

BIS208: EXPERIMENTING THROUGH THE ARTS
THE MATERIAL TEXT: VISUAL POETRY AND POETICS
2013 WINTER, BIS208
M, W 5:45-7:45 UW2 031

Instructor: Amaranth Borsuk
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Office Hours: T, R 5:30 PM – 6:30 PM at UW2-331, and by appointment.
Class website: <http://bis208spring2013.wordpress.com/>

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This class will explore the way artists and writers have used visual approaches to text for social, political, and aesthetic ends. Poets have historically been attuned to issues of line break and layout, but over the years they have also incorporated other visual techniques into their work, from religious poems in the shape of crosses and altars, to typographic works that distill words to their essence, to collages that cut words into pieces. Visual artists, too, incorporate words into their work, from Marcel Duchamp's clever ready-mades and Tom Phillips' altered books to Jenny Holzer's projected phrases. These works challenge the dichotomy between art and language, showing us the way words can be visual, and images can be legible. Taking poetry as our case study, we will examine visual writing practices from a historical and cross-cultural perspective to ask what is at stake in these intermedial works. We will also experiment our way through this terrain, creating work inspired by and in dialogue with the art we will examine.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- To examine the way a text's visual and material qualities influence our reading, understanding of, and interaction with it.
- To understand the history and implications for poets of working visually.
- To see the work of these writers as embedded within larger social and cultural contexts.
- To develop skills in media-specific analysis that are applicable to visual and literary texts.
- To build awareness about the range of interdisciplinary artistic practices that influence 20th and 21st-century poetry and discover pathways for future study.
- To explore creative expression through visual uses of language.

COURSE FORMAT:

This class will be run as a studio for experimentation in forms that meld visual and textual material. You will be called upon to create work inside and outside of class, and to share that work with your peers in small and large group sessions. Our goal will be to explore how these techniques influence our understanding of the ways words function and to see what makes such works more or less effective. The best way to see what makes them tick will be to try these tactics ourselves, challenging one another to create relationships between word and text in which neither is subservient to the other, but both are contributing equally to the experience.

REQUIRED TEXTS: (also on reserve at the library)

- Henderson, Gretchen, *Galerie de Différence* (AndNow Books, 2011)
- Phillips, Tom, *A Humument* ([Fifth Edition](#), Thames and Hudson, 2012)
- PDFs and linked readings below.

Do not be intimidated by the number of readings each week. Many are links to images you will look at or short media works you will watch.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

Gluesticks, a bone folder, a pencil, a black marker, colored pens, and other drawing implements.

Recommended: Caran d'ache watercolor sticks. <http://www.amazon.com/Caran-Neocolor-Soluble-Pastels-Colors/dp/B000YIMXMG/>

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- 1) **Participation in class discussions.** Full and engaged participation is only possible if you are **present and on-time, attentive, and have completed the readings and experiments and brought them with you.** While you will not be graded on attendance, missing more than 2 classes will impact your participation grade, since completion of in-class writing, in-class sharing of creative work, and peer collaboration with a spirit of generosity and support are essential to the class.
- 2) You are required to keep **an artist's journal** (8.5 x 11 sketchbook preferred—usually available cheaply at major chain book stores) for this class. Keep this journal with you while doing the reading and use it to make notes on both the critical work you read and the visual art you look at. I prefer a physical journal because you can easily doodle, collage, and paste inspiring images in it. However, if working digitally is more conducive to your creativity, you may certainly keep a blog or website. The journal will be your record (and mine) of your thought process this quarter and engagement with the class. **Bring it to every class!**

You should do the following in your journal:

- Take notes: in class and outside of class
- Create weekly experiments listed on the syllabus
- Write down ideas for projects as they come to you. Create a page where you begin to jot these down. They can be sketchy, i.e. “take photographs of street signs and Photoshop the words off of them so that they provide no information” or “a book whose pages are guaranteed to cause papercuts to anyone trying to open it” or “a poem shaped like a flowchart.”
- Draft creative projects
- Copy favorite lines from the reading and attribute them
- Complete in-class writing

When in doubt, put it in the journal!

Always date your work in the journal.

