

The PAPERS *of the*
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL
SOCIETY *of* AMERICA

VOLUME 109:2 JUNE 2015

The 2014 Whitney Biennial: the Book as a Medium
in Contemporary American Art

BY MICHAEL THOMPSON

Beyond the Fronde: Jacques Cailloué's Border-Crossing Books

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Constructing a Canonical Colonial Poet: Abram E. Cutter's
Bradstreetiana and the 1867 *Works*

BY PATRICIA PENDER

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The 2014 Whitney Biennial: the Book as a Medium in Contemporary American Art

MICHAEL THOMPSON

“Paper is a star of this Biennial, with dozens
of books and printed material.”
Carol Vogel, *New York Times*, 27 February 2014

“The exhibition is replete with printed matter,
writing, texts of all sorts—in short, with words.”
Emily Apter, *Artforum*, May 2014

EVERY TWO YEARS THE WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART in New York mounts an exhibition intended to chronicle the current state of contemporary art in America. This daunting task began in 1932, when the show was annual, and has continued since 1973 as a biennial in the museum’s Breuer Building on Madison Ave. The Whitney has now moved to a new Renzo Piano-designed building on Gansevoort St. in the Meatpacking District, and future Biennials will be held there.

As a survey of the broadest possible cross section of what is happening in American art, the Biennial, like the art world itself, is never without controversy. Selecting art for this high-profile and high-visibility show is a delicate task that in the past was done mostly by artists acting

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as curators and, for the first thirty years, anonymously. The rationale for this unusual practice was not to provide protection but rather to focus the attention of the viewing public, both professional and nonprofessional, on the art rather than on the curatorial function. This practice eventually gave way to identified committees of curators and, for the first time in 2014, to a process with three identified curators acting not as a committee but independently. We thus had not one but three Whitney Biennials comprising works by a total of 103 artists.

The three curators were: Stuart Comer, a curator of film at the Tate Modern and recently chief curator of media and performance at the Museum of Modern Art; Anthony Elms, an artist and associate curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania; and Michelle Grabner, an artist and professor of art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. At the time the show was put together, Stuart Comer was still in London; therefore none of the three curators was working in New York.

Anthony Elms has said there was a conscious decision to make this Biennial a literary event, and this choice appeared to extend across the work of all three curators.¹ Elms and Grabner selected artists known for being writers: Alex Jovanovich (Grabner), Gary Indiana (Elms), David Robbins (Grabner), Pedro Vélez (Grabner), and David Foster Wallace (Grabner). Elms and Comer selected artists known for being poets as well as artists: Etel Adnan (Comer), Susan Howe (Elms), and Travis Jeppesen (Comer). And Comer selected two publishers: Semiotext(e) and Triple Canopy. In addition to the fourteen artists whose work is discussed in this article, other artists in the Biennial whose work features significant components of written, drawn, painted, printed, or photographed words include David Diao (Grabner), Phillip Hanson (Grabner), and Steve Reinke (Elms). Stuart Comer summed up this aspect of the event by stating “[a]rtists increasingly make work whose hybridity is marked not only by the incorporation of multiple forms and media but also by processes in which these forms translate and morph into

1. Andrew M. Goldstein, “Whitney Biennial Curator Anthony Elms on the Rise of Literary Art and the Usefulness of Ghosts,” *Artspace*, 5 March 2014, http://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/whitney_biennial_curator_anthony_elms_interview/.

one another,” including prominently “complex relationships between linguistic and visual forms.”²

The semiotic theme to which Comer refers was prevalent throughout the Biennial, and the show accentuated the strong connection between contemporary philosophy, practiced primarily through print media, and contemporary art, practiced primarily through any available material structure or, in light of what has become known as the dematerialization of the art object, through no material structure at all. This development has evolved over decades and through influences and cultural forces so diverse that they cannot be traced to a single person, event, or work of art. A good place to start, however, is a book and film by Belgian poet and conceptual artist Marcel Broodthaers and the recognition accorded to it fifteen years ago by art critic and Columbia University professor Rosalind Krauss.

A VOYAGE ON THE NORTH SEA

Fifteen years before the 2014 Whitney Biennial, at Birkbeck College at the University of London, Rosalind Krauss gave the thirty-first Walter Neurath Memorial Lecture, which she entitled “*A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*.”³ In it she examined in great detail the work of Broodthaers, and in particular his 1973 film and book *A Voyage on the North Sea* (see fig. 1), through which she contended he became the figure who “stands *at*, and thus stands *for*” the evolution of art into what she describes as the post-medium condition.⁴ This condition signifies a world where artists can create art without being confined by the attributes of any particular medium, e.g., painting, sculpture, or photography, in contrast to a previous period where the medium had been seen as critical to understanding and evaluating an artist’s work. More particularly, the idea that any given

2. Stuart Comer, Anthony Elms, and Michelle Grabner, *Whitney Biennial 2014* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2014), 21.

3. The lectures ran from 1969 until 2000 and reflected the interests of Walter Neurath, the founder of the publishing firm Thames & Hudson. The Krauss lecture was published as “*A Voyage on the North Sea*”: *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999).

4. Doubtless a play on an earlier book, François Lyotard, *La Condition Post-moderne: Rapport sur le Savoir* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979).



Fig. 1: Cover of the Brussels edition of *A Voyage on the North Sea*. Photograph by Hannah King.

medium had unique characteristics that differentiated it from any other medium was part of a broader theory of aesthetics most famously articulated by art critic Clement Greenberg as part of a strict formalist theory of modernism.

Broodthaers's book was an understandable subject for Krauss's lecture because it embraces many different and diverse artistic media, although in some respects it is just another artist's book, like many of the democratic multiples made by artists in the era of the 1960s and 1970s.⁵

5. Ed Ruscha was the most prominent artist to use this medium. His important early books include *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* (Alhambra, CA: Cunningham Press, 1963); *Various Small Fires and Milk* (Los Angeles: Anderson, Ritchie, & Simon, 1964); *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (Los Angeles: Dick de Ruscha, 1966); and *Crackers* (Burbank, CA: G.R. Huttner Lithography, 1969).

It appeared simultaneously in three separate editions—English, French, and German—as small soft-cover books (15 × 17.5 cm) printed by offset press in large runs of 1000 copies each. Important for Krauss, however, was the deluxe edition, with 100 copies in English and ten copies in French, which were numbered, signed, and packaged in a bluish-gray box that included not only the book but also an accompanying silent 16mm film with the same title lasting 4 minutes, 15 seconds.⁶

The book and film portray two voyages on the North Sea, one with photographs of an oil painting showing a square-rigged vessel returning to port, and the other with a photograph of a modern day sloop running before the wind under spinnaker and mainsail (see plate 1). The film is organized as a slideshow of a book with intertitles between stationary shots of the pages announcing “Page 1,” “Page 2,” and so forth through to “Page 15.” The details of the oil painting are examined closely by the camera moving toward the painting and then withdrawing, but always in sharp focus. The book follows this approach with sharply focused detail shots of the canvas. The oil painting itself, which Broodthaers had purchased in a Paris flea market, was displayed at the opening reception for the book held at the Petersburg Press in London on 28 January 1973. He took the photographs of the sloops himself at the port of Ostend in Belgium. Broodthaers prepared a slide show of still photographs entitled “Bateau Tableau,” which was to be seen alongside the film, but this aspect of the project was never realized in his lifetime. The complete multimedia work is used by Krauss as the prime example of the phenomenon where, in the post-medium condition, artists and the individual arts “will have recourse to every material support one can imagine, from pictures to words to video to readymade objects to films.”⁷

The *Voyage on the North Sea* project, taken as a whole, comprises the media of oil painting, still photography, offset printing, bookmaking, and filmmaking. In Krauss’s view, the work was departing from the formalist belief that art and the aesthetic values it embodies are autonomous and can be detached from other social or ethical considerations. In the hands of Clement Greenberg, this formalist theory devolved into a formidable intellectual force that drew the attention of the art world away from *what* was represented in a particular work of art and toward

6. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQPKG1efWGg/>.

