

Text for the Potential Uncovering of More Framing Poems

Despite the fact that so many literary journals advertising their consideration of poetics in any form (experimental, edgy [sic], odd, visual) don't, in fact, want anything to do with such poetry, it stands that the amount of work being created at this time which engages the possible limits of poetry, which hangs around the intersection of borderblur, is quite significant in mass. Whatever the quality of the work turns out to be, once it has spread through the veins of the creative class via print, or more likely websites and social media, if it has been presented as poetry, it is. That's the way it works now. Very egalitarian.

The breadth of permissiveness is both exciting and dulling. It means, at least in theory, the possibility of accessing formal approaches and territories of content without limit. That said, as I stand in my backyard and look down admiringly at my daughter's chalk drawings/ writing/ scrawls I can't conceive of any vast difference between her work and many other visual practices by poets and/or visual artists. Consider asemic writing, a practice in which the creator produces a text which does not engage an alphabet or other system of regulated symbols, but which, at least in theory, contains its content in the physicality of the mark, in the act of writing itself. Now, I remember, as a child, or at least I believe I remember, the act of writing and drawing before I had sufficient skill to produce the agreed upon symbols which transmit meaning. What occurs then is a process of transmission which is certainly not asemic (and probably asemic writing is not asemic, either)—not asemic—what occurs is writing, which, while lacking the regulated symbolic tools which achieve successful transmission of ideas to others, i.e. language (in this case written) a writing is pursued where the ideas or stories intended (or even if *not* intended, consciously or unconsciously) to be communicated are nonetheless embedded in the text/script—that they cannot be accessed post-composition does not then mean the writing is asemic. The writing is overflowing with semantic meaning, it simply cannot be transmitted. So, what is the difference between the child's writing and the asemic writing of practitioners of a neo-avant-garde? The stock answer is intention, base of knowledge/choice within professional ability, and conscious historical context. But what if we consider these same texts in the frame of the death of the author? And what of some visual poetry which chooses not to engage written language at all, but instead relies on images purely, for example a great many pieces in Gustave Morin's *A Penny Dreadful*, or certain pieces by Márton Koppány? We could attempt to stroll along some imagined outermost perimeter of poetic practice but how would one locate it, and what would we learn? Probably that just about anything can be conceived of as poetics— if framed properly.

My framing poems? Are they a gesture in a prevailing sense of the arbitrary? To drop a frame onto a page and say, *Look, a poem!* That the series is a limit test—with positive results? In the pessimistic, and full of forgetting, they can seem that way. And sometimes, when I am looking at them, they do. But, shadows are cast because of the presence of light. Hand in hand with the pessimistic is optimism. Here I remember that territory of thought which is the motherland of these poems. The desire of that landscape is to explore the creator's ability to activate sites via suggestion. The shamanistic urge creators often experience and manifest. Making work which

touches the actuality of magic in our lives. And not illusion. No, that threshold where illusion breaks down under the presence of the real. To demarcate and signify, and by doing so, alter our perception of, in this case, a text, and consequently change that text, our relationship with it, its function, its aura, its power—and the reader's. The simplicity of the action, the placing of a frame—a slide mount—onto a text, in its smallness, renders the resultant pieces objects easily dismissed.

