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Materia Secunda: Text as Image, II

Abstract:
This paper is an extension of the arguments and examples offered in 'Materia Prima, Text-as Image' (Calvert: 2012), where the materiality of language was foregrounded, rather than its transparent role in communication. The claims of neutrality to content in The Crystal Goblet, made by Beatrice Warde, alongside ideas from various traditional philosophical sources were contrasted with the work of concrete poets, artist, and designers, whose free-play with materiality in language upsets those relatively uncomplicated notions of transparency to content. The current paper proposes that in the next stage, we might think of the materiality of language as a kind of 'event', in which the raw materials of language (whether writing/typography/ speech), are fully mobilized and enacted. This performative stage, which harnesses the dynamic attributes of language, is grounded by reference to Deleuze's theory of the event, as well as Adorno and Benjamin's notion of 'constellation'. Katherine Hayles, Villém Flusser and others, are used to support the contention that we might think materiality and performativity/gesture, in language as a form of content. Lyotard's Discourse/Figure is invoked as away to describe a different space of interaction between the textual and the figural, where the distinction between them is erased. Examples from art/design/typography are offered to support these points.

Keywords:
Language
Plasticity
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Performative
Event
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Transparency
Surface
Discourse
Figure

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Dr Sheena Calvert holds a Master's degree from Yale University, and a Ph.D. in Philosophy and Aesthetics from the Department of Humanities, Media Arts Philosophy and Practice at the University of Greenwich. Her research is broadly concerned with rethinking the relationship between language and meaning, viewed through the lens(es) of identity, difference and paradox. Specifically, as a typographer, printmaker and graphic designer by background, her research interests are an extension of her long-standing involvement with fully engaging with the materiality of text/speech, as a form of knowledge about language. She teaches critical theory and practice of art/design/illustration at Central St. Martins, the London College of Communication and the University of Westminster. Her research workshop/studio, the .918 press, in London, E8, consists of a fully functional letterpress facility for the production of experimental printing and bookworks. Recent work undertaken includes the paper *Materia Prima (published in the* Journal of Writing and Creative Practice . *Materia Secunda*, and *Materia Tertia* (in progress), are part of a series of publications, investigating the possibility of a materially grounded philosophy of language, and which are supported by printed and digital works in the area of what Katherine Hayles has termed, with reference to Johanna Drucker's work: 'visual typography'. These are produced by the .918 press, and are seen as both a complement and extension of the ideas in these papers.

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Part 1. Materiality

> 'An almost infinite effort is required for the eye to give in to form, to become receptive to the energy stored therein. Here we must keep at arm's length the assumptions, interpretations and habits of reading that we contract with the predominant use of discourse. It is precisely of this skill that discursive education and teaching deprive us: to remain permeable to the floating presence of the line (of value, of colour). From the very beginning, our culture rooted out sensitivity to plastic space' (Lyotard 2011: 212)

In the opening quote, taken from Discourse/Figure, Lyotard reminds us that in a culture which is, and has been, dominated by textual discourse, language[1] as a phenomena needs to be constantly interrogated and placed under scrutiny. In an earlier paper 'Materia Prima, Text-as-Image', written for the Journal of Writing and Creative Practice (Calvert 2012), I attempted to demonstrate how the materiality of language (whether written/typeset/spoken) has a potential, and latency, which precedes any specific instance of its participation in of communication/meaning: foregrounding languages' base materiality, or 'plasticity', prior to its ordered configuration in discourse. Historically, and by convention, the material qualities

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[1] The word 'Language', for the purposes of this paper, is to be understood as those forms of communication which involve, variously, written/typeset/spoken words, and which convey content from the minds of one person to another. Typography, as in the setting of text as a particular group of aesthetic practices, is not per se the subject matter of the paper, but is acknowledged as forming one aspect of the material dimension/presentation of language: how it 'looks', or languages' 'visuality'. However, the paper takes a step back from a view of language as a transparent vehicle for content, and focuses on its raw material: prior to denotation. This primary material is argued to have a productively disruptive presence in the field of communication, one which constitutes a different kind of meaning.

of language (taken in its broad sense to mean writing/speech), become subservient to semantics/meaning; slipping into the background, as though an invisible window onto content. The term 'material language', as used throughout this paper, can be compared to what Katherine Hayles has termed 'visual typography' (Hayles 2002: 65), where the visual attributes of letters, including typestyle, scale, construction, are components in the establishment of meaning, and in which the medium is as significant as the message conveyed: what Hayles refers to as a 'typotext' (Hayles 2002: 65). While Hayles wonders why materiality has been an underexplored subject within literary studies, she states that: 'Significant Exceptions include the tradition of artists' books and the exuberant experiments of such materially-based practices such as concrete poetry' (Hayles 2002: 19)

However, the aim of this paper, and the earlier one, is to extend these definition of material language, or 'visual typography' to include reflections on the non-stylistic characteristics of language, and to look beyond the construction or typographic presentation of letters in the way Vilém Flusser proposes: 'If we want to seize what the gesture of writing really is about, we have to consider its original form' (Flusser 1991:1). He goes on to say, of writing that:

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                                                       It has nothing to do
with constructing.  It is, on the contrary, a taking away, a de-structing. It
is, both structurally and historically, closer to sculpture than to architec-
ture.  It is a gesture of making holes, of digging, of perforating.  A pene-
trating gesture.  To write is to in-scribe, to penetrate a surface, and a
written text is an inscription, although as a matter of fact it is in the vas
majority of cases an onscription.  Therefore to write is not to form, but to
in-form, and a text is not a formation, but an in-formation.  I believe that
we have to start from this fact, if we want to understand the gesture of writ-
ing: it is a penetrating gesture which informs a surface.
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—Flusser, The Gesture of Writing, 1991.


In this essay, Flusser is concerned with the material event of writing, not with any content or external reality which it may concern or denote.  In returning the reader's focus to both the material facts and actions of writing, he exposes the ways in which writing becomes: 'a gesture of such complexity that it defies description' (Flusser 1991: 2). In doing so, he explicitly suggests that we focus on pure form, or plasticity in-itself as a source of meaning for the act of writing; an approach which does not rely on the stylistic attributes of text as it appears on the page, and which stands distinct from the discipline of typography, which: 'is concerned with the determination of the appearance of the printed page' (Bil'ak, P. 'What is Typography', (Typotheque: 2007). However, as Lyotard points out, in the quoted passage from Discourse/Figure which opens this paper, (Lyotard 2011), there are 'assumptions' which we bring to the habits of reading, which deprive us of the ability to appreciate the

plastic/material qualities of language as part of the establishment of meaning. Katherine Hayles, in 'Writing Machines' (Hayles: 2002) explains how in the consideration of written texts, even cultural studies, which has traditionally paid more attention to materiality, usually focuses on 'artifacts outside the literary text rather that the text itself as a material object' (Hayles 2002: 19). These habits extend from readers to writers, whose understanding of the role of the materiality of language (usually demonstrated in the form of typography) in the publication of their works, is frequently limited, and is often relegated to the functional realm, where aesthetic considerations of the typographic style in which text is presented are secondary, if relevant at all. This in turn invokes Beatrice Warde's remarks in her classic essay: 'The Crystal Goblet, or Why Printing Should be Invisible' (Warde, 1955). To briefly reprise Warde's argument:

> "Imagine that you have before you a flagon of wine. You have two goblets before you. One is of solid gold, wrought in the most exquisite patterns. The other is of crystal-clear glass, thin as a bubble, and as transparent. Pour and drink; and according to your choice of goblet, I shall know whether or not you are a connoisseur of wine. For if you have no feelings about wine one way or the other, you will want the sensation of drinking out of a vessel that may have cost thousands of pounds; but if you are a member of that vanishing tribe, the amateurs of fine vintages, you will choose the crystal, because everything about it is calculated to reveal rather than hide the beautiful thing which it was meant to contain. Bear with me in this long-winded and fragrant metaphor; for you will find that almost all the virtues of the perfect wine-glass have a parallel in typography… The most important thing about printing is that it conveys thought, ideas, images, from one mind to other minds. This statement is what you might call the front door of the science of typography. Type well used is invisible as type, just as the perfect talking voice is the unnoticed vehicle for the transmission of words, ideas".