- 3) **Weekly creative experiments, as listed on the syllabus (due dates indicated).** These are skill-building and exploratory exercises for helping us understand how these forms of visual poetry work and what we might gain from them. You may wish to use some of these approaches in your chapbook and artist's book. **These contribute to your journal grade**
- 4) **3 Projects:** Guidelines will be distributed in class.
 - a. **A collaborative write-up and presentation of a concrete poem (Due April 22)**
 - b. **A chapbook spread for our collaboration (Due May 27)**
 - c. **An artist's book (Due June 5)**

GRADING:

Your grade will be based on your participation in every facet of the class.

If you complete all the assignments on time, participate actively, and do not miss more than 2 classes, you are guaranteed a B in the class.

This grade will be lowered for excessive absence / lateness (which constitutes a lack of participation) and incomplete work.

This grade will be raised if you throw yourself into the work wholeheartedly and display a higher level of

commitment to the assignments and participation.

The relative weights break down as follows:

- Journal: 30% (including weekly experiments in and out of class)
- Participation: 30% (including in-class experiments and in-class sharing of creative work)
- Artist's Book and artist's statement: 20%
- Chapbook spread: 10%
- Collaborative presentation: 10%

Grades will be given according to the University of Washington grade point system. Please refer to <http://www.uwb.edu/registration/policies/grading/grading-ug>.

IAS PORTFOLIO:

Work done in this class should be archived in your IAS portfolio. Students majoring in any degree offered by IAS begin the process of creating a capstone portfolio in BIS 300: Interdisciplinary Inquiry and conclude it in BIS 499: Capstone Portfolio. IAS students should maintain an archive of all of the work they have done in (or in relation to) their undergraduate education, preferably through their UW Google Site. For more information about the IAS portfolio, visit the IAS [webpage](#). For help on the technical or rhetorical development of your IAS portfolio, visit the [Writing Center](#) (or 425-352-5253) or [Learning Technologies](#) (learningtech@uwb.edu).

POLICIES:

Technology

Since technology is profoundly linked to education, there will be times in class when I will ask you to use these tools for gathering information or for your experiments. However, attentiveness and participation are the most important aspect of the class, so please turn off and put away laptops, cell phones, and iPods unless specifically asked to use them. I will make exceptions for students with specific note-taking and other needs if you see me in advance.

Late Work

You are expected to turn in all work on time and come to class prepared. Late work will not be accepted except in extreme circumstances discussed with the instructor in advance.

Academic Integrity

See <http://www.uwb.edu/student-services/academicconduct> for crucial information regarding academic integrity. The library also has an extremely useful website with resources at <http://libguides.uwb.edu/ai>. You are responsible for knowing what constitutes a violation of the University of Washington Student Code, and you will be held responsible for any such violations whether they were intentional or not.

Respect for Diversity

It is our goal to create a classroom environment in which everyone feels comfortable sharing thoughts, opinions, and writing so that we can learn from one another. It is incumbent upon every member of the class to help make it so by remaining mindful of IAS and [UW Bothell's policy on diversity](#).

Disability Accommodations

I want to make this class fun and useful to everyone involved. If you believe that you have a disability and would like academic accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services at 425.352.5307, 425.352.5303 TDD, 425.352.5455 FAX, or at dss@uwb.edu. www.uwb.edu/student-services/dss.

Inclement Weather

In the event that I cannot get to campus due to weather or an emergency, I will notify the class by group email. Please check if the campus may be closed due to weather either on the uwb.edu website or by calling the Campus Information Hotline: 425.352.3333. Please see www.uwb.edu/alert. Class activities will be rescheduled as needed.

Preliminary Course Schedule:

UNIT 1: THE SHAPE OF THE WORD

WEEK 1: LANGUAGE AS MATERIAL

Monday April 1	Wednesday April 3
Introductions, syllabus Guest reading and screening with poet Kate Greenstreet and her husband and collaborator Max Greenstreet. We will be encountering their work later this quarter when we look at Video Poetry	In-class reading of poems by James Merrill, Orlando White, Christian Bök How do we talk about poems? In class experiment with poems that bring letters and words to life.

