in a variety of ways, confronting the poem's formal and thematic concerns more thoroughly for the effort. This new, all-encompassing exercise in reading applies not just to reading direction on the printed page but to the directionality of more intangible things such as the flow of the poem's argument, which the sonnet, say, overdetermines even before it begins. In such a work, meaning resides not in a punchline-like final couplet that the reader must reach in the end. Rather, it lies suspended in the relative, nonhierarchical relationships between words, lines, and ideas in the piece. The free verse poem is, as Broodthaers's contemporary Charles Olson wrote, a matter of tensions:

> The objects which occur at every given moment of composition (of recognition, we can call it) are, can be, must be treated exactly as they do occur therein and not by any ideas or preconceptions from outside the poem, must be handled as a series of objects in field in such a way that a series of tensions (which they also are) are made to *hold*, and to hold exactly inside the content and the context of the poem which has forced itself, through the poet and them, into being. (Olson, "Projective Verse" 243-44)

While these lines are somewhat cryptic in Olson's famous essay, substantiated by relatively few examples of how one might actually practice an object- or field-based poetics, their potential applications (and Olson's meaning) are clearer when viewed with an eye toward the poetry Broodthaers produced in his more three-dimensional poetic space.

Beyond this, Broodthaers and Metres also suggest that free verse is stronger when its potential for omnidirectional, non-hierarchical meaning causes enough background/foreground confusion to make the systems and assumptions within which the poem dwells visible once again. This was a virtue of early English-language free verse, which at its inception truly was about getting poets to see the structures they used with a more critical eye and to question their necessity. Both Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot's return to aspects of traditional form is enough to suggest that it was ultimately the questioning and testing of the system that mattered more to them than its outright abolishment. In Broodthaers, this self-referential, art gallery free verse pulls back the curtain on the museum and Mallarmé as cultural institutions, and on the signifier/signified formulation of language. In Metres, that relational omnidirectionality forces us to contend with both the museum and the way extrajudicial systems and the convention of redaction intervene in other battles between speech and silence, understanding and the lack thereof. This, by virtue of history and formal inclination, makes free verse prosody a tool for measuring and evaluating other prosodic tools, a space for measuring and evaluating other spaces—other readable, poetic rooms—and how or why we've used them as we have. Together, Broodthaers and Metres suggest that the definition of free verse as the removal of 18th and 19th century poetic structures isn't exactly wrong; it is simply too limited along its own lines. Free verse, deployed as an omnidirectional collage of relative lines and imagery, is a system revealer and (if need be) a system buster, as it proved when the Symbolists, the Imagists, and their descendants used it to break open their own pre-existing prosodic systems. The only question now is what new systems and assumptions need revealing, and how, as Metres does with extreme rendition, these things may be put on display and questioned by this form of verse.

Broodthaers, it is worth noting, continued to question the institutions within which we make meaning for the rest of his career, though as Cathleen Chaffee writes in her essay on Broodthaers's "Emblems of Authority," the artist's critique eventually moved beyond the museum to encompass "other entrenched powers. These ranged from the economic structures and critical authority that govern art's value to the power of academies and the acquisitional and sometimes colonialist spirit of government" (248). One of Chaffee's primary examples of this is a 1968 work in which "Broodthaers made a painting simulating a chalkboard; over matte black, he inscribed in white paint, 'Il n'y a pas de structures primaires / il n'y a pas de 'Structures Primaires'' (There are no primary structures / there are no 'primary structures')" (248). This dual statement, which questions not only the primacy of one structure over another but the existence of "primary structures" as a whole, recalls the formal equivalencies of Broodthaers's "What is painting?" Chaffee, however, points to the work's broader context, noting that Broodthaers created his chalkboard "the same year that the exhibition *Minimal Art* at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague introduced [this] largely American movement to European audiences" and that the piece may critique the premise behind the "iconic" Minimal art exhibition *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors*, staged at the Jewish Museum in New York several years prior. "The American exhibition's thesis," Chaffee writes, "was that such large-scale abstract forms had reduced art to its originary, generative essentials" (248). In his chalkboard painting and throughout the 1960s and 70s, however, Broodthaers, in Chaffee's words, "polemicized against this notion that primary forms could be accepted as self-evident, and against the idea that such apparently simple Minimalist sculptures could obviate art's historical context, societal role or connecting language" (248). His proof of this included not only *Le Corbeau et le Renard* and *Exposition littéraire autour de Mallarmé* but other, more pointedly

political works, including his provocatively titled *Décor: A Conquest by Marcel Broodthaers*, which in 1975 extended the home decorative metaphor undergirding Sadakichi Hartmann's approach to free verse as *Japanese Art*. One crucial difference between Hartmann and Broodthaers's use of décor as poetic analogy, however, was that in Broodthaers the poetic home was always suspect—an institution whose language (visual, social, or otherwise) was questionable regardless of whether the poem was an adornment of existing structures or an engine of spatial and linguistic reformulation.

In broad terms, one of the most appealing things about free verse, to both writers and readers, has always been its illusion of frank simplicity, of authenticity compared to the intricate, courtly artifice of something like the sestina. The fact that this is hardly the case and that a good free verse poem can easily be more intricate and façade heavy than any sestina hardly matters. If the poem looks, sounds, and advertises itself as freedom, then it will be for most people. Free verse makes it easy to believe that the formal minimalism achieved in getting rid of rhyme and meter brings us to a kind of a ur-poetry, a "primary" poetic form in the language of American minimalist art. Broodthaers and Metres, however, encourage us to remember that no amount of formal simplicity (for example, the austerity of a black redaction bar) "obviates art's historical context, societal role or connecting language" (Chaffee 248). If free verse reformulates the poetic home from the inside out, as it does for Hartmann, it is also a prosody which encourages us not to get too comfortable with our surroundings. As we have seen, one poem's or reader's comfortable stroll through a museum exhibit may quickly become another poem's or reader's years-long detention in an American black site. In works like these, the two are not separable except to the extent that we turn blind eyes toward one or the other, a point Broodthaers made in

his *Décor*, which situated the banality of 19th and 20th century room decoration within the context of the military powers underwriting them (fig. 24).

Figure 24. Broodthaers, Marcel. *Exhibition view with Salle XX siècle (Twentieth-century room)*. 1975, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. *Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective*, edited by Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Christophe Cherix, The Museum of Modern Art and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, p. 322. Photographs by Maria Gilissen. A patio set authorized by American military power. Visible through the door is *Salle XIX siècle (Nineteenth-century room)*, featuring cannons and other 19th-century military props. The rooms create a mutually informative tension that is historical, social, and visually poetic.

Writing in "Dix mille francs de recompense" of an earlier portrait-based work sometimes called "General with cigar" (but speaking, in his relative way, for all the equivalent modes of art and literature), Broodthaers claimed to think of the piece not as portraiture but as "a pedagogical object. It is necessary to unveil," he explained, "the secret of art, the dead general smokes an extinguished cigar" (413). The same is true of free verse. If the prosody does no harm to poems

that do not make pointed use of it, as in so-called lazy free verse, neither does it help these poems in its role as a powerful instructional tool. For that, we must learn to read the poetic room, and its décor, differently.

CHAPTER IV:

OBJECT/ACTUAL: PROJECTIVE VERSE IN DERIK BADMAN'S *COLLETTA SUITE*

Figure 25. Badman, Derik "Colletta Suite I." *Comics as Poetry*. Edited by Franklin Einspruch, New Modern, 2012, p. 13.

How are we to read and understand a work like *Colletta Suite*, Derik A. Badman's collage sequence born of digitally redrawn Vince Colletta romance comics, reset in triangular arrays alongside text from Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* (fig. 25)? Though Badman's sources are narrative, the narrativity of his adaptation is so deliberately obscure that readers cannot, for the most part, rely on interpretive strategies that would sustain them in other comics and novels, graphic or otherwise. The work is so visually *avant garde* that even its author has been at a loss to explain its effectiveness. In a 6 March 2013 post on *Madinkbeard.com*, Badman notes that:

> As I work on these comics . . . [and] move further away from narrative and from really strict structures . . . it is harder to tell what is working and what isn't, beyond some basic visual elements like layout, color balance, and composition. The text is based on procedural limitations (. . . paragraphs in *The Tale of Genji* where the word "letter" appears) which remove me from normal modes like story/narrative as well as from a more general personal expression (I'm not attempting to say anything about myself through the words). So the "writing" is very much a process of intuitive selection and arrangement. I grab a bunch of phrases that sound interesting, then I rearrange and edit them (slightly) into something that might work with the images. . . . I'm not sure how to know if it works at all. I just stop when everything seems balanced. (Badman)

If the author isn't even sure of the terms under which his work might be successful, what are we to make of it? What might this "balance" produce, and along what lines?

In the end, the paradigm that best fits Badman's collage is not that of narrative prose or narrative comics at all, but rather that of the hybrid literary genre of Comics Poetry. Though

definitions of the genre vary from artist to artist, comics poetry is generally comprehensible by way of analogy to other forms of literary production. Comics poetry is to the mainstream narrative comic what contemporary lyric poetry is to the narrative poem or novel. This is to say, in part, that comics poetry is generally more contemplative or open-endedly introspective than its comparators and more invested in meaning made from the omnidirectional juxtaposition of its constituent parts (which include both poetic language and comics conventions like the panel and gutter) than it is in meaning made from events or images in chronological sequence. This chapter furthers the lyric poetry analogy, going so far as to argue that comics poetry is essentially a new form of projectivist free verse—one that might even have been legible to Charles Olson, author of the open form manifesto "Projective Verse" (1950), had he lived to see the genre flourish. Reaching outside of traditional comics analysis into the realm of projective poetic theory yields powerful new tools for the creation and evaluation of comics like *Colletta Suite* and ultimately helps us answer some of the questions of efficacy that Badman had about his work.

This chapter's argument is also related to the arguments in chapters two and three of this dissertation. In the previous chapter, for example, I argued that qualities of earnestness and frank simplicity in free verse make it an enduringly popular form of prosody even when it is self-evident that free verse may be just as complex as its rhymed and metered equivalents. Within the context of Marcel Broodthaers's visual poetry (particularly his reaction to the American Minimalist movement), this comment served as a caution against the belief that free verse was an originary, minimalist form itself. Free verse, like every prosody, has a historical, social, and literary frame that cannot be obviated. Still, the feeling that we draw closer to the heart of poetry or to the raw, unfiltered actuality of the work when we write this way persists, speaking to a desire on the part of writers and readers that we must contend with further. This chapter suggests

that we may understand something of the mid-20th century quest to apprehend a deeper actuality through free verse by following a thread in the form's history from the early days of free verse discourse, in the visually focused writing of Max Eastman, through Olson's mid-20th century "Objectism," and finally into contemporary American comics poetry, where works like *Colletta Suite* mainline objectism to produce a pictorial free verse that might even be the revitalized dramatic verse anticipated by Olson in 1950. Objectism, in particular, helps us appreciate exactly what that deeper actuality is meant to revitalize in the first place: namely the lyrical drama of the "word-as-action," rendered by Badman and other comics poets as an extremely present mix of language and imagery.

Finally, this chapter serves as a corrective conclusion to chapters two and three in that Badman's work splits the difference between the comparative lack of visuality in Hartmann's verse and the overabundance of it in Broodthaers's installations. *Colletta Suite* provides a compellingly graphic, archly relational poem that still operates within the confines of the two-dimensional page like normal poetry. As such, *Colletta Suite* and comics poetry offer an even more seamless blend of verbal and visual poesis than something like Philip Metres's "Black Site," which layered poetry and line art but never fused the two in the same artistic field.