*(note: I have an original copy of Warde's book, and will scan and introduce the text as an image, as with the Flusser)*

Rooted firmly in printing history, and the tradition of fine book design, Warde's comments reflect a significant and long-lasting prejudice in typographic circles, and those of writers, that typography should be invisible to content, and that the material qualities of written language should not be allowed to interfere with the transmission of ideas, from the mind of the writer, to the mind of the reader. This prejudice, arguably, dominates the world of book design, and infers that the relationship between the writer of words, and the typographer should be one where 'invisibility' reigns. Throughout 'Writing Machines', Katherine Hayles challenges this view, and updates its significance for digital literature (Hayles 2002). Flusser, in 'The Gesture of Writing' (1991), and 'Does Writing Have a Future?' (1987), focuses on the act of writing, rather than what writing 'does'. Philosophers from Derrida to George Steiner, have made significant contributions to the way we understand language in its broadest sense, and specifically in it relation to materiality (cf Derrida 'Of Grammatology',

1976, Steiner, 'The Poetry of Thought' 2011) . However, it continues to be the case that aside from well-documented historical experimental works such as Derrida's 'Glas' (Derrida, 1986). Or Avital Ronell's 'The Telephone Book' (Ronell, 1989), and more recent work by the publishing house Visual Editions, who have collaborated with writers such as Jonathan Safran Foer, those writers who have concerned themselves with the material attributes of their language, are still working largely against the received wisdom, and norms for textual presentation: challenging the paradigm long established by Warde and her conservative proponents.

In response, in *Materia Prima, Text-as-Image 1*, I showed some relatively simple examples of how typographers, designers, artists and illustrators have historically intuitively understood the 'performative' nature of language as a plastic/material phenomena, and have freely played with its creative potential, or 'energy', both in collaboration with writers, poets and artists, as well as autonomously. I advocated a step back to allow a refocusing on the inherent, material attributes of written language, as source of meaning (this argument could be equally applied to speech, but the paper did not address this, except tangentially). The argument made there included reflections on concrete poetry, book artists, and others, including e. e. cummings, H. N. Werkman, Tom Phillips, Kurt Schwitters, and the work of the artist Cy Twombly. The proposition of 'Materia Prima' was that the numerous artists, typographers, designers, writers and illustrators who have worked both in collaboration and alone, demonstrate the role of materiality in language as a partner in the production of meaning, by exhibiting language 'as such'. They fully engage with John Dewey's remark, 'All language, whatever its medium, involves *what* is said, and *how* it is said, or substance and form' (Dewey 1980: 106). Dewey's comment reinforces the significance of medium, or the formal qualities of language, as an intimate partner in the production of meaning, and communication. For Dewey, the subject matter of language (what it refers to) is different from language itself (its matter, or material), but the latter affects or modifies the former. In the contemporary context of digital literature, Hayles describes these phenomena as 'technotexts', where: 'the physical form of the literary artifact always affects what the words (and other semiotic components) mean' (Hayles 2002: 24), This constitutes what she terms a 'media specific analysis', wherein 'technotexts is a kind of criticism that pays attention to the material apparatus producing the literary work as physical artifact' (Hayles 2002: 29). Hayles, Flusser, Dewey, Derrida, and others, all return reflections on language to its 'surface[s]', which is the philosopher Richard Shusterman's departure point. He locates a phenomenon within the traditional literary and philosophical communities, of a deep antipathy towards writing, in favour of the 'authenticity' of speech. Shusterman proposes that the surface of language (along with both windows and pixels) is frequently invisible: it often has no more than a residual impact upon our conscious apprehension: 'We do not usually notice the

surface of our glass windows because we are looking through them; nor do we notice the particular color and size of the pixels on our computer screen as we look at them to grasp the images they constitute' (Shusterman 2002: 159)

What this remark unequivocally establishes is that by convention (one could almost go as far as to say, by definition), language is supposed to 'point', away from itself, and towards another concept, reality or object. The surface is redundant (echoing Warde), but Shusterman, unlike Warde wants to argue for a revisitation of the importance of surface, not to reinforce its redundancy. However, in referring back to itself, as material, matters of communication become complicated and paradoxical, since when the graphical 'surface' of language is emphasized (for the purposes of Shusterman's proposition, to be understood as typeface, size, position, etc.), and languages' role in communication is exposed the usual distinctions between discourse and figure (Lyotard 2011), text and image, collapse in a vortex of self-referentiality.[2] We are entered into a paradoxical space, where initially it is not clear what language *is* under these conditions. It seems to have no role, and, moreover, upsets notions of transparency in communication, since it points towards itself, and nothing else, with the full opacity of language, constituting what Lyotard terms a 'scandalous' form of materiality, which disrupts the conformity of textual relations (Lyotard 2011). However, as the typographer and artists highlighted in 'Materia Prima' confirm, after reflection, we see that with the relative slowness of the figural (image), the persistence of the plasticity of form in text (discourse) brings us to a stop, creating another space of reflection, somewhere between the figural and the discursive. As Lyotard remarks, 'Once again it [plasticity] will slow down the eye, and judgment, forcing the mind to take position in front of the sensory' (2011: 212). He proposes that we need to pay attention to this visual surface, in order to fully understand written language[3], through 'the understanding of the graphic form in and of itself, and thus the patient probing of the plastic meaning it carries' (2011: 211). Giorgio Agamben states this same point, slightly differently; 'To bring the word to a stop is to pull it out of the flux of meaning, to exhibit it as such' (Agamben 2002: 317), and Arthur C. Danto reiterates it, in a remark about cinema that can easily be reinterpreted with respect to language:

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[2] Lyotard's understanding of the relationship between text and image is distinct from the critic W. J. T. Mitchell's 'textimage' (WJT Mitchell, Iconology: Image, Text, and Ideology, 1987), which Hales criticizes as not fully recognizing the significance of text-as-image, but stays at the level of texts and images alone (Hayles 202: 20), and does not acknowledge any other forms of materiality. Lyotard is attempting subtle critique of structuralism, in which, he argues, the discursive and the figural modes of knowing have been separated within abstract thought. He wants to defend the importance of the sensual, and figural (associated with seeing), in the mutual implication of discourse and figure. He cites the examples of poetry, and illuminated manuscripts, which bring discursive and figural modes of knowing into alignment (Lyotard 2011).

[3] These remarks about 'surface' can be extended to include spoken language and its acoustic properties, but a full explication of this point is outside the scope of the present paper.

> We do not become aware of [language/time] in ordinary [reading] because too much takes place in [language] for [language] itself to become the object of consciousness'. The sign can signify anything except that it is in the process of signifying. (1997: 67)

In summary, I proposed to call these kinds of self-referring, figural/plastic language *Materia Prima* or *Prima Materia*, the Latin term for 'primary matter' or 'first source'. It was used to suggest a form of material language that has no function other than to be an image of itself, or to refer to its own 'surfaces', possessing an almost alchemical quality, comprising formless, undifferentiated base material(s), which nonetheless possesses enormous creative and analytic potential. In other words, this *Prima Materia* was posed as an undifferentiated plastic material that has a different kind of meaning, and which has the potential to close the space between image and text, or between what Lyotard has describes as the discursive and figural.

