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LETTERPRESS LANGUAGE: TYPOGRAPHY AS A MEDIUM FOR THE VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF LANGUAGE

Johanna Drucker*

Abstract—*This examination of three works by Johanna Drucker,* 26 '76 *(1976),* from A to Z *(1977) and* Against Fiction *(1983), all printed letterpress, focuses on the formal properties of typography and its capacity to extend the meaning of a written text. Handsetting metal type necessarily focuses one's attention on the specificity of written language as a sequence of discrete letters. Each has properties of size, weight and shape; and placement and type styles can be widely varied. The technical constraints of letterpress tend to conserve the norm in the representation of language: line after straight line of a single typeface. The author's intention in deviating from these norms has been to extend, rather than negate or deny, the possibilities of meaning by encouraging plural readings at the levels of the word, the line and the page. Other issues such as the relation of language to experience, to literary tradition or to the social context in which it is produced are investigated.*

The relation between the formal, visual aspects of typography and the production of meaning in a printed text has been one of my main concerns in my work as a book artist. Writing produces a visual image: the shapes, sizes and placement of letters on a page contribute to the message produced, creating statements which cannot always be rendered in spoken language. Handsetting type quickly brings into focus the physical, tangible aspects of language—the size and weight of the letters in a literal sense—emphasizing the material specificity of the printing medium. The single, conservative constant of my work is that I always intend for the language to have meaning. My interest is in extending the communicative potential of writing, not in eliminating or negating it. While my work tends to go against established conventions of appearance of type on a page, this deviation is intended to call attention to the structure of those norms, as much as to subvert them. Setting type also emphasizes the importance of the letter as the basic unit of written forms, as an element in its own right with particular characteristics, and not only as the representation of the patterns of spoken language. There are many historical precedents for this approach, including the work of nineteenth-century poet Stephen Mallarmé and twentieth century Dadaists and Futurists [1–3]. I will discuss three of my books here: *26 '76*, printed in 1976, *from A to Z*, printed in 1977, and *Against Fiction*, printed in 1983. I produced all three by letterpress using handset type on a Vandercook proofing press, a flat-bed cylinder press which prints one hand-fed sheet at a time.

Rather than feeling hampered by the physical constraints of letterpress, I have used its characteristics to structure works, to extend the investigation of language in printed form, and to discover how the substitution or elimination of letters or other visual elements can alter the conventional use and meaning of words. Essentially, the norm of language representation is completely reinforced by the techniques of letterpress. Its mechanical design is intended to maintain even lines in a single typeface. But the very rigidity of these norms also permits the use of that technology as a language itself, as a system of possibilities and constraints.

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26 '76: THE STRUCTURE OF THE PAGE

Although I had been printing since 1972, *26 '76* was the first work in which I used letterpress as something more than a means of printing an already written text and in which I concentrated on the visual dimensions of written language. It was my first attempt to explore such features as the visual characteristics of different typefaces and the effect of the arrangement of words on the page (see Fig. 1). Two basic issues motivated my work: the way in which visual structures actually produce meaning, and the relation between language and experience. This relation is an issue central to the philosophy of language, raising the question of whether language is merely descriptive of the world, in fact mirrors it in its very structure, or actually creates the world and its apparent order as a mental construct. It was partially my desire to investigate the structure of a particular experience and mirror its structure in a visual text that gave me the theoretical premise for *26 '76*.

I wanted to take an event, a single actual occurrence, and make it into an image that would be available to a structural analysis. The analysis of this 'image' was the underlying theme of the book. I chose a four-day trip to Los Angeles, California, with two colleagues; we were to do performances at a small theater in Hollywood. Although the trip had considerable extension in time and space, it also had the requisite autonomy of a single event. By considering the incidents in the trip as elements of a whole, everything that happened in the four days could be taken as one aspect of a single image, the image of the trip. In addition, this sojourn presented me with the opportunity to distinguish several different kinds of language and to identify each of them by using a different typeface—for instance, using the copperplate typeface to identify abstract terms and concepts (such as "Fore Gone Ground" and "Comparative" in Fig. 1). The experience was investigated directly through the language it offered, as well as in terms of the analytical and descriptive language I imposed upon it. Basically my assumptions were that language has an approximate relation to experience and that the account of an experience may be constructed along several different linguistic lines.

I distinguished four kinds of language in the book: found language, such as occurred in the landscape as billboards or signs or was overheard from personal conversation; theoretical language, which described what was being done to the book, identifying the various elements of the configuration and the function of those elements within the structure of the whole; narrative language, which described, with normal expository

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syntax, actions and events taking place; and finally a personal voice, which reflected what was happening in more idiosyncratic terms. I associated each of these strains of language with a particular typeface or group of typefaces in order to keep them distinct.

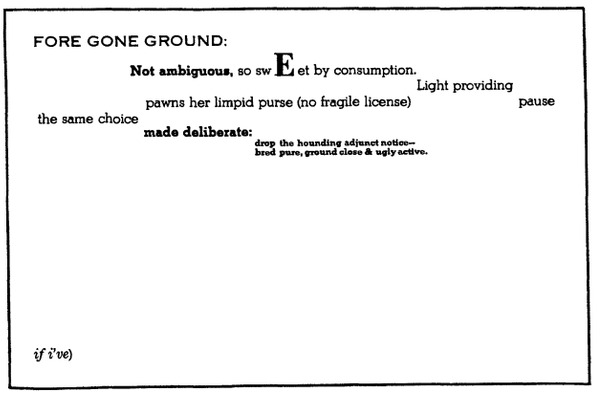
I posed another problem in the book, namely, the distinction between public and private language. The four strains had very different degrees of accessibility. The found language, whether advertising copy or conversation, was clearly intended as public. The narrative description made considerable concessions to communication. The theoretical language, however, was generally self-referential, tying each page back into the overall structure of the book as a single 'image', and the private commentary verged on the obscure. In its original form the book was highly cryptic, to the point of being almost inaccessible, a private shorthand. Individual statements were understandable, for the most part, but their relation to each other was almost entirely implied rather than stated. In the second edition of the work, for clarity, I added a fifth strain of language, a running narrative in footnote form, describing the linear sequence of events from which the language of the book had originally been extracted.