To begin, the rhetoric tying free verse to a deeper authenticity or actuality has been with it since the start, growing in tandem with the form. In certain instances, this rhetoric has even been linked to the kind of two-dimensional illustration that Sadakichi Hartmann discusses in *Japanese Art* and which would have been found throughout the museums hosting Marcel Broodthaers. Take, for example, the early case of editor Max Eastman, the driving force behind little modernist magazines like *The Masses* and its spiritual successor *The Liberator*. Writing in the preface to *Journalism Versus Art* (1916) about the difficulty of capturing a coherent, broadly

workable definition of beauty, Eastman claims that: "the question whether we *can* define beauty is secondary to the question whether it is important for us to do so":

> The important distinction for us to remember and refine and philosophize about, is the distinction between all the immediate values, which have their certification in themselves, and those mediate, or moral, or practical values which look to some ulterior benefit to certify them. It seemed to me that if the English language were wise, it would contain a very eminent word (not altogether unlike beauty, although less aristocratic) to express the whole range of things which are good simply because they are chosen. And among these things we should often find objects distinctly unbeautiful, and even unpleasant, because life has a thirst after experience which is very general, and is willing to suffer a good deal of pain for the sake of tasting its reality. (Eastman 8-9) [emphasis original]

Eastman is not writing about free verse, here, but rather about the visual art that editors included or excluded from contemporary magazines, having just presented readers a black-and-white version of Boardman Robinson's *The Mask of the Red Death* as his frontispiece along with an anecdote about how the work was rejected by *Century Magazine* for its unprofitable focus on horror (4). The applicability of these musings to free verse is tantalizing, however, for free verse, too, paints itself out as a prosody of "immediate values, which have their certification in themselves." It, too, is a term denoting something potentially beautiful, within which "we should often find objects distinctly unbeautiful, and even unpleasant" that touch upon "reality." In this, free verse has traditionally claimed to stand apart from older forms of English prosody—forms which run on "mediate, or moral, or practical values which look to some ulterior benefit to certify them." Arguments that once linked the intricacies of metrical poetry with the refinement

and superiority of European culture, as in the early pages of Laurence Binyon's *Tradition and Reaction in Modern Poetry* (1926) where Binyon compares Europe and metrical poetry to Rome on the verge of being sacked by "barbarian" Goths and Vandals, are examples of such justification (5).

The problem, for Eastman, was the publishing industry. Eastman writes elsewhere in *Journalism Versus Art* that *The Masses* was valuable precisely because it was free of unwarranted "conciliation" toward readers and advertisers. This, he claimed, gave the magazine "a unique character" and "the freedom for a perfectly wilful play of the creative faculties, such as would inevitably produce unique works of art" (Eastman 11). That conciliation, which led to a deviation from what Eastman calls "true art," returns in the book's first essay, "What Is the Matter with Magazine Art?" where Eastman argues that "editors have not an interest in true art . . . due . . . to their struggle for existence under the prevailing system of journalism" (21-22). In Eastman's telling, the cash-strapped editor, lured by compensation structures tied to sales, proceeds to "mix into their publication a little bit of everything that will sell. The editorial is the art of ever attracting new constituency without alienating the old," he claimed, and "the result, an insane passion for variety, but a perfectly automatic toning down of every variant that appears. A profitable mediocrity—sometimes called a 'golden mean'" (22). Such polished consideration could not help but thwart "true art" stemming from sharper edged work beyond that mean.

This was the case not just for editors but artists, who, hemmed in by the same structures, "learn to draw pictures that will sell, pictures that will attract ever new constituents without alienating the old. Or if their native impulse to be an individual . . . is too strong—then they do not draw for publication at all, which comes to the same thing" (Eastman 23). Eastman claimed that the magazine artist (and by our extension the magazine poet) had long ago "destroyed all his

own warm and lovable idiosyncrasies, and turned himself into a reproducing machine which can 'go over' a canvas from top to bottom, and 'put in' with unerring accuracy everything that 'ought to' be there" (26). The early twentieth-century prosodist was often a great technician as well, "a highly skilled person" capable of measuring out "men, horses, buttons, pants, books, hatracks, seltzer bottles, shoes, shoestrings, cats, frowns, kisses, hot-water bottles, anything and everything scattered or combined" in the existing prosodic structure but who might still become flummoxed when it came to the matter of "how to draw a single human perception" (26). Soon, of course, the charge of hollowly going over a subject would fall squarely back on free verse. In 1916, however, the opposite case still pertained, at least in the European and American *avant garde*, as free verse was a putative solution to the scourge of profitable metrical mediocrity.

Eastman, for his part, did not wait long to address the potential hollowness of the new prosody, as his institution (publishing) was already inundated with it in the form of what he termed "Lazy Verse." In an essay of the same name from *Journalism Versus Art*, Eastman draws distinctions between worthwhile instances of free verse and instances that fell prey to the "please everybody" dictum that hamstrung artists and editors. "Journalism is the unique literary achievement of this age," Eastman writes:

> but journalism is not literature; it is business. And with some accidental exceptions the tendency of journalism to insert itself into the place of literature is a disaster to the art of writing. I am thinking of the new dilute variety of prosy poetry which is watering the country, and in order to separate myself from those who have any conventional or technical prejudice against composing poetry without meter I call it Lazy Verse (Eastman 89).

According to Eastman, lazy verse writers were the sort who participated in literary movements of the day—Futurism, Imagism, Vorticism, the "Sceptric School," and Amy Lowell's Polyrhythmic Poetry by name—individuals attempting to "compensate [for] a sense of creative inferiority" that he leaves undefined. More than school affiliation, however, Eastman worried that increasing numbers of poets wrote free verse because they were "convinced that they have gained in freedom and power to convey realizations to the imagination," when really, "*in the majority of cases* a mere lack of energetic idle time, or the habit of intense concentration, is the motive to free verse, and the only value gained is the journalistic dilution which enables poetry to expand and multiply and cover space, as all the rest of our writing does in this day of innumerable magazines and the enormous newspaper" (90-91). Whatever we may think of Eastman's charge, this again indicates that free verse went hand in glove with the desire "to convey realizations," *i.e.* the bedrock reality of the poem, to readers.

It is not that Eastman disapproved of free verse whole cloth. The *Masses* editor includes in "Lazy Verse" a list commending free verse poets who he felt avoided the title, as for example did Walt Whitman:

> Even the very absence of form, and often of intensity itself, can have poetic value in so unique an achievement as Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass." It was necessary that some miraculously powerful poet should burst up through the fine pages of recorded high passion with the uncouth realities of the hours of man's every-day life. This could only be done with the every-day manners of language. It could only be done irregularly, *verbosely*. It could only be done *unsatisfactorily*, for if it were satisfying it would not be the unqualified and incommensurable reality that was required. (Eastman 91-92)

Note again the emphasis on "reality" in the "unqualified and incommensurable reality that was required" of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. The question of praxis implied by Eastman's writing is thus how one might achieve a similarly powerful approach to reality when using free verse on subjects beyond Whitman's (or Blake's or Tagore's) own—how poets might encourage in themselves and in readers the intense concentration missing from watery free verse and, in so doing, avoid "journalistic free-verse" that organizes itself in lines only because it takes up more space on the page than prose, like "display-advertising" (Eastman 92, 95). How was free verse, with all its verbal and visual heterogeneity, to mean something immediate in itself and avoid becoming an adjunct to the "kaleidoscopic motion picture" effect of the "black spots and queer blotches . . . dashing from one part of the page to another" in the magazines, which editors ensured would be "stimulating to the curiosity" of the buyer regardless of whether, "after the purchase is made, any one enjoys reading type which jumps across, over, under, and around the misshapen angles of an extraneous insert" (46). How could the visuality of free verse become most fully relevant? One answer is that free verse might find expression as comics poetry of the sort we see in *Colletta Suite*, which makes great strides on all of these fronts.

One way of understanding *Colletta Suite* in these terms is to consider it alongside Charles Olson's "Projective Verse," not only because that treatise demonstrates a persistence of the desire to approach reality through strongly visual free verse but also because Olson is an important link in some versions of comics poetry's lineage. The comics poet Alexander Rothman, a prime arbiter of that history, has on multiple occasions pointed to Olson's 1950 essay in his attempts to define the genre. Rothman's focus has almost always been on Olson's claim from

Figure 26. Rothman, Alexander. "Untitled"

“Projective Verse” (Olson 241) that “it is by their syllables that words juxtapose into beauty” (fig. 26), a formulation with bearing on both Rothman’s and Badman’s habit of “glomming” panels and images onto other panels and images until their juxtapositions build organically into meaning (Rothman, “New York Comics Symposium”). However, Olson’s treatise is even more universally applicable to comics poetry and *Colletta Suite* than Rothman might suggest.

In general, “Projective Verse” forwards the notion of “composition by field,” a breath-based prosodic system employing the entire page for the placement of text, as a remedy for the lifelessness of traditional verse. For Olson, this lifelessness was the result of metrical poets failing to recognize the kinetic nature of their own work and the ultimate status of the poem as “energy transferred from where the poet got it . . . by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader” (240). Traditional forms, even the descriptive function in poetry, he felt, sap this energy by forcing the dynamic flow of perception-in-composition into irrigation channels of predetermined thought. While those pathways may convey sound and sense efficiently from point A to point B, they do so without reference to the shifting, natural processes that created this energy and without attention to the problems of generalizing forms, thus blunting their true source of power and authenticity in the “open” field (Olson 243-44).

More specifically, however, “Projective Verse” is an essay in two parts, both of which have bearing on comics poetry. In part one, Olson attempts “to show what projective or OPEN verse is, what it involves, in its act of composition, how, in distinction from the non-projective, it is accomplished,” while in part two he aims to “suggest a few ideas about what stance toward reality brings such verse into being, what the stance does, both to the poet and to his reader. (The stance involves, for example, a change beyond, and larger than, the technical, and may, the way things look, lead to a new poetics and to new concepts from which some sort of drama, say, or of

epic, perhaps, may emerge)" (239). Though it is easy to lose sight of amid the many things Olson claims, this final statement makes clear that projectivism was a continuation of the quest to touch a deeper, more fundamental reality through spatially attuned free verse. As such, it aimed to do more than simply take up room, as Eastman feared lazier verse might.

The first (and more frequently discussed) portion of the essay begins by dealing with "some simplicities that a man learns, if he works in OPEN [form], or what can also be called COMPOSITION BY FIELD, as opposed to inherited line, stanza, over-all form, what is the 'old' base of the non-projective" (239). These simplicities boiled down to three statements on the poem's "Kinetics," guiding "Principle," and overall "Process."

The "kinetic" of the poem refers to the poem's role as a linguistic device for energy transfer and has to do with communication of meaning from the poet's sources, through the poet, into the object of the poem and, finally, to its reader (though Olson is aware that no such transfer is perfect) (240). Olson then suggests a "principle" that would help poets accomplish this energy transfer via field-based poetics, namely that "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT," a dictum he ascribes to the poet Robert Creeley. "Right form, in any given poem," Olson continues, "is the only and exclusively possible extension of content under hand" (240). In other words, it is the content being transferred that quasi-organically determines its own best form, projecting that form outward like a screened lantern casting patterns on the page—or better, like the lightbulb-in-a-wire-frame trick that projects the landmasses and latitude/longitude lines of a round earth on a flat wall with all the attendant distortions. As noted in Chapter Two's argument about Sadakichi Hartmann and the reformulated poetic home, poets of the day were often more likely to accept (and then decorate with incidental pictures) the existing prosodic edifice of something like the sonnet or rhymed

quatrain. Olson, however, advocates a change like what Hartmann describes when (for good and ill) he essentializes the Japanese preference for changing the edifice to suit the picture. Projective verse, like the Japanese *kakemono*, implied its own architecture and all the décor-related distortions needed to achieve what Badman would later call “balance.”

The immediacy and authenticity of this projective principle was further authorized by an approach to poetic “process” that Olson drew from another of his mentors, Edward Dahlberg. “ONE PERCEPTION,” Olson thundered, “MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION” (240). The aim of this process was to produce an accurate transcription of reality, as Olson understood it, in the midst of creating right form. This prescription about immediacy “means exactly what it says,” Olson continued, and “is a matter of, at *all* points (even, I should say, of our management of daily reality as of the daily work) get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, the split second acts, the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can, citizen” (240). The rambling nature of this quotation illustrates the way that perpetual forward movement and attention to “split second acts” of thought might work in prose to make an energetic and propulsive sentence. Yet, it is also a messy and unnecessarily repetitive sentence set in a form that tends toward grammatical and syntactical continuity—a sentence that gets in the way of its own meaning as much as it conveys that meaning accurately. In this, projectivism demonstrated itself in need of a more suitable arena, one Olson would soon give it and which comics poetry extends.