For instance, the printed experiments of H. N. Werkman exemplify the idea that; 'freedom of the press belongs to those who own one' (Leibling: 1960), also that type can function independently of communicating a specific message, or denoting something external, and that his playful method of working with text (in this case, the medium was letterpress) is as productive as any specific intentionality, system, or method. "The subject *proclaims* itself, and is never sought', he would say, in terms of his habit of working directly on the bed of the press, and seeing what emerged. This is not language as an instrumental partner in the expression of ideas, concepts or reason; which takes a backseat, or hides in the shadows, as Warde proscribes, but something closer to a musical instrument, being 'played', and which can be experienced at the point where text 'kisses' paper, and ink sticks to the surface of wood and metal; the tones and gestures of the visual surface, resonating with sensual and visual frequencies. This is intense radical material articulation, operating at the visual surface; drawing our attention firmly toward the surface, using language as *Material Prima,* or a-priori, undifferentiated form. In doing so, it articulates the point at which meaning is/is not established in written language, by attempting to break the link between text/type/writing, and meaning. Its very failure to fully do so is meaningful.

With his self-authored use of print as paint, Werkman, understands that the material event of language is meaningful in and of itself; requiring no other justification. Language just 'is' in his hands, and its full opacity makes no concessions to any author of the words. The intelligence of this work is in the stand it takes against 'transparency', and in its radical concern with the 'matter' of language/communication. It also begs the profoundest of questions about "the thin film at the limit of words and things" (Deleuze: 1969, 38), in ways which any number of written accounts cannot accomplish. This is the metaphor through which Deleuze attempts to describe the notion of 'sense' in language. By attempting to break the link between printed text and meaning, yet never quite succeeding, Werkman is able to

articulate these questions at more than just a metaphorical level, and without closing them down; allowing room for interpretation, through fearless experimentation with the primary material(s) of language.

Similarly, the artist Cy Twombly's work conspicuously foregrounds the act of reading; the 'work' of language, not the meaning of words themselves. In other words, it asks you to 'hear' the hearing of the work, to 'read' the reading, and to look at the surface presentation of the drawn, marked, inscribed, heavily materialized written language language he employs. This applies as much to his work with text as with image or symbol. He constantly defers meaning in favour of focusing on material expression. Working almost three-dimensionally with thick impasto, and scratched marks on surfaces was, for Twombly, a way of exploring materials and the meaning they promised, but did not reveal.

John Berger puts it in this way: 'Twombly imposes his materials on us not as something which is going to serve some purpose, but as absolute matter, manifested in its glory' (Berger 2002). As Werkman exposed, whether it is possible to make work with written language that is entirely self-referential, since even the most ephemeral or distorted elements of a visual language tend to cling tenaciously to meaning, is an open question, and one that Twombly, Werkman and others from the worlds of concrete poetry and artistic practice are at the centre of. In a remark about Twombly, Berger pointed to the inherent complexities in this project when he said:

> "The materia prima [raw material] is what exists prior to the division operated by meaning: an enormous paradox since nothing, in the human order, comes to man unless it is immediately accompanied by a meaning, the meaning which other men have given it, and so on, in an infinite regress. The [demiurgic] power of the painter is in this, that he makes the materials exist as matter; even if some meaning comes out of the painting, pencil and color remain as "things", at stubborn substances whose obstinacy in "being there" nothing (no subsequent meaning) can destroy." —The Wisdom of Art, John Berger
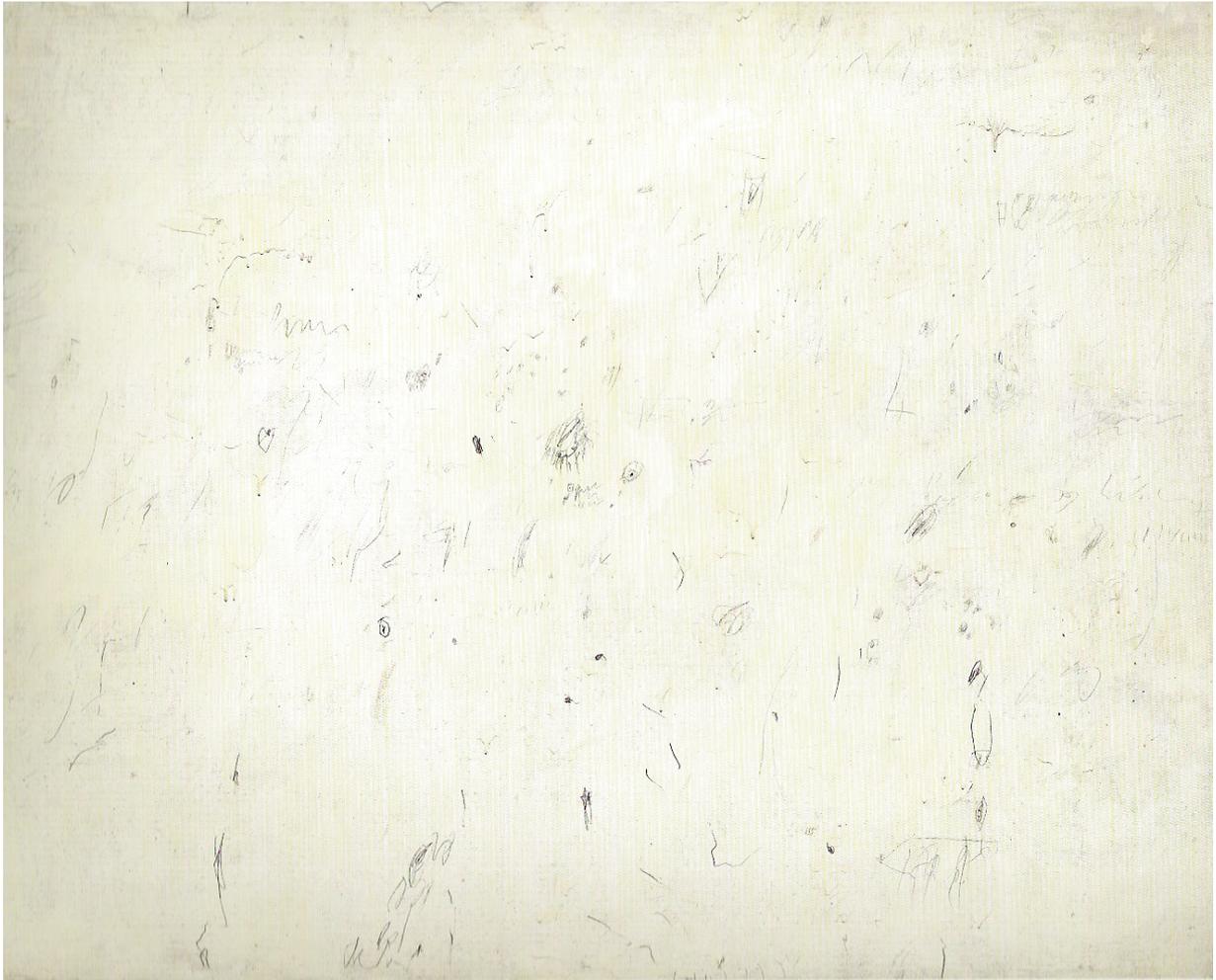
Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, Lexington, 1959, House paint, crayon and graphite
on canvas. 152.5 x 188.5 cm, 60 x 74 1/4 inches
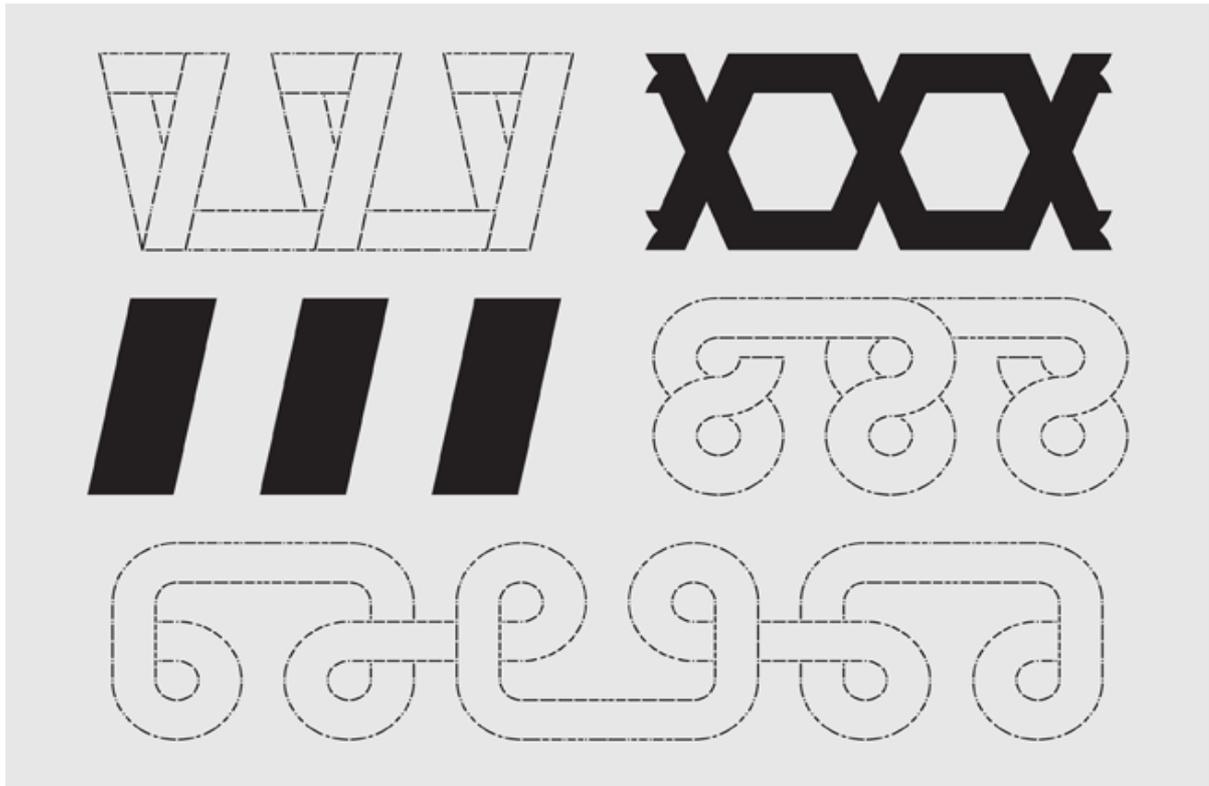
Image 2:  The **PDU** (Plaque Découpée Universelle) is a universal stencil created by Dries Wiewauters (based on a stencil system patented by Joseph A. David in 1876). The stencil can make uppercase, lowercase, accents and so on - Each cut can make 1579 glyphs. This simplification of the visual codes of written language, points us to the formal attributes of language, but also highights its arbitrary nature: lines/circles/angles.