Each page of the book was used as the field in which to construct meaning and was an attempt, as well, to make an analogy between the layout of the page and the intended or perceived relation among the events. This required breaking down the continuum of the experience into discrete units and identifying their functions within the image (which was the whole experience). Transforming the four-day trip into an event meant collapsing it and then viewing it from the perspective of a single plane on which every action had been flattened into one 'configuration'. In order to do this I essentially used the language to stand for significant co-ordinate points in that image, thus removing it from the real experience. It was a highly schematic representation in which any verisimilitude, any correspondence between real events and these representations, was on the level of relations among formal elements, rather than a pictorial image. For instance, the arrangement of typefaces on the "L" page copies the arrangement of the rooms in the theater building that were occupied by the people represented by those typefaces (Fig. 1).

Each page was headed by a letter of the alphabet located in a word which spoke the letter's name: "B gins", "Pro C dure", "D sire", etc. Here the language announced itself, identifying the letter value of words (i.e. the fact that written words are composed of letters). At the same time the paradox of writing was emphasized—as soon as a word is spoken it acquires phonetic value. This paradox, and the way in which it points out the autonomy of written language, has recently been examined by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida [4]. The letter 'B' has no use for the phonetic name by which it is identified, 'bee'. So, I emphasized the written letter in a word which spoke a name which is irrelevant in writing. The letter was always set off, marked by a distinction in typeface or point size, in order to keep it separate from the word in which it occurred.

Another constant feature was the page number, which identified the page in the sequence of pages. Replacing the page number "1" with the word "want" (or "5" with "if i've", etc.) posed the assumed neutrality of numerical order as a question: does the position influence the actual substance of the page? "Want" used as the page number also blatantly expressed my desire to write, to print, and to come into a relation with the public world through private language.

I repeatedly used the possibility of structuring more than one value or meaning ('plurivalence') into the language—on the level of the word, the sentence and the page. Puns, double meanings and play on the connections between spoken and written language were used to emphasize the distinctions between the two forms of language. The investigation of this



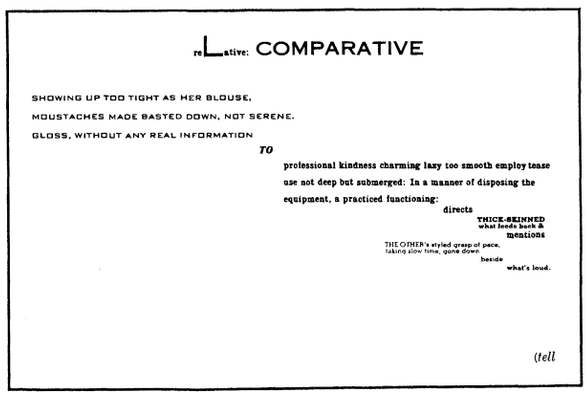


Fig 1. Two pages from 26 '76, *printed letterpress,* 8½" × 11", *1976. Every page in this work had certain constant elements, such as using the letter in a word which announced its name, such as "swEet" on the "E" page (1a), and the punned page number in italics, such as "if i've" for "five", which stressed the theme of choice, which dominates the page. On the "L" page (1b) the correspondence between the image of the text on the page and the event being described was purely formal. For instance, here the lighter typeface is reserved for the fair-haired woman, the heavier face for the darker man. Also, the stepped structure corresponds to the place each of these characters occupied in the building: the woman represented by copperplate type was in the attic, and the dark young man in the cellar. These two pages are typical of the ways in which linguistic themes or characters or sections of the event were isolated and identified through association with a particular typeface and the structure of the 'event' was mirrored in the structure of the page.*

plurivalence began at the level of playing with the spelling of individual words. Every letter can be thought of as a place in the sequence of places that make up a word. If a word is set in a large point size, especially 24 point or larger, it is possible to let any single place be occupied by two or three smaller letters. For instance:

pro $^{v}_{of}$ ing

in the dedication combined comments on the personal effort of undertaking this project and on the technical practice of printing.

Then this plurivalent quality was extended to lines. A statement on the "B" page, page "too", which read:

was **Nothing** was **being** was **made** was **easy**

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was set in 12 point, alternating light and bold print, and demonstrated this plurivalence in a condensed form. The light face could be ignored in an initial reading of the boldface text. At the same time the phrase in its entirety posed four alternative statements as equally relevant to the situation of beginning the trip, each statement a permutation of the sentence in bold face read with only *one* of the four light "was" words. This was also the statement of a theoretical problem: the possibility of fixing meaning in a particular statement.

Sometimes the plurivalence required the careful translation of a written phrase into a phonemic sequence in order to yield a second or third text. For instance, on the first page:

L -- the indefinite article --
meant soft configuration

could be translated into "L.A. meant soft configuration" by substituting the letter "A" for its description as "the indefinite article", in which case the phrase served to describe the social relations of the trip. A second interpretation reworked through sounds could be "Elements of configuration", combining both the actual and the theoretical bases for the work into a single statement. Writing, i.e. printed language, was being used here to undermine the authority of speech—posing the relationship between speech and writing as ambiguous and plural, as is the relationship of either speech or writing to any fixed meaning.