7. Krauss, *Post-Medium*, 15.

how it was represented, i.e., how well the medium chosen by the artist was deployed to make an artistic statement. For Greenberg, modernist formalism, or just modernism, progressed only by removing from a given artistic medium all its inessential elements so that it could become a “pure” art form: “Under the testing of modernism more and more of the conventions of the art of painting have shown themselves to be dispensable, unessential. By now it has been established, it would seem, that the irreducible essence of pictorial art consists in but two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and the delimitation of flatness; and that the observance of merely these two norms is enough to create an object which can be experienced as a picture.”⁸ Whereas old masters bent on realistic representation sought to disguise the flatness of the canvas through the techniques of perspective, *chiaroscuro*, and foreshortening, Greenberg argued that the inherent nature of the two-dimensional canvas required it to be accentuated. The flat two-dimensional surface of the canvas (“flatness”) and the edges of the stretcher holding it (“the delimitation of flatness”) are thus the quintessence of a painting and on what, in this minimalist view, a modern painter should focus. Without the distracting composition of a picture painted on a canvas, one can better experience the pure quality of the color, form, space, and materials of the art.

Krauss argues that Greenberg’s views have become irrelevant in the post-medium environment; it is not sensible to evaluate art or an artist through the lens of a particular medium if the artist is free to employ any medium or many different media, as Broodthaers did, in the creation of a single work. Much art produced in the last three or more decades, such as conceptual art, mixed-media art, installation, appropriation, aggregative media, and performance art, do not have a single or even any material support. Using the touchstone of *A Voyage on the North Sea*, she constructs three intellectual and historical narratives, the confluence of which she heralds as the start of the post-medium condition. The first is the deconstructive attack on the idea of the autonomy of art, the second is the reaction against the commodification of art in the market and the resulting rise of conceptualism, and the third is the

8. Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 4:131.

acceptance of the idea that minimalism's extreme reductiveness has an inherent logical inconsistency. While all three are relevant to art being made today, it is the third argument that establishes a direct link to the 2014 Whitney Biennial.

Krauss cites the work of Joseph Kosuth in his essay "Art after Philosophy" and credits him with generalizing the impact of Greenberg's view of the flatness of paintings to the broader world of art in general. Kosuth focused on minimalist sculptor Donald Judd's analysis of the work done by Frank Stella with *The Black Paintings* that were included in the Museum of Modern Art show *16 Americans* (1959–60). According to Judd,

Half or more of the best new work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture. Usually it has been related, closely or distantly, to one or the other. . . . But there are some things that occur nearly in common.

* * *

Stella's shaped paintings involve several important characteristics of three-dimensional work. The periphery of a piece and the lines inside correspond. The stripes are nowhere near being discrete parts. The surface is farther from the wall than usual, though it remains parallel to it. Since the surface is exceptionally unified and involves little or no space, the parallel plane is unusually distinct. The order is not rationalistic and underlying but is simply order, like that of continuity, one thing after another. A painting isn't an image [emphasis added].⁹

Stella showed four canvases that featured penciled lines filled in with black house paint (see plate 2). Ad Reinhardt, also recognized by Kosuth, was at the same time making paintings even more starkly black than Stella's, containing no contrasting pattern and only slight variations in tonal quality (see plate 3). In each case the work belies any suggestion of the illusion of depth or space and concentrates the viewer's attention on the object-ness of the painting itself. Judd reacted to this idea by pointing out that paintings that achieve the irreducible essence of pictorial art, viz., flatness and the delimitation of flatness, become just another three-dimensional object, like a sculpture.

Kosuth criticized Greenberg as a "critic of taste," for "[b]ehind every one of his decisions is an aesthetic judgment." For Kosuth, art and aesthetics are not the same although they have had a long historical association due to art's frequent function as decoration, and decoration

9. Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," *Arts Yearbook 8* (1965): 74, 78.

is about aesthetics. Kosuth calls painting and sculpture “formalist art” whose “art condition is so minimal that for all functional purposes it is not art at all, but pure exercises in aesthetics”;¹⁰ such media are considered art simply because they look like the art of the past or have been placed in an institutional setting, like an art museum, that bestows upon them the same imprimatur as the art of the past. Certain of Judd’s minimalist aluminum sculptures, he suggests, “seen filled with debris, seen placed in an industrial setting, or even merely seen on a street corner” would not be perceived as art.¹¹

For Kosuth, it is important that an artist go beyond questioning the nature of a particular medium, as Greenberg and Judd did, and to question the nature of art itself: “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. . . . Painting is a *kind* of art. If you make paintings you are already accepting (not questioning) the nature of art. One is then accepting the nature of art to be the European tradition of a painting-sculpture dichotomy.”¹² Since art transcends the various media it embraces, to question art requires an artist to escape the confines of any one medium. For Kosuth, “art” is not located in the object itself nor in the medium used but in the idea of the object, and the idea of the object exists only in the minds of the artist and of the viewer. Kosuth argues, foreshadowing the 2014 Whitney Biennial, that displayed works of art are nothing more than “the physical residue of an artist’s ideas” and as a consequence thereof “an original Cubist painting is not unlike, in most respects, an original manuscript by Lord Byron,” since “[a]ctual works of art are little more than historical curiosities.”¹³

Kosuth concludes his essay by stating “the propositions of art are not factual, but linguistic in character,”¹⁴ and as linguistic propositions they are, using the terminology of the philosopher A. J. Ayer, analytical not synthetic, meaning their validity depends solely upon their own internal logical consistency. This is a notion taken up directly or indirectly in this past year’s Whitney Biennial by any number of artists, including

10. Joseph Kosuth, “Art after Philosophy,” *Studio International* 178, no. 915 (October 1969): 134.

11. *Ibid.*, 135.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*, 136.

many of the fourteen book-related artists featured here. Biennial artist Keith Mayerson, a representational painter not among the fourteen, was nevertheless the most explicit about this semiotic idea in his catalogue essay:

Art is language, and language is power. A primary concept of semiotic theory is the Saussurean sign: the word that represents the object (the “signifier”), as opposed to the object (the “signified”). Art arises when a work reveals the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified. At its best, perhaps, art provokes the sublime when you, as the viewer, become the object—that is, when you recognize yourself as a being within a larger world. . . . Art, whether a Mondrian painting or a Cady Noland installation, is most powerful when it triggers you to think about your thoughts, to become aware of your consciousness, or to reflect on the world. There’s something about the ineffability—the mystery, the stuff you can’t put into language—that ultimately is the life force of art, whether it’s post-postmodern, postmodern, modern, of the work of the Old Masters.¹⁵

Kosuth’s final statement in his lengthy and complex essay is that art is a tautology: “Art’s only claim is for art. Art is the definition of art.”¹⁶

Visual works using language have clear antecedents in earlier twentieth-century art. Dadaists used newspapers and other printed media as part of a collage to mimic an illustrated magazine or catalogue. Cubists and futurists used words within the frames of their canvases to highlight the visual nature of a word, demonstrating it as having both shape and abstract meaning. Most prominently, however, is Surrealist painter René Magritte’s famous painting *La Trahison des Images* (*The Treachery of Images*, 1928–29) in which a painted image of what is clearly a pipe has below it the painted words “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” (“This is not a pipe”; see fig. 2). Kosuth’s *One and Three Chairs* (see fig. 3) at the Museum of Modern Art goes a step beyond questioning the nature of representation, as Magritte did, by semiotically questioning the nature of art itself. The work has the following inventory record: “Wood folding chair, mounted photograph of a chair, and mounted photographic enlargement of the dictionary definition of ‘chair.’” The media for this work therefore comprise an actual chair along with two photographs, one of the same chair and one of a printed dictionary passage defining “chair.” Kosuth is here simultaneously showing three codes: the physical

15. Comer et al., *Whitney Biennial 2014*, 105.

16. Kosuth, “Art after Philosophy,” 137.



Fig. 2: René Magritte, *La Trahison des Images* (*The Treachery of Images*), 1929. Oil on canvas, 23.75 × 32 inches. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. © 2015 C. Herscovici / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

code of the chair itself, the visual code of the photograph of the chair, and the verbal code of the definition.