Following Lyotard's logic, in a self-initiated project considering the arbitrary nature of linguistic form, and its base materiality, Margherita Brooke-Huntley, a recent graduate of Central St. Martins College of Art, produced the following series of explorations of typographic form/language, which respond to Lyotards' idea that 'A line, without the system of connoted meaning is unrecognisable.' (Lyotard 2011: 211). The letters, broken down into their constituent parts, become unrecognizable: *Materia Prima*. At a second level, they take form, and become readable (once the system is learned). In the final iteration (lower image), the original line from Lyotard's text is rewritten, in this new, disjunctive typeface, created from the dismembered parts of the original.

'A letter's rhythm, position and sequence refer to a position occupied by the reader', the text 'faces' the reader. Letters don't represent anything, they are not pictograms: 'A, N and Z all have the same constituent parts/lines. They are terms that are only to be recognised as part of their place in the system they belong to (the alphabet/word) and their spacing (I.e AN, A, A NZ, ZAN etc)'. Punctuation and spacing changes meaning. 'Where figural difference once reigned, now informational space operates only (with indications regarding pauses, but could rhythm suffice without punctuation?)' (Lyotard 2011: 211).

Part 2. Event/Constellation

> "A certain view of the world, of consciousness, and of language has been
> accepted as the correct one, and, if the minute particulars of that view are
> examined, a rather different picture (that is also a non-picture as we shall see)
> emerges. That examination involves an enquiry into the 'operation' of our
> most familiar gestures" —Gayatri Spivak: Preface, 'Of Grammatology',
> Derrida, 1974.

Having reiterated the basic premise of Materia Prima, where the raw material of (in this case, written) language is foregrounded in place of transparent communication, the present paper wishes to further extend these arguments, and add another layer, by metaphorically referring language to the notion of *Materia Secunda*. In this stage of the 'four worlds' the potential of matter, or 'Materia Prima'is realized and set in motion.[4] Applying Aristotles' definition of *entelechy,* which is the condition of something whose essential potential is fully realized (actualized), this is where, it will be suggested, the full potential of language-as-raw-material is engaged. Moving forward from these earlier remarks about base materiality, or *Materia Prima,* I will now use the metaphor provided by *Materia Secunda,* to establish how it might affect how we understand the nature of language, and for the purposes of Book 2.0, specifically the relationship between this new understanding of type/language/writing, and the writer of words. These arguments are, by their nature, more abstract, and less easy to demonstrate at the level of the figurative qualities of language, and so in this paper, I will include some expanded reflections on the potentially productive relationship between philosophy and/as a form of type/writing. This will be seen through the lens of writers such as Walter Benjamin and Adorno, whose notion of 'constellation' subtly but fully engages the materiality of language in its formulation of a style of philosophical thought, while Gilles Deleuze offers the notion of the 'event', as a way to speak about the inexpressible attributes of language, where mobilization of the dynamic attributes of language takes place.

> 'In the broadest sense, materiality emerges from the dynamic interplay
> between the richness of a physically robust world and human intelligence as
> it crafts this physicality to create meaning' — Katherine Hayles, Writing
> Machines, 2002: 33

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[4] Materia Prima and Materia Secunda are terms taken from Genesis, and are used in a loosely metaphorical sense throughout these essays. In the former, the raw materials, or formative elements (earth/fire/water), are considered a blueprint to be mobilized through the next stage (Materia Secunda), which is described as the third of the four worlds. '*Materia prima,* cannot itself be known, inasmuch as things are known through their form: *Materia Prima* is the subject of every form'(G. M. Cornalidi, SJ, 'The Physical System of St. Thomas: 1893). In Materia Secunda those raw materials become active and enabled, subject to modifications and application. In Materia Secunda we see the dynamic attributes of language set in motion.

Hayles places human action at the centre of this process, and it is this interplay between the raw material of language and its enactment that this section concerns itself.[5]


Event/Sense

In the chapter: 'Twenty-Sixth Series of Language', in 'The Logic of Sense', Gilles Deleuze attempts to show how the 'event' haunts language. The 'event', which is unspoken, and incorporeal, nonetheless makes language possible, subsisting in language as its primary means of expression, and partaking in the moment of expression.