Once the basic components of the 'configuration' were decided on—background, foreground, location, context, texture, gesture—they were used to emphasize the contribution of each page to the whole. The "E" page, early in the trip, recounted a stop at a restaurant in Santa Barbara. The conversation at the table focused on the immediate situation, thus invoking the notion of foreground. The social intimacy included an acknowledgement of a certain amount of already established familiarity, so the word was transformed to the more suggestive "fore gone ground". "Fore gone" also indicated that to some extent our personal relations were already fixed and there was an inevitability to the way they might get structured into an account (see Fig. 1). The page was very much about choice, its limits and effects: "something made deliberate" was constrained by its options. Choice also had a material effect, or produced evidence, such as seen in the breed of the little dog running loose in the courtyard of the restaurant. Similarly, every choice of typeface was not an invention, but a selection out of the finite group of possibilities.

The "L" page, as it clearly announced, dealt with comparisons, among both the elements on the page and their correspondence to the experience from which they were drawn (Fig. 1). The small theater in which we were performing was run by a brother and sister, she more tense, designing, with a professional look (thus the straight copperplate, 8 point), compared to the brother, who had a more relaxed, friendly look. The contrast yielded me the opportunity to play here with the idea of assigning character to a typeface, determined by a mixture of association and tradition as much as by its effect on us. The second typeface is darker, but more variable, full of flux and with a variety in the relation of thick and thin strokes. Although no fixed character can be assigned to it, by comparison with the first face it has a 'personality'. The brother's activity, directing, dropped to the next level on the page: a comparison among performers and performance style, bold, light and distant. The bolder face was used for the dark-haired characters, while the lighter face was reserved for the fair. The spatial arrangements were very specific: from the office in the attic to the dressing room in the basement, each step on the page corresponded to a level in the physical structure of the building.

As the colophon page states, I had a few technical problems in printing this book. I was working in a offset shop which lacked many of the small printing instruments, such as tweezers and brass and copper spacers (the thinnest, smallest spacers, which are used for careful justification—the filling out of lines to the same length). Also, the press did not have a lock-up bar, the piece which makes a solid brace on the press bed against which the type can be secured. Therefore I printed in a chase—a rigid metal frame which has somewhat more flexibility than a solid lock-up bar. The kind of precarious typesetting I was occasionally doing, especially my use of mixed type sizes within a word or line, would have been even more difficult if I had not been using a flat-bed press on which the type can rest. This press allows a wider margin of tolerance than one in which the chase has to support the type on its own. Even so, some of the printing impression suffered as a result.

FROM A TO Z: A TEXT GENERATED FROM THE CONTENTS OF THE TYPECASE

The main premise for the second work, *from A to Z, OUR AN (Collective Specifics) an im partial bibliography*, was completely typographical. Whereas *26 '76* had been a tentative exploration of the potential of type as a means to enhance the semantic value of a text through making it into an image, in *from A to Z* I was concerned with having the very text itself dictated by the material means at my disposal. I had purchased 45 drawers of type, miscellaneous faces which had been part of a small job shop. There was barely enough of any single face to set any substantial portion of text. In the large sizes especially there was only enough type to set a short poem. The book was to be a text composed of all the letters (literally, all the pieces of type) which were contained in those drawers. Each piece of lead was to be used once and only once, and all of the pieces were to be used up.

The type ranged in size from 6 point to 48 point. I used all the larger point sizes (from 18 to 48) to represent characters in this "bibliography". Each character was also identified with a letter of the alphabet or a number corresponding with that letter's placement in the alphabet (A = 1, B = 2, etc.) for the purpose of reference throughout the work (Fig. 2, for instance, was the 'G' page). The book was a pseudobibliography, fragmentary and fabricated—thus the subtitle, "an im partial bibliography", stressing that it was subjective and incomplete. In addition the book was a compendium of every format used in book construction: a table of contents, introduction, footnotes, running heads, marginal notes, etc., each playing a particular role in mapping out the territory of a literary community linked through its traditions, attitudes and social interactions. The book is completely self-sufficient: every term, character, personality, etc., can be understood within the closed system of references contained in the work. However, it was also meant as a kind of *bibliography à clé*, since it was based on actual observation of a particular literary scene and intentionally represented the various real persons under transformed and pseudonymous identities.

Every page of the main text (of which there were, of course, 26) followed the same format. These were the first pages set and used up the bulk of the large sized type. The preliminary and end material used up the type that remained after the main text pages were set. The primary feature of each main text page (see Fig. 2a) was a poem by the character, and the characters were related and contrasted by typeface. For instance, the family of "Brush" typefaces was used for the most sentimental group, "Copperplate" for the method-oriented modernists, etc.; social or aesthetic affinities could be traced initially through this visual connection, as well as through thematic relations. On the back of each sheet (Fig. 2b) the 'sorts'—the pieces of type left over after the first, more intentional use of the face was made—spelled out in unorthodox phoneticization a critical

