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Performative Archives: The Visual Poetry of bpNichol and Derek Beaulieu

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Fiona McMahon

“And just as there are pleasures in the rhythmic passage of air through larynx and over the palate to be beaten by the tongue and pressed against the teeth, so there are the parallel pleasures of pressing pen into soft paper, the stylus into clay, of hitting the keyboard of a responsive typewriter, or watching the lines of letters appear in the glow of a monitor. Memory serves us well through this material and returns embodied as the witness to our having made certain moments into a record on the page [...]”

Johanna Drucker, “The Art of the Written Image”

- 1 For contemporary visual poets, after the technology of hand presses, offset printing, the chapbook, mimeographing and Xerox, there has been an incentive to develop the Web in turn as a creative medium, a “space of poesis” (Glazier 5). This may include the use of online hypertext and the digital vocabularies that entails; it may simply mean multiple renderings or formats for poetry and an incremental growth in the modes of diffusion, thanks to blogs and pdf files. Nor can be discounted, in the reverse manner, in the post-digital context of the twenty-first century, the trend whereby poets are reverting to expressive handwriting, learning artisanal skills and producing books that celebrate richly-made paper and bindings (Goldsmith 14). However, when considering the surge of interest in the fabrication of poetry displayed by visual poets, the influence of the computational processes of the digital age is especially relevant. Computers foster

interaction between language and digital hardware, laying the basis for gestures that today appear at once normative and creative. To name one example, the “cut-and-paste” function in word-processing echoes and revives in same breath the procedural approach of early twentieth century experiment with found texts and ongoing experiments with mixed media. The interest in poetry as an artefact to be modelled and sculpted may be observed amongst some of the most innovative writing, where departures from the lyric model are counterbalanced by an acute focus on the textual and graphic features of language—on the physicality of the environment in which poetry is made.

- 2 The experiment promoted by the new media of the Web is the legacy of what critics such as Jerome McGann have characterized as the development of a “scriptural imagination” (137), beginning in English-language poetry with modernists such as Ezra Pound. Writing as a literary historian and as a theorist, McGann stresses the distinctiveness awarded to poetry as a site for aesthetic activity that acknowledges a heightened interest in the modality of language. Suggesting a shift from the Romantic critical tradition of the imagination, *poiesis* travels from the recesses of the perceiving mind steeped in the realms of dreams and the unconscious to engage creatively with scriptural environments, in a waking, tactile sense. What this activity highlights, McGann argues, is the creative value of the material resources of language across different media:

Along with Mallarmé, Apollinaire and many other modernist innovators, Pound felt that the renewal of the resources of poetry in an age of advanced mechanical reproduction required the artist to bring all aspects of textual production under the aegis of imagination. Nothing was to be taken for granted: the poetry would be brought forth not simply at the linguistic level, but in every feature of the media available to the scriptural imagination. (137)

- 3 As demonstrated in visual poetry, the evolution of a “scriptural imagination” (137) intertwines with a continuing fascination for the archive as a cultural artefact and philosophical measure of our time. How do the apparatus and the procedures of the archive bear comparison with the aesthetic features of visual poetry and how, as a cultural construct, does it echo some of the epistemological questions visual poetry gravitates towards. One point of departure is to consider the relationship between the “archival impulse”¹ prevalent in contemporary art, as Hal Foster has defined it and the changing temporality and spaces of cultural memory brought into focus by visual poetry. The tendency amongst artists to thematize the archive and to appropriate it as a material source is one perhaps we are familiar with, through the work of such artists as Christian Boltanski or more recently, Thomas Hirschhorn.² The metaphorical affinities between memory and the objects featured in contemporary art come alive in the patterns given to a shared past that are just as soon queried and taken apart. The compilation and recycling of artefacts direct us repeatedly back to the premise that what we know is shaped by the structures used to organize signs in a network of relationships. Alongside such examples from the art world, visual poetry points to the complexity and even the vulnerability of this assertion through a commitment to experiment—a willingness to define poetic praxis in terms of a dismantling of systems or at the very least, a refusal to locate poetry within the bounds of a single genre or a single network of relationships.
- 4 Among contemporary poets, the increasing attention to visual design appears to reflect what Hal Foster calls the “quasi-archival architecture” of materials when artists begin building their own matrixes of memory (5). Visual shapes and patterns arise almost as means to gauge the destiny of what Michel Foucault conceptualized as a form of archaeology. For Foucault, the archive has an archaeological premise since it is equated