> 'The expression, which differs in nature from the representation, acts no less
> as that which is enveloped (or not) inside the representation…
> Representation must encompass an expression which it does not represent,
> but without which it would not be 'comprehensive', and would have truth
> only by chance or from outside' (Deleuze: 1990, 145)

The event is that which is cannot be represented, but which nonetheless makes expression possible. Representation, according to Deleuze, is extrinsic by nature, operating on the basis of resemblance, or mimesis (understood as replica/copy); exclusively externalized in a process which fixes meaning. However, there is something which consistently escapes this manner of representation; a matter internal to the expression (enveloped, or subsisting within it), which provides its fully 'comprehensive' character while remaining enigmatically inexpressible at the level of the textual 'image'. The example Deleuze uses to explain the concept of this 'unrepresentable' is death, which is a concept forever extrinsic to the signification as long as actual death is not realized: in other words, death is 'deprived of sense' in advance of the event of death. In this respect representation is always abstract and empty; incomplete and unfulfilled. Another way of saying this is that:

> 'Representation envelops the event in another nature, it envelops it at its
> borders, it stretches until this point, and it brings about this lining or hem.
> This is the operation which defines living usage, to the extent that
> representation, when it does not reach this point, remains only a dead letter
> confronting that which it represents, and stupid in its representiveness'. —
> Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, 1990: 145

Without the event, representation would remain 'lifeless and senseless': the 'extra-representative' exceeds the functional. However, Deleuze wants to retain the tension between the representable and the non-representable as that which makes possible the fullest form of representation and this is where the object (in this case language), is fully mobilised.

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5 The third part of this series of remarks: *Materia Tertia* (paper in progress) will assess how these dynamics change within synthetic speech and artificial language(s) contexts.

The accounts of material language offered in *Materia Prima* seem at first encounter to be incompatible with this view, or at least of different kinds. For example, in Richard Shusterman's work, there is an interest in promoting visible language as a factor in meaning; right at the sur[face], at the level of the *Materia Prima*, while Deleuze's 'event' proposes an expression which is internal and invisible to language, but nonetheless intrinsic and crucial to meaning; something unrepresentable but essential. The visible/invisible distinction traversing these two arguments would seem irreconcilable. However, it seems reasonable to suggest that the material forms of language are of the nature of an 'event' in the sense Deleuze proposes, and that it is only at the level of the 'pure' event that language has full meaning (in the stage called *Materia Secunda*). It is here, where written language is both specific in terms of the uniqueness of each 'event' of language (each utterance, each printing, each inscription is an unrepeatable event), and where at the same time such language is abstracted from its specific application as a bearer of meaning or sense, that we see something newly-meaningful in the raw materials and dynamics of language (in the form of language in-itself, not language as a transparent vehicle for communication cf. Warde). For the purposes of this paper, we could say that the *Materia Prima* of language (the base material) requires the stage *Materia Secunda* (energy/event), to mobilize the full power of language as representation, and that this is the place where the text and the writer need to rendezvous. Where materiality and event configure, is the place where language and meaning become coterminous; where the 'space' of literature takes place (Blanchot 1989).

In this scenario, rather than instrumental, purely denotative, or invisible to content (as in Warde's claim), language might be thought of as differently 'tensioned', as in the skin of a drum which involves the literal tensioning of a surface to achieve textual (and acoustic) modulations, and which involve various resonances, expansions, contractions, temporalities, movements. In place of instrumental forms of language, we could productively contemplate language as an instrument, which needs to be 'played' with a sensitive eye and ear to form. This in turn, takes language to a kind of anarchic extreme, where: '[For Deleuze], writing means pushing the language, the syntax, all the way to a particular limit, a limit that can be a language of silence, or a language of music, or… for example, a painful wailing.' (Deleuze, 1988-89 cf. Kafka's *Metamorphosis*).

Poetry could be claimed to be a residual example of the event-based anarchy of language, whose complexity has not been entirely stripped away in favour of function: 'literature is concerned with the event *of* language, far more than the event *in* language.' (Lecercle 2002: 130). Wittgenstein went as far as to say that 'Philosophy ought really to be written only as *poetic composition*', (cited in G. H. Von Wright 1980: 24) suggesting that the only way to do philosophy is to take it to the limits (and beyond) of language, and to critique it on its own terms, immanently (internally: from within), in the same way that poetry

becomes a critique of language. This requires a different orientation to the relationship between type and writer: one which respects the dynamic tension between the metaphysics of language (its immaterial qualities), and the physical properties of language as a concrete *fact.* Taken in this sense, language (in the broad sense) can be seen as a kind of controlled chaos, borne of the marks and sounds made by the body. It is irreducibly complex at the surface, and while articulation takes place, and communication does happen, it frequently does so at the expense of that complexity: Lecercle makes this point with respect to speech: 'The materiality of sounds is inseparable from the ideality of articulate language.' (Lecercle 2002: 129). Rather than trying to suppress the full articulation of language, by separating form from content, those writers who appreciate the intrinsic qualities of language as expression, are able to harness the full power of the dynamic tension between representation and meaning by harnessing the full materiality and event-ness of language (text/writing/speech). By consciously, or unconsciously working with material language in this way, creative practitioners and writers supplement our understanding of language, by drawing attention to those materially-bound qualities of language which cannot be spoken or written about. In other words, they enact, rather than describe, aspects of language which remain at the root of most critical discourses on language, but which are perforce unable to account for the materiality or 'event' of language, since they have no view from outside language where they could take language as an object of examination (this would require a theoretical point outside language, known as 'a view from nowhere').

In contrast, as Walter Benjamin recognizes, for James Joyce, language is a form of activity which constitutes its *own* essence, rather than participating in pre-established discursive forms. His efforts are directed towards breaking the link between language and meaning as something pre-constituted, in favour of language as a mimetologically, constitutive medium in its own right. Joyce's language *does* something, *creates* meaning (although, in truth, language never arrives for Joyce, it's always on detour), and actively engages Samuel Beckett's injunction that language should be 'alive', bringing it closer the event which Deleuze speaks of. Speaking of Joyce's work, in his book 'Dante, Bruno, Vico, Joyce'*,* Beckett writes: "Words are not the polite contortions of 20th century printer's ink. They are alive. They elbow their way onto the page, and glow and blaze and fade and disappear" For Joyce, both life and language are immanent: they have no ground, or origin. (Ben Zvi 1980), echoing Beckett's remark that: "There is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication." (Beckett 1957: 47). Joyce effects: "the writing that you find so obscure is a quintessential extraction of language and painting and gesture, with all the inevitable clarity of the old inarticulation." (Beckett 1957). For Beckett, Joyce is able to move beyond what he sees as the inherent abstraction and limits of English, to find a raw, direct authenticity which is closer to gestural forms of painting, out of the
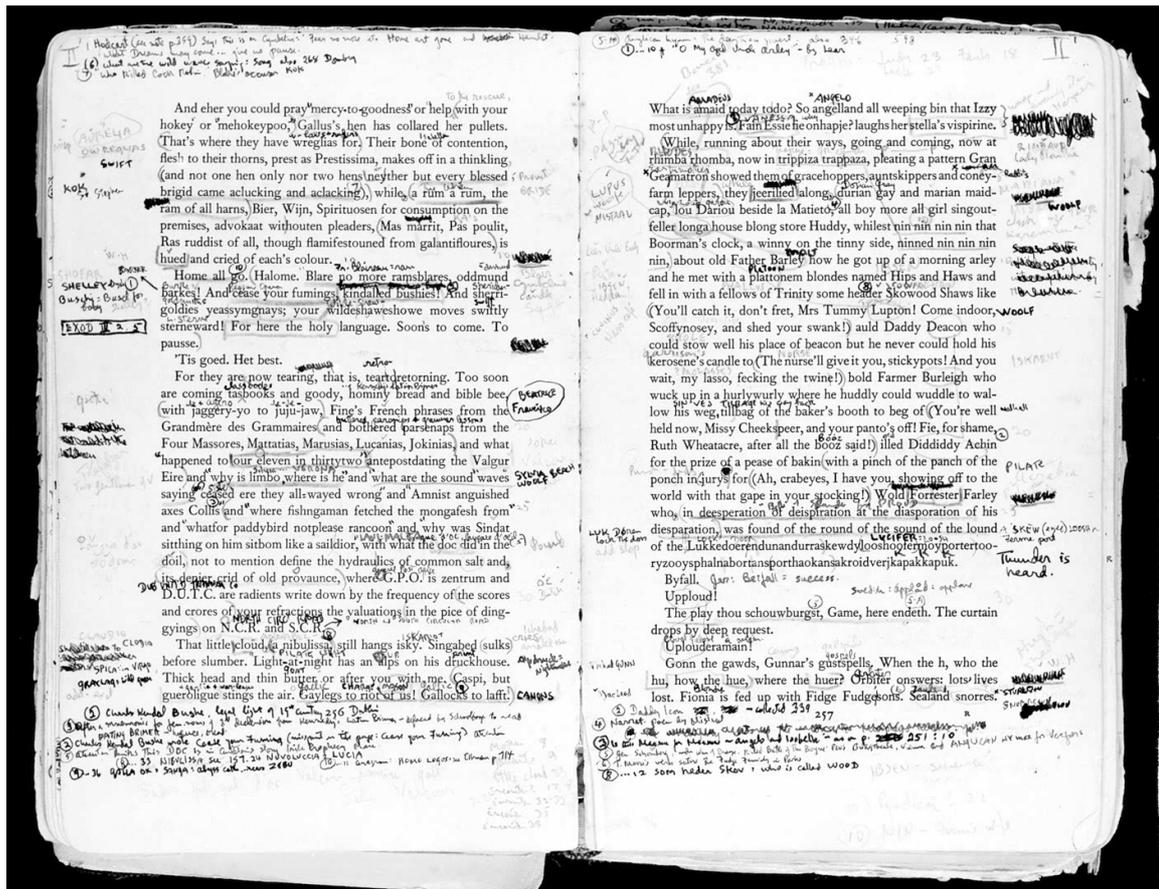
immanent/immersive act of *making* language: an 'event', in which final meaning is never fully articulated.