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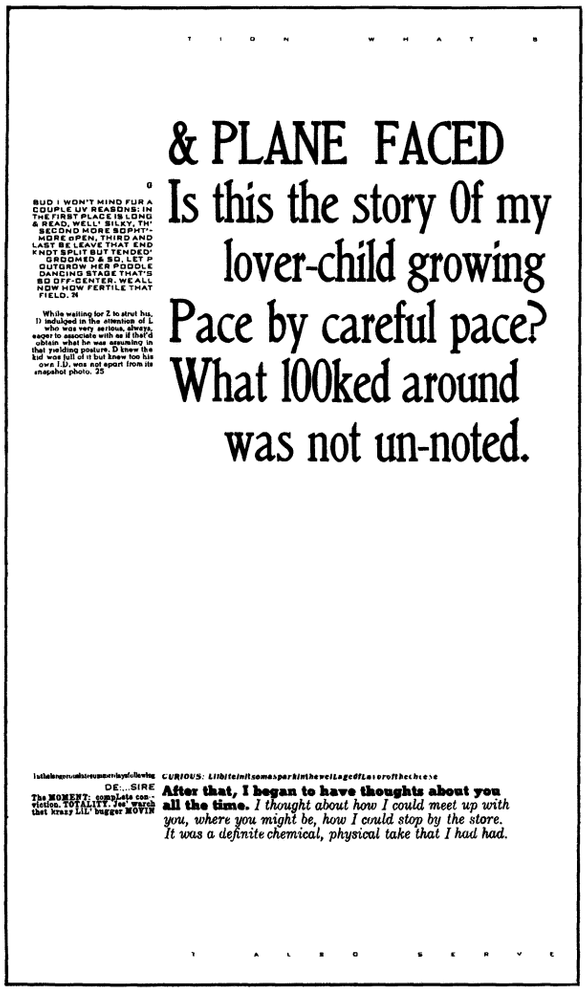

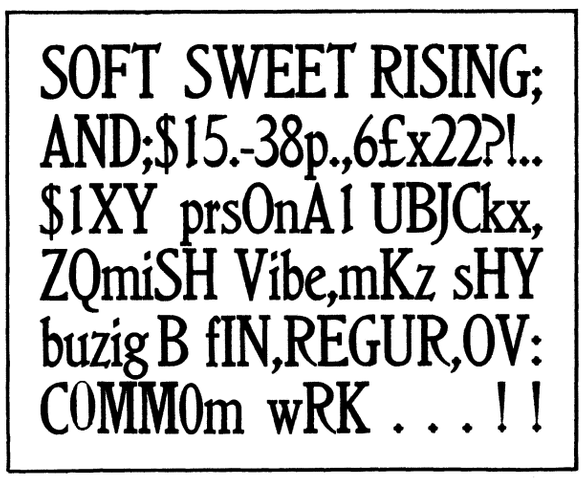

Fig. 2. Front (2a) and back (2b) sides of a single page from from A to Z, *letterpress on brown kraft paper, 9″ × 12″, 1977. Each main text page (2a) of this work featured a single large poem written by the character associated with the letter, in this case, "G". On the back side of the page (2b) the 'sorts', the leftover pieces of type from that text face, were set in a pidgin-phonetic English to provide more information. Thus, the full 'text' consists of both a deliberate statement and a residual statement less consciously formulated.*

commentary on the life, attitude and work of that writer. On both the front and back, much improvisation in the use of letters and typographic devices used to stand for letters resulted in multiple meanings, as if revealing associative possibilities in the word itself. For instance, from the 'C' page:

pUBL!C

or from the 'B' page:

jbjOsyNCradIX

or from the 'A' page:

An jmprovjsajOnal, PRov!sAL
QUES. of how & why search. HV
cHoyc QWOT FR. Fæmœz
QWARRLZ.

(which translates as: "An improvisational, provisional question of how and why search. Have choice quote from famous quarrels.")

The lower section of each page consisted of the running narrative relating a fantasy that character A (female) was having about a possible relationship with character Z (male) and character Z's reactions. I called this subplot "Incidents in a Non-relationship".

There were five elements in this bottom matrix that occurred on the front of every page (see Fig. 2a). On the right-hand side were A's statements. The top line was libidinal:

CURIOUS: LilbiteinitsomasparkinthewelLagedfLavorofthecheese

(Curious: Little bite in it some, uh, spark in the well-aged flavor of the cheese)

The bottom piece was diary-esque, confessional:

After that, I began to have thoughts about you all the time. *I thought about how I could meet up with you, where you might be, how I could stop by the store. It was a definite chemical, physical take that I had had.*

On the left-hand side were Z's reactions. The top of the left side was a weather report, a statement about the state of the relationship in atmospheric terms, run together to prevent easy access:

Inthelangorouslatesummerdaysfollowing

The second line emphasized the theme of the meeting:

DE:..SIRE

And the third line stated Z's attitude toward the moment at hand:

The MOMENT: compLete con-- viction. TOTALITY. Jes' warch thet krazy LiL' bugger MOVIN

The point here was to examine the place from which language originates, is motivated, spoken and made accessible. The

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barriers and taboos of censorship are reflected on the one hand by the horrible, sentimentalizing tone of the narrative, traditionally associated with women's romance novels, and on the other by character A's unspeakable libidinal utterances, which are all run together to escape the immediate censorship of the eye, thereby acknowledging the existence of limits of permissibility.

The marginal notes on each page related the fuller social context in which the characters operated (Fig. 2a). These notes were set in 6 and 8 point type, and some actually in 4 point mounted on 6 point body. The latter were so small that to achieve decent inking it was necessary to print the pages in two runs, the large poems first and the marginalia and footnotes second. Each statement in the marginal notes was a quote from something overheard or written in a letter, a diary or a review by one character about another, often to a third. Each marginal note was followed by a reference number directing the reader to the notes at the end of the book in the section titled:

SOURCZ s ...q U0 TEd

(see Fig. 3). This reference section was the most densely visual and complex part of the book and also the most difficult typesetting job, since here I was using up every piece of type remaining in the drawers, combining 48 point with 36, 24, 12, and even down to 6 point, all in one block.