As this past Whitney Biennial shows, in the era after minimalism, post-structuralist and conceptual artists like Kosuth have moved closer to philosophy than the modern artists of Greenberg's day, and they have embraced fully the express use of words and language not just as visual semiotic images but as art itself. Many contemporary artists have been motivated not only by developments in how art is made but also by the linguistic turn of analytic philosophy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Led by German philosopher Gottlob Frege, British philosopher Bertrand Russell, and British-Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, the direction of philosophy in English-speaking countries turned to an analysis of the meanings implied by the words used in philosophical statements and how those meanings could differ



Fig. 3: Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs*, 1965. Wood folding chair, mounted photograph of a chair, and mounted photographic enlargement of the dictionary definition of “chair,” chair 32 × 15 × 21 in., photographic panel 36 × 24 in., text panel 24 × 24 in. Museum of Modern Art. © 2015 Joseph Kosuth / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

from context to context and from reader to reader. One important impact of this approach is the recognition that language does not merely reflect or express philosophical ideas but can serve to formulate and shape them and thereby impose unwanted and perhaps latent constraints on the ideas themselves.

By viewing Greenberg’s emphasis on medium analogously to this linguistic analysis, one could hypothesize that the parameters of any particular artistic medium may exert the same constraints on artistic expression as words do on philosophical expression. The medium may in other words formulate and shape art rather than just ontologically be art, as Kosuth’s tautology would require. With this in mind, the current operative view of contemporary American art was perhaps summarized best by 2014 Biennial artist Radamés “Juni” Figueroa: “I try not

to become a slave to any medium.”¹⁷ It is in this context that the 2014 Whitney Biennial took place.

THE 2014 WHITNEY BIENNIAL

The prevalence of printed or manuscript material in the 2014 Biennial was obvious from the ground floor, featuring a vitrine installed by Matthew Deleget with forty-two monographs about artists, through the top, or fourth floor, featuring the archives of author David Foster Wallace. From the 103 artists in the show I have chosen fourteen whose work embodies some aspect of book-ness:

- Conventional artists' books (Etel Adnan, Lisa Anne Auerbach, Allan Sekula) including broadsides made from or destined to become books (Channa Horwitz, Susan Howe, Charline von Heyl);
- Installations featuring books (Matthew Deleget, Travis Jeppesen, David Robbins) including two publishers (Semiotext(e), Triple Canopy);
- Archives as art (Julie Ault, Joseph Grigely, David Foster Wallace).

The choices of all three curators are represented in this list. Stuart Comer, whose guiding selection criteria were what he called “shape shifting” and “hybridity,” chose three artists' books, three installations with books, and one archive. Anthony Elms, who included three artists' books and one archive, stated that he was looking for new ways to construct and display an artist's or an author's voice. And Michelle Grabner, the professor among the three who included two installations with books and one archive, stated she wanted to build a “curriculum” showing the forces influencing the making of contemporary American art at this point in time. Below I will discuss the work of each of the fourteen artists identified above and relate their work to the central theme of the use of the book as a medium in contemporary American art.

ARTISTS' BOOKS

Etel Adnan

(born 1925 in Beirut; lives and works in Sausalito and Paris)

Etel Adnan grew up in Beirut with a Greek Christian mother and a Syrian Muslim father. She spoke Greek and Arabic with her parents, but her education in Beirut and in France was in French. Her graduate education was in philosophy, and she taught the subject at Dominican

17. Comer et al., *Whitney Biennial 2014*, 71.

College in San Rafael, California, for most of her professional life. She has only recently become known for her visual artwork, having first established a reputation as a poet, novelist, and essayist.

She had seven works in the Biennial, of which the three leporellos,¹⁸ all in Arabic, are relevant here (see plates 4 and 5).¹⁹ She began using this format in the 1960s after it was introduced to her by an American friend who had learned to make them in China, and she found them to be well suited for combining literary and pictorial work. In an article published in *Discourse* seventeen years ago, she identified the sequential attribute of a book as being what appealed to her:

Things happen in time, therefore they always constitute a story; the unfolding of one's mental operations is akin, it appeared to me, to these long horizontal scrolls that are not meant to be grasped in a single vision like a painting, but rather *to be read*, visually, in sequence, like an ordinary book that you cannot read in a single glance. . . . I suddenly saw that I was going to write poetry on these papers and paint watercolors with the sentences, verses, or words.

* * *

Thus, although a painted landscape on a traditional canvas freezes, so to speak, its subject matter, a landscape on these accordion-like books can be seen in different manners, the first two openings juxtaposed, for example, with later ones at will, so that a single landscape becomes many, according to the way the work is folded.²⁰

Comer, who chose Adnan, described leporellos as the precursors to laptops and tablets, where the screens can unfold and fold back unto one another, and where text and image can be integrated into a single body of content.

Comer's criteria of shape shifting and hybridization mean the tendency of artists not only to use diverse forms of expression but also to use them in a way in which they tend to morph into one another. He

18. A term used primarily by Francophones. More common terms in this country are accordion-fold books or concertina-fold books. Leporello was the term used by the Whitney.

19. *December from My Window*, 1993 (ink and watercolor on paper; 7.5 × 100 in.; 19.1 × 254 cm); *Five Senses for One Death*, 1969 (ink and watercolor on paper; 11 × 255 in.; 27.9 × 266.7 cm); *Funeral March for the First Cosmonaut*, 1968 (ink and watercolor on paper; 10 × 105 in.; 25.4 × 266.7 cm).

20. Etel Adnan, "The Unfolding of an Artist's Book," *Discourse* 20, nos. 1 and 2 (1998); 12, 24.

observed about Adnan that her “work and the nomadic, cosmopolitan patterns of her life have formed something of a loose framework for this exhibition.”²¹ When asked, Adnan wrote, “if the drawings and watercolors which I mingle with the written texts are ‘illustrations,’ I have to answer that they are not; they are, rather, an ‘equivalence.’”²² This equivalency is considered by many, Comer doubtless among them, to be the ideal state of an artist’s book, where the text and illustrations each convey the same message or related messages but in different ways, in contrast to earlier traditions of illustrated books where the illustrations depict something already described in words by the text or where the text does no more than serve as a caption for the illustrations.

Lisa Anne Auerbach

(born 1967 in Ann Arbor, Michigan; lives and works in Los Angeles)

Lisa Anne Auerbach semiotically pairs the traditional feminine craft of knitting with hard-edged political messages, usually using language drawn from clichés and thereby obscuring or perhaps ridiculing the original meaning. The resulting product, sweaters and other garments, were displayed at the Whitney on mannequins.

In addition to the garments, Auerbach submitted two publications to the Biennial, *American Megazine #2* and *BOOKSHELF #2*.²³ The latter is a zine about her own library and contains some quite personal assessments of each book, such as how it came into her library, whether she plans to retain it and why, and in some cases, whether she plans to read it. *American Megazine* is an enormous periodical (60 × 39 in.) that she began as a commemoration of the books and architectural projects of Ed Ruscha and Judy Fiskin. The first issue of the periodical (see fig. 4) dealt with megachurches in Los Angeles, and Auerbach made it as large as her inkjet printer would permit in order to become an obvious parallel to the size of the churches themselves. *American Megazine #2*, submitted for the Biennial, depicted the more modest spaces where psychics worked, also in Los Angeles, but nevertheless in the same large format. Both publications were displayed on a large table with two

21. Comer et al., *Whitney Biennial 2014*, 20.

22. Adnan, “Unfolding,” 22.

23. *American Megazine #2*, 2014 (inkjet prints and staples, 24 pages; 60 × 39 in.; 152.4 × 182.9 cm [the first issue, *American Megazine #1*, is shown in fig. 4]); *BOOKSHELF #2*, 2014 (publication, 20 pages; 8.5 × 11 in.; 21.6 × 27.9 cm).