Image 1. This example of James Joyce's literary self-constitutions includes both Joyce's proof-level annotations, and the playwright Thornton Wilder's attempts to 'understand' the text (or to decode it), through extensive personal annotation, we see how the text resists the assignment of singular meanings, due to its 'constellatory' structure, and the heterogeneous play of linguistic signifiers, which refer the reader back to the operations of the text itself.

To further contextualize this point, Joseph Kosuth's *First Investigations* (subtitled *Art As Idea As Idea*), consists of a series that includes photostats of dictionary definitions of words such as "water," "meaning," and "idea." The simple presentation of the dictionary definition of the word 'meaning', sets out the terms of a different engagement with the embodiment of ideas in language: questioning the terms significant, unambiguous, signified, *referred* to. This work can be seen as responding to Kosuth's comment that:

> "Being an artist now means to question the nature of art. If one is questioning the nature of painting, one cannot be questioning the nature of art . . . That's because the word 'art' is general and the word 'painting' is specific. Painting is a *kind* of art. If you make paintings you are already accepting (not questioning) the nature of art." — Kosuth, Art After Philosophy, 1969

In the same way, there is an argument to be made (Derrida, Adorno, Benjamin, Flusser, Hayles and others have made it), that being a philosopher, or a writer, should make you question and exploit the nature of language, as the primary material within which ideas are communicated. This was certainly for numerous writers such as James Joyce and Raymond Roussel, and philosopher/writers such as Benjamin and Adorno. The medium in which literature and philosophy is expressed is language, and therefore it should be scrutinized as a medium in its own right, irrespective of any specific content, but in terms of its role in enframing concepts (see Hayles' 'Media Specific analysis' 2002 and Flusser's 'Does Writing Have a Future?' 1987). To actively demonstrate this discursive, self-reflexive aspect of art, Kosuth employed language itself as his medium. What resulted was a rigorously Conceptual art where intellectual provocation was placed parallel to perception, and words displaced images and objects. The work is therefore about the idea of meaning, rather than meaning itself. Deleuze, Derrida and others asked: Where *is* meaning? For Deleuze, it's in the 'sense' of a word, at that: 'thin film at the limit of words and things', implying that it's both part of, but separate from, the word: metaphysical, but physical at the same time; forming a nexus where sense and nonsense coexist; an event which is involved in both creating and dissolving a limit at the same time.
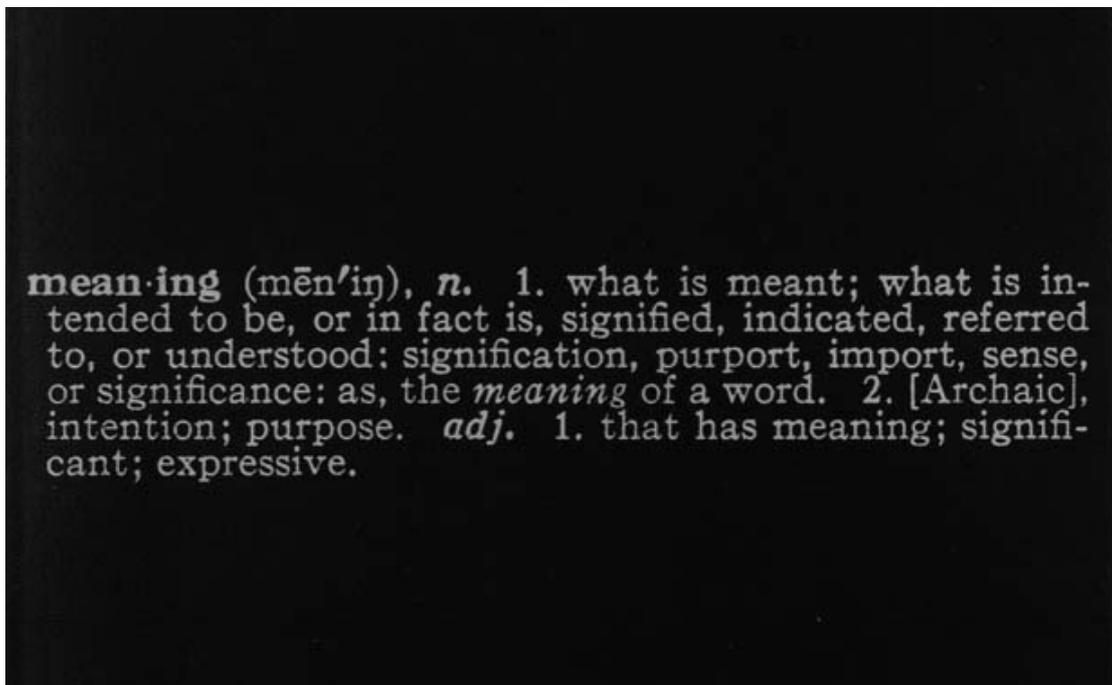


Joseph Kosuth, (Art as Idea as Idea) *Meaning*, 1967, Photostat on paper, mounted on wood.

<u>Constellation/Style</u>

Philosophy, literature, design and the fine arts frequently occupy different spheres of knowledge, and constitute separate bodies of practice. With a view to the broader aims of the Book 2.0 series of volumes, to build connections between often disparate communities, I would like to revisit the term 'constellation', as a way to think about artworks, literature, and philosophies, which engage it as a method, and in which it mobilizes the relation between writer and text, in a subtle way. There is value in considering the continued relevance of the practice and theory of constellation as both a 'performance' (linking it to the 'event' as described previously) of language, and a style of thinking, in which new forms of thought are promised, and where experimentation with language is pushed to a limit and beyond. In this respect, the writings of Walter Benjamin and Thodor Adorno are key to unlocking the potential of 'constellation' as a structural device for understanding language as enactment/event.