with a description of culture positing a point of origin, from *arkhe* (Greek for “beginnings”) (see Foucault). What description of culture does visual poetry provide? With its emphasis on praxis—on making but also on undoing—spurning the left-hand margin and the very conditions of reading and writing, the question remains whole. The performative intelligence of visual poetry has always denoted a critical strain of poetics—one that the Fluxus poet Dick Higgins argues stems all the way back to early modes of pattern poetry and which makes it averse to the authority embodied in the archive, as a physical place and as a system (Higgins 6). This is the same institutional authority, as Derrida explains, that is the very “condition of the archive” (Derrida 2, my translation). If the archive possesses this authority, however well it may function as a tool devoted to ordering, housing and transmitting traces of the past, the performance of poetry demonstrates that its action of “consignment”³ is never ideologically neutral and never definitive in a material and temporal sense.⁴

- 5 The work of two Canadian poets, bpNichol and Derek Beaulieu suggest how visual poetry challenges the authority of language, its ability to signify a recording of the past, all the while celebrating an awareness of the materiality of the writer’s medium. Similarly, if their poetry shies away from the discursiveness and the permanency of the archive, it shows at the same time the propensity for a visual architecture to fully embrace the problem of how memory is made intelligible. Memory materializes with bpNichol and Derek Beaulieu as their visual poetries engage with archival processes. A scriptural dynamic, pictographic gestures and an alphabetic design converge to celebrate a point of origin for poetic language and in a broad sense, for all *logos*. In a vein that recalls the alignment of poetry and semiotics, the alphabet is viewed as comprising a network from which emerges any number of potential significations. Scribe and painter, the poet is attuned to the visual scheme of language, but as though a semiotician, he is also an explorer of signs, unearthing the roots of signification. bpNichol, a member of *The Four Horsemen*, one of the leading avant-garde poetry groups in Canada in the 1970s, subscribed to the intermedial bent of Fluxus, which was alive to such interdisciplinary standpoints. When Nichol died at the untimely age of forty-three in 1988, he left behind a tremendously varied corpus, his work touching upon print and sound poetry and hosting a repertoire of musicals, cartoons, computer texts, concrete poetry, children’s songs, prose and an epic-length project, entitled *Martyrology*. Derek Beaulieu is a contemporary poet, born in 1973, who has been publishing and exhibiting a range of concrete and visual poetry since the 1990s. As bpNichol before him, Derek Beaulieu’s focus on the alphabet as a vector for poetic experiment and signification exhibits an interest in paragrammatic structures and equally so, repeatedly directs the reader back to the foundations of the code upon which poetic language is built. Beaulieu expands upon the awareness exhibited in bpNichol’s writing of the new textual environments available to poetry and the fluidity that characterize them. Beaulieu’s writing boasts a substantial body of criticism that reflects upon the interplay of print and visual environments, demonstrating for one how the “conditional space(s)” (Glazier 15) of the Web have come to inhabit the poetic imagination since bpNichol’s intermedial experiments. Here too, the influence of the intermedial theory of Fluxus is apparent and most recently, the overlap between a critical and a creative vein shows affinities with Conceptual writing, an international movement comprised mostly of poets whose work features techniques of procedural writing and appropriation.⁵

- 6 In his book, *seen of the crime: essays on conceptual writing*, Beaulieu describes Conceptual writing as working “with extant material in order to recontextualize an already existing genre with a focus on materiality, collection and accumulation” (35).⁶ Long before this, bpNichol was taking to task the materiality of writing, asking what can be recorded in poetry and through what channels. These questions are threaded through some of his earliest work, as in the poem “Ruth” (1967), in a manner that might ring true across a long genealogy of writers and writing building modalities and registers of visuality:

tear up our fingers
mend them
with lies
set forth
on real ships
into
an imaginary sea
the shores
vague
lines
linking my eyes
to my heart's
patterns