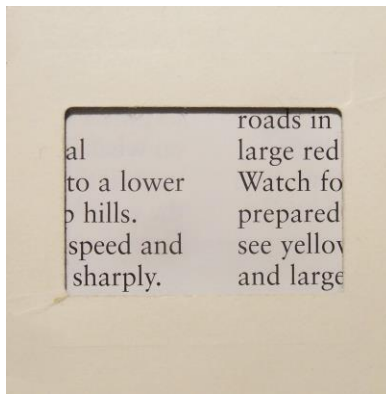
This reminds me of a story I was once told about Barnett Newman's *Voice of Fire*. Apparently, the purchase of this painting at the close of the 80's by the National Gallery of Canada for nearly 2 million dollars was somewhat of a scandal for the Canadian public. The painting is 18 feet tall and consists of three vertical lines of colour: blue, red, blue. It was brought to my attention that among the astonished and scandalized viewers was a man who took the clichéd refrain *my child could do that* into his own hands. Returning home, where he had a barn, he proceeded to reproduce *Voice of Fire* on the side of said barn, in a gesture which seems to me both fruitless and, yes, childish. But, when you think of it, it is nice that (assuming the story is true) he at least engaged with the painting on a creative level. Now that the purchase is nearly two decades in the past I doubt the seeming simplicity of the piece will provoke again such a reaction in the *my child could do that* audience. Its simplicity will either draw the viewer in, or failing to do so, lead to dismissal. Simplicity is like that. Who has time for it?

David Antin, in the first part of his book *john cage uncaged is still cagey*, speaking of the second movement of Cage's work *Composition as Process* says that it functions as an art machine. He defines an art machine as "... a system whose parts when put in motion act upon each other in such a way as to cause you to see things differently"ⁱ. This is both quite funny and somewhat serious. An art machine can, by that definition, be an alarming amount of possible things. Antin, following the definition, goes on to say that having wanted his students to make an art machine, he directed them to one in order to give them an idea of what one might be. The art machine he directed them to turns out to be a jukebox.

I began reading *john cage uncaged is still cagey* after having begun this piece of writing you are reading now. The appearance of this mention of an art machine just as I was about to resume work on this here is the kind of happy accident I depend on. An art machine? That's what I made! The parts were a camera, a few slide mounts, and a number of books. The books I chose were ones lying around the house. Some I targeted because they seemed to resemble poetry least, some were books I particularly liked and which were not poetry, and some just happened to be close at hand—not all of them were mine, and so were completely unfamiliar to me (a welcome distance). The slide mounts also were close at hand—they were my grandfather's and there were plenty of them about because at the time of composition I had recently returned from living abroad for some years and was temporarily living at my grandparent's home. This kind of unplanned choice (the slide mount, not living or returning from abroad—though those too, of course) is the type of casual gesture which can, in time, amount to more significant

results. Having chosen the slide mounts without much thought, I found that in fact I had made a choice that agreed with me. I enjoyed the slide mount as it suggested, as a material for frame, an emphasis on visuality. Poems to be read—and looked at. Lastly, the camera. It was the only viable option for documentation. Each framing poem was an ephemeral meeting of page/text and frame. I would open one of the chosen books to a random page, or quickly flip through it and stopping on a page for whatever reason prompted me to stop, I would place the slide mount on the page and move it around, looking for a sweet spot. Having landed on a satisfying location, I documented the momentary poem by photographing it. Because the slide mount would be used again to find another poem it was not affixed to the page—had it been, I could have used a scanner to document a finished object. As it is, the ephemerality is central to the project: that poems are latent in texts (and situations) and as quickly as they are revealed, they disappear—it is the potential which always remains and remains charged. The photograph then, documents an event (machine at work?) that's simplicity and fleetingness suggest that anybody, even children, might find poetry wherever they are open to let it speak. Where, indeed, is poetry located? What might its many faces look like?

To render the form closer to a traditional reading experience I could easily have transcribed the text so that a piece such as this one,



would instead have been presented as,

	roads in
al	large red
to a lower	Watch fo(r)
hills.	prepared
speed and	see yellow
sharply.	and large

One, I think it's safe to say, is much more apt to identify the transcription as poetry than they are the photograph. But that is someone else's project, perhaps—certainly not mine. When decontextualized from the parts of the process the focus becomes the content of the found words—one aspect of the framing poems, to be sure. But so much is lost. It is the materiality of the original source hand in hand with the isolated text fragment which in the framing poems work as a whole/hole to unveil the presence of a floating poetry.

Site.

Event.

Machine.

¹ David Antin. *john cage uncaged is still cagey*. Singing Horse Press, 2005

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