With these simplicities out of the way, Olson turns his attention to an almost atomic classification of the poetic process, one where the best verse is the kind that “manages to register both the acquisitions of [the poet’s] ear *and* the pressure of his breath” (241). The ear, for Olson,

was essentially a data port linked to the poet's mind. Over the course of years, one would absorb the sounds of syllables, which Olson viewed as the smallest inviolable particles of language and therefore poetry's primary building block. More than just the sounds of those syllables, however, the poet also acquired a sense of the precise meanings humans attached to them, as well as the webs of connection and meaning brought into play when syllables juxtaposed into words, words into sentences, sentences into stanzas, and so on. These meanings were stored in the mind against future need and later deployed in the near-instantaneous, non-logical moment of poetic composition: the moment, in other words, when the writer's creativity and innate judgment came to bear on all that preparation. An author's ability to play around constructively with these mind-syllables, to "dance" or let "rip" stored poetic ammunition in this way, showed their mind's worth. That brief moment of choosing would be best met by the poet whose listening had been most scrupulous (241-42). These views are important both because their emphasis on juxtaposition and beauty at the minims of language come back in forceful ways in the thought of artists like Alexander Rothman and because they eventually match up with comics poetry's reconfigured view of what it means to author a poetic line.

"Line," for Olson, provided a counterweight to the mind's choice between stored up syllables and was the result of a less cerebral processes—in this case, the measuring influence of the human heart played out within the limits of human "breath." Like the near-instantaneous choice of syllable-meanings, the poet's employment of the breath-line was also spontaneous. Line, however, was spontaneity after the fact: an embodied form of aesthetic control akin to changing one's grip around a fistful of sand as it invariably slips away. If the ear/mind portion of the dance was all unconscious creativity, judgment, and play, then the breath/line half of the equation was the center of the poet's conscious work, the place where the poem was really

"getting made"—where "the attention [and] the control" reside (242). "It is right here," Olson says, "in the line, that the shaping takes place, each moment of the going" (242). One could not write a fourteen-line sonnet in projective verse for the simple reason that such forms were preexisting aural/mental constructs and therefore separate from the source of projective lineation, which came from elsewhere in the poet's body and took its cues from the poem's subject matter. ABABCDCDEFEFGG rhymes in the expected pentameter would have been a betrayal of the poet's body and an abdication of the "work" the projective poet meant to complete. That work was the transcription of a moment-to-moment experience of reality as it was actually lived, not as the sonnet would have it: in the readymade octaves, sestets, quatrains, and couplets that, for Olson, relieved the poet of the need to think even as they supported and amplified thought.

It is worth emphasizing, here, that Olson was as suspicious of the linguistic structures that house meaning and of the signifier/signified chain as Marcel Broodthaers in his more-or-less contemporaneous work. This is evident not only in Olson's skepticism toward received forms but in his insistence, in "Projective Verse," that writers avoid false transparencies within the line that would drain its language of power and immediacy. Olson posits these kinetic-sapping constructions and easy generalizations as the true source of laziness in verse, free or otherwise:

> When the line has, is, a deadness, is it not a heart which has gone lazy, is it not, suddenly, slow things, similes, say, adjectives, or such that we are bored by?
>
> For there is a whole flock of rhetorical devices which have now to be brought under a new bead, now that we sight with the line. Simile is only one bird who comes down, too easily. The descriptive functions generally have to be watched, every second, in projective verse, because of their easiness, and thus their drain on the energy which composition by field allows into a poem. *Any*

> slackness takes off attention, that crucial thing, from the job in hand, from the *push* of the line under hand at the moment, under the reader's eye, in his moment. Observation of any kind is, like argument in prose, properly previous to the act of the poem, and, if allowed in, must be so juxtaposed, apposed, set in, that it does not, for an instant, sap the going energy of the content toward its form. (243)

These lines can be confusing, as description and simile are indispensable parts of contemporary poetry that readers and writers almost always associate with coming to know a subject more deeply. To get at the truth or actuality of a subject, wouldn't one want a more probing investigation of its parts? Not necessarily, according to Olson, who in essays such as "Human Universe" (1951) considered most of the language employed by Western poets since ancient Greece a vehicle for abstraction, a form of linguistic transparency in which the signifier vouches for, but does not actually show through to, a concrete signified. However detailed or figurative this abstracting language might be, it still carried readers away from the word-as-object and word-as-action, replacing them with an ever-growing pile of second- and third-degree handles that only served as release valves on language that should have been an exciting, highly pressurized construct. It was on the projective poet to find new paradigms for the display of verse, paradigms that would mitigate this unpreventable loss of energy while still allowing something like Olson's mind-syllables to juxtapose into meaning and lines built from the moment-to-moment workings of the human body.

Olson's non-comics solution to the problem of abstracting language was markedly visual, involving the word's status as a quasi-tangible object within the newly liberated field of the page. Note how often words like "object," "thing," and "solidity" appear below:

It comes to this, the whole aspect of the newer problems. (We now enter, actually, the large area of the whole poem, in the FIELD, if you like, where all the syllables and all the lines must be managed in their relations to each other.) It is a matter, finally of **OBJECTS**, what they are, what they are inside a poem, how they got there, and, once there, how they are to be used. This is something I want to get to in another way in Part II, but, for the moment, let me indicate this, that every element in an open poem (the syllable, the line, as well as the image, the sound, the sense) must be taken up as participants in the kinetic of the poem just as **solidly** as we are accustomed to take what we call the **objects** of reality; and that these elements are to be seen as creating the tensions of a poem just as totally as do those other **objects** create what we know as the world.

The **objects** which occur at every given moment of composition (of recognition, we call it) are, can be, must be treated exactly as they do occur therein and not by any ideas or preconceptions from outside the poem, must be handled as a series of **objects** in field in such a way that a series of tensions (which they also are) are made to *hold*, and to hold exactly inside the content and context of the poem which has forced itself, through the poet and them, into being.

Because breath allows *all* the speech-force of language back in (speech is the **"solid"** of verse, is the secret of a poem's energy), because, now, a poem has, by speech, **solidity**, everything in it can now be treated as **solids**, **objects**, **things**; and, though insisting upon the absolute difference of the reality of verse from that other dispersed and distributed **thing**, yet each of these elements of a poem can be

> allowed to have the play of their separate energies and can be allowed, once the poem is well composed, to keep, as those other **objects** do, their proper confusions. (Olson 243-44) [bolded emphasis mine]

In the context of this dissertation, Olson's views are quite familiar. The above could not have been a more accurate description of the omnidirectional, object-based installation poetry of Marcel Broodthaers if Broodthaers had written it himself. The notion of "tensions" made to hold "exactly inside the content and context of the poem," which "must be managed in their relations to each other" such that they keep their "proper confusions," aptly describes the foreground / background muddling in *Le Corbeau et le Renard* and Broodthaers's Mallarmé exhibit.

Yet, we must also note the distinction Olson makes when he insists upon the "absolute difference of the reality of verse from that other dispersed and distributed thing" (lived reality). This is important because Broodthaers's manipulation of physical objects in a manner akin to free verse does not apply as exactly as we might like to our understanding of free verse still confined to the page. Olson, too, wanted verse to touch the actualities that language only gestures at, to lay bare what he found to be a terminally compromised poetic system and replace it with something truer to the moment-to-moment spontaneities of life. Yet, for better and worse, he was determined to accomplish this in a two-dimensional form of poetry where the objecthood of language would always be compromised by the inability of signifiers to be their signified. To offset this linguistic sabotage, Olson took advantage of projectivism's object focus to put his hands on a more definite poetic realty, if one that stops short of 3-D physicality.

This is where the free verse potential of comics form reenters our discussion, allowing contemporary artists a closer approach to three-dimensional experience without leaving the two-dimensional field of the page. The juxtapositional nature of comics panels (and the text and

visual materials they contain) do virtually everything Olson asks of projective poetry, bettering poems that deal only in language by coding their arcs of energy in ways that further minimize the dissipation of that energy. In effect, comics poetry safeguards the kinetic, ever-changing expression of reality and "right form" in language-only poetry by offloading much of its object/action burden on the perpetual "now" of the comics panel and its verbal-visual imagery. The projective hybridity of mainstream comics form manifests itself in a variety of ways ranging from the expressive shape of panel borders and sound effects to the inclusion of motion lines—and even the powers of superheroes like Reed Richards, whose rubbery nature allows him to project movement, meaning, and energy across the page at something like the speed of thought (fig. 27). The breadth of the page, and the embodied limitations an artist like Jack Kirby would have encountered as he muscled his pencil with moment-to-moment nuance across that space, provide an analog to Olson's breath-line. At each instant of Kirby's going, the sand slipped away, but he could shape it as it went, leaving the brute fact of his linework as a heightened actuality in support of Stan Lee's script. Following the "Marvel Method" of comics production, Lee's text was added only after Kirby's pages returned

Figure 27. Marvel panels with schematic breakdowns in Lee, Stan, and John Buscema. *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*. Simon and Schuster, 1978.

to the office, a procedural quirk ensuring that the form and extent of Lee's language was as projectively shaped by Kirby's embodied content as any poem.

Comics poetry is adept at this sort of projectivism. For example, consider "Colletta Suite VI" (fig. 28), the finale of Badman's sequence:

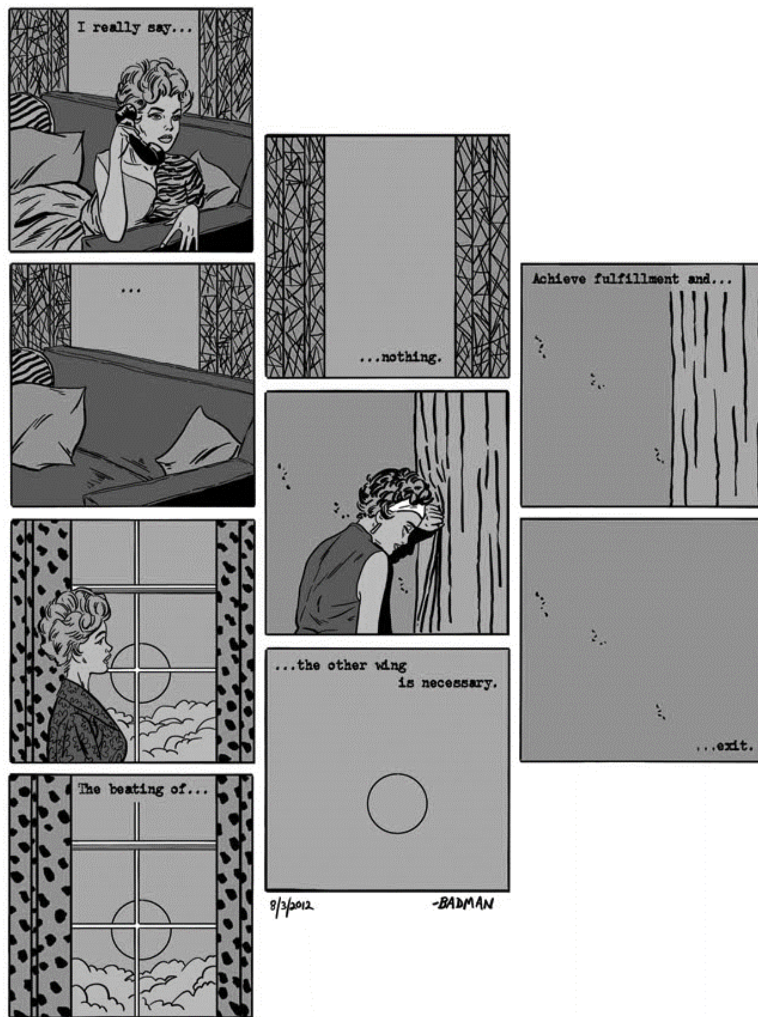


Figure 28. Badman, Derik "Colletta Suite VI." *Comics as Poetry*, edited by Franklin Einspruch, New Modern, 2012, p. 18.

The only help Badman provides regarding the form of this piece, beyond the aforementioned desire for "balance," is a brief note that he was "trying out a strange 9 panel layout, designed as a

set of 3 groups of 3 panels, . . . [as] an attempt to confound a normal reading path" and that later pages like this one become "a little more geometric." These groupings are most visible when looking at the main character's clothing, the curtains/wall behind her, and the moon (fig. 29).