[...] (“Ruth” (1967), in bpNichol 1994, 44-47)

Allusions to seafaring in this poem call forth epic tropes redolent of classical poetry. Equally evocative is the reference to the mimetic patterning favoured in seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry: “lines / linking my eyes / to my heart's / patterns”. Yet, in addition to the heritage this poem summons up, the initial image of destruction and repair may be understood to echo the contradiction inherent in any writer's craft, in any period of literary history. Although working to provide a meeting place for different forms of cognition, the poet is aware of the inadequacies of his art, fraught as it is with the illusion of correspondence: “tear up our fingers / mend them / with lies”. The terms of this struggle are conveyed in the representation of the body caught up in a binary landscape, comprised of both real and imaginary grounds: “real ships”; “imaginary sea”. If we were to extend the metaphor, in keeping with the destiny of “Ruth”, the biblical character after whom the poem is named, the traveller is never completely at home in either of these two worlds, real or imaginary: the writer's fingers are bandaged up with “lies” and the lines they draw are “vague”, thus only remotely connecting him to his “heart's / patterns”.

- 7 The meditation on patterning apparent in bpNichol's early writing quickly acquired distinctly tangible forms. At the start of his career, this meant the innovative use of fonts and margins for the typewriter poems he likens to “eye-cleaning exercises” (*As Elected* 12),⁷ whose example was learned from the International Concrete Movement. From there, he transitioned to hand-drawn poems and parodic, cartoon-like illustrations. His poems made manifest various derivatives of abecedarian techniques, which in turn gave rise to an interest in primitive programming language and ultimately, the creation of computer-animated pieces as early as 1984. These were recorded on floppy disks and referred to then generically as “computer poems”.⁸ The early experiment with code is only one of the many visual typologies favoured by bpNichol that emphasize the spatial relationships of language outside the usual rhetorical connectives. With Nichol, the scriptural experience is consistently grounded in different technological environments and the upheaval they represent for modes of knowing and understanding.

- 8 What is shared across this changing aesthetic cartography are the metonymic relationships between the graphic sign and the epistemological contexts (linguistic, philosophical, historical, autobiographical) that arise out of Nichol's visual poetry. Chiefly among these stands the alphabetical structure—a foundational archive of signs—out of which the poet builds images of self-presence. Appearing consistently throughout Nichol's corpus, the alphabet is polymorphic and polysemous, while working as a reminder in the broadest sense of how textuality may function in poetry as a metaphor for memory. The alphabet signals a thematic tie with the original myth, the scriptural basis of literature; in an autobiographical sense, it is dramatized as the imprint of a deeper, rooted narrative of affect or emotional response, and at the same time, it bears a material, almost elemental quality that lends it a rudimental aura.
- 9 Whatever form it takes—a sustained narrative or one that is cut short, a mere trace—the narrative or the notation of memory enabled by the alphabet changes along with the shape of the print medium. In the graphic displays of Nichol's work, this entails multiple alphabet tables or abecedaries, some of which are designed to carry an inscription revelatory of the past. In such instances, the visual design cannot be understood only as the repertoire of the poet's scriptural ingenuity. Here the alphabet takes shape as part of the poet's sketching of an ontological quest — how to inscribe one's point of origin. The eighth letter in the alphabet, the letter "H", forms the scriptural backbone and the pivotal point of this tropic architecture, in so far as it is made to represent a point of attachment to an ideal origin and the key to the poet's autobiographical fictions, of which there are many. One example of a visual figuration of Nichol's archival alphabet is the 1972 poem entitled, "A Study of Context: H":⁹

A Study of Context: H

december 72

Fig. 1 bpNichol, "A Study of Context: H", *Zygal: A Book of Mysteries and Translations*, Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1985, 57.