Fig. 4: Lisa Anne Auerbach, *American Megazine #1*, 2013. 24 pages, ink jet printed, custom staple bound. Photo by Lisa Anne Auerbach, courtesy of Gavlak Gallery. The issue in the Biennial was *American Megazine #2*, 2014.

gallery assistants turning the pages wearing T-shirts reading “Bigger” and “Better.” To Auerbach, the churches and the psychics are related subjects because both deal with the “spirit” or the “beyond.”

All of her work in the exhibition has a single coherent theme, although it may not at first be apparent. The theme relates to self-publishing, whether in the form of complex large-format color magazines, simple DIY zines like *BOOKSHELF*, stylish hand- and machine-knitted garments, or the words on the T-shirts of the gallery page turners.

Channa Horwitz

(born 1932 in Los Angeles; died 2013 in Los Angeles)

The work of conceptual and performance artist Channa Horwitz could be viewed among the artists profiled here as containing the fewest attributes of conventional book-ness (see plate 6).²⁴ The individual

24. *Sonakinatography Composition Number Three Variation Three*, 1993 (Casein and ink on Mylar; 67 × 47 in.).

two-dimensional pieces grouped under the single title “Language Series” are framed, hung on the wall, and described in the Whitney Catalogue as “a selection of drawings.”²⁵ While not a codex, the work is essentially a musical score or, more to the point, a dance-notation manual like those in the collections of Pennsylvania State University (the Mary Ann O’Brien Malkin Collection of Early Dance), the New York Public Library Dance Collection, the Harvard University Theatre Collection, and the Library of Congress music division.

The method she uses, which she calls “Sonakinatography” (from sound-motion-notation) was described by art critic Chris Kraus in *Artforum*: “‘Sonakinatography’ was premised on the numbers one through eight. Subjecting these integers to various mathematical operations, Horwitz generated numerous sequences; in drawings, the resulting ‘data sets’ were expressed as intricate geometric patterns graphed onto a gridded matrix. Each number corresponds not only to a specific color but also to a specific duration, expressed in terms of ‘beats.’ The two-dimensional works could and often did function as instructions for music and dance.”²⁶ Her work is thus an unusual combination of a rigid structure imposed upon an aleatory process. In her words, “[t]he world plays out in an apparent chance that is really a structure.”²⁷ The artist studied with performance artist Allan Kaprow and conceptual artist John Baldessari at the California Institute of the Arts and created her own happening in 1971 with an earlier work that used the same method employed for her Biennial submission. A performance of one of her drawings was performed in its entirety in Italy in 1978.

It is well to remember that as an aggregated medium without a single structural source, a book’s many components make it easily adaptable to the post-medium condition, and the post-medium condition may in turn serve to expand the notion of what a book can be. The notion of what constitutes a “book” has also been expanded by the availability of electronic media and by recent innovations by book artists. Horwitz’s work embodies many important attributes of being a book, such as content, a system for ordered or intentionally random sequencing of information, portability, permanence, and copyright protection. Most

25. Comer et al., *Whitney Biennial 2014*, 404.

26. Chris Kraus, “Channa Horwitz,” *Artforum* 52, no. 1 (2013): 67.

27. *Ibid.*

importantly, however, like any book it possesses a communicative intent and an understandable narrative structure designed to deliver it.

Susan Howe

(born 1937 in Boston; lives and works in Guilford, Connecticut)

Susan Howe received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 1961 from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and began her career as a painter. In 1974, one year after Broodthaers's *A Voyage on the North Sea*, she wrote an essay entitled "The End of Art," which was inspired by the art and writings of visual artist Ad Reinhardt, the concrete poetry of Ian Hamilton Finlay, and the visually oriented poetry of Robert Lax. With Reinhardt, Howe had a special interest in his black paintings (see plate 3), about which she wrote "[h]ere were truly simple paintings; simplicity was their mystery. Paintings that offered no compromises. Paintings that forced the viewer to search for what is offered."²⁸ After writing the essay she left painting and became a poet.

As a poet Howe was associated with the Language school, named for the literary magazine *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, which placed nearly complete emphasis on language as a direct source of meaning in the form of shape, sound, and image rather than the mere expression of an exogenous meaning. Her verse is sometimes upside down, parts of it crossed out, words overlapped, or on the other extreme large white spaces left between them. She aimed, as with other Language poets, to have the viewer become aware of the tangible word itself instead of unconsciously reading through it to the object it signifies. Her success as a poet is evidenced by her 2011 Bolligen Prize in Poetry, a Guggenheim fellowship, and her appointment as a distinguished fellow at the Stanford Institute for the Humanities.

For the Biennial, Howe submitted twenty-two letterpress prints²⁹ produced at the Grenfell Press in New York from designs made by Howe (see fig. 5). She begins work of this nature with original printed source material typically drawn from early American history and early historical documents, copies it mechanically, cuts out fragments from the copies, and by collage creates a new text that retains the original

28. Susan Howe, "The End of Art," *Archives of American Art Journal* 14, no. 4 (1974): 2.

29. From *Tom Tit Tot*, 2013 (twenty-two letterpress prints; 12 × 9 in.; 30.5 × 22.9 cm each).

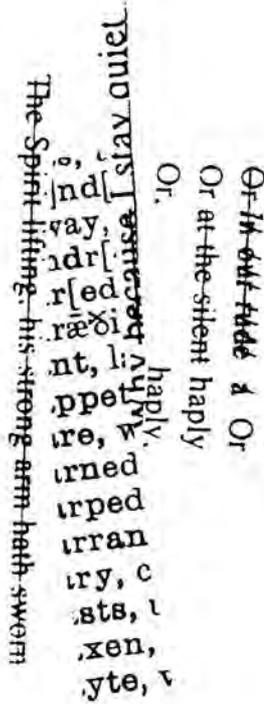


Fig. 5: Susan Howe, *Or, at the silent haply* (from *Tom Tit Tot*) (one of twenty-two) 2013. Letterpress print; 12 × 9 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

typefaces and spacing. A polymer plate is then created from this collage and printed on a letterpress. Howe is often quoted as saying, in reference to her original source material, “the bibliography is the medium.”³⁰

Howe is no stranger to the artist’s book. In 1968, before she gave up painting, she began to make artist’s books that, one might surmise, eased the transition from painting to poetry, although she said “[t]hese books I made were not books of poetry or prose; they were objects.”³¹ She described her work at this time as taking a sketchbook in which she

30. 2014 Whitney Biennial Website, <http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/2014Biennial/SusanHowe/>.

31. Lynn Keller, “An Interview with Susan Howe,” *Contemporary Literature* 36, no. 1 (1995): 5.

would juxtapose a picture with a list of words under it. Forty-six years later the letterpress prints included in the Biennial are scheduled to become, as of late 2014, a limited-edition artist's book published by the Library Council of the Museum of Modern Art titled *Tom Tit Tot*. The book, named for the English version of the Grimm brothers' German fairytale *Rumpelstilzchen*, was designed by R. H. Quaytman, an artist and Howe's daughter, and will be printed by the Grenfell Press.

Allan Sekula

(born 1951 in Erie, Pennsylvania; died 2013 in Los Angeles)

Like Susan Howe's early sketchbooks, the work submitted by Allan Sekula comprises five unique notebooks (see fig. 6) containing handwritten notes and drawings about a variety of personal things but mostly about his planned art projects of photography and film.³² He had been a student of Herbert Marcuse at the University of California-San Diego and became schooled in the Frankfurt School of philosophy, which holds, as part of critical theory, that philosophy should be linked to the empirical and social sciences. A theory, in order to be a "critical" theory, must be not only explanatory but also normative and practical.