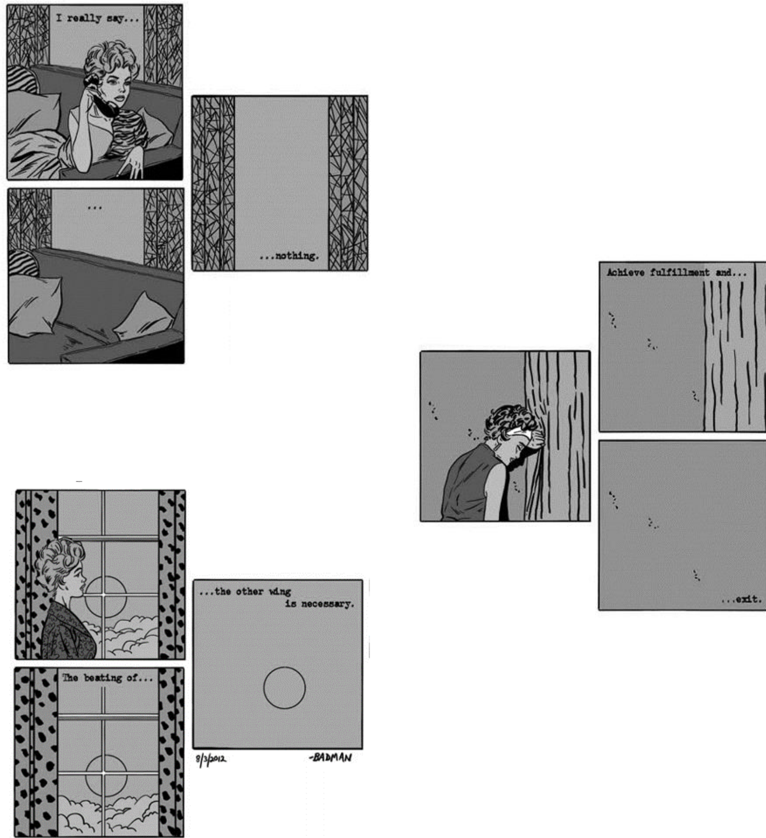


Figure 29. The most likely three-panel groupings in "Colletta Suite VI."

Even with this structure evident to readers, however, the message of the work is far from clear. Different reading paths produce markedly different interpretations. A reading that begins in the upper left and proceeds clockwise, for example, results in a dispiriting visual poem where the female protagonist criticizes her lack of substantive speech and her "exit" after short term "fulfillment" before concluding that "The beating of . . . / . . . the other wing is necessary." Given the pining-for-you panel illustrations and overall heteronormativity of 1950s romance comics, it

would be easy to interpret the “other wing” as a male romantic partner and view “Colletta Suite VI” as a feminist indictment of the gender roles that too often characterize this genre. A clockwise reading path beginning with the bottom left grouping might also be construed as feminist-aligned, though with a meta-comics twist. Here, the speaker (who we again assume is the woman) begins with an emphasis on the necessity of the other wing—beside which she barely matters as an individual, and in the face of which she “say[s] nothing.” This path ends on the right side of the page with the idea of exiting once “fulfillment” has been achieved, a conclusion that might point more at the reader’s satisfaction than the speaker’s and at the convention of romance comics whereby they end almost immediately once the lovers unite. The outlook is more positive for the woman, however, if readers proceed in a snakelike fashion down the leftmost column, then up and down the remaining columns as they narrow toward the right side of the page. Here, the speaker seems to claim that it is the “necessary” beating of the other wing that is “nothing,” a genre-obligated vacuity against which her main advice is to “Achieve fulfillment and . . . / . . . exit” (a move indicating personal agency and symbolized, perhaps, by her absence in the rightmost column’s bottom panel, the last in this path). This is to say nothing of readings where the viewer’s eye skips more liberally around the page. Badman offers no sense of which reading is most authorized, a fact which makes “Colletta Suite VI” more similar to the operation of some open-ended poems than to much fiction, where plot order (if not the interpretation of that plot) is usually clear.

“Projective Verse,” however, gives us a way to interpret this page as something more than the sum of its narrative confusions, especially when we consider that Badman’s work is strongly projective in almost every sense. “Colletta Suite VI” is eminently “kinetic” to Olson’s definition, even if much of the comic’s power comes from the anguished stasis or outright

disappearance of its main character. In terms of period/genre energy, it is clearly a transfer from Colletta-drawn romance "sources," up through Badman and his reformulated collage poem, all the way over to the reader. The comics poem also makes much of Olson's projective "principle," whereby form is an extension of content and right form is the only projection that fully captures this content. *Colletta Suite's* confining, off-kilter geometries and deliberately confused reading paths accurately figure the claustrophobic doubt and indecision that attends the "does he love me, and I him?" interlude of a romance comic, which this page draws upon. Because Badman strands readers in this moment, which would not yet have a clear resolution within the original story, it is appropriate that his form strands readers in a place similarly short of resolution. Both the main character and the reader are left wondering where to go next. As both then stumble through the work, figuring things out spontaneous moment of choice by spontaneous moment of choice, they follow Olson's preferred "process" for the projective poem, which was to ensure that one perception flowed immediately and directly into the next.

Deeper into Olson's essay, similarities between *Colletta Suite* and "Projective Verse" suggest themselves again, this time regarding Olson's thinking about the relationship between mind-syllables and breath-lines, and the way that comics make use of similar formal elements in even the strictest, most nonpoetic contexts. If we accept, for example, Chrissy Williams and Tom Humberstone's equation of the comics panel with the poetic line on the basis that both panel and line present discrete units of sound and visual sense juxtaposed across the gulf of an interlineal "gutter," then we see, here, something like the word → breath sequence that Olson writes so fervently about. This is the case in Stan Lee and John Buscema's breakdown of another Jack Kirby panel in *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way* (1978) (fig. 30). In the bottommost panel, reduced to its schematic elements by Buscema in a nearby thumbnail, Captain America faces off

against a group of minor villains who surround him on nearly every side. In the panel's visual syntax, Kirby's villains act like words wrapping their malevolent compositional energy around the panel's subject in a way that conveys movement while still holding together as a mass of tensions. This fits with Olson, for whom speech was the "solid" of verse, and who felt that these solids were organized into lines such that "every element . . . must be taken up as participants in the kinetic of the poem just as solidly as we are accustomed to take what we call the objects of reality" (243). Badman stages something of the same when, in "Colletta Suite VI," he chooses to wrap his romance subject in a similar kinetic field, though one defined less by the position of stereotypical supervillains than the position of the protagonist within grasp of her own archenemy, emptiness (fig. 31). The diverse levels of aggregation here—visual objects acting as words within a single panel for Kirby versus their being formed from the confluence of many panels for Badman—matters less than one might expect in light of scholar Rachel Blau DuPlessis's concept of "segmentivity," the most important non-comics-related theory in all of comics poetry. According to Du Plessis, "the ability to articulate and make meaning by selecting, deploying, and combining segments" across "sequenced, gapped lines" is poetry's primary literary gift, and we should expect to see such

Figure 30. A Jack Kirby Captain America panel (bottom) with accompanying breakdown by John Buscema (top left), in Lee, Stan, and John Buscema. *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*. Simon and Schuster, 1978. This panel figures comics composition as an act of visual energy transfer.

level skipping aggregation in many cases, as “the specific force of any individual poem occurs in the intricate interplay among the ‘scales’ (of size or kind of unit) or comes in ‘chords’ of these multiple possibilities for creating segments” (qtd. in McHale 28-29). Kirby and Badman’s use of segmentation within and between panels does the same, building these discrete but otherwise extremely flexible measures into a visual *vers libre* on the cusp of actual poetry. Though the “poetry” of mainstream comics in this sense is still a matter of analogous units as opposed to outright similarity, the reach would have been a familiar one for free verse pioneers like Ezra Pound, who strove for an approach to lineation on the order of music (another imperfect but instructive comparison which DuPlessis extends with her talk of “chord” structures).

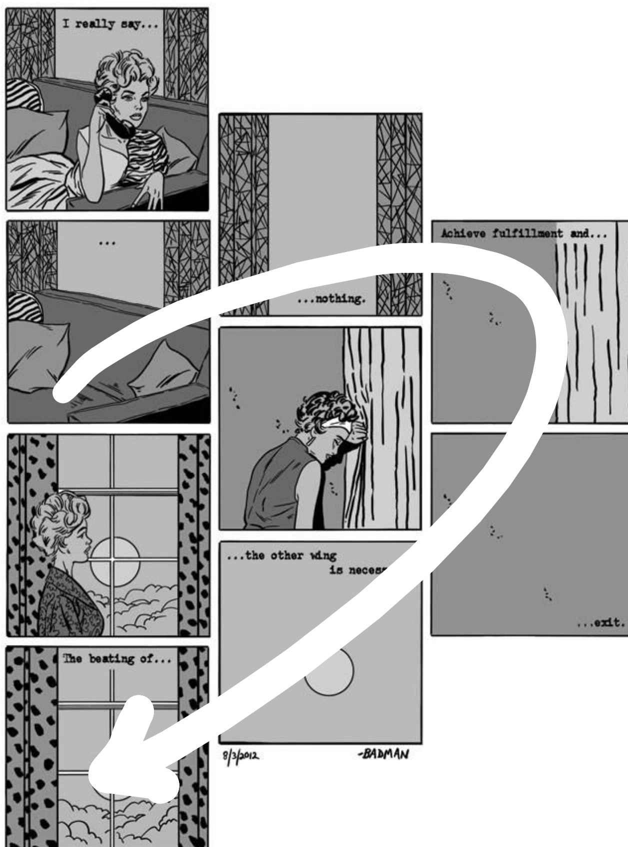


Figure 31. Visual and linguistic objects in “Colletta Suite VI” as “chord” structures projecting across the page and a variety of interlineal gaps.

As for the syllables that make the words that build into projective lines, Lee and Buscema suggest analogs for this in their chapter “The Secrets of—Form! Making an Object Look Real.” According to Lee and Buscema, “Anyone, even you or I, can draw some sort of circle or square,” the comics version of the syllable-as-building-block, “but how do we make it look like the real thing?” they ask. “How do we make a reader feel as if he can just reach out and touch it? How do we stop it from just lying there, flat and one-dimensional

on the page?" a charge we might also level at lazy free verse (19). Lee and Buscema's answer, as with Olson, is to think in a more generously spatial way. While tight, thin columns of verse spread the entire length and breadth of Olson's projective page, lineal objects in comics (already present in the open field) avoid flatness by virtue of the artist thinking of everything as "solid—as having bulk. John calls this 'thinking through the object,'" Lee notes (20). Just as the projective poet devotes time and attention to gathering syllables and their meanings through listening before they write, the budding comics professional is encouraged to avoid getting "impatient" and to make sure that they "have all this preliminary jazz down pat first . . . . Stay with it for the next few pages," Lee claims, "and we promise you'll find it much easier to do the difficult drawings when you come to them" in the moment of composition when that store of visual knowledge would help direct the delicate touches of the artist's pencil or inking brush (21). Lee's reference to jazz is telling, as it implies years of musical practice so that, in the moment of soloing, the musician might freely "let it rip" (Olson 242). As if in proof, Buscema later presents nine versions of a character's head to show how the syllables of the human face combine into expressions of emotion, something one could do from muscle memory only with much visual listening beforehand (100-101).

Having said as much about mainstream American superhero comics, it becomes easier to turn back, once again, to "Colletta Suite VI" and see Olson's stored up mind-syllables and embodied breath/energy-lines underlying a work that might otherwise seem hopelessly fractured. In addition to the swath of emptiness around the woman in "Colletta Suite VI," for example, we might also say that the work runs on principle of orderly, or "balanced," disappearances. Leaving aside the question of which three-panel grouping to read first or last, it remains that reading any of them as segmented arcs from the central figure (with telephone, bathrobe, or headband) to the

emptiest panel (bare curtains, bare moon, bare wall) in that order produces a set of right-side-up and upside-down check marks that arrange the work in a surprisingly straightforward way. The effect obtained by these panels, by this push of the energy under Badman's hand, is one of progressive removal or deletion—an inexorable dissolve from the room at its most well-furnished to the room at its emptiest, each successive line/panel surprising us after the break with the fact of a protagonist who has already left or furniture that has already been removed from the house. Judging by the static proportions of the curtains to the space between them in "I really say . . . / . . . nothing," the size of the moon in "The beating of . . . / . . . the other wing is necessary," and the texturing dots on the wall in "Achieve fulfillment and . . . / . . . exit," the reader's point of view remains immobile. It is only the things in their objectifying panel frames that disappear into thin air, like a commentary on Vince Colletta's notorious habit of eliding details, even whole figures, in the process of inking them (Bryant, Jr. 47-60, 73). Badman's digitally redrawn panels scream with a desperate, concrete aphasia—though just what this aphasia means is left, again, to readers and how they interpret the bare fact of a wall.