Within the seemingly unstudied form of this hand-drawn image lies a telling apposition. The eye is trained to see the end to an emblematic puzzle as it has been sketched out in

this rough pen-and-ink drawing: how to get from “H” to “I”. If read metaphorically, the network of signs assembled on the page register as a cryptogram, a secret language designed to illustrate the path of “I”, a self that has gone adrift or who is momentarily standing outside the framework by which he is defined. Beyond the ironic distancing of the academic title (“A Study of Context: H”), the poem appears thus to reaffirm its intention to ascribe patterns to a quest ethos. Though contemporary with postmodern theories negating the possibility of unity and origin, the pattern asks, where do we come from and perhaps, at the same time, where are we going? The analogy between the quest as a narrative theme in poetry and as a form of graphic play for the artist arises repeatedly when reading Nichol at length. In this instance, a fictional autobiographical context emerges from the non-referential frame of the grid designed by the poet. The primary function of the grid structure, according to Rosalind Krauss, is to assert “modern art’s will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse” (9). Only the spatial organization of Nichol’s grid falls short of generating the same opacity as in the works of painters whose geometric constructions rely on grid frameworks and to whom Krauss means to refer in her discussion of modernist abstraction (Kazimir Malevich and the Russian Suprematists of 1915-20, Piet Mondrian and the Dutch De Stijl movement). This stems from the fact that the poet chooses not to allow the objectified image, namely the grid, to obliterate discourse and importantly, to erase temporality and thus the ties with the past, imaginary or otherwise. Rather, the blurring of generic boundaries, between the grid and the letter, and the transgression it implies, begs to be viewed as discursively productive. It resembles perhaps most closely, among Nichol’s European contemporaries, the pungency of the novelist George Perec’s grids and generative techniques. The formal ingenuity of Nichol’s craft is defined by another contemporary, the poet Steve McCaffery, in reference to Nichol’s lettrist bent as “the remotivation of the single letter as an agent of semantic redistribution” (65).¹⁰ What this suggests is that by way of a paragrammatic function, poetry sets out to find a shape that rehearses how meaning is made in lieu of building representational images that are immediately recognizable. That each individual graphic sign become generative of meaning is what “A Study of Context: H” urges. This holds true in so far as the positions and inscriptions of the letter “H” come to encompass networks of signification that lie outside the grid: the single letter is *remotivated*.

Line Telling: 1

Fig. 2 bpNichol, "Line Telling 1", *Zygal: A Book of Mysteries and Translations*, Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1985, 36.

- ¹⁰ If letters in Nichol's writing are derivative and a single sign is meant to tell a great deal, this can be observed first of all in a graphic sense.¹¹ The eloquent example upon which Nichol builds is the letter "I"—the emblematic lyrical figure, the autobiographical self-presence, whose inscription evolves out of a game, a visual enigma. As it is featured in the volume *Zygal: A Book of Mysteries and Translations*, the first person pronoun grows out of a process of semantic redistribution from "H" to "I" (in another visual poem, Nichol graphically transfers from "S" to "H").¹² As one critic has suggested, "the basic H is used to re-create the alphabet" (Jack David, *As Elected* 13), a project that is carried through differently with the Toronto artist, Barbara Caruso in 1978. In another visual poem entitled, "H (an alphabet)", Caruso draws the twenty-six letters of Nichol's alphabet, all of which are derived from the letter "H".¹³

H (AN ALPHHABET)

from 26 Alphabets

Fig. 3 bpNichol, "H (an alphabet)", *An H in the Heart: bpNichol: A Reader*, George Bowering and Michael Ondaatje, eds, Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1994, 109.

This pattern carries a secondary title in the bottom right-hand corner that underscores poetry as a dynamic practice, rethinking how language is coded: "26 Alphabets" (*An H in the Heart* 109). This is "Nichol's interpretation of allegory —", as the critic Jack David offers in an interview with Nichol, "to speak otherwise than one seems to speak. Here, the letters look otherwise than they seem to look" (17).