As primarily a film documentarian, Sekula used his artwork to pursue clearly defined economic and political goals. His notes and sketches in the Biennial are mostly about his project "Polonia and Other Fables," which portrayed Poland both as Sekula recorded it *in situ* and as it is perceived in the minds of Polish émigrés living in Chicago. As an art project it resembles Broodthaers's *A Voyage on the North Sea* because it uses a multiplicity of media: the original exhibition, shown at the Renaissance Society in Chicago in 2009 and at the Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw in 2010, was a series of large-format photographs accompanied by a printed-text booklet written by Sekula, by didactic panels, and by slide projections of other photographs. The photographs themselves use a variety of photographic methods, from snapshots to formal portraiture and from street photography to aerial views. In all, it explores the different but related themes of the artist's own ancestry and of national identity, migration, and global economics.

32. Five notebooks with notes and sketches, 2009 (ink, correction fluid, and marker on paper; 3.5 × 5.5 in.; 9 × 14 cm each).



Fig. 6: Allan Sekula, installation view of sketches from notebooks *PR Poland* 2009(1), 2009, *Untitled*, 2012, *Documenta 12*, 2007, and *Facing the Music* 2009, 1999–2009. *Whitney Biennial 2014* (7 March–25 May 2014), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Estate of Allan Sekula; courtesy Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica. Photograph by Bill Orcutt.

Charline von Heyl

(born 1960 in Mainz, Germany; lives and works in New York)

Charline von Heyl is an abstract artist best known for her large, colorful paintings just on the edge of recognizable representation. She says her intention in painting is “to create an image that has the iconic value of a sign but remains ambiguous in its meaning. I want to get abstraction to a point where it screams that it is something: a representation and a thing.”³³ She has experimented with other media and in 2008 made an innovative artist’s book entitled *Sabotage*, which interleaved transparent Mylar leaves with opaque paper leaves, thus creating a changing superimposition of pages as one moves through the book. Von Heyl characterized the process thusly: “The very simple formal device of the Mylar pages that one turns back and forth forces the mind to create and re-create abstract images, and to always wonder about what that could mean.”³⁴

33. Mark Godfrey, “Statements of Intent,” *Artforum* 52, no. 9 (2014): 300, quoting von Heyl.

34. John Kelsey, “1000 Words: Charline von Heyl,” *Artforum* 47, no. 2 (2008): 330.

Her work in the Biennial, like that of Channa Horwitz, was two-dimensional and hung on a wall (see fig. 7).³⁵ While not a conventional book, or really even a book at all, it is included here because its source material is printed photogravures taken from an earlier book, viz., a mid-twentieth century book about Polish and Russian folk art that von Heyl photographed, enlarged, and collaged into a larger single image that was then printed with an inkjet printer. Von Heyl says of the technique: "I'm obsessed by the way printing works in these books. It's photogravure, not photography, and the intense velvety black translates in an exciting way into ink-jet printouts."³⁶

INSTALLATIONS WITH BOOKS

Matthew Deleget

(born 1972 in Hammond, Indiana; lives and works in Brooklyn)

Matthew Deleget takes aim, deconstructively, at the history of abstract and minimalist painting in the twentieth century. His deconstruction is both analytical, as in his Whitney piece, and physical. Physically, his strategies include hanging a blank canvas on a gallery wall and then painting it and the adjacent areas of the wall with spray paint, painting with randomly selected colors in a random pattern and, most interestingly, actually destroying a monochromatic canvas, similar to those of Frank Stella and Ad Reinhardt, and displaying the resulting detritus as art. Taking up where Krauss, Kosuth, and Judd leave off, he starts with the final logical extreme of minimalism, a monochromatic painting, and then moves a step beyond it.

His work at the Biennial, called *Zero-Sum*, was a vitrine containing forty-two monographs from his personal library, all of which were purchased at a discount or had been discarded, which to Deleget reflects the shifting tastes of the marketplace for art (see fig. 8).³⁷ The idea came to him when he saw a copy of *Circle; International Survey of Constructive Art* being used as a doorstop. Eight titles in *Zero-Sum* are by

35. *Folk Tales* (thirty-six separate works), 2013 (acrylic, ink, wax, charcoal, and collage on paper; 24 × 19 in.; 61 × 48.3 cm each).

36. Ann Landy, "Charline von Heyl: Unexpected Collisions," *Art News* 112, no. 11 (2013): 68.

37. *Zero-Sum*, 2011–present (42 publications of various sizes, vitrine; 20 × 2 × 3 feet).



Fig. 7: Charline von Heyl, *Folk Tales* (one of thirty-six), 2013. Acrylic, ink, and wax on paper; 24 × 19 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York.



Fig. 8: Matthew Deleget, *Zero-Sum*, 2011-present. 42 discounted or discarded art publications, vitrine, site-specific installation for the Whitney Museum; 20 × 2 × 3 feet. Photo by Sheldon C. Collins, The Whitney Museum of American Art.

or about Alfred Jensen (1903–81), one about fellow Biennial artist David Diao (b. 1943), and the rest about contemporary artists exploring minimalist abstraction (see Appendix 1 for a complete short-title listing of all forty-two books).

In his own words, through this work he has become “an advocate for artists and ideas that are extraordinary but that are generally overlooked, unfashionable, unmarketable, or, worst, discounted altogether. . . . By thinking of these books as works of art, I’ve brought them back full circle into the realm of ideas and aesthetics.”³⁸ There is a connection here to his physical destruction of monochromatic paintings, since in each case he addresses the minimalist issues of painting by not creating a painting at all but by moving an existing painting into the realm of what Marcel Duchamp called “the service of the mind.”³⁹

38. Comer et al., *Whitney Biennial 2014*, 330.

39. Quoted in H. H. Arnason and Maria F. Prather, *History of Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Photography* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998), 274.

Travis Jeppesen

*(born 1979 in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida; lives and works
in Berlin and London)*

The ontological work submitted by Travis Jeppesen, *16 Sculptures*,⁴⁰ comprises many media: a book of the same name, records, headphones, sleeping masks, chairs, media players, and a performance. A viewer of the installation at the Whitney would sit in a chair, don a sleeping mask, put on headphones, and listen to the artist read a text taken from the book, which would “be” one of the sixteen sculptures. In his catalogue essay, Jeppesen provided a description of how an object that is never defined or identified can exist by only the written word: “[As] he finds himself facing the object, seated before it, forcing his thoughts to coalesce into something—words. Words the physical manifestation of something: the object. The object’s bluntness. Not a copy, not a simulacrum, for that is not something *his* words could ever be. His words, he thinks, he knows, are always something else, even when they purport to represent, to critically engage with, the object and its thingness, what it purportedly is outside of all possible and potential representation.”⁴¹ The recordings in the gallery covered five of the sixteen sculptures, all of which are well known, in some cases even historically well known, and none of which were represented at the Biennial in any manner other than by recorded or written words.⁴²

Jeppesen calls this “object oriented writing” wherein he positions his authorial voice within the object so that the work is not “about” the object. Being about an object effectively distances the viewer from the object, he feels, and consequently from the experience itself. In his preface to the accompanying published book, Jeppesen says “[u]nlike criticism,

40. *16 Sculptures*, 2014 (records, headphones, sleeping masks, chairs, and media players [dimensions variable]); Travis Jeppesen, *16 Sculptures* (Portland, OR: Publication Studio, 2014); and a performance featuring a marathon reading of Travis Jeppesen, *The Suicides* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2013).

41. Comer et al., *Whitney Biennial 2014*, 89.

42. The five sculptures “at” the Biennial were: Anonymous, *Venus of Willendorf*; Thomas Houseago, *Walking Figure 1 (City)*; Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*; Cady Noland, *Misc. Spill*; and Antoine Coysevox, *Neptune*.

which is always *about* an object, and unlike poetry, which is *inspired by*, object oriented writing takes on the task of *being*.⁴³

Comparing and contrasting the appearance and approach of *16 Sculptures* with Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* is helpful to understanding both. In a museum gallery they look alike, with the most obvious component of each being a chair, but more importantly they take on the same semiotic issue of representation of physical objects in three ways: with written words describing the object, with the physical presence of the object itself, and with what Jeppesen called in the catalogue a simulacrum, or visual imitation of the object. For Kosuth, all three were present; for Jeppesen, none. Like Matthew Deleget and his destruction of monochromatic paintings, Jeppesen dematerialized the sculptures and brought them back into the realm of ideas.