Constellation is Walter Benjamin's term for the method of relating ideas in a montage of fragmentary, disjunctive, often temporally unrelated configurations, which nonetheless produce meaning by allowing unseen correspondences to emerge, instantaneously. This method can be seen most clearly in Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, (Benjamin Belknapp Press 2002). His methodological preference shares an affinity with Adorno's notion of constellation (which Adorno in turn explicitly borrowed from Benjamin), as the process which unlocks the 'specific side of the object', and where the particularities and objectivity of phenomena exceed conceptual categories (Adorno 1990: 162). Benjamin explains the constellation as the place where:

> '[I]deas are not represented in themselves, but solely and exclusively in an
> arrangement of concrete elements in the concept: as the configuration of
> these elements… Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars'
> — Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*

Adorno's understanding of constellation has been described as: 'a juxtaposed rather than integrated cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, essential core, or generative first principle' (Jay 1984: 14-15). He utilizes the constellation as a way to challenge how concepts (mental constructs, or ideas) operate in 'identity thinking'. Such identity thinking, or conceptual thinking wants to make a simple or generic classification of something thought, in such a way that objects of knowledge are blocked by such thought from achieving their fullness. As part of this classifying procedure, such concepts profoundly prohibit knowledge of the object, and strip away what Adorno would term the intramundane: the particularities, or singularities that make an object *what it is*, but

not in an essentialist sense (by observing the difference between things, not their shared identities). Such departures from identity thinking are controversial:

> 'Once it has been decided what is to count as thought, that is, what is to count as describing reality, any thought that does not fall under that concept will be attacked as nonsensical: '[h]ence the fanatical intolerance of the method and its total arbitrariness against any arbitrariness as deviation'– Adorno, *Against Epistemology*: 1984, p13

Adorno's argument is that the ordinary for of conceptual thinking (which is scaffolded by language) traps us into never seeing what lies beyond our concepts, in turn excluding the truth of things in themselves, and this is a major problem for thought, and a sticking point in terms of languages' ability to provide access to truth. The fixity of language is a conspirator in this dilemma, since identity thinking is at the root of language, when it proceeds relatively unexamined.

Adorno's answer to this problem is that concepts should 'enter into a constellation […which] illuminates the specific side of the object, the side which to a classifying procedure is either a matter of indifference or a burden (1990: 162). Since, 'Such constellations of concepts 'represent from without what the concept has cut away [excised] within' (1990:162). They gather around an object of cognition, and in doing so they potentially attain what was excluded from thinking by the apparatus of concepts supported by language. In short: concepts block, while constellations illuminate. Concepts limit, while constellations expand and proliferate. Concepts are, in that sense, uncreative, while constellations are creative, iterative, and process driven, rather than limited by outcomes. The concept by itself, cannot but formalize, exclude (difference), freeze (in static time), and identify. All that needs to happen is that constellations explode the myth of identity thinking, and such groupings of thought as are provided by the constellation cause identity thinking to evaporate. Combinations of multiple concepts displace single concepts, such that subjective thought replaces abstract identity. However, each concept in a constellation is itself to be subjected to the same process, in an infinite proliferation, and grouping concepts does not necessarily provide access to a truth hidden by conceptual categorizing, since language is implicated in both forms.

> 'becoming aware of the constellation in which a thing stands is tantamount to deciphering the constellation which… it bears within… cognition of the object in its constellation is cognition of the process stored in the object'. (1990: 162).

The concept of constellation can also be seen in both Benjamin's and Adorno's philosophical writing styles in which they seek to enact these principles in which concepts are not reduced to categorical understandings, but are constantly exceeding their boundaries, or restraints. By preserving the contradictory and irreconcilable differences of arguments and observations in his work, Adorno maintains the tension between the universal and the particular, between

essentialism and nominalism while Benjamin finds meaning in the 'interstices', not in the direct objects of language, which resonates with the 'event' as a way of viewing the dynamic potential of language. Constellations can hold contradictory meanings in suspension without the imposition of a totalizing closure: they promise the 'more' which concepts cannot express, because their procedure is to classify/represent, rather than 'present'.

The idea of 'constellation', then, is essential to understanding the aesthetic and formal qualities of the writing[s] of both Benjamin and Adorno, which are in turn immanent to their philosophical project[s]. In each writers' work, form and content are not arbitrarily detached, but follow a simultaneously tightly woven but divergent path, which, for Adorno, denies the claim that: 'In positivist practice, the content, once fixed in the model of the protocol sentence, is supposed to be neutral with respect to its presentation, which is supposed to be conventional and not determined by the subject' (Adorno 1991: 23). As with Warde, presentation (form) is supposed to be a *disinterested* participant in the production of ideas. However, in his short work 'The Essay as Form', Adorno outlines the manner in which the form of philosophical writing, and its content, should be recognized as interdependent, in the same way that content and method are not to be rendered as separate, but intrinsically bound to one another. This leads him to the conclusion that it is necessary to: '[P]rise open the aspect of its objects that cannot be accommodated by concepts' (Adorno 1991: 23)[6]. These involve the social and historical conditions of knowledge, which are lodged, or sedimented, to use Benjamin's phrase, in discourse, and delimited by concepts, making it impossible to know *objects in themselves*. This argument could be equally applied to language as an objects of knowledge, and it is this potential which is the driving premise of the current paper. The aim of both *Materia Prima* and *Materia Secunda* is to bring reader and writer into a more intimate relation, and explore the im/material dynamics which are at the root of expression in writing/speech, and language in a broad sense.

Goethe, in his *Scientific Studies* points to the fundamental difficulty with correspondence theories of truth, grounded in simple notions of identity, or of language as transparent and objective: "How difficult it is… to refrain from replacing the thing with its sign, to keep the object alive before us instead of killing it with the word" (Goethe 1995: 275). For Benjamin, the constellation configures the conceptual and the empirical into their original intimate relation, so that the sign (word) and its object are reunited. He does not seek to resolve contradictions or oppositions, but to retain them as 'residue', or the non-communicable (Woodfield, Bush 2001: 137). Benjamin's claim is that language has, over time, become predominantly instrumental, such that its mimetic, expressive aspects have been

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6 See *Materia Prima*, (Calvert 2012) for a description of Adorno's Intramundane as expressed through a single printed letterform, which demonstrates how such history is sedimented in the object.

subordinated to its role as sign[7]. His contention is that the 'paradisal' relationship between language and object has been eroded over time, in favour of an aesthetically and experientially impoverished linguistic systematization where: 'Logical analysis is the most extreme expression of an objectified experience of language. The living, breathing texture of everyday language is denuded into a formal, technical series of procedures' (Critchley 2001: 104). Compare this extreme rationalization of language with Steven Connor's remarks, based on Bachelard, from his paper 'Topologies: Michel Serres and the Shapes of Thought', where he states that:

> 'Bachelard emphasises the oneiric dynamism of the hand that is involved in any action in, and upon, the world, shaping the dough, or bringing to bear the black matter of the graphite on the white matter of the paper, in order that the paper may be 'roused from its nightmare of whiteness' — Steven Connor 2004, citing Bachelard 1988: 52.