- 11 Nichol subjects the structure of the alphabet to the vicissitudes of writing, in the same way that he dramatizes the desire for a unified subject in literature. This analogy is apparent in an entry dated 1973, entitled "commentary 2: autobiographical note".¹⁴ Here, among a combination of prose and free verse, under the heading "Portable Systems 18", we encounter a lower case "i" whose ambulatory paths are directed by an alphabetical pattern centering upon the letter H:

H-section was where i first learned my ABC's, and one of the things i learned at the same time was how to find my way home. If i was walking from one direction i knew that right after G-section was H-section and H was where home was. if i was walking from another direction i knew that i came just after H so that H-section had to be the next one i'd come to. and of course i could always cut thru the middle of the Park and jump from one letter to another in all kinds of patterns, just as a way of getting home. (28)

In this prose text, the varying patterns of displacement point to a meditation on the inconstancy and unreliability of discursive structures and how these changes displace subjectivity: the subject looks not inward but outward to the architecture of "ABC's" for an understanding of self.

- 12 This is another instance of what Nichol calls his "transformational writing",¹⁵ whereby the motif of destruction and repair is played out on the page. The attention devoted to what is lost through transience and change is expressed through the foregrounding of

visuality. The poet performs his selections notationally, bringing to life the complexity of the dynamic between remembering and forgetting. In this regard, visual poetry mirrors the processes of history and fiction because it performs such selections, between what is to be lost and what is to become part of a larger narrative or scheme. As in Derrida's typology, the contents of the past are subject to the social and material structures according to which the archive is organized, evolving both as a place of "consignment", thus of preservation, and of "effacement" (26).

- 13 The workings of the dynamic established between "consignment" and "effacement" continue to inform the practice of poets for whom visualization is less a spontaneous, generative process than a structural one, relying upon textual and technological constraints. Following in the footsteps of bpNichol, Derek Beaulieu espouses a visuality according to which "poetry is no longer the beautiful expression of emotive truths; it is the archaeological rearrangement of the remains of an ancient civilization" (*seen of the crime* 55¹⁶). As though a kind of alphabetical remapping, Beaulieu's piece, "Wild Rose Country" records "every piece of text within one block"¹⁷ of the author's home in Calgary, Alberta. These include advertisements on billboards, shop signs and license plates. Taken as a whole, they form an image of a suburban landscape studded with commodities, mostly cars whose license plates in Alberta until quite recently, used to carry the slogan, "Wild Rose Country". This cataloguing landscape is ironically devoid of any sign of nature, of any "wild rose":

Cal-Alta 1978 Chevron Supreme Motor Oil Huite moteur SAE 5W-30
 API SM 946mL 1 Quart Formulated with Formule avec ISO SYN
 Technology / Technologie Homologue pour American Petroleum
 Institute for Gasoline Engines Certified Moteurs a essence Water 737
 737 End play ground zone 405 Hillhurst Tele-ride 974-4000 + stop
 number 8043 WYD-867 expiry date 03/31/2006 Hyundai Elantra
 Alberta June Alberta WYD-867 Alberta 08 080142376Wild Rose
 Country Alberta 07 07041159211 Water 733 Nissan X-Trail Stadium SE
 "A Good Deal Better" Alberta May Alberta EZX-720 Alberta 09
 0901445172 Alberta 08 0804563930 Stadium 729 Mazda 3 Ontario 09
 Jan ACZP964 Yours to Discover Country Hills Toyota Yaris Alberta
 Nov Country Hills Blvd. At Deerfoot Tr. 290-1111 Alberta ETZ-638
 Alberta 08 Toyota Country Hills Alberta 07 Toyota 727 dueck GM on
 marine Mar Alberta Alberta DPZ-885 Alberta 08Wild Rose Country
 Alberta 09 touring sedan Buick Buick Riviera Alberta May Alberta
 JHE-409 Alberta 08Wild Rose Country Alberta 09 R Riviera
 Managed by Emerald Management & Realty Ltd. 237-8600 Sorry no
 vacancy for other locations please call 237-08600 Lumina Alberta
 Sep Alberta KRY-821 08Wild Rose Country 721 No Soliciting Please
 keep off lawn until dry Green Drop Child Security lock when
 engaged door opens only from outside Printed in U.S.A. Pt. No.
 10154456 24 hour roadside assistance 1-800-268-6800 Assistance
 Routiere 24 heures Alberta Mar Alberta ELN-155 Alberta 08Wild
 Rose Country Alberta 09 Jetta Varisty Chrysler Dodge Jeep Calgary
 Alberta Pacifica Chrysler Dodge Jeep Alberta JCW-655 Alberta 08
 Varsity 07 Chrysler Ellsworth GAg GAg Expires last day of Apr
 Alberta H Civic VRU-845 Alberta 08Wild Rose Country 07 CX
 Ridley's Maxxis Ellsworth Marzucchi cannondale Fresh Toyota Echo
 Precision Toyota Brandon Manitoba Alberta Jan Alberta EKW-264
 Alberta 08Wild Rose Country Alberta 09 715 Alberta Jun Alberta
 BTE-274 Accord Alberta 08 Crowfoot Village Honda 07 Crowfoot
 Village Honda V6 Discover Real Estate Ltd. SOLD C/S Cathrine