David Robbins

*(born 1957 in Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin; lives and works
in Shorewood, Wisconsin)*

David Robbins's installation at the Biennial included three television commercials, a public service announcement, an open-air writing desk, and a wooden bookcase with eight copies of his book, *Concrete Comedy: An Alternative History of Twentieth-Century Comedy* (2011),⁴⁴ wedged together in a square hole cut out of the bookcase. Concrete comedy, an obvious spin on the phrase concrete poetry, is a term Robbins coined to describe comedy that is physical rather than verbal and conceptual rather than narrative. He identifies its originator as Karl Valentin (1910–48), a Bavarian comedian active during the Weimar Republic. Valentin engaged in conventional comedic routines but also made objects understandable and funny without an intervening narrative medium. A famous

43. Jeppesen, *16 Sculptures*, 7.

44. *Television Commercial for The Suburban*, 2010 (video, color, silent, 45 seconds); *Bookcase for David Robbins*, 2013 (53 × 48 × 10 in.; 134.6 × 121.9 × 25.4 cm; and eight copies of David Robbins, *Concrete Comedy: An Alternative History of Twentieth-Century Comedy* [Copenhagen: Pork Salad Press, 2011]); *Open-Air Writing Desk*, 2013 (wood, glass, and bronze; 144 × 36 × 110 in.; 365.8 × 91.4 × 279.4 cm); *Public Service Announcement*, 2013 (video, color, sound, 70 sec.); *Television Commercial for The Poor Farm*, 2013 (video, color, sound, 1 min.); and *Television Commercial (Gavin Brown at The Green Gallery)*, 2013 (video, black and white, sound, 57 sec.).

example is a small flask, about six-inches high, half-full of water, with a sign leaning against it reading “Cold Steam from an Express Locomotive.” To Robbins, this is comedy in its purest form.

Robbins in his catalogue interview takes on not just the problems imposed upon an artist by a delimiting medium but also those imposed by the art world in general, and in that sense he is following Kosuth’s admonition to question the nature of art itself. He describes his work as cultural rather than artistic and is pursuing his work in a way that absolves him of having “to run what [I] made past art’s interpretive system.”⁴⁵ The important question in his view is “[h]ow are you going to give what you have to give? That’s the question. Any obstacle to doing that—art included—has to be identified and outfoxed.”⁴⁶

Semiotext(e)

(founded in 1974 in New York; based in Los Angeles)

Sylvère Lotringer and other graduate students at Columbia University founded the independent press Semiotext(e) to translate and introduce French post-structuralist theory to America. In the early years, it published the work of Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and others. Despite this intellectual and philosophical bent, its high standing in the art world is beyond question, and the Whitney website states that the work published by Semiotext(e) “has been best read, and most understood, within the context and values of contemporary art.”⁴⁷

Like all 2014 Biennial artists, Semiotext(e) was chosen by only one curator, in this case Stuart Comer, but its body of work has influenced a generation of artists, many of whom were in the Biennial as a result of choices made by Anthony Elms or Michelle Comer. Its work fits particularly well within the critical-theory theme undertaken by Grabner in what she called her curriculum building. She identified nine of her artists in addition to herself who were influenced by post-structuralist critique and semiotics: Gretchen Bender, Sarah Charlesworth, David Diao, Gaylen Gerber with Sherri Levine, Karl Haendel, Ken Lum, Philip Vanderhyden, and Donelle Woolford.

45. Comer et al., *Whitney Biennial 2014*, 383.

46. *Ibid.*, 382.

47. 2014 Whitney Biennial website, <http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/2014Biennial/Semiotexte/>.



Fig. 9: Semiotext(e), installation view of *Semiotext(e): New Series*, 2014. Whitney Biennial 2014 (7 March–25 May 2014), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photo by Bill Orcutt.

For the Biennial, Semiotext(e) submitted two videos, a vinyl record, and twenty-one new titles published on the occasion of the exhibition (see fig. 9).⁴⁸ The books include newly commissioned work by Franco Berardi, John Kelsi, and Chris Kraus, among others, and also previously unpublished work by Simone Weil, Julio Cortázar, and Jean Baudrillard (see Appendix 2 for a complete listing of new titles).

48. Sylvère Lotringer *Interviewing Jack Smith*, 1978 (vinyl record, 60 min.); *Claire Parnet interviewing Gilles Deleuze*, 1996 (video, color, sound, 16 min.); *Sylvère Lotringer interviewing Paul Virilio*, 2008 (video, color, sound, 9 min.); *Semiotext(e): New Series*, 2014 (twenty-eight publications; listed in Appendix 2).

*Triple Canopy**(founded in 2007 in New York; based in Brooklyn)*

Triple Canopy, a name chosen with reference to the three layers of foliage shading the floor of a tropical rainforest, is a self-described “model for publication” that embraces digital art, literature, public conversations, exhibitions, editions, performances, books, and, primarily, an online magazine that appears roughly three times a year. Writing in the *New York Times*, Melena Ryzik said, “Triple Canopy has been a high-minded, high-design artifact, with writers and art directors from *Harp-er’s* and *Artforum* and a sharp, scholarly wit.”⁴⁹ Triple Canopy seeks to develop projects that make use of the distinct characteristics of the internet, and in doing so it seeks to continue and to reinvent with electronic media the tradition of the artist’s book, the avant garde literary journal, the political pamphlet, and the alternative art space.

For the Biennial, Triple Canopy submitted an installation called *Pointing Machines*, which refers to an eighteenth-century apparatus used manually to make three-dimensional copies of sculptures. The installation includes eighteenth- and nineteenth-century furniture reproductions, color transparencies, photographs, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century artworks and furniture, a sound work, and an accompanying issue of the online magazine that effectively extends the work outside the boundaries of the gallery and the Whitney Museum.⁵⁰ The work explores the history of reproduction by hand, photography, facsimile, press release, catalogue entry, forgery, and conversion into code by way of three dimensional printing, and it explores how a reproduction might affect the viewer’s relationship with, and the status of, the original work.⁵¹

The allusion here to Walter Benjamin’s classic essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” is clear. Benjamin traced the history of reproduction from stamping and woodcuts through etching, engraving, lithography, photography, and film. He argued, underscoring what would become an important theme of postmodern deconstruction, that reproductions do not have the authenticity or “aura” of an

49. Melena Ryzik, “Arts Journal in Cyberspace Finds a Home on the Grand,” *The New York Times*, 8 August 2011.

50. *Pointing Machines*, 2014 (eighteenth- and nineteenth-century artworks and furniture, reproductions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century artworks and furniture, color transparencies, photographs, online publication; dimensions variable); see http://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/pointing_machines/.

51. Comer et al., *Whitney Biennial 2014*, 142.

original because an original is confined to a particular time and place, and the ubiquity of reproductions puts them in shifting environments constructed by the viewers themselves. Reproductions do not, like the original, lend themselves to contemplation, and Benjamin argues that distraction has become the modern alternative to contemplation. Krauss characterized Benjamin as having “a deconstructive attitude toward the very idea of a medium.”⁵²

Benjamin argued that the earliest art was dependent on ritual and was used therein. He felt art in 1936 (when he was writing) was free from that dependency and, since he was a Marxist, could be used for political purposes.

Triple Canopy chose naïve American crafts and art for its installation, not for blatantly political purposes, but to show “how early American visual culture relied heavily on the publication and circulation of reproductions to aid in the cultivation of a national self-image,” which is doubtless a closely associated idea.⁵³ The installation at the Biennial is an informed updating of Walter Benjamin’s ideas about mechanical reproduction to the present age of digital reproduction.