With the help of verbal-visual "breadth lines" like the elision sequence above, comics poems avoid many of the descriptive mistakes that Olson feared would siphon away their energy. By partially deleting the "remove" language imposes on poetry, they strive to protect the work's core actuality, or at least the illusion of verisimilitude also guarded by normative free verse. This choice does the remaining language an essential service, often freeing it to pursue other, more lyrical avenues of expression that add to the concrete visuals rather than simply replicating their work. That these examples do not feature real lovers hardly matters, as their more direct interpretations are still superior with respect to energy conservation. All of this also fits Olson's emphasis on "the absolute difference of the reality of verse from that other dispersed and

distributed thing" (true reality), a notion that only strengthens our argument that comics poems are forms of projective free verse. Ultimately, the medium's concrete, energy-retaining visual objects and lyrical text elements reinforce one another's ability to do what all free verse must: to allow the "free turning" of form and content away from the expected so that their combination speaks to us with greater surprise.

Such is the case in comics poetry beyond Badman's as well, as for example in Paul K. Tunis's "Avenge Me, Eavesdropper" (fig. 32). In the spread below, magical realism shifts rapidly to nature illustration, then to an even more iconic/cartoony style of drawing, and back to magical realism in rapid succession. Meanwhile, the text moves from a harshly segmented "We

Figure 32. Tunis, Paul K. Excerpt from "Avenge Me, Eavesdropper." *INK BRICK: A Journal of Comics Poetry*, no. 1, May 2014, pp. 21-28.

eavesdropped on leaves to learn how to fall," to math (a symbol meaning "the sum of all calamities"), to free verse ("We'll wrap our gods in newspaper / They Leak"), with the labels from the life cycle diagram intervening in the latter. Though Tunis does not say it outright, the juxtaposition of these jangling elements and their surprising turns away from one another speak profoundly, and in kind of verse, to the likelihood of an accidental pregnancy.

For those skeptical about the connection between projective verse and comics poetry on the grounds that visual syllables and panel-based "breadth lines" take us too far from the verbally-oriented poetry Olson actually wrote about, it is important to stress that wording remains a vital and inextricable aspect of most comics poems. Badman's *Colletta Suite* is a fair example of this, as its depth of meaning would collapse into a pastiche of American romance comics without the translated fragments from Murasaki Shikibu's eleventh-century *The Tale of Genji*.

Part of this dimensional loss in "Colletta Suite VI" would surely come from a lack of the current version's deep literary-historical resonance. In Japanese literature, *monogatari* like *Genji* are, broadly speaking, extended prose narratives often (if not always) focused on courtly romance. They are also studded with poetry and poetic allusion because it would have been expected that Japanese courtiers like those in Shikibu's story compose and transmit poetry on a regular basis. Poetry, as Royall Tyler notes in the introduction to his English translation of *The Tale of Genji*, was one of the few ways that upper-class individuals could circumvent the "strictures of formality" that served, for example, to keep the woman courted by a noble person from being seen or heard by him except through screens and intermediaries. Poetry was "outside the domain of hierarchically marked language" and for this reason became a vital communicative resource (xxiii). To pair the pining-for-you moment of a contemporary American romance comic

with text from a *monogatari* as replete with them as *Genji* is to short-circuit the idealized cultural context of gender relations in 1950s America and, in the same breath, enter a transhistorical, transcultural, translinguistic space as capacious, confusing, and rife with possibility as Olson's history-spanning projective poem "The Kingfishers." It is to deepen *Colletta Suite* from a period-specific meditation on gendered isolation into a kind of transmedial Heian drama where panel borders serve in the place of shoji screens and poetry runs between them, piercing and reinforcing that isolation at every turn.

Badman's text borrowing also complicates his 1950s material in the sense that upper-class Heian women were almost never truly alone. "A lord or lady," Tyler writes, "lived surrounded by a more or less large staff of women and, just outside, men." Furthermore, European and American "notions of solitude and privacy did not exist. A lady slept within curtains, it is true, but they were only curtains, and any number of gentlewomen slept just outside them on the floor. . . . If [a lord] said something privately to a gentlewoman, he managed to do so in a room already containing a good many of them" (Tyler xix). Whether this reinforces the isolation of "Colletta Suite VI's" protagonist by dint of contrast, reminds us that it is not only in 1950s America that women were forced to vie for stable relationships with men, or inflects that 1950s context by asking us to consider who or what may have been elided (by Badman's stylus, romance convention, or the Heian period's insistence that "a lord or lady with no one but attendants or household staff close by was alone [because] . . . such people did not count") remains uncertain (Tyler xix). Like the many reading paths possible in "Colletta Suite VI," the work's transgenre literary meaning remains open. However, it is interpretation at a more suggestive, alluring depth for its free and mutually deformative pairing of visual and verbal

lines—a pairing that, as with Broodthaers, renders visible the previously transparent cultural/literary frames within which romance comics and *monogatari* have been set.

The link between Vince Colletta's romance comic imagery and *The Tale of Genji's* language resonates in other ways as well, particularly with respect to readership. It does not seem like a coincidence, for example, that *Colletta Suite* draws on two historical genres with a primarily female audience. As Michelle Nolan writes in *Love on the Racks*, her history of the American romance comic genre, "seemingly every female, including plenty of adult women, read romance comics from the late 1940s to the early 1970s," the period from which Badman pulls Colletta's work. "For the better part of three decades," Nolan claims, "romance comics were an American institution. They were the first genre of comic books to deal with 'real-life' situations instead of flying men and women, impossibly accurate gunfighters, glamorous gangsters, space explorers, jungle heroes and heroines, vampires and zombies, anthropomorphic animals, and the like"—though she freely admits, as Olson does, that "'real-life' . . . demands quotes, because the vast majority of the romance stories published in comics were contrived (and often banal) fantasies" (3). Like the projective poem, romance comics did not fully cross the boundary between reality as expressed in art and reality as it exists in the real world, though their approach to reality was still much closer than that of their competitors for these reasons. Tyler, meanwhile, notes in his introduction that while *Genji's* most influential defenders were men, men were not the *monogatari's* primary readership. "In Murasaki Shikibu's world," he explains, "the men (apart from clerics) were all officials great or small. They studied philosophy, history, law, and so on in Chinese, learned to write the Chinese language, and also composed Chinese poetry—Chinese being the learned, written, formal language. . . . They of course composed poetry in Japanese as well, but fiction was in principle beneath them," as were comics for many

adults in the 1950s and romance comics for many boys then and now, "since it was classified as worthless fantasy" (xxiv). Looking at *Genji's* Japanese prose, Tyler notes that "prose fiction in phonetically written Japanese, with few Chinese characters," would have been seen as "especially for women," a fact the explains why, "in *Genji*, only women openly read or listen to tales" (xxiv). These gender-marked fictions had utility in real life, however, as "a woman caught in strange or painful circumstances might comb tales for examples like her own, just as an Emperor might review the formal histories of China and Japan in search of a precedent for his plight" (xxv). The case was the much the same, Nolan writes, for American teenage girls in the latter half of 1949 when the romance comic boom swamped newsstands, slipping by a forerunner of the Comics Code Authority to add more than 1,000 new romance stories across 256 separate issues of 118 new titles (Nolan 43). It was not only four-color love that these readers sought but a better four-color bead on reality.

Further strengthening the bond between Badman's sources is the fact that both romance comics and *monogatari* (including *Genji*) were illustrated and that these illustrations were a vital part of their appeal. Though one hardly needs proof of this for American romance comics, the importance of picture making to *monogatari* like *Genji* may be less well known to some English readers. Yet, the relation of graphic illustration to the poetry and prose of the *monogatari* was so important that Shikibu speaks to it in a notable pair of scenes, first between Genji and his adopted daughter and later between Genji and his wife. As Shikibu writes in chapter twenty-five, "The Fireflies":

> The long rains were worse this year than most, and to get through the endless wet the ladies amused themselves day and night with illustrated tales. The lady from Akashi made up some very nicely and sent them to her daughter. This sort of

> thing particularly intrigued the lady in the west wing [Genji's adopted daughter], who therefore gave herself all day long to copying and reading. She had several young gentlewomen suitably gifted to satisfy this interest. Among her assemblage of tales she found accounts, whether fact or fiction, of many extraordinary fates, but none, alas, of any like her own. The trials faced by the young lady in *Sumiyoshi* were remarkable, of course, and so, too, was her fame still in the present world, and her narrow escape from the Director of Reckoning certainly had a good deal in common with the terrors of that Audit Commissioner. (Shikibu 460)

The Audit Commissioner, above, had previously proposed an undesirable marriage between himself and the lady in the west wing. Escaping that situation and others like is what brought her to Genji and the shelter of his nearly imperial household, where romance comic-like tales such her own were accepted with only light scoffing. A few pages later, Genji's wife, Lady Murasaki, likewise "invoked her young lady's wishes and found it hard to put down her tales," praising the beauty of an illustration from *The Tale of Kumano* before engaging in a brief debate with her husband about genre's influence on young girls (Shikibu 462). Genji, who Shikibu says should have been famous "for his rare collection of wanton adventures" of this sort, exhorts his wife to "not read our young lady naughty tales like that. . . . Not that a heroine secretly in love is likely to catch her interest," he says, but because "she must not come to take it for granted that things like that really happen" (462). Genji's "sole care was that no one should find fault with his daughter," Shikibu writes, and "he wanted to avoid putting ideas about evil stepmothers into her head, since the old tales are full of them, and so he was strict in his choice of the ones that he had copied and illustrated for her" (463). Beyond illuminating the historical resonance between

Shikibu's *Genji* and romance comics of the sort Badman borrows for *Colletta Suite*, the passages above also point to an important idea about form and thought that Olson shared. Underneath Genji's conservative peevishness about the lack of truth in such tales lies the conviction that form in literature has at least some bearing on the real thought and action of its readers. By this argument, new form (here the *monogatari*) might conceivably lead to a new "reality" and an agency within that field of possibility that did not previously exist, at least not in an actionable sense.

This notion returns us to Olson's "Projective Verse" and helps us understand to an even greater degree why the comparison of projective poetry and comics poetry matters. More specifically, it returns us to the less frequently read second section of the essay, where Olson says he will finally explain "the degree to which the projective involves a stance toward reality outside a poem as well as a new stance towards the reality of a poem itself" and its implications for the revitalization of dramatic verse (246).

Olson begins this portion of the essay with a point that inverts and expands his prior explanation of the way that content projects into right form, an expansion that echoes the form → thought → action argument Genji makes about the *monogatari* and which is therefore embedded in *Colletta Suite*. The form/content relationship is a broader thoroughfare than the first section's "principle" makes it seem, and it runs in both directions. According to Olson:

> It is a matter of content, the content of Homer or of Euripides or of Seami as distinct from that which I might call the more "literary" masters. From the moment the projective purpose of the act of verse is recognized, the content does—it will—change. If the beginning and the end is breath, voice in its largest sense, then the material of verse shifts. It has to. It starts with the composer. The

> dimension of his line itself changes, not to speak of the change in his conceiving, of the matter he will turn to, of the scale in which he imagines that matter's use. (246-47)

In other words, if what the projective poet says (in terms of mind-syllables) shapes the overall form of its saying (in terms of breath-lines), the opposite must also be true; change at the level of form or medium would inevitably bring about new possibilities with regard to content and the entire field of what is possible to think now that a form (or genre, or medium) exists to render that thought manifest. Though Olson undoubtedly meant "breath, voice in its largest sense" to signal the new vacillations projectivism allowed language in the open field of the page, nothing prevents us, today, from going beyond this to include new conceptions of the open poetic line in our understanding of visualized voice at its largest. At its most elemental, Olson's breath-line is an attempt to encourage embodied, corporeal forms of poetic measurement and promote them in the place of received Euro-American forms that existed outside that body. "Voice" in the sense of the breath-measured speaking voice was only the most obvious way to accomplish that embodiment given the nature of page poetry as it had existed to that point. The embodied and expressive line of the comics illustrator is another. One of the many benefits of comics poetry is that it takes clear advantage of both the embodied breath-line and the embodied graphic line in its projection of content, leading not only to Olson's new literary reality but an improved, extended version of the same.