HW for week 2:

- Guillaume Apollinaire, Selections from *Calligrammes* (1912-18) and [English translations](#) (click on each image to enlarge it)
- Samples of [Early Visual Poetry](#).
- Shape poems by John Hollander [PDF]

Experiment: In your journal, write a shape poem (also known as a pattern poem) in which the text acts out or depicts what it describes. Then, using your word processor, shape the poem into an object, series of objects, or some other shape that is meant to evoke the content of the poem. **Due Wednesday April 10.**

WEEK 2: THE *LOGOS* AND LOGOS, “THE CRISIS IN POETRY”

Monday, April 8	Wednesday, April 10
An introduction to semiotics. How slippage between signifier and signified activates visual poetry. How do we talk about the visual? Fact→idea lists introduced Close readings of Kay Rosen	A brief history of pattern poetry and shaped poems, Mallarmé touched on. In-class sharing of your shape poems in small groups (3 per group). Assignment 1 distributed

HW for week 3:

- Eugene Gomringer: "[Concrete Poetry](#)" (1956), "[The Poem as Functional Object](#)" (1960), "[Silencio](#)" and "[Wind](#)"
- Décio Pignatari, "[beba coca cola](#)" (1957)
- Mary Ellen Solt, "[Flowers in Concrete](#)" (1966)
- Max Bense, "[Concrete Poetry I](#)" and "[II](#)" (1965)
- Mary Ellen Solt, "[The New Poet-Reader](#)" (1968)

Experiment: Play with concrete poetry, creating a poem in which typography and content contribute equally to the piece's meaning. They should be inseparable.

For example: 1) Take a word and break it into its constituent parts, finding other words within it. You may look for words that can be broken apart from it, or anagrams hidden within it. Arrange these words on the page in a way that highlights the relationship among these parts. (i.e. RANDOMIZE might conceal RANDOM + EYES or anagrammatically might put one in a MINOR DAZE) **OR** 2) Write a poem that loops, a circle poem that can be read continuously like Augusto de Campos's homage to Gertrude Stein's [rose](#) poem or Alec Finlay's [circles](#). **OR** 3) Create a constellation like Gomringer's work. See what happens when you cluster words and connect them to one another. See what happens when you gradually remove or add letters to a word or phrase. **OR** 4) Try to mimic one of your favorite works from the Solt or Williams anthologies on reserve. Use new language to do the thing it's doing. **Due Monday 4/22.**

WEEK 3: CONCRETE POETRY: MAKING WORDS MEAN

Monday, April 15	Wednesday, April 17
<p>Class cancelled for group work. Complete Assignment 1: Collaborative Response Paper and Presentation.</p>	<p>Class meets at UW Seattle campus in Special Collections, where Sandra Kroupa will show us a variety of works. Special Collections is in the basement of Allen Library. UW Seattle Campus Map: http://www.washington.edu/maps/?ALB King County Bus map here Schedule here Trip planner here (use University of Washington as the end point. You'll want the Hub exit. If you are coming from Bothell, bus 372 connects the Seattle campus with the U-District. The 4:13 pm and 4:43 pm buses will get you to the Seattle campus in time. If you are unfamiliar with the campus, be sure to leave yourself time to find your way to special collections.</p>

HW for week 4:

- William S. Burroughs, "[The Cut-Up Method of Bryon Gysin](#)"
- Al Hansen, [Hershey wrapper collages](#), more on [Flickr](#), and more at [DesignBoom](#)
- Selected [collages by Jess](#) and [found poems by Bern Porter](#).

Experiment: Create 3 collages using packaging from a product found in your home. Play with the text, the colors, the shapes. Experiment with grids, repetition, sense, and nonsense. In addition, as preparation for Wednesday’s in-class experiments, bring in 5 photocopies of a page from a textbook, workbook, or critical essay from any field. Also photocopy a page from a graphic novel, manga, or newspaper comic strip from which you have erased all the words. **Due Wednesday 4/24.**

WEEK 4: CONCRETE, COLLAGE, AND CUT-UP

Monday, April 22	Wednesday, April 24
<p>Discussion of concrete poetry manifestos. Student presentations on concrete works and discussion of the techniques being used. Sharing from your concrete experiments.</p>	<p>In-class experiment: collage and cut-up. Bring photocopies, scissors, and a glue stick to class. We will do experiments directly in the journal. Sharing of your packaging collages in small groups.</p>