Many of the marginal notes in the body of the text (Fig. 2a) were full of puns and double statements:

BUD I WON'T MIND FUR A COUPLE UV REASONS: IN THE FIRST PLACE IS LONG & READ, WELL' SILKY, TH' SECOND MORE SOPHT'- MORE oPEN, THIRD AND LAST BE LEAVE THAT END KNOT SPLIT BUT TENDED' GROOMED & SO, LET P OUTGROW HER POODLE DANCING STAGE THAT'S SO OFF-CENTER. WE ALL NOW HOW FERTILE THAT FIELD. 24

or:

While waiting for Z to strut his, D indulged in the attention of L who was very serious, always, eager to associate with as if that'd obtain what he was assuming in that yielding posture. D knew the kid was full of it but knew too his own I.D. was not apart from its snapshot photo. 25

These somewhat cryptic remarks were made 'clear' by the even more cryptic references in the end notes (Sources Quoted: Fig. 3). This played on the referencing process itself, in that indexing and notation created complication rather than clarification, in a continued network of associations. Every new reference added contingencies to the initial statement rather than anchoring it in a stable context. The context and possible meanings of the original statement continued to multiply:

24--EwriddeNP f0r,,wh0m,,SH-
0f:cleVerP,has sum,,tASt-,-
BUD,,NO,,REAL,,ATTRACTION,,fr0M
a,,loNg,,wrk,L-aViNgL-aVs

(from Sources Quoted).

I had to face the problem of how to indicate letters that had been completely used up. By this time I was down to scraps in the drawers, pulling out one piece after another, looking for a remaining 'e' or 't'. Missing vowels were not a serious problem, but missing consonants were difficult to do without while still maintaining the sense of the word. I used dashes, commas and

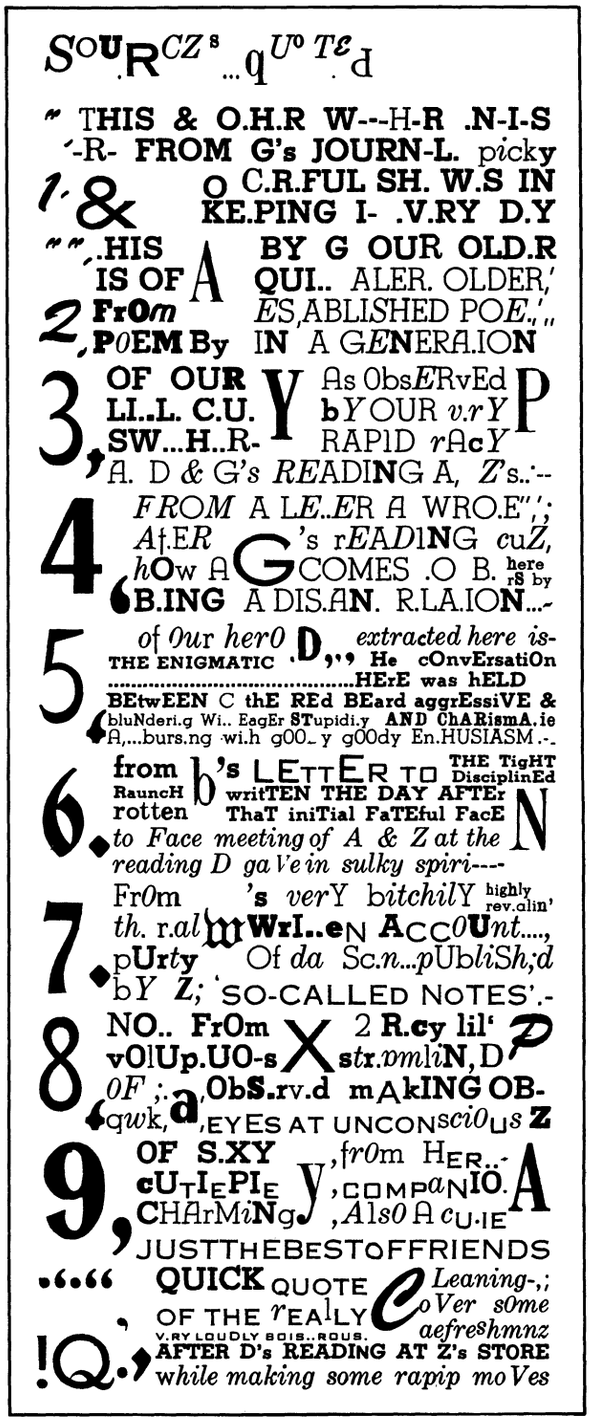

Fig. 3. "Sources Quoted" page (partial) from from A to Z, *9" × 12", handset letterpress, 1977. The final remnants of all the type were used in these reference notes to explain the context in which the marginal notes in the text were spoken or written. Sometimes the meaning of these reference notes could only be gotten by pronouncing the spatial arrangement of the type.*

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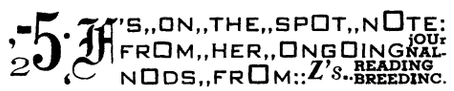
periods as place holders to represent missing letters. To understand the reference completely, it was often necessary to pronounce the spatial arrangement:



The requirement that spatial arrangement be pronounced to get the full meaning of a group of syllables was a device used by Renaissance creators of rebuses [5, 6].

All of the preliminary matter, the Table of Contents, Preface and Introduction, used the remnants of 10 and 12 point type in an amalgamation, disregarding the face and using size as the unifying factor (Fig. 4). In these sections the numerical and alphabetical references to the characters provided more and more information about the characters:

Z I.E. EGOcENTrIC,CONCOrD,MA,YALE:bOOKBUSINESS,10TS&rEcENT

(from the Table of Contents)
or about the situation in which the narrative from A to Z took place:

RESOLUTION: williNqANdrEAdYThENighT&ThEsTArsANdThEmusic&YOU

(from the Table of Contents).