Seeking a term that separated his thinking from the fight between subjectivism and objectivism pursued by W. C. Williams and Ezra Pound in the 1910s and 1920s, Olson eventually settled on "Objectism" to describe the way projectivism's verbal and visual lines

conspired to bring about this newer, deeper reality, brushing up against notions of poetic organicism in the process:

> What seems to me a more valid formulation for present use is “Objectism,” a word to be taken to stand for the kind of relation of man to experience which a poet might state as the necessity of a line or a work to be as wood is, to be as clean as wood is as it issues from the hand of nature, to be as shaped as wood can be when a man has had his hand to it. Objectism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the “subject” and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature . . . and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. For a man is himself an object, whatever he may take to be his advantages, the more likely to recognize himself as such the greater his advantages, particularly at the moment that he achieves an humilitas sufficient to make himself of use. (247)

As seen here, the point of Objectism was not to simply to push words around on page like so much linguistic furniture but, again, to cut down on the many forms of “interference” that threatened to hamstring projectivism’s new formal reality and its staging of the word-as-action. One of the best ways to accomplish this quickly was to strengthen the illusion that the poem at hand was a “thing” and not, as it actually was, a product of the author’s “individual ego.” Olson’s projective poetry managed this illusion by sending words and literary images spinning across the page, forcing readers to acknowledge the thing-like uniqueness of the work’s visual footprint and the effort expended by both poem and reader to give action to those words. The comics poem complicates this by adding literal visual imagery, but the goal is much the same: to

produce a poem that satisfies, more than ever, the view of poetic materiality expressed by Archibald MacLeish in "Ars Poetica":

> For all the history of grief
> An empty doorway and a maple leaf.
>
> For love
> The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea—
>
> A poem should not mean
> But be. (ll. 19-24)

MacLeish's sense that the poem must exist almost beyond language as a kind of poetic thing, "palpable and mute / As a globed fruit," is well exemplified by Badman's *Colletta Suite*, which places so many roadblocks in the way of traditional, transparency-affirming systems like narrative structure and reading progression that its verbal fragments and object-like panels are always "now," always in the midst of actively transitioning (MacLeish ll.1-2). Lack of an easy past or future means that, most of the time, *Colletta Suite* doesn't feel as though it is growing toward anything so much as it is simply there, growing, producing verbal-visual objects like wood cleanly "issuing from the hand of nature" (Olson 247). Olson's desire to attain objecthood for the poem by "getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual ego, of the 'subject' and his soul" is also well served by Badman's experimental process and his stated disinterest in personal expression (247). Though no amount of procedural distance could ever make Badman a fully objective presence, his mechanical procedure does render him a model objectist poet. This is to say: one who both shapes and is shaped by the parameters and materials of his experiment.

This, in comics poetic form, furthers Olson's quest for a poetry that may at least "try to take its place alongside the things of nature" (247).

This idea is not without its problems, of course, chief among them the notion that viewing human beings as "objects" or "creations of nature" can quickly turn dangerous. After all, the objectification of opponents amid conflict was a clear factor in the creation of the American internment camps that nearly swallowed Hartmann at the outset of WWII and of the equally American black sites in Metres's work. Furthermore, as demonstrated in essays like "Human Universe," Olson was not above engaging in a strain of late-modernist primitivism regarding the people of the Yucatan peninsula, where he went to dig for Mayan glyphs (the ultimate word-as-object). So, we must pause to ask about the ethics of Olson's reification, or "thing-making," now that we have applied it to comics poetry. As Joseph Jonghyun Jeon argues in *Racial Things, Racial Forms*, the "thing" has always stood for dehumanization in American literature and remains so, despite improved twentieth-century formulations like W. C. Williams's "No ideas but in things" (xviii). Jeon even goes on to claim that "although . . . avant-garde thing-art generally strives to make the physicality and visuality of things more dynamic than objectification might lead us to believe, it has tended to disarticulate itself from a specifically racialized context" (xix). How does *Colletta Suite* escape the stain of such an objectism with regard to the Japanese characters in Shikibu's novel?

In the case of comics poetry, help comes in the form of "Thing Theory" scholar Bill Brown, whose ideas contribute much to Jeon's introduction. According to Jeon, "Brown argues that *things* should be disarticulated from *objects*, [the latter of] which are usually characterized by utility. Playing off Marxian accounts of valuation," he writes, "Brown locates in things a *misuse value*, which we glimpse when, for example, a knife is used improperly as a screwdriver.

In these irregular moments of decontextualization, the strangeness of the thing flashes its 'secret life'—a previously unseen complexity that offers intimate access to what might otherwise seem a reified commodity" and helping us escape reductive treatment of race even in an "objectist" treatment of *The Tale of Genji* (xx). Olson, as we have seen, uses "thing" and "object" interchangeably, though context helps us see that what he probably means when it comes to people is what Brown means when he talks about "things." People are instinct-driven products of nature, yes, but still not those "other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects" in Brown's sense (Olson 247). When the people and things of poetry express themselves in comics, and the people and things of comics express themselves in poetry, the mutual "misuse value" engendered by the combination decontextualizes both halves, bringing them together "in a mutually elaborating engagement" that heightens the thing-like actuality of the work while resisting racial "objectification." As we shall see, this has implications not only for the reality of comics poetry but the medium's claim on the future.

Near the end of "Projective Verse," Olson claims that he wants this objectist pseudo-reality and its approach to human experience to open not just the field of the page but the entire field of American poetry to dramatic content that he felt had not been seen in English since the Elizabethans. The successful verse dramatists mentioned in this final section (Homer, Euripides, and Seami: two ancient Greeks and a fifteenth-century Japanese Nō poet) emphasize this, as does Olson's critique of the more recent verse drama of T. S. Eliot. The difference between the successful verse dramatists and Eliot's failed work, Olson contended, was Eliot's inability to imbue his work with "projective size," an obscure concept that comes down to Olson's preference for poetic forms drawn from the infinite, ever-changing well of the poet's mind/body/experience over forms drawn from any culture's more limited trough of preexisting

forms (248). Though Olson believed that Eliot could appreciate the projective size of Elizabethan drama in his reading, as evident in the latter's appreciation for writers like Thomas Kyd, Thomas Middleton, and John Webster, he maintains that Eliot struggled because he was not projective in the way of his models. "Eliot is, in fact, a proof of a present danger, of 'too easy' a going on the practice of verse as it has been, rather than as it must be, practiced," Olson proclaims in his final paragraph, concluding that:

> It is because Eliot has stayed inside the non-projective that he fails as a dramatist . . . his root is the mind, and a scholastic mind at that (no high *intelletto* despite his apparent clarities) . . . in his listenings he has stayed there where the ear and the mind are, has only gone from his fine ear outward rather than, as I say a projective poet will, down through the workings of his own throat to that place where breath comes from, where breath has its beginnings, where drama, has to come from, where, the coincidence is, all act springs. (248-49).

This criticism of Eliot is clear enough given Olson's explanation of mind-syllables and their insufficiency absent the embodied, breath-based line that Olson felt Eliot did not have. Drama springs from action, which comes from bodily movement. If Eliot's verse was entirely cerebral, based on existing mental/verse forms and not the action of his body, it lacked the basis for drama. Yet, this does little to explain why Homer, Euripides, and Seami, the other dramatists mentioned in this part of "Projective Verse," are better at imbuing their work with the requisite embodiment.

Homer and Euripides we may guess at in light of Olson's complaint that Western language has suffered from a plague of abstraction since their time. Homer and Euripides lived and worked prior to the word-as-action's fall from grace, and their language would presumably

have been closer to that source than our own. Seami is a more complicated case, however, owing in part to his position outside the canon of Euro-American literature and the sparsity of Olson's commentary on him elsewhere. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander's edition of Olson's *Collected Prose*, for instance, mentions Seami only twice: once in "Projective Verse" (246) and once in the editorial note to this mention (427). That along with another, more pointed reference in Ralph Maud's *Charles Olson's Reading*, however, is enough to put us on the trail of the poet's most likely source for the author, Arthur Waley's *The Noh Plays of Japan* (1921), an English translation of several Nō plays, including *Hagoromo* (the one specifically mentioned in "Projective Verse"), which Olson acquired in May of 1948 (Maude 270). Olson was almost certainly thinking of Waley's translation/work of literary-cultural interpretation when he included Seami alongside fellow "Projective Verse" interlocutors Pound, Shakespeare, and Homer in a visiting lesson for students at Black Mountain College in December of that year. 1948 and 1949 were years of frequent visiting lectureship at Black Mountain, a beneficial arrangement for Olson, who wrote that he enjoyed the ability to "lecture on [those things] which concern[ed] [him] at the time" without any "break in stride" regarding his other work (qtd. in Maud 79). Other things that concerned him in this period, during which he was composing his long projective poem "The Kingfishers" and the explanation of its praxis in "Projective Verse," included a BMC lecture "on the ear" in February 1949 and a summer course titled "Verse and Theater." Notably, Verse and Theater ended with a student performance of the *Odyssey* containing a great deal of active (*i.e.,* dramatic) "improvisation" (Maud 79-80). Letters also disclose that Olson was engaged in an examination of Euripides' *Orestes* around this time, searching archaeologically, as he was wont to do, for evidence of the older, word-as-action focused language that lurked beneath its Greek linguistic surfaces and which might serve as a

“clue to the re-invention of new theatre” (Maud 79-80). Language was not Olson’s only potential path toward the word-as-action, however. Frustrated by his lack of ancient Greek, he would eventually ask Edward Dahlberg in a letter dated 25 March 1949 whether he knew of “any writings by anyone on HOMER, which has illuminations” as a shortcut to the *Odyssey’s* deeper truth (qtd. in Maud 81). This request, coming just as Olson was in the midst of composing and thinking about “Projective Verse,” strongly suggests that he would have credited the projective potential of a comics poem like *Colletta Suite*, even if it was not the kind of projectivism he practiced himself.

As for what Olson may have taken from Seami and *The Noh Plays of Japan* specifically, Waley’s introduction suggests that Nō theater’s stylization and simplification of plot and stage dress were not rejections of realism but a different method of constructing realism to begin with—one where the apparatus (the dramatic masks for major players or the pine forest implied by a few snapped-off branches) was always visible and perhaps more productive of realism’s end goals than realistic acting itself. Paraphrasing Seami’s own theories of dramatic praxis, Waley notes that Nō actors and writers sought to include “a tinge of the ‘unlike’” in their imitations, “for if imitation be pressed too far it impinges on reality and ceases to give an impression of likeness” (xxiv). This, too, fits Olson’s disclaimer about the absolute difference between the reality of verse and the reality of lived experience in the sense that both projectivism and Nō strive for an actuality that they know they cannot pursue to a fault.