ARCHIVES AS ART

Julie Ault

*(born 1975 in Boston; lives and works in Joshua Tree,
California and New York)*

Julie Ault’s multiple-platform installation at the Biennial, called *Afterlife—A Constellation* (see fig. 10), comprised fifteen separate works, four of which are of bibliographical interest: (i) an essay prepared by Ault that includes a press release related to the Unabomber and a 1993 *New Yorker* story by Janet Malcolm entitled “The Silent Woman,” both pinned to the wall of the gallery; (ii) a ledger book with a color drawing by experimental filmmaker James Benning after one by Sauk Indian leader Black Hawk and reminiscent of the Plains Indians’ use of ledger books rather than animal hides for narrative drawings after the ledger books became available from white settlements; (iii) a publication by Martin Beck entitled *Last Night*; (iv) and archives from the estates of artists David Wojnarowicz and Martin Wong now held by the Downtown Collection of the Fales Library at New York Univer-

52. Krauss, *Post-Medium*, 45.

53. Didactic Panel at the Whitney, Triple Canopy, *Pointing Machines*, 2014.



Fig. 10: Julie Ault, installation view of *Afterlife—A Constellation*, 2014. *Whitney Biennial 2014*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (7 March–25 May 2014) Photograph by Bill Orcutt. Left to right: Martin Wong, *Closed*, 1984–85; Robert Kinmont, *The Wings are in the Paper Drawer*, 1972–73; David Wojnarowicz, *Calendar*, 1989; Matt Wolf, *Magic Box Slide Show*, 2005–2014; Danh Vo, *Snowfall, northern Sierras, 1847*, 2014; James Benning, *Easy Rider*, 2012; *After Howard*, 2013; Martin Wong, *Semaphore Gallery Press Release*, 1984; James Benning, *After Blackhawk*, 2013.

sity. The archives were supplemented with other work by both artists from the Whitney's permanent collection, a photograph in the case of Wojnarowicz, and a painting by Wong, and supplemented by an interview with Marvin Taylor, Director of the Fales Library and Special Collections at New York University.⁵⁴

54. Julie Ault, *Afterlife*, 2014 (an essay comprising text, a copy of the *New Yorker*, and a press release); Martin Beck, *Last Night* (New York: White Columns, 2013), (a publication, 11 × 8.5 in.; 27.9 × 21.6 cm); James Benning, *After Blackhawk*, 2013 (colored pencil on found ledger; 10 × 15 in.; 25.4 × 40.1 cm); various documents and artifacts from the David Wojnarowicz Papers and the Martin Wong Papers, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University; and three related works, David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled [Time Money]*, 1988–89 (gelatin silver print, 13.5 × 18.5 in.; 34 × 46.7 cm), Martin Wong, *Closed*, 1984–85 (acrylic on canvas, 84 × 108 in.; 213.7 × 274.8 cm), and "Interview with Marvin Taylor by Julie Ault," 2013; available

As an artist in residence at the Headlands Center for the Arts in Sausalito in 2013, Ault described her own work in literary terms: “I work as an artist, curator, writer, and editor. . . . [O]ver the past decade, I’ve specifically concentrated on editorial pursuit as artistic practice, using publication as a medium, and at times employing text as medium.”⁵⁵ In the 1970s Ault was a founding member of a collaborative group of artists in New York called Group Material, which explored issues relating to art and politics and which included Wojnarowicz and Wong. Several of the early members of Group Material had studied with Joseph Kosuth at the School of Visual Arts. In the Group they followed the post-conceptualist practice of not producing art in order to show disdain for the commercial art world and its reliance on named artists and saleable objects. For example, the Group organized exhibitions of objects borrowed from people living in the neighborhood around their Lower East Side gallery; in 1985, they organized an exhibition at the New Museum where they invited 200 people to submit 12 × 12 inch flat objects with which the Group spelled out the word “MASS” on the gallery wall.

The view that archives can now be taken from libraries and placed in a museum gallery as art was shared by three of the Biennial artists, all profiled here. The rationale for this practice varies, but Ault is the most explicit about it in her interview with NYU archivist Marvin Taylor. In it, she proposes the idea that archives preserve something important that would otherwise be lost:

Archiving is in part a rescue mission; the threat of disappearance propels the thinking behind the archive. Instituting something in an archive removes it from jeopardy. The legitimacy of a subject—a person, place, event, practice, organization, community, or movement is designated as valuable, and positioned on the verge of becoming history. . . . People, things, and event can seem to come to life in the archive.

to which Taylor responds:

As I’ve said before, archives are the fossil remains of experience, because what disappears is the smell, the touch, all these other aspects of living that are

on the Whitney Biennial website, http://whitney.org/file_columns/0005/5248/ault_taylor_final.pdf.

55. Headlands Center for the Arts Website, <http://www.headlands.org/artist/julie-ault/>, accessed 19 September 2014.

hard to experience from written documents. What we're left with, basically, are things we can look at—at least in traditional archives. There are other objects that archives cannot collect, and the museums tend not to collect as well, that brings us closer to the person . . . because I think they have embodied meaning. By embodied, I mean there is a physicality about them that your body or my body interacts with that tells us something that we can't know in any other way.⁵⁶

Taylor then theorizes, echoing Benjamin, that an archive can't replicate precisely the physical space where the actions that created the archived material took place but, he says, "in other ways, perhaps, it can, if objects have enough aura."⁵⁷

Joseph Grigely
(born 1956 in East Longmeadow,
Massachusetts; lives and works in Chicago)

Joseph Grigely's work for the Biennial, going by the purely descriptive title *The Gregory Battcock Archive*,⁵⁸ was found in an abandoned warehouse space in Jersey City in 1992. It got there because a neighbor of Battcock's, to whom the archive had been left, had apparently run out of money for its storage, and the material had been seized by the moving and storage company who occupied the warehouse space. Upon the later bankruptcy of the moving and storage company, the material was abandoned. Grigely, who had a studio in the same building, discovered the material, rescued it, donated most of it to the Archives of American Art in Washington, DC, but kept a small portion, seen at the Biennial, for his own research purposes.

Battcock (1937–80) died in Puerto Rico as a victim of a brutal unsolved murder. He was an artist turned critic who in the latter role had an interest in artists who pushed the boundaries of contemporary American art. He was a noted expert on minimalism, conceptual art, video art, and performance. His *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (1968) is an important documentary publication that helped to galvanize the minimalist movement.

56. "Interview with Marvin Taylor," 3.

57. *Ibid.*, 4.

58. *The Gregory Battcock Archive*, 2009–14 (various inscribed and printed documents from Gregory Battcock's personal archive, printed captions, seven vitrines, five framed posters, and one painting, dimensions variable).

Battcock's work as a critic is strangely prescient of the literary concentration in the 2014 Biennial. In 1969, the same year as Kosuth's *Art after Philosophy*, Battcock reviewed an exhibition organized by art dealer Seth Siegelau called *0 Objects, 0 Painters, 0 Sculptors*, where, quoted by Grigely in his catalogue essay, Battcock said:

Anyone who doesn't go [to this show] needs to have his head examined because this is perhaps the first exhibit this season that really goes someplace and offers . . . something that really matters. . . . Another thing about this show is that perhaps it isn't art and maybe it's art criticism, which is something I've suspected all along, that the painter and the sculptor have been moving further and further away from art and in the end perhaps all that would remain is art criticism.⁵⁹

Grigely has organized Battcock's found material into a modular sculpture that, like the work of Julie Ault, is more about how to tell a story artistically than about the story itself (see fig. 11). The vitrines are each different in height, shape, and material and are arranged in a pattern leading up to posters in frames hung on the wall. Within the vitrines is a variety of materials, from a model steamship to books, photographs, mailed envelopes, and conventional documents in file folders. The installation also includes Battcock's lone extant painting.

Grigely is a professor of Visual and Critical Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, but he is no stranger to rigorous bibliographical work, and his artistic approach to it is reflected in this archive. He studied textual criticism and bibliography under David Foxon at Oxford and was involved with the Society for Textual Criticism. In 1995 he published *Textualterity: Art, Theory, and Textual Criticism*, in which he criticized the notion of the "ideal" text. Grigely argued that alternative texts (the "-alterity" of the title) should be viewed seriously because they embody the perhaps larger life of the work as it exists outside the mind of the author in the society at large.