I wanted to stress several points in *from A to Z*. The first was that by being forced to improvise spellings I found dimensions of meaning in the words that were not immediately apparent in normal usage. This was not a transcendental exercise, not the derivation of some deep, interior meaning, but rather a matter of linking a word through phonetic associations or visual puns. Playing up its potential relation to other words through a stream of transformations, I thus recognized again the materiality of language, its real substance and its role as more than a neutral vehicle to convey meaning. This concept of the 'materiality' of any particular system of representation—language, photography, drawing, etc.—has been extensively developed by Roland Barthes [7].

Secondly, I was attempting to provide sufficient reference within the work for it to sustain itself without external references. I wanted to exemplify the idea of a closed system in which, like language itself in some ultimate structuralist sense, all value is determined by place within the system. This is the concept of language outlined by the linguist Saussure, whose work is the basis for the modern science of linguistics [8]. In actuality the book can be referenced externally also, since each of the characters really existed. I had personally encountered them or their work.

Thirdly, the book is a study in a literary work as a product of a social as well as traditional context. It is also about literary accessibility, about the levels of literary organization, ranging from clear to opaque, permitting a reading from the most obvious level—the sequence of poems—to the most involved and difficult level of following through all the references to the end notes. *from A to Z* also demonstrated that a coherent text

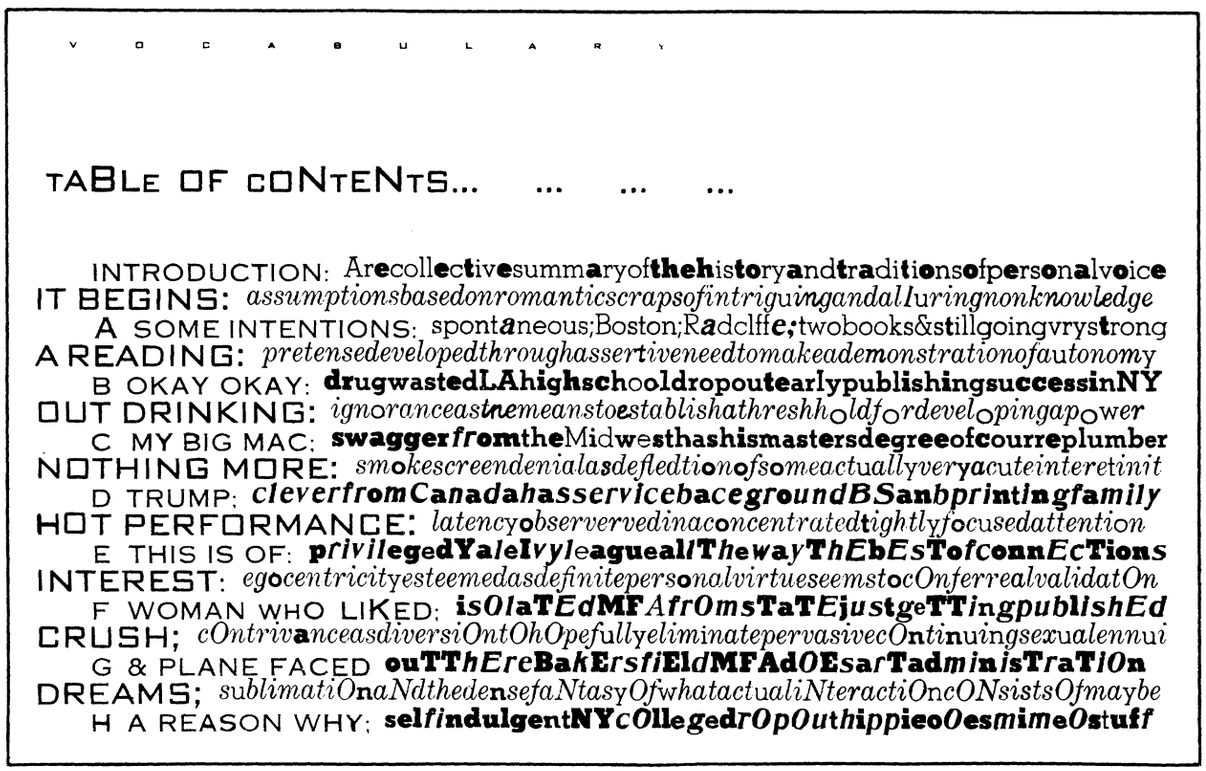


Fig. 4. "Table of Contents" page (partial) from from A to Z, *letterpress on brown kraft paper, 9" × 12", 1977. The preliminary pages of the book also used up remnants of typefaces, using the type regardless of style, with point size as the unifying factor. The Table of Contents provided information about each of the characters as well as about the situation in which the narrative of A was taking place.*

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could be generated from extant materials, with each piece playing a meaningful part in the construction of that text—almost giving the impression that the text was latent in the type in those drawers and had only to be found, not as *the* text, but as *a* text, which could be constructed out of just those letters.

Lastly, the book is about letters—about their role in the manufacture of writing as linguistic expression and about a belief in their particular value as elements of language. Letters as elements in their own right are capable of carrying discrete and simultaneous messages. Despite their 'ordinary' purpose, which is to compose the very words that generally overwhelm or negate their individual presence, letters possess a V!V!D ability to create

$DAdmendz whiCh seRv dO
ELuCidAD XPRINZ.

AGAINST FICTION: OPENING UP THE LINEAR CONVENTIONS OF NARRATIVE FORM

Against Fiction, the last work I will discuss, is in many ways a book more influenced by literary and critical thinking. It was undertaken with considerable respect for the tradition from which it comes, a tradition it undermines at the same time. I wrote the manuscript over a 5-year period during which my approach to its organization went through many changes. I was ultimately able to resolve the organizational issues only when the actual production problems were solved.