This quality of chasing reality without crossing into realism and of using transparency-resisting forms to do so takes full shape in *Hagoromo*, a play traditionally ascribed to Seami about a *tenin’s* (angel’s) lost feathered robe and the heavenly dances the angel must perform to win it back from a fisherman. The way that Seami “causes the fisherman and the angel to stand

[out] clear[ly]" in the play exemplified, Olson felt, "a less 'heroic' but equally 'natural'" form of the projective size Eliot lacked (248). Given what we know about Olson's definition of "drama," this was probably not down to Seami's writing but the way in which the stagey second half of the work "consists merely of chants sung to the dancing. Some of these," Waley writes, "(*e.g.*, the words to the Suruga Dance), have no relevance to the play, which is chiefly a framework or excuse for the dances" (155). Assuming that Olson credited Waley on this point, the appeal of such a play could not have resided solely in its verisimilitude (in the transparent interleaving of chant, dance, costuming, and plot), as this verisimilitude was broken by the extraneous wording. Rather, its appeal would have resided in the drama present whenever *Hagoromo's* language was enacted, measured out by the inherently dramatic real-world movements of the dance (every step of which was an irreducible verbal-visual plea for the fisherman to discharge the *tenin's* debt). Even the dances with chants that don't match the plot are useful, as their refusal to rationalize themselves as natural parts of play—as signifiers pretending to an unreachable set of signifieds—makes the structure of everything around them more visible and less likely to squander its energy on impossible transparencies. Per Eastman, the verbal-visual combination of the Suruga Dance exists for itself, not for what it might contribute to the "mediate, or moral, or practical" engine of the plot to which it had been grafted (8-9). The dance and its accompanying Shinto chant are beautiful in *Hagoromo* simply because are chosen. It is most likely this mix of opaque language and embodied action, this "balance" between verisimilitude and system-revealing unlikeness, that Olson meant when he wrote about the dramatic poetry that would follow projective form.

Nearly three quarters of a century later, it is unclear whether the projective free verse that Olson imagined has produced this revitalized dramatic verse. Though many contemporary poems

certainly look like Olson's, moving freely about the printed page, that freedom did not, in the end, cause verse drama's triumphant return to the stage any more than Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. Nor has it led to an unchecked flood of modernist epics on the order Pound's *Cantos* or Olson's *Maximus Poems*. Charges of "lazy verse," too, remain common in American poetic criticism, suggesting, perhaps, that Olson's return to the word-as-action never really occurred, despite the fact that projectivism did enter something like the mainstream of American poetry. These ideas appear with particular force in the criticism of Marjorie Perloff, whose essay "The Linear Fallacy" (1981) turns on her contention that even now, "in an age that has made free verse the established norm rather than the daring exception," it is not the case that "a series of words, phrases, or clauses divided into line lengths and arranged on the page with a fixed left margin must constitute a poem" (855). Perloff's writing echoes Max Eastman's as she blasts the "banal journalistic prose" (857) of poets C. K. Williams, Karen Snow, and Robert Pinsky (859, 861-64), even claiming that Williams's "With Ignorance" "undergoes no significant change when it is written as conventional prose" (859). "Why does it ask to be read as poetry?" Perloff wonders about these "imprecise and sloppy" works, which, "were it not for their linear frame, would hardly make it past the copy editor of *Newsweek*, not to mention the *New Yorker*" (860-61). One of Perloff's most cutting answers matches Eastman's: that the free verse in Karen Snow's *Wonders* (1978) "seems to be no more than a convenient way of packaging the material" (861).

Perloff, however, is just as admitting of the potential for good free verse as Eastman. Considering a brief free verse poem by George Oppen, Perloff exclaims that this, finally, is "a composition that is genuinely linear, that cannot do without lines," and free verse lines at that, "for Oppen's lineation serves to enact the process of the poet's thoughts and emotions in the act of making love," which "cannot be rewritten as a prose paragraph, for in prose Oppen's phrases

would make absolutely no sense. Each line, indeed, each word has suspended meanings, its referents left open. We cannot say quite how the poet feels about making love because he doesn't seem to know himself. His feelings are too complex to summarize or to present discursively" (Perloff 865-66). Furthermore, "Oppen's verse is 'free,' which is to say that its forms of recurrence are not regular measures . . . because the experience conveyed in the poem must remain particularly *open*. . . . For Oppen, in other words, the line seems to be the only form that can trace the graph of consciousness, a consciousness that moves forward, not like a flowing stream [of prose], but in little spurts and odd jumps" (867). Perloff does not consider free verse a bankrupt form so much as a form too often used without any need to organize itself in lines or "verses" turning at highly visible intervals away from one another.

Though Perloff has criticized projectivism, her demands of free verse in "The Linear Fallacy" are ultimately satisfied by any work that truly lives up to projectivism's ideals—comics poems included, for they come from an American poetic lineage that explicitly includes both Oppen and "Projective Verse." As we would expect, the free verse "graph of consciousness" that Perloff approves of in an Objectivist, Pound-Williams school inheritor like Oppen compliments the poetry and poetic theory of an Objectist, Pound-Williams school inheritor like Olson, whose ideas in "Projective Verse" were common currency not only among his fellow Black Mountain Poets but among all of the Pound-Williams inheritors in Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1960). This included visually oriented poets of the New York School

C PRESS

"C" magazine, a Journal of Poetry. Contributors include Guillaume Apollinaire, John Ashbery, Ted Berrigan, Joe Brainard, William Burroughs, Joe Ceravolo, Gregory Corso, Harlan Dangerfield, Edwin Denby, Kenward Elmslie, Dick Gallup, Allen Ginsberg, Barbara Guest, Brion Gysin, Richard Huelsenbeck, Max Jacob, LeRoi Jones, Kenneth Koch, Frank Lima, Michael McClure, The Mercenaries, Frank O'Hara, Charles Olson, Ron Padgett, Francis Picabia, The Poem Machine, Theodore Roethke, Ed Sanders, Aram Saroyan, James Schuyler, Peter Schjeldahl, David Shapiro, Philippe Soupault, John Stanton, Larry Swingle, Lorenzo Thomas, Tony Towle, Tristan Tzara, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Tom Veitch, Philip Whalen and John Weiners

.... $3 per year

Figure 33. Masthead of *C Comics*, no.1 (1964), actual and spiritual contributors, including Olson, who never made a comic.

like John Ashbery, and Kenneth Koch (fig. 33), who with Barbara Guest and others, created the first American comics poetry worthy of the name alongside illustrator Joe Brainard in *C Comics* (1964-65). Just as Oppen "suspended meanings" in a way that left his referents "open," building meaning from a collection of tensions, so do comics poems like Guest and Brainard's "Foreheads" revel in feelings "too complex to summarize or to present discursively" (fig. 34). If "The Kingfishers" was Olson's initial stab at a new dramatic poetry, the verbal-visual work of

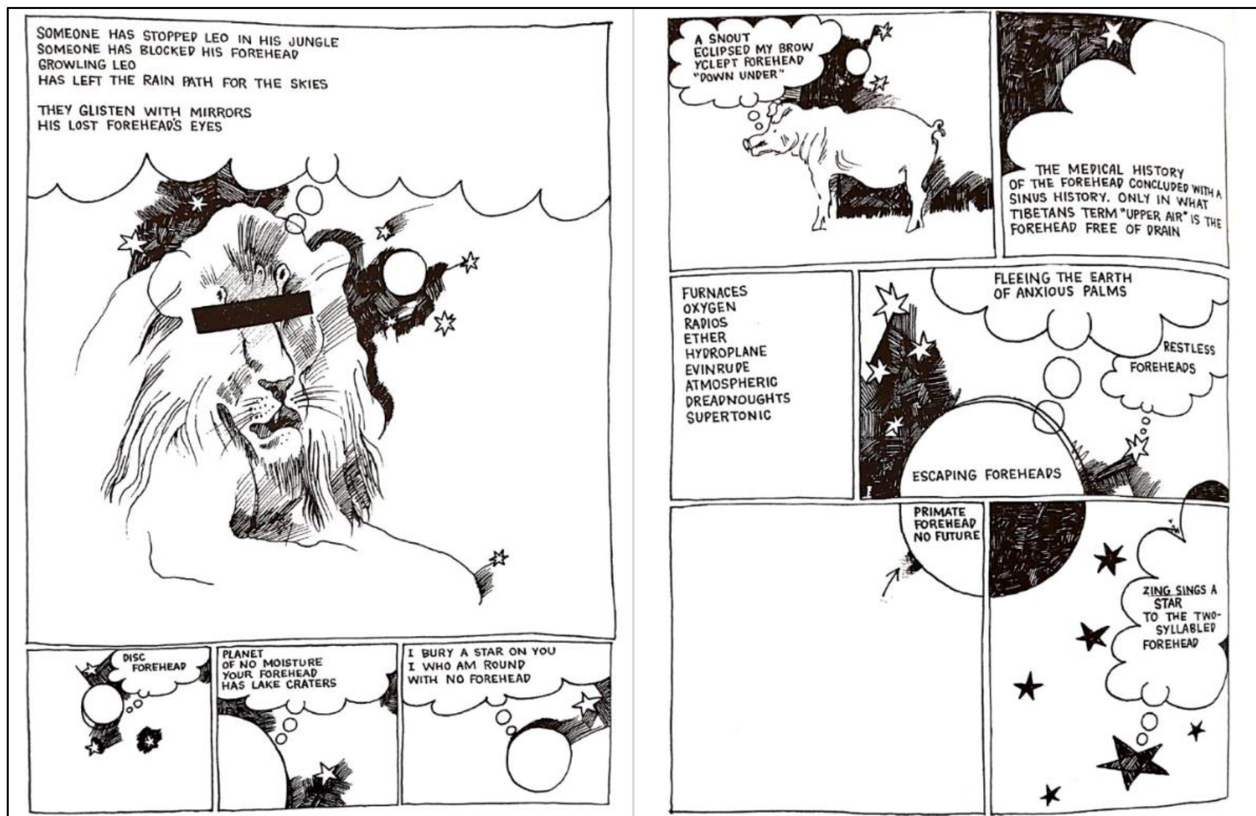


Figure 34. Guest, Barbara and Joe Brainard. Excerpt from "Foreheads." *C Comics*. no. 2, Boke Press, 1965.

Edwin Demby/Brainard in "Shine" and "Practice Every Day" (fig. 35) improves upon it, grafting projectivism onto the free-verse-adjacent romance (and other) comics saturating newsstands.

"We are only at its beginnings," Olson wrote of the projective process from which new dramatic verse might spring, "and if I think that the *Cantos* make more 'dramatic' sense than do

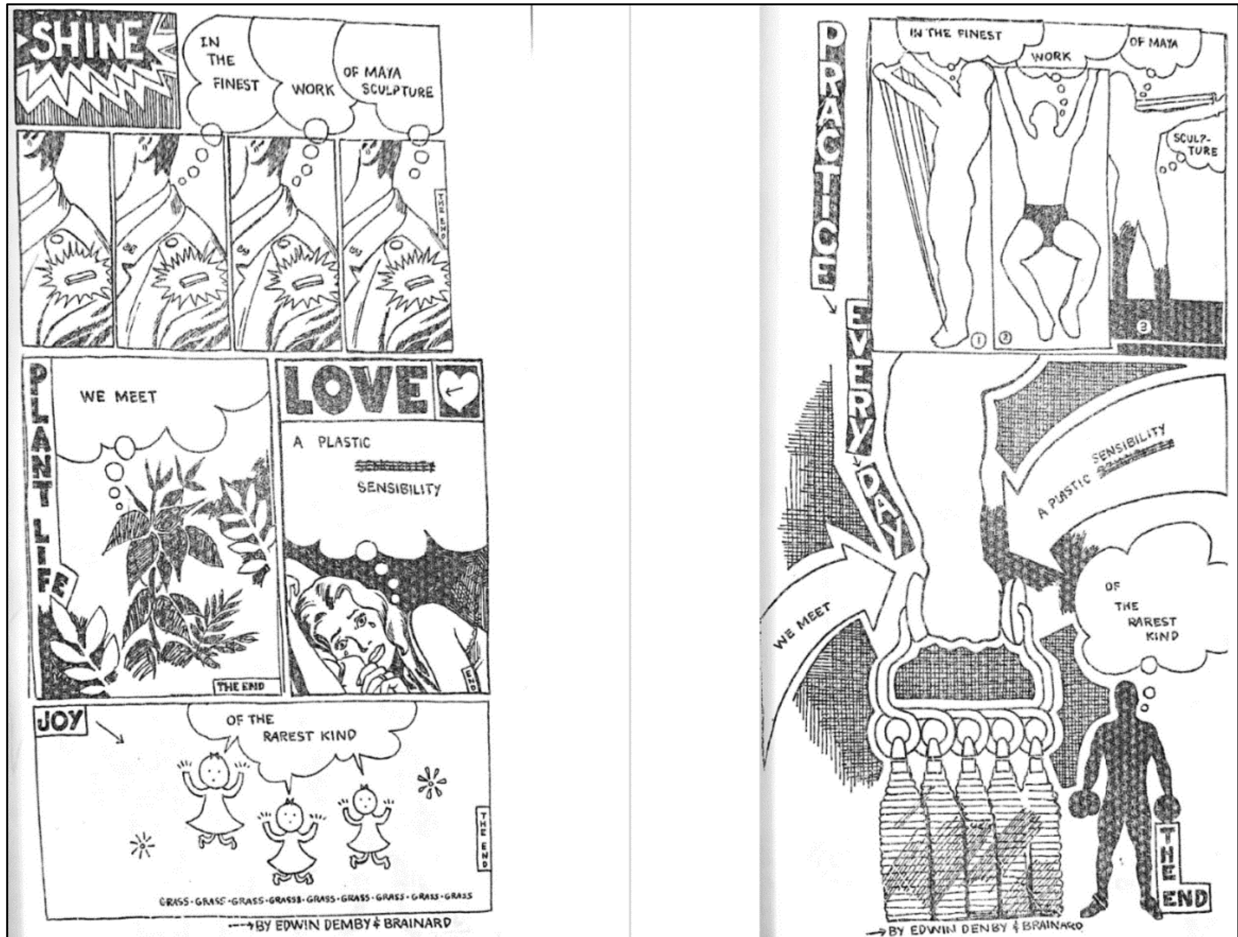


Figure 35. Demby, Edwin, and Joe Brainard. “Shine” and “Practice Every Day.” C Comics, no. 1. C Press, 1965. The emphasis on Mayan sculpture links with Charles Olson’s “Human Universe,” by way of Charles Atlas bodybuilding ads.