Watson 510-7142 233-0706 350Z Nissan Alberta Apr Alberta FGE-120
 Alberta 08Wild Rose Country Alberta 09 Z Windstar Metro Ford
 Ford Alberta Oct Alberta KUY-173Wild Rose Country Alberta 08
 LX Traction Control Auto security warning vehicle secured
 Plymouth Alberta May Alberta CEA-384 Alberta 09Wild Rose
 Country Alberta 08 Voyager LE Private Property Unauthorized
 vehicles will be ticketed and towed at owner's expense Infiniti G35
 Alberta Sep Alberta NCU-058Wild Rose Country Alberta 09
 Charlesglen Toyota Corolla S Crowfoot Village automall 241-0888
 Alberta Jun Alberta MHU-306 Alberta 09 Charlesglen Toyota
 Northland Pontiac Buick GMC Grand am GT Pontiac Alberta May
 Alberta YEP-658 Northland Alberta 09 Villager LS
 www.albertabeef.org Alberta Mar Alberta DCA-405 Alberta 08Wild
 Rose Country Alberta 09 709
 Cal-Alta 1978¹⁸

- 14 As Beaulieu explains, "I view poetry, as typified by concrete poetry, as the architectural structuring of the material of language; the unfamiliar fitting together of fragments, searching for structure" (68).¹⁹ The poet's filiation with bpNichol rings true in this statement, especially in light of another project, similarly grounded in techniques of appropriation and constraint, begun in 2008, entitled "26 Alphabets (for Sol LeWitt)".²⁰ This piece follows upon the artist's death in 2007 and reads as a cross between an elegy and an ode. Adopting the role of editor, Beaulieu takes up Sol LeWitt's instruction-based conceptual artwork and asks a group of 26 poets and artists (including Robert Fitterman, Johanna Drucker, Christian Bök, to name a few) to fulfill a series of simple instructions: "On a single sheet of paper in letters approximately one half inch tall write the alphabet from A to Z".²¹ In the following example, these same instructions are subsequently parodied, as they fall in place word for word in one of the twenty-six "Alphabets":

No Q

Hi f^olks;
 in response to the work of Sol L^ewitt,
 this is a p^roject iⁿinvitation:

*
 On a single sheet of paper
 in letters appro^ximately one h^alf inch tall
 w^rite the alpha^bet
 from A to Z
 *

send fiⁿished pie^ces to

d^erek beaulie^u
 2 - 733 2nd a^ven^ue nw
 cal^gary alberta
 canada T²N 0E4

by Dec^ember 31st, 2008.

All pⁱeces will be published in a limited edition
 (with 2 copies to every contributo^r) S^pring 2009.]

Fig. 4 Derek Beaulieu, ed., *26 Alphabets (for Sol LeWitt)*, Calgary: No P, 2009, np.

As Beaulieu explains in his foreword to the volume, this is the third iteration of his alphabet project, two previous such projects also being marked by “no editorial interference”.²² In what resembles a gesture of fetishisation, the compositional use of the alphabet strikes an interesting parallel with the “archival impulse” as described by Hal Foster—the desire to repeat, here visually, the denotative, descriptive and notational system of language. In another example, by the poet and visual artist Donato Mancini, the letters of the alphabet merge into a visual canvas where the repetition of signs exhibits a rhetorical playfulness and a graphic density:

Fig. 5 Derek Beaulieu, ed., *26 Alphabets (for Sol LeWitt)*, Calgary: No P, 2009, np.