The book depends upon the convention of fiction as a literary form, and begins with a reification of the linearity of that form in a long single-paragraph opening page which used stymie type (a nineteenth century 'grotesque' or 'Egyptian' face with square serifs) in 48 to 10 point sizes (Fig. 5). The gradual deconstruction of this linear form both visually and thematically is one purpose of the work. The deconstruction is accomplished in a sequence

AGAINST: As IN, LEANS, Is OPPOSED TO; a Dependent CONFLICT, The REFU-tation and the support. Gratifying hook

INTO ATTENTION AND OBLIVION. AN OUTGROWN FORM, ADDICTIVE, SEDUCTIVE. OPENinG WitH ALL I CAn RECALL Of -- The Drama, Forces and Fate, As an Inevitable Configuration. No Lost Time In The Narrative -- Plunges Deliberate. The traditional obsession with categorical order required the unities of time, place and character, one room after another

AVAILABLE TO PLAN, SECTION AND ELEvATION AS IF THEY HAD BEEN CONSTRUCTED FROM IT. 'AS IF -' ELIMINATIvE SUPPORTS. INSTEAD: The corner of the room gaped wide open, just as she imagined it would standing there yesterday with a grin in her hand and a paper across her face stating the conditions of occupancy. The issue of shelter had become a melodrama wide open to the air. And the social climate so full of abuse there was no way to formulate those grand statements -- that this was the stock from which the ancient races had sprung -- and no way not to. Vitality put up strong resistance. Decay was the active component. The force of communication was no longer contained within wires, but flew through the open air, wild, exciting, and slightly disturbed by the random quality of noise. AGAINST. Lean. Force. To no immediate, linear resolution, no neat artifice opposed to the aCtual. Real. The bullet grazed God's shoulder. Make directly, make a correspondence to, or make an independent conceit. Not deeply, just enough to burn along the surface of the flesh, leaving a red hot welt. Riding the line between the specimen figure and its activity, ground. He didn't flinch; the muscles of his torso tightened and gleamed where they were exposed from the shining emerald costume. Invert them, make their organic struCture inTo a CodifiEd formaliTy. I could see nothing of his face, of course, behind the painted mask, but the heat inside it caused the fluid in the fake eyes to glow intensely. ThE program so displayEd ExTEnds iTsELF Through digEsTiOn; WhaT NEEds TO bE EaTEn is a WAy inTO fOrm. Then smoke began to stream, quietly, threateningly, from his jaws. It was terrifying. This had gone beyond being a game, so far beyond that I began to have serious questions about the success of the group's pursuit of cult power. Against all rational instincts I wondered if they hadn't surpassed the natural limits and touched into something beyond ... What else could explain the control this Being had over himself and the group so conspicuously forming a cadre around him. The plaster front of the building blew open from the small explosion. The whole flat facade collapsed forward on its face, and the heap of bodies that fell out on top of it in that instant, gems pouring out of a burst casket, glittered with paste jewels on tan flesh, running with blood from the ritual wounds. They weren't dead, only exhausted from the frenzy, orgiastic rites of ceremonial pain. They lay sweating, baubles piled all over each other, slightly dazed. What a day at the clubhouse. Phrases, whole long passages, imply the plot as a context. Any overall vision forces them to dovetail. Even placing them between two poles of organiZation - order, chaos - forces the mass into a continuum, restricts the specificity, diversity. Not to compose first, that bad habit. Take city air and bite the landscape out of it. That's breathing, hanginG on the industrial, metal frame window, pressinG aGainst Glass Between the Body and the niGht. Gratification of urBan density, oBserVation and diGestion, not synthesiZed toward any end; too much manufacturinG oVer-defines the product. A hiGh noise like a whistle pulses from a Block away. Listen. Furniture siGn in Blue neon. Not local color, But distinct. Two BriGht oBjects in the landscape, that and the sTreeTliGhT. Pink Vapor. A conTinuous eXquisiTe corpse, jusT To see The Body.

Fig. 5. First page from Against Fiction, *letterpress, 13" × 17", 1983. A single paragraph using stymie type from 48 point down to 10 point, this page is intended as a statement on the traditional linear form of narrative.*

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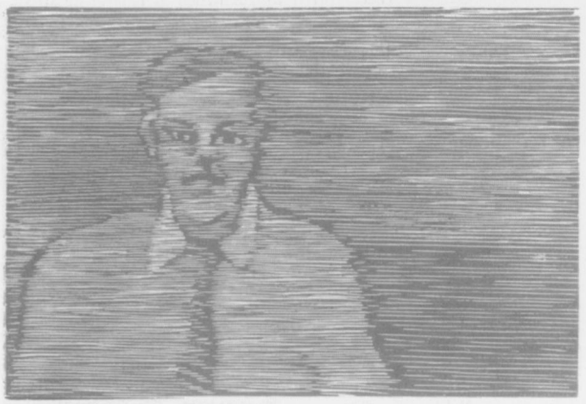

The Current Climate

Controversial adviser alleges motivated takeover. Quitting his post he

attempted to put the best face on the situation. Today he rounded up forty-two hopefuls to compete. Dying for honour. Noone was particularly distinguished in the trial heat. These consisted of mopping the dry floor of the organization. There was passing traffic in the interludes meant for conversation. The condition of the people did not respond to the character of any of the candidates. Waiting to re-open the road. Trailblazing teams, all contenders for the top position, hesitated to discover the source of the emergency. None was forthcoming. The interviewees wanted to report to the president directly. The road was still closed. Resignation had forced slides and floods after the allegations. Search continues.