HW for Week 5:

- Watch the documentary film [Concrete!](#) (streaming online)
- Read Johanna Drucker, “The Artist’s Book as Idea and Form” [pdf]

UNIT 2: THE SHAPE OF THE PAGE

WEEK 5: THE ARTIST’S BOOK

Monday, April 29	Wednesday, May 1
<p>Artists’ Books at UW Special Collections Sandra Kroupa will present artists’ books from the collection to us. The space will be available to us until 9pm, so you may stay late to view and interact with these works.</p> <p>HW: Make notes in your journal about one of the books you look at that really speaks to you. Write down quotes from it, do a fact→idea list, take a photo, and freewrite about the book, either at the library or when you get home.</p>	<p>Discussion of Drucker reading, Sackner film, and library visit. A brief history of artists’ books as they emerge from early 20th century. Introduction of GDD and our interventions into this visual poetry text.</p> <p>Journals Collected Mid-Quarter Evaluation</p>

HW for week 6:

- Read [this brief history](#) of books and nonlinearity.
- Read Gretchen Henderson’s *Galerie de Difformité*. The book is big, interactive, and non-linear. You may not see every last page (unless you make a concerted effort). This is ok.

Experiment: As you read the book, map your trajectory through GDD in some way. For examples of maps others have created, click [here](#).

Provide a 1-2 paragraph explanation of your approach to tracking your path. These works will be contributed to the GDD website, so think about how you might explain your aesthetic choices to a reader unfamiliar with the book. **Due Monday 5/6**

WEEK 6: THE INTERACTIVE ARTIST’S BOOK, GALERIE DE DIFFORMITÉ

Monday, May 6	Wednesday, May 8
Discussion of GDD and sharing of your maps. A2 Distributed	Discussion of GDD continued. In-class experiment: chapbook collaboration for inclusion in <i>Galerie de Difformité</i> . A3 Distributed

HW for Week 7:

- Read Tom Phillips, *A Humument*, including the notes at the end of the book.
- Look at Brian Dettmer’s work on his website and read his [artist’s statement](#).
- Skim Genevieve Kaplan’s blog for samples of other approaches to erasure:
<http://genevievekaplan.blogspot.com/search/label/erasure>

Experiment: Photocopy a page from a novel written prior to 1950. Make 5 copies of this same page and paste them into your journal. Create 5 different erasures of the same page to see how many different results the same field of text can provide. Experiment: try making sense and nonsense, using whole words and partial words, using adjacent words, connecting words with rivers, connecting words with lines. Try different materials: highlighter, white-out, cray-pas, markers, colored pens and pencils, spray paint, collage, scratching, watercolor pencils, or anything else that inspires you. **Due Monday 5/13.**

Begin brainstorming for A3.

WEEK 7: ERASURE AND ALTERED BOOKS

Monday, May 13	Wednesday, May 15
Discussion of Phillips. Close reading of favorite passages. Sharing from your erasures.	Class cancelled for meetings to discuss your altered book projects.

HW for week 8:

- Read Tom Konyves, “Videopoetry: A Manifesto” [PDF]

Watch:

- Man Ray, “[L’Étoile de mer](#)” (“The Starfish,” 1928)
- Kate and Max Greenstreet, “[Trailer](#)” (2011), “[Locating Faraway Objects](#)” (2012) (more films available here: <http://kickingwind.tumblr.com/>)
- Christopher Funkhouser and Amy Hufnagel, “[Grammar Girl](#)” (2010)
- Grace Cho, “[Coping](#),” based on W.S. Merwin’s “Separation” (2010)
- Mathieu Doyon, Simon Rivest, and Paul Gibbons, “[Like Wings Abandoned from Some Future Score](#)” (2011)

- Eileen Myles, “[You Make Me Smell](#)” (2010)
- Zuzana Husárová, “[To Myself](#)” (2011)

WEEK 8: VIDEOPOETRY

Monday, May 20	Wednesday, May 22
Guest talk by Aimee Harrison Discussion of videos and Konyves manifesto	In-class experiment: Collaboration around Directr App (http://directr.co/#what). How can we hack this? Break into groups to brainstorm. In-class constraint-based exquisite corpse in each group to create a poem for the video.