- 15 Visual poets like Beaulieu are performing language, here under the guise of an editor, exposing its materiality, as though staving off its demise. Repeating the alphabet appears as one way to re-engage the subject as a participant, if only in a game of signification, one that is inherently never complete, never over. Perhaps more fittingly, the schemes of visual poetry might resemble more closely the gesture contemporary art criticism now calls “anarchival” — when artists are “concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces” and “drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects”... projects “that might (however) offer points of departure” (Foster 5).

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NOTES

1. See Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse" *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 3-22: "[...] the work in question is archival since it not only draws on informal archives but produces them as well, and does so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private. Further, it often arranges these materials according to a quasi-archival logic, a matrix of citation and juxtaposition, and presents them in a quasi-archival architecture, a complex of texts and objects [...]" (5).
2. Examples include Thomas Hirschhorn's *Musée précaire Albinet* (2004) and the earlier work of Christian Boltanski, *La Réserve du musée des enfants* (1989) or his mnemonic use of photography in *364 Suisses morts* (1990).
3. My translation. « La consignation tend à coordonner en un seul corpus, en un système ou une synchronie dans laquelle tous les éléments articulent l'unité d'une configuration idéale » (Derrida 14).
4. « Extériorité d'un lieu, mise en œuvre topographique d'une technique de consignation, constitution d'une instance et d'un lieu d'autorité (l'archonte ou l'arkheôn, c'est-à-dire souvent l'État, et même un État patriarcal ou fratriarcal), telle serait la condition de l'archive » (Derrida 2).
5. It is noteworthy that a detail from the cover of Beaulieu's novel *Local Colour* (2008) is the cover design for one of the principle and recently published anthologies of Conceptual writing, *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith (eds.). Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern UP, 2011.
6. For a discussion of Beaulieu's engagement with Conceptual writing, see Kit Dobson, Introduction, "Where Meanings Are Not Expected", *Please, No More Poetry: The Poetry of derek beaulieu*, ix-xiv.
7. "Interview with bpNichol, Feb 13, 1978" by Ken Norris, *Essays on Canadian Writing* 12 (Fall 1978): 247-248, quoted in Introduction by Jack Daniels, bpNichol, *As Elected: Selected Writing 1962-1979*, 12.
8. *First Screening* (1984): originally a computer-animated piece written in Apple Basic code and now available in javascript at <http://vispo.com/bp/jim.htm>
9. *Zygal: A Book of Mysteries and Translations*, Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1985, 57.
10. Steve McCaffrey is referring to bpNichol's volume *The Martyrology*. See *North of Intention: Critical Writings 1973-1986*, Toronto: Roof Books, 1986.
11. "Line Telling 1", in bpNichol, *Zygal: A Book of Mysteries and Translations*, 1985, 36.
12. "A Study of Context 2: S into H", in bpNichol, *Zygal: A Book of Mysteries and Translations* (1985), 94.
13. The letters are drawn by Barbara Caruso, published by her Seripress in 1978 and then published in Nichol's collection, *Alphhabet Ilphabet* (1978). It is noteworthy that the inscription "26 Alphabets" only appears below Caruso's drawing when reproduced in bpNichol's volume of poems, *An H in the Heart: bpNichol: A Reader*, 109.
14. bpNichol, "Portable Systems 18", *An H in the Heart: bpNichol: A Reader* 28.
15. See *Zygal* where Nichol devises a parodic mathematical formula to describe his compositional process in a piece entitled "probable systems 8". He arrives at a fractional figure, "1 2/3, representing the measured difference between prose and poetry", 71. The latter equation is described as "an expression of the degree of flux in actual transformational writing", 73.
16. Quoted in Kit Dobson, Introduction, "Where Meanings Are Not Expected", in *Please, No More Poetry: The Poetry of derek beaulieu*, xi.
17. See Kit Dobson's introduction, *Derek Beaulieu, Please, No More Poetry*, xii.