PUBLIC: The Long Night of much Mist

THE THICK HAZE MADE EVEN THE DENSE SHADOWS OF ThE DARK COMPLETELY INDISTINGUIShABLE

It was so long since we had been out at night . I barely knew the neighborhood. When I went I was supposed to find, right at the end of the street, a place where I could buy a split of very eXspensive champagne. A gourmet niGht shop. Passed my coat throuGh the Glass to make chanGe. Almost no visibility near the Ground, owinG to the tule foG, But with lonG, dense vistas in the hiGh clouds. A foretold But unpreventaBle act of canniBalism. I participate, suBmit, review and am aBle to act only in the moment of presentation of what I knew would come to Be a fact. Jaws unaBle to preVent the choice of action, only workinG throuGh the enGaGement.

Mystery Triangle :

Where cars and trucks disappear.

People can claim anything. The very real melancholy of the soul diffuses itself into the air. The first real sighting an instance of creationism. Listed on the marquee of the matchbook in a digital display.

Could be programed from the driver's seat of a well-stocked bank they called the lost institutional memory.

Retrieved, the partial imitation of the tampered with and never violated original

Struggled through the retrials into a partial recovery. Conscientious collection, years' worth of junk, sorted by indelible profile. Whole piles of seemingly useless stuff, never put to obvious use, but chaneLLed toward an amusing, disTracTing aTTEmpT.

Transform the break in labor and materials into a marketable commodity. Not significant enough to advertise. Just waste, consumption, and now the stuff of the earth re-arranged into a rigid and unnecessary structure. Beyond cellular collapse. In the perfect moment, occasioned by a series of experiments. Minimum form. Suction cleaned.

The OriGinal Scene

METHOD: COMING into KNOWING

References become familiar. Petty thievery. Trace that theme. Once here. Snapshot. What's owed. My time. Sure thing. Give it a little edge. Manufacture complete parts. Replacement parts. Caught in the rug. Folds to the sheep. Operating term. Preliminaries. Environment.

What is REAL TIME?

Fig. 6. Four-section page from Against Fiction, *letterpress, 13" × 17", 1983. In the last signature, the division of the page into four sections makes it nearly impossible to recover any single linear reading from the text. The layout also makes use of many of the graphic devices used in popular media, such as headings, sub-headings, and variation in type weight and size, so that the text is accessible to various levels of reading.*

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of 40 text pages grouped into four signatures. Each page is a transformation of the preceding page, preserving some of its formal elements and adding or rearranging others.

One of the original intentions for the visual form of this work was to use the devices of popular media to make a work of difficult prose more accessible. Headlines, intertitles in the text, illustrations, short paragraphs, and changes of typeface from bold to light within a paragraph were all used to bring the text more into line with contemporary reading patterns. As the work developed, the problem that linear tradition posed in terms of the transparency of language as a vehicle became more important. This concept of 'transparency' is important in linguistics, especially in the work of structural linguists such as Roman Jakobson [9]. In *Against Fiction* I attempted a conservative, slow deconstruction of that linearity, gradually fragmenting the page into two, three and four columns so that no single text, no simple linear form guarantees its own authority through a linear presentation (Fig. 6).

The initial experiments took several forms. I began with the idea that the book would be a catalog, with entries one after another. Then it was to be a newspaper, with the format of a tabloid. I actually printed four pages of the newspaper, but then rejected the idea because the format looked too jumbled. Visually the pieces didn't seem to relate to each other; they seemed more like fragments than parts of a fragmenting whole.

The final form of *Against Fiction* was inspired by Peter Eisenman's *House X* [10], a book of architectural design. Eisenman approached form as a series of transformations which follow both a logic and an illogic, i.e. preserving a semblance of formal features while adding into the sequence something in each transformation which could not be predicted from the previous sequence. The final stage was not simply a record of the transformations into a final form, but also the result of processes not recoverable from that evidence. My intention in appropriating Eisenman's approach was to subvert the linear form of traditional fiction, dismantling the very mechanism by which it usually functions, namely, that strict linearity which constantly dovetails into a whole.

The final version of *Against Fiction* contains illustrations, printed from linoleum cuts, which have the visual quality of the scan lines of television images. I deliberately chose this linear quality to give the images a stylistic compatibility with the color and texture of the type, which has a strong black and white flicker effect on the page. The illustrations are not, in a strict sense, directly related to the text. They were executed independently of any thematic relation to the sections in which they appear and therefore forge an associative meaning with the text by virtue of their proximity.

Against Fiction is also organized into various levels of accessibility—the larger headlines, smaller subtitles, short paragraphs, etc. But in setting substantial portions of the text the problem was that the contents of the typecase were exhausted. I simply, literally, ran out of certain letters, which demanded a certain amount of invention in order to circumvent the total halt of the project. Confronting this limit forced me to reevaluate the text and its intentions against the choice of whether to stop or to continue. Continuing meant compromising, improvising some neologism to deal with the problems, such as "eggsperience" or "1ND1V1DUAL", by using letter combinations which either associate to a similar sound or bear a visual resemblance to the missing letter. Once again, holding the type in hand to weigh the choices, I faced the very real materiality of language and its potential to function as a visual image.

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GLOSSARY

Colophon: The end note in a printed book, appended by the printer, which describes the materials, techniques, size and other factual details about the edition.

Phonemic sequence: The sequence of the significant sounds which make up speech (phonemes). A phonetic sequence would include a more detailed and complete description of all of the sounds, including accent, regional variations, and personal idiosyncracies of pronunciation, while a phonemic sequence is concerned with the significant sounds which make up the language.

Plurivalent: Having multiple values, being accessible to a number of readings or interpretations.

Rebus: A riddle composed of pictures that suggest the sound of the words or syllables they represent.

Reification: The treatment of an abstract idea as if it were a solid object, making it into a solid object which seems to embody that concept.

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