Along with Event and Constellation as mobilizing attributes of language at the stage of *Materia Secunda*, where the raw material of *Materia Prima* is set in motion, I would like to offer a short remark on the role of noise in communication. Michel Serres thinks of noise as an unavoidable part of the transmission of information (Serres: 1980). Noise is a form of interference which happens in the process of moving any form of information between sender and receiver; one that occupies a frequency which registers chaos, disorder and nonsense as productive, not disruptive. Katherine Hayles concurs, as she considers the implication of noise within digital media (in the section of 'Writing Machines' entitled 'Lexia to Perplexia'): 'The noise that permeates the text may serve as a stimulus to emergent complexity, but it also ensures meanings are always unstable and that totalising interpretations are impossible' (Hayles 2002: 60). This kind of heterogeneous expression is akin to the constellational thinking which Benjamin and Adorno employ, and is an inherent attribute of digital media. Noise, for Serres, implies movement and disruption, instability and disjunction, rather than linear, stable systems which cohere. Even the process of translation is material, and that 'noisy' materiality cannot (and should not) be eradicated. Yet rather than seeking to eliminate

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[7] Saussure sees the sign as an arbitrary link between signifier and signified. Structuralism privileges a system of differences, in which signs are networked and relational, rather than possessing intrinsic/expressive/mimetically-announced meaning in and of themselves. Their value depends on their being oppositional to other signs within the system as a whole. 'The essential feature of Saussure's linguistic sign is that, being intrinsically arbitrary, it can be identified only by contrast with coexisting signs of the same nature, which together constitute a structured system' Roy Harris, Translator, Saussure, Course in General Linguistics. P. x (need to complete reference). Signs are not concrete, or grounded in experience, but abstract: markers or tokens in a structure to which they defer. "A sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern" (Saussure p. 66). The sound of an element in speech is the signified, while the thought to which it relates is the signified. However, it is only within a system of similar 'linked' relationships between sound/concept, and sign/signified that meaning gets established.

noise as an unwanted 'excess' to communication, Serres suggests that it is *precisely* here, in the midst of this chaotic, cacophonous environment, that the potential for new forms of thinking emerges from the alternative patterns created (Hayles broadly agrees). Out of noise, new pathways, relations, movements, and assemblages are formed, bringing together the virtual, synthetic and aesthetic.

Enactment

       In closure, and to show how these principles might work in practice, would like to close with two 'visual' examples of enactments of some of the ideas expressed in this paper. The theoretical terrain I have tried to establish, with the use of the metaphorical terms *Materia Prima* and *Materia Secunda*, are simply means by which to demonstrate how we might think about text-as-image, the 'event' of language, 'constellation', and the relationship between form and content (surface and depth). The true test of these ideas is in the engagement with the material and event-based forms of writing/text, which these examples promote, and actively interrogate.



Chloe True, Chatterly Black, 2012. Hand made pigment and silk screen.

Chloe True's work (a recent graduate of the Design and Interaction course at Central St. Martins), shows how the plasticity of language can take on many guises, and offer multiple readings, related to the 'constellation'. Returning to Lyotard's distinction between the discursive and the figural, used to open this paper, this work arguably collapses that space in one gesture, or singular 'event'. The work emerges from a project which required the exploration of a single colour, in this case, the choice was black. In her own words:

> *"Chatterley's Black* is a documentation of my investigation into the colour black, tracing a journey from page to pigment.
> The novel Lady Chatterley's Lover written by D.H. Lawrence in 1928 was never ceremoniously burnt, but it was banned in Britain, on the grounds that it was sexually explicit. Penguin books was prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act for publishing the book, which contained the use of the words 'fuck' and 'cunt' multiple times, along with sexual scenes. It was banned completely in England and Wales until the conclusion of the trial; by the mid-1980s, it was on the school syllabus as well as having been adapted for the screen numerous times. Penguin Books relied on Section 4's 'public good' defense, with academics and literary critics such as E. M. Forster and Helen Gardner testifying at the trial that the book was one of literary merit. The trial at the Old Bailey eventually ended with a not guilty verdict, allowing the unexpurgated edition of the book to be openly published and sold in England for the first time since it was published in 1928. The trial is said to have change the face of literary censorship.
> As a comment on the continually shifting boundaries of censorship, I staged a book burning of the first unexpurgated edition of Lady Chatterley's Lover. I then used the ashes of the novel to produce a traditional carbon pigment. I named the pigment Chatterley's Black and used it to screen-print a film still captured from the first English language adaptation of the book."— Chloe True, 2012.

It doesn't seem too much of a stretch to suggest that by collapsing the space between the discursive and the figural, or between text and image (the image is literally comprised of the text), and by the 'event' of language as a base material (reduced to pigment through the act of burning) as it forms the image (a single image was printed, since this was the amount of pigment produced), the work opens up the space for a constellation of meanings to emerge; none privileged over the others. This work can be seen as both text and image, not either one or the other. It becomes a narrative of, not only the colour black, but of censorship, language, erasure, materiality, etc. The work amounts to a paradox, in the sense that the 'difference' which it embodies, in its ability to be this/not this, shows us the limits of representational thinking; since, as it strains against that limit, it simultaneously (and paradoxically), retrieves the intensity of thought, seen through the lens of 'plasticity' as an interruptive/transformative force in the transmission of meaning. The text of the book is literally the image, in such a way that the discursive and the figural are realigned and space between them collapsed. The not-able-to-be-said is very much at play in Chloe True's work, and through the singular event of printing the image from the burned text of the book (rendered as pigment). Benjamin's notion

of *Darstellung*[8] acknowledges that truth cannot be the direct object of communication, but can only be glimpsed 'para' to its mode of expression, since it is not yet communicable in that form of presentation: in this case in the form of the photographic image.

In contrast, in Anthony Burrill's Oil Spill poster (2010), the text is constituted from the subject matter, by being printed in the same spilled BP oil fromrthe the Gulf of Mexico, which is inferred in the text, in such a way that medium and message are fully integrated. The difference between 'Chatterly Black' and Burrill's work is that in the former, there is a hidden, or 'para' dimension to the work, since the text of the book forms the invisible base substance of the printed medium, while in Burrill, that relationship is more direct, and the message far less ambiguous. In Chloe True's work, the process, or event of mobilizing the raw material of the original text is as important (if not more so) than the final outcome, while Burrill's poster embraces process, but relies on the audiences' recognition of the materiality of the outcome. Each engage materiality, and the event of language, but to different ends. In both examples, the meanings established by the image are rendered connotative, not denotative, which for Barthes are understood as: 'irrecoverable instants'. In its singular printing, made from the burnt text of just one book, Chloe True's work is particular, not universal. For Alexander Duttman, there's a difference in what you can see 'in' the image (as in: there is a picture of petals on fire), and what you can see 'to' the image (as in: 'There's something 'to' it) (citation to be provided). The first is produced by representation, the second by 'halting' the process of knowing, in favour of something else, and that something else, is the fact of its making, out of the raw materials of the original text. In Burrill's work, this halting is seen in the final object, where the viewer is asked to step back from language as denoting something outside itself, and return to the 'noisy' materiality of the text. In this kind of work, there is an indiscernibility between the 'what should it be', and everything 'should be as it is'. All is as it should be, but not in the sense of a stable, fixed, form of representation.

Work such as this offers the difference between language as representation (concept/object correspondence), and language as constellation/event. I would like to close by suggesting that, not only does the work shown in these examples, inhabit a different linguistic space, where the embodiment of ideas is fully bound to the materiality of writing/text/language, but that these works propose a new kind of material enactment of philosophical ideas such as Constellation and Event, which are all but impossible to invoke at the level of Warde's 'invisible' typeset word. In such work, the stage of *Materia Secunda,* is enacted through the mobilization of the primary material of language, into new configurations, which realize the full potential of *Materia Prima.*

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[8] Benjamin offers fragmentary forms of representation: heterogeneous forms of 'presentation'.

Example 2 (as a caption). Anthony Burrill's limited-edition posters, printed in BP oil from the ecological disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. The oil was collected direct from the polluted beaches of Grand Isle, Louisiana. Here, text and image are literally 'one'.

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