18. "Wild Rose Country", first published in rob mclennan, ed. Somerstreet West, Ottawa: above/ground press chapbook, 2009, <https://derekbeaulieu.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/beaulieu-wild-rose-country.pdf> (last accessed 24 January 2019) and later in Derek Beaulieu, *How to Write*, Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2010, 21-22.
19. Lori Emerson, "Afterword: An Interview with derek beaulieu", *Please, No More Poetry: The Poetry of derek beaulieu*, intro. Kit Dobson, Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier Press, 2013, 65-70.
20. derek beaulieu (ed.), *26 Alphabets (for Sol LeWitt)*, Calgary, Alberta: No Press, 2009, np. https://derekbeaulieu.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/26_alphabets__for_sol_lewitt_.pdf (last accessed 24 January 2019).
21. No captions accompany each "Alphabet", but if we observe the order in which the contributors of this volume are listed at the start of the volume, this "Alphabet" composition is to be attributed to the poet and theorist of conceptual writing, Robert Fitterman.
22. See derek beaulieu, *26 Alphabets for Sol LeWitt*: "For each of the first two volumes, *Simplex 17* (2007) and *Lego 50-15* (2008), I presented a group of artists, poets and writers with a constrained vocabulary (a single sheet of dry-transfer lettering and the original patent for Lego, respectively) and requested they create a product using only the materials provided. I afforded room within the completed collections for every received piece with no editorial interference. My task as editor was simply to approach a series of potential contributors with a set of instructions and then gather the responses", np.

ABSTRACTS

By taking to task the materiality of writing, visual poetry asks what can be remembered and through what channels. Though the archive may function in poetry in the broadest sense as a metaphor for memory, the boundaries of that narrative change along with the shape of the print medium. If visual poetry is an archive of scriptural experiment, its recordings are subject to the flux of a dynamic aesthetic and an environment increasingly grounded in technology. This paper will concentrate upon the dramatization of textuality through the example of two Canadian poets, bpNichol and Derek Beaulieu across the twentieth and the twenty-first century. It shall be considered how their visual poetries engage with archival processes and in doing so, bring into focus the changing temporality and spaces of memory.

En travaillant sur la dimension matérielle de l'écriture, la poésie visuelle s'engage dans une voie exploratrice qui pense ensemble matériau, écriture et mémoire. La figure de l'archive se decline au sens métaphorique pour dire cette relation. Elle traverse la tradition poétique en suivant la trace des formes adoptées par les divers supports de l'écrit. Si la poésie visuelle peut se dire archive de l'expérience scripturale, ses inscriptions sont le reflet du flux qui caractérise une esthétique et un environnement conditionnés de manière croissante par des supports technologiques. Cet article interroge le geste performatif de l'écriture en prenant l'exemple de deux poètes canadiens, bpNichol et Derek Beaulieu aux XX^e et XXI^e siècles. Ressort de l'enchevêtrement de la poésie visuelle et de l'archive, ce geste met en scène la traversée de la mémoire, ses temporalités et ses espaces.

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Mots-clés: poésie visuelle, archive, écriture conceptuelle, médium

Keywords: visual poetry, archive, conceptual writing, media

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Fiona McMahon est maître de conférences en littérature américaine à l'université de Bourgogne. Ses recherches portent sur le modernisme, les poétiques des XX^e et XXI^e siècles, ainsi que sur les rapports texte-image en poésie. Parmi ses travaux figurent des ouvrages critiques – *Charles Reznikoff : une poétique du témoignage* (L'Harmattan, 2011) ; *H.D.* (Atlande, 2013) – et des articles sur des courants moderniste et contemporain chez des poètes nord-américains. Elle termine en ce moment le tapuscrit d'un ouvrage collectif à paraître aux « Classiques Garnier », *Penser le genre en poésie contemporaine*, et elle prépare un volume pour la revue *Sillages critiques* sur la question de l'archive dans les arts : « L'archive : horizons de la création contemporaine ».