HW for week 9:

Experiment: Get together with your group and create a videopoem using Directr and your collaborative poem. Music must come from one of the royalty-free sources listed on our links page. Keep Harrison’s definition of “intermedia” and Konyves’s various terms in mind. As a group, write up a 500 word artist’s statement explaining the ideas behind your piece. Provide credits for any sources used, and be sure to list all of the collaborators involved in the project.

You may wish to consult the site’s tips: <http://blog.directr.co/category/movie-making-tips/>.

Due Wednesday 5/29.

WEEK 9: VIDEOPOETRY AND FINAL PREPARATIONS

Monday, May 27	Wednesday, May 29
Memorial Day Holiday – no class meeting A2 digital file due	Sharing of videopoems.

HW for week 10:

- Complete A3. **Due in class, with your statement, Monday 6/3.**
- Print copies of A2. **Due in class Wednesday 6/5.**

WEEK 10: SHARING OF PROJECTS

Monday, June 3	Wednesday, June 5
A3 Deformations due We will arrange these as an exhibition in class, photograph them, and mingle	A2 prints due Evals, party, construction of our collaborative chapbook.

Table of Due Dates		
	Monday	Wednesday
Week 2		Experiment: Shape poem
Week 3	Class cancelled for group work	Class meets at UW Seattle Special Collections
Week 4	A1 Collaborative paper and presentation	Experiment: Packaging Collages Photocopies for in-class experiments
Week 5	Class meets at UW Seattle Special Collections	Journals Collected (Available for pick-up Thursday 5:30-6:30pm at my office)
Week 6	Experiment: Map of your reading process	
Week 7	Experiment: Erasures	Class cancelled for meetings with Amaranth
Week 8		
Week 9	No Class, Memorial day A2 digital file	Experiment: Collaborative videopoem
Week 10	A3 Deformations and statements	17 prints of A2

Assignment 1: Concrete Poetry, Collaborative Response and Presentation

Prompt:

How do concrete poems work, and what makes them different from their precursors, pattern/shaped poems? Concrete poems attempt to bring signifier and signified closer together, to speak in a language that transcends cultural and linguistic barriers, and to use typography in a way that is as important to the work's meaning as the words themselves. These poems could not be written any other way and mean the same thing.

Select 2 works from the anthologies on reserve for this class at UWB/CCC library and provide a short write-up (1-2 paragraphs) of each one in which you address the way the verbal, sonic, and visual components of the piece are working together to create meaning.

Method:

Meet with your group at UWB/CCC Library to look at the reserve books on concrete poetry:

Solt, *Concrete Poetry, A World View* (1970)

Williams, *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (1967)

Each member of the group must photocopy 3 favorite pieces and paste them into their journal. Jot down a few notes on why these works appeal to you (a sentence or two). Share these with your group, then work together to select 2 pieces you feel you can say something about. Create a fact→idea list for each one and compose a 1-2 page response that addresses the interplay between visual and textual material in these pieces, including both a description of each work and an analysis of what it is doing. Be sure to provide the artist's name and the title of the work within your response. Imagine your reader has not seen the piece in question. Describe and analyze it for him or her.

Help us understand what makes these poems successful so we can emulate their techniques.

Materials:

Papers must should be typed in 12-point Times New Roman or equivalent font, double spaced, with 1" margins, spellchecked, and proofread. Scan and staple or embed your two images.

Include the following in the upper left corner:

BIS208, Spring 2013

Professor Amaranth Borsuk

Collaborative Concrete Poem response

Names of group members

Deadline: You will turn in your paper (1 copy per group) Monday 4/22 at the beginning of class. You will also present one of these works to the class on Monday (this should only take about 5 minutes), so you must also bring a thumb drive with your scanned image and be prepared to explain what you discovered through close reading the piece.

Assignment 2: Collaborative Chapbook: Textual Transformation

Background:

In the spirit of the collaborative books created by Russian Futurist artists in the early 20th century, we will collaborate on a chapbook that considers the material nature of language, inserting the concerns of this class into Gretchen Henderson's *Galerie de Difformité*.

