derek beaulieu

avantacular press
2008
concrete poetry for me is not a score for performance & is a refusal to participate in the trade of meaning which is underscored with the writer proclaiming the meaning for an ever-receptive audience of captives. by stepping away from the score it is my aim to trouble the exchange values of poetry and its commodity fiction. Siânne Ngai in "Raw Matter; a poetics of disgust" referred to the 'inarticulate sound, the thing I want to expand to the inarticulate mark'; the mark which refuses to participate in the traditional meaning-making. Ngai writes that "no words are used in the expression of disgust and thus what the question of what words mean is simply irrelevant to this particular type of utterance" (103)... concrete poetry treats language and communication as raw matter without a reinforced referent as a means of briefly interrupting exchange-based signification, language here, ultimately, only covers a space, perhaps building upon the idea of a field poetics...

by using obsolete technology, the concrete poet can recuperate means of communication which have been rejected and trashed. Lee Vergine, in her book When Trash becomes Art (2002) argues that "the artist of course, is a useless figure (...)
he is a social error" as is concrete poetry in this context. the poet has become, much like the means of production itself, an obsolete form, a generator of facile, statements of the 'human condition' meant to transfer an emotional state to the audience/reader. In this form, poetry is an empty signifier. We already have enough people writing about people & the emphasis on content - MEANING - only reiterates a traditional, humanist drive for understanding. While form may be more or less than an extension of content, the reverse is also true: content is never more than an extension of form.

this is not to suggest that the romantic image of a writer pounding away at a typewriter with the ever-present bottle next to him is something I am supporting here, rather that the poet's role has become as obscure as outdated machines, an un-needed and un-served 'social error'.

concrete poetry, then, is a brief moment of reclamation of a poetic space which does not attempt to map the author as anything but a 'place-marker', signifying the absence of role. Christian Bök argues that best-selling poet is the equivalent of world-famous doily-maker of championship house-of-card maker; and it is increasingly an issue of alienated labour and endurance, to be a poet should be tantamount to being involved in scientific research; what can the restrictions of the form (26 letters and punctuation) communicate, and why?

this may also testify to my reluctance to create concrete poetry on the computer, preferring to use hand-made forms such as lettraset, typewriters, printmaking et cetera, using the computer only as a storage and transferral device (emailing poems for submission, compiling manuscripts, etc) in the actual process of creation of concrete is a hands-on issue for me.
visual poetry for me is a way of eliciting the poetic 'voice' in
favour of materiality, of the materiality of communication -- letterforms, punctuation (and its inevitable overlap with *** design) is
ignored in favour of the content (as if McLuhan never wrote) in
most communication, and as B Nicholson wrote "all that signifies can
be sold."

by briefly breaking (as meaning is constantly being
perscribed) the semantic chain, the concrete poetry I am interested in
(by practitioners as Johnson, Kevin McPherson, Eckhoff, Donato
Mancini, Jesse Ferguson, Frances Krak and others) proposes (as establishes is too strong a proclamation) a moment where meaning
is a process of loss, much as the role of 'poet'.

concrete poetry, then, is as much about waste as it is about 'poetics'. the means of production, the voice being articulated, the audience and the very economy around textual production and sales, is shaped by marginalization -- a
self-perpetuated marginalization at that. if the author is a
"social error", a "useless figure" she is one linked to a useless
machine and a useless genre; concrete poetry then becomes
an attempt to record or refuse. the attempted articulation and appropriation of that waste is placed upon the machine or the biological author-figure.

by embalming the limitations of 'effective communication' concrete poetry becomes a tool to attend on the space of disjunction and absence...
or performance as a commodity in the
trade of performance and exchange when a writer proclaims
what the meaning of performance and exchange mean by steppin
away from. The poem is a commodity in the moment of the score for
and meaning. The commodity in the score of poetry and commodity
of language, a poetic commodity not referred to in the "particular
of meaning" as something with the exchange to include the "in-
participate in the traditional meaning of meaning. Nort writes that "no words are
used in the expression of a poet and thus the question of
what the word means imply irrelevant to this
particular type of literature (103)... Concrete poetry treats
language and communication as a matter without an exchange
or reinforced reference. On means in the poem, the
exchange of meaning of significance, language he
returns, ultimately, only covers the field... by using obsolete
technology, the concrete poet can prepare a means of communica-
tion which has been rejected and refused, has become waste
and a metaphor for what is dry, as in a particular, empty
signifier, an obsolete form... or, in the poetic discourse,
objects which point only to the empty, the artistic, of course, is a useless
"empty" error... the author is figure only maps a path... of the empty space of poetry..."