the pays of Mr. Eliot, it is not because I think [the *Cantos*] have solved the problem but because the methodology of the verse in them points a way by which, one day, the problem of larger content and of larger forms may be solved” (Olson 248). Comics poems like *Colletta Suite* are one apotheosis of projective verse because they do, in the end, offer a solution to the problem of larger content and form, providing a flexible approach to 2-D literary reality on subjects beyond Whitman’s and demanding from artists and readers the intense concentration missing from watery verse. In so doing, comics poetry avoids journalistic free verse that organizes itself in lines only because it takes up more space on the page. Instead, it extends Olson’s tinkering with

lineation in the first line of "The Kingfishers" by the addition of new lines, new breaks, and the well-developed visual language of comics. With comics poetry, the hesitation that inaugurated *The New American Poetry* becomes more visible and palimpsestic than ever, taking Hartmann's strategy of overlapping prosodic techniques and making even this free verse new again.

The potential for comics to merge with poetry in this way may be seen in a final thought exercise (fig. 36) using the visual portion of "Colletta Suite V" to adapt and interpret the above line from Olson's "The Kingfishers." In this comics poem, visually extending the pause created by the forward slash in "What does not change / is the will to change" amplifies the segmentivity of the original line, fragmenting its declarative statement so that we see, once more, the question (What does not change?) couched within Olson's answer. The text's initial panels, filled with cloud banks, sand dunes, and several views of a pyramid (that, were we closer, would show erosion) suggest, wordlessly, that everything changes, casting doubt on Olson's assertion that "the will to change" remains fixed. How could it, when the main character exhibiting that will turns this way and that as if uncertain of where to go? In the same way, splitting "is the will" from "to change" and isolating these words near the bottom of the page turns the latter part of Olson's line into a question as well. Is the will to change? Or does the main character's will tend toward something else—other people, perhaps, or the problematic but Olsonian desire to renew oneself via the artifacts of another culture? The latter is unfortunately appropriate to a visual adaptation of this poem, a late modernist work that deals in several places with the ancient Khmer city of Angkor Wat. The comics version highlights the racial positionality of the poem's speaker even as its female protagonist cuts against the masculinity of Olson's pronouncements.

Though Laurence Binyon once complained that the logical end of free verse's insatiable "advance" was nothing less than the loss of "sense as well as of meter"—a future where poets

would “merely ejaculate interesting sounds” before finally unshackling themselves from sound as well, lapsing into the “silence” of no poetry at all—comics poetry demonstrates that some silent, irreducible realities might have a positive effect on the form (8). This is especially true if poets replace the lost expressive structures of accentual-syllabic prosody with something as robust, communicative, and focused on the verse turn as comics form.

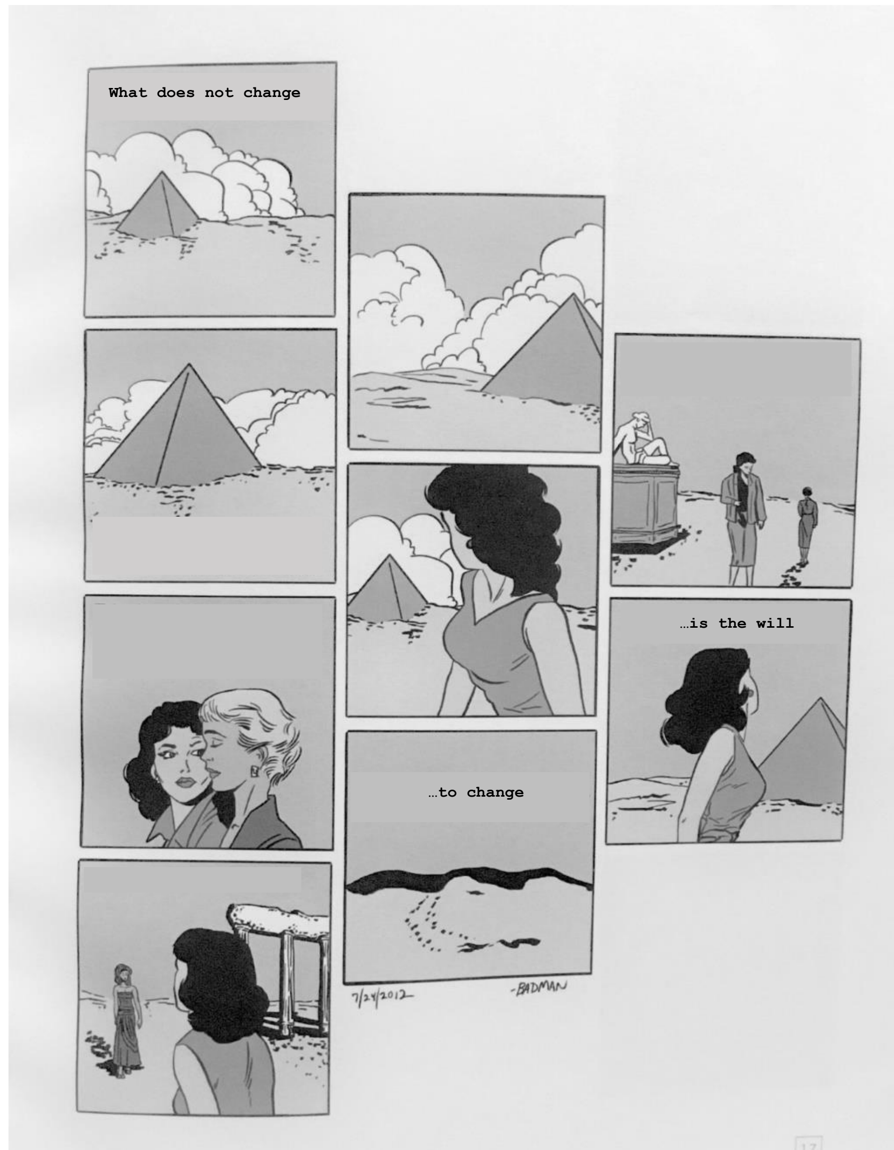


Figure 36. Adapting Badman’s “Colletta Suite V.” Images by Colletta, text from Olson’s “The Kingfishers,” altered by the author.

CHAPTER V:

CODA: INTO THE FREE-VERSE

At the beginning of this dissertation, we proposed to run for a time alongside the verbal-visual work of Sadakichi Hartmann in *Naked Ghosts*, Marcel Broodthaers in his installation exhibits, Philip Metres in *Sand Opera's* transparent black sites, and Derik Badman in his romance comic homage *Colletta Suite*. Now that this race has run its course for the time being, it is time to take stock of the "positive" definition of free verse that we have cobbled together so far.

With the caveat that no such definition is ever final and, further, that this definition will not come close to typifying all free verse poems, what seems clear from the preceding chapters is that free verse, absent its most longstanding aural techniques, has increasingly embraced visual schema for the juxtaposition and layering of meaning (or for the marshalling and directing of reader attention, which can amount to the same thing). Following organically on the heels of this increased visuality is the following corollary, bordering on a necessity in each poem: namely that readers must be made to see and acknowledge those visual forms clearly in each piece for the visual free verse to work, even if it leads to confusion at first. After all, what good is a visual technique that no one notices?

In many ways, this is not so different from the situation readers once found themselves in with rhymed accentual-syllabic poetry. The artifice of such writing was always meant, on some level, to cry out its difficulty, forcing readers to contend with each opaque, fragmentary measure (and its conjunction/disjunction with respect to its surroundings) as the first step in understanding the whole poem more intimately. In this sense, the loss of something like meter to modern and contemporary poetic practice was not simply the loss of tradition, class, or potential

for meaning that its mourners claimed it was. It was also the loss of a highly visible, and by some lights necessary, form of poetic artifice, one of several kinds of speedbump that had, for hundreds of years, forced readers and writers to slow down and appreciate the way verse-based poetry constructed its meanings differently compared to everyday speech and its polished form in prose. Visually attuned free verse of the sort addressed in this dissertation makes up for this loss of poetic opacity by reinjecting the day's dominant (and in some cases transparently written) mode of poetic composition with elements designed, in no uncertain terms, to be noticed.

It may be worth pointing out, in this context, that Max Eastman's condemnation of "lazy" free verse in *Journalism Versus Art* is not inherently linked to his condemnation, earlier in the book, of *avant garde* formatting. After all, the problem with advertising-style layouts was not that they were uncomfortable or new but, rather, that they were crass, unnecessary additions included to pique the reader's interest and sell magazines that relaxed into the comfortable mediocrity of the "golden mean." The problem, in other words, was that the reader wouldn't get much out of them once they returned home and saw that formatting for the empty calorie it was.

The unorthodox visual divisions in Sadakichi Hartmann's *Naked Ghosts*, however, do not fall into this trap, as their multiformal complexities only serve to reveal the poet at the center of works like "Cyanogen Seas are Surging," who also grappled with the awkwardness of being too much of some things and not enough of others in the eyes of his detractors and saw prudence in keeping his options open. Neither does it apply to the visuality of the installation art work of Marcel Broodthaers or the poem/diagram layering of Philip Metres in his "Black Site" series, as the visual techniques utilized by both authors ultimately go toward reminding us that the "reality" of our situation is not one of clear communication but, rather, the presence of constraining, obfuscating systems that we stop seeing after a while, even when we know it would

be unwise to forget them. The visuality of the free verse in these works makes a virtue of its tendence toward self-sabotage, making it so that the S/s equation lands (when it lands at all) with the tenuousness it deserves. The pop cultural visual segments in *Colletta Suite*, too, make good use of their strange, projective geometries, underling in this case the continued primacy of the individual line/measure and of the "break" or "verse turn" between them, even though these things are rendered as figures, panel borders, and gutters. The comics poetry that Badman builds from these analogous units provides the clearest example yet of what Charles O. Hartman's survivor of a free verse line might look like if it were given over to Marjorie Perloff absent any grieving over the meter that was. The truth of the free verse line's operation and its relation to other lines shines through all the better for this lack of linguistic (and nostalgic) interference, an aid even for poets who continue to write more normative, verbally-oriented poetry.

So, in the end, how does one avoid the black hole of a free verse visible only in the absence of something else, that too often reads as "lazy" in its construction, and that sucks up all the poem's energy with words and forms that, in Olson's terms, are little more than a "deadness" ("Projective Verse" 243)? The answer suggested by the authors in this dissertation is that one does whatever one must to "see" the vacuity's outlines again, diving back into the hard parts of a too-easy verse form despite the difficulty in perceiving negative things. Then, one projects a concrete path (verbal and visual as needed) around that all-consuming center, even if it leads us through poetic territory we no longer fully recognize. In this way, the contemporary poet avoids what increasingly seems like the trap of free verse as a negative prosody and travels outward again, line by graphic line, across the open field of the stars.

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