Prompt:

On pages 232-233, Henderson invites readers to create a chapbook, which she will make available on her website for readers to download, print, and assemble.

For chapbooks created by other collectives, see: difformite.wordpress.com/chapbooks/

Method:

The theme for our class chapbook will be Deformity as Transformation. As a springboard, we will use the game of "crazy chain" to generate a collaborative text. The game begins with the first participant speaking a well-known 2-word phrase: "money clip," "hang out," or "reading room," for example. The next person repeats the phrase, adding a two-word phrase that begins with the previous end-word: "reading room" + "room service" = "reading room service." We will go around the room, with each person repeating the chain and adding a word that creates a 2-word phrase with the last word.

When we arrive at a chain we like, each person will use his or her 2-word phrase to build a 2-page spread in our collaborative book, a long, mutating visual poem.

Materials:

Each of you will be creating a folio (a page folded down the middle) from a landscape-oriented 8.5x11 sheet of paper. At the left edge of the sheet, leave a 1" margin blank. This will be folded back to create a hinge for gluing your folio to the one preceding it. Your spread, which starts 1" from the left edge, should be 5" on either side of a gutter (the center fold). The book will be an accordion, allowing readers to create new juxtapositions.

Do whatever you like with your two words. Illustrate, create collages, erasures, concrete poems, shape poems, typographic textures, or use QR codes to do something with video or sound. You may work in Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, or on the page. **Sign your spread in some way.**

Deadline:

A .pdf of your 2-page spread is due on the course website by **May 27, 2013**.

17 copies of your 2-page spread are due in class at our final meeting, **Wednesday June 5, 2013**, where we will fold and glue our chapbooks together.

For influence / inspiration, check out:

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/article/182397>

<http://www.ubu.com/vp/>

<http://visual-poetry.tumblr.com/>

Assignment 3: Artist's Book / *Galerie de Difformité*

Background:

We have seen examples of artists' books at the Allen Library at UW, in the documentary about the Sackners, *Concrete!*, and in images of work by Brian Dettmer online. Tom Phillips' *A Humument*, which we have looked at closely, provides another point of reference.

Prompt:

Given these points of influence and inspiration, your task is to create a one-of-a-kind artist's book of your own that alters Gretchen Henderson's *Galerie De Difformité*.

Henderson invites readers to "Deform This Book" on pages 230-231. Start by reading these pages if you haven't encountered them yet.

Think about the form of Henderson's book and the questions it raises about the structure of books (through crowd-sourcing, QR codes, her website) and the structure of the body. Then consider how you might contribute to the conversation by altering her book (or a portion of it) in some way. For some examples of the ways others have approached this project, please see: <http://difformitechapbooks.wordpress.com/2013/03/30/how-to-mail-a-book/>

Materials / methods:

You may choose any method you like using addition, subtraction, and alteration to create your work. Feel free to draw upon techniques with which we have experimented in class (erasure, cut-up, found poetry, concrete poetry, etc.), or to develop your own. You may use the book itself as your starting point, print an "exhibit" from the website (<http://difformite.wordpress.com>), copy a portion, or build your own book object, drawing on language and ideas from *Galerie de Difformité*.

You must also write an **artist's statement** to accompany the work that explains your vision for the piece. What approach did you take to the altered book, and which precursor works you looked at this quarter inspired your project? The artist's statement serves a dual purpose. First, it helps orient the reader to your work so we get a sense of your awareness of the field and interest in entering into the contemporary conversation. Second, it helps me assess your level of engagement and effort, given that the finished product may fall short of your aesthetic ambitions (and that is ok – we are "experimenting" here!). I am not going to grade you solely on the work you produce, but also on the ideas behind it. For samples of deformation statements, see <http://difformite.wordpress.com/documentation/>.

Add your name, title, list of materials and processes used, and an Exhibit letter to archive your project (see Exhibit A, B, C etc. on <http://difformite.wordpress.com>).

Deadline:

Your book object is due in class on Monday, June 3, 2013. We will exhibit the books and walk around the room discussing them. I will photograph the works at this meeting for submission to the GDD website.