David Foster Wallace

(born 1962 in Ithaca, New York, died 2008 in Claremont, California)

David Foster Wallace, who died by suicide at the age of forty-six, was described in his *New York Times* obituary as the author of "prodigiously observant, exuberantly plotted, grammatically and etymologically chal-

59. Comer et al., *Whitney Biennial 2014*, 182.



Fig. 11: Joseph Grigely, installation view of *The Gregory Battcock Archive*, 2009–14. *Whitney Biennial 2014*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (March 7–May 25, 2014). Courtesy of the artist.

lenging, philosophically probing and culturally hyper-contemporary novels,”⁶⁰ a description that accurately but ironically mimics the very writing style for which he was remembered. He is best known for his 1996 novel *Infinite Jest*, where through the eyes of a young athlete American society is portrayed as self-obsessed and distracted by entertainment, pleasure, and a variety of other mindless and undemanding pursuits. Wallace is perhaps the most controversial choice among the fourteen artists included here because he was by no means a visual artist, and the five works included in the Biennial, loaned by the Harry Ransom Research Center at the University of Texas, were no more than written notes made by him in preparation of his next novel, *The Pale King*

60. Bruce Weber, “David Foster Wallace, Influential Writer, Dies at 46,” *New York Times*, 14 September 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/15/books/15wallace.html?_r=0.

(published posthumously in 2011).⁶¹ The item chosen by the Whitney to represent Wallace's contribution is not a sketch but just the author sharpening his pencil (see fig. 12).

Michelle Grabner, the curator who selected Wallace, explained her choice in a letter to Jonathan Franzen, Wallace's literary executor, which was reprinted in the Biennial catalogue: "I am working to assemble a group of artists and a collection of artworks as well as artifacts that represent and ground my ardent enthusiasm for the waywardness of contemporary art. . . . I have no interest in 'talent hunting.' Instead I am composing an exhibition that features artists who are pivotal in shaping young artists' practices as teachers and mentors."⁶² The choice is thus part of her curriculum building and is indeed understandable given the influence Wallace's work has asserted in the past fifteen years. While the least visual of the fourteen artists profiled here, perhaps of all the 103 artists in the Biennial, Wallace and his concern for distraction can nevertheless be seen as being firmly aligned, at least analogously, with Benjamin and Triple Canopy's exploration of the effects of reproduction on the authenticity and associated aura of visual artworks.

CONCLUSION

The 2014 Whitney Biennial provides convincing evidence of the accuracy of Rosalind Krauss's observation, quoted earlier, that in the post-medium condition artists and the individual arts "will have recourse to every material support one can imagine, from pictures to words to video to readymade objects to films." So how can books be a medium in contemporary American art, as the title of this article implies, if contemporary American art is in the post-medium condition? Because in today's world of conceptual art, media have not been abandoned entirely, they have only been demoted to a level of secondary importance, and books,

61. *Federer as Religious Experience* (*The New York Times*, August 20, 2006), interview notes (two-page manuscript, 11 × 8 in.; 27.9 × 21.6 cm); *The Pale King materials*, "Butterfly" notebook, notes and clippings, n.d. (manuscript notebook, 9 × 6 in.; 22.9 × 15.6 cm closed); *The Pale King materials*, handwritten drafts, pink kitten "Scenes" notebook, n.d. (manuscript notebook, 11.5 × 8.25 in.; 29.2 × 21 cm closed); *The Pale King materials*, handwritten "Roster of Parts," Rugrats® (manuscript notebook, 11.25 × 8.25 in.; 28.6 × 21 cm closed); *The Pale King materials*, "Midwesternisms" notebook (manuscript notebook, 10.5 × 8.25 in.; 26.7 × 21 cm closed).

62. Comer et al., *Whitney Biennial 2014*, 265.

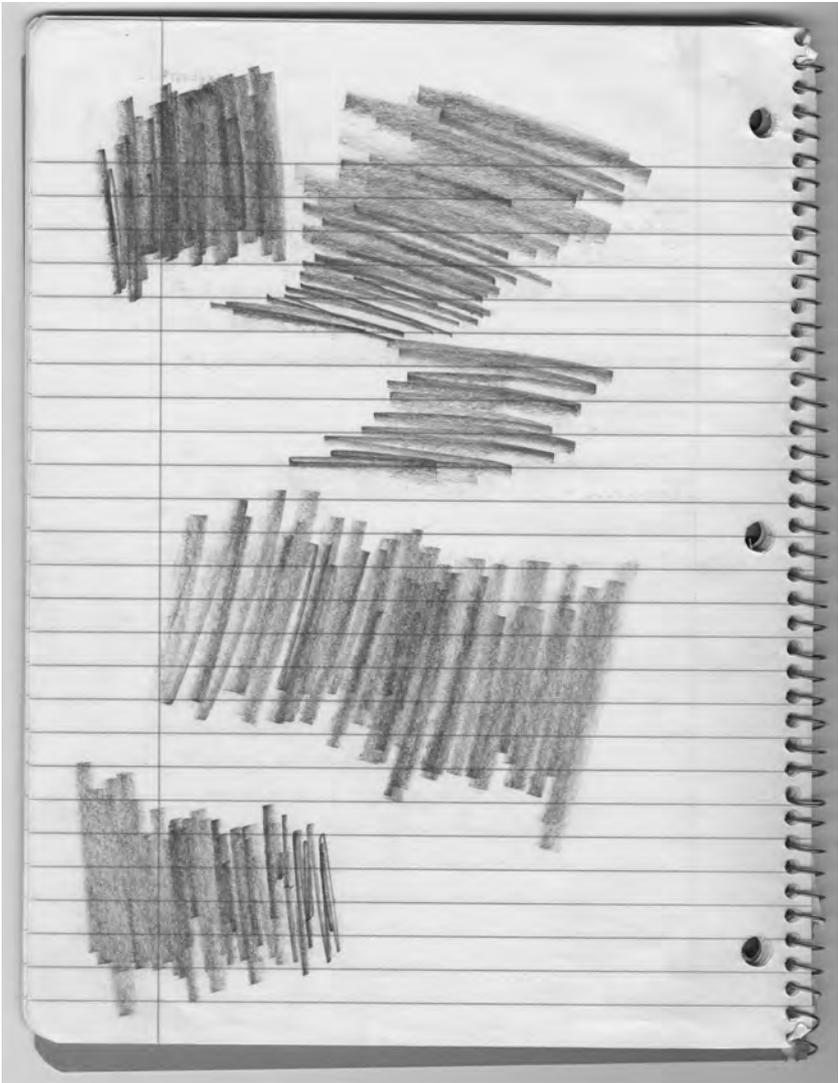


Fig. 12: David Foster Wallace, page from *The Pale King* materials, “Midwesternisms” notebook. Image courtesy of the Harry Ransom Research Center, University of Texas.

as an aggregated medium comprising many component parts, present few constraints for contemporary artists.

The books and other bibliographical material used by Biennial artists were generally parts of larger installations or were one medium used by an artist who chose to use many. The significance of the supporting role played by books in the Biennial should not be underestimated, however. Just as Stella and Reinhardt's black paintings signaled the final step in the elimination of the inessential from painting, books may have a similar role to play for conceptual art. The one component that all conceptual art needs is an idea, and a book, which can take the form of scroll, codex, score, patterned broadside, leporello, audio recording, manuscript sketchbook, and most recently electronic file, and which has long been viewed as the primary means by which to transmit ideas of any kind, whether scientific, philosophical, literary, or artistic, may therefore be the final irreducible essence of conceptual art: an idea without a fixed physical object.⁶³

63. The author would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Amanda Schriver of Chicago for compiling the appendices and securing rights for images, and of Maria Fredericks of New York for reviewing and commenting on an earlier draft of this essay.

APPENDIX 1

Titles in Matthew Deleget installation, *Zero-Sum* (2011–present).

- 10th Circle: March 2–April 13, 2013, VAST space projects.* Shannon McMackin, Smack-sheets Publishing, 2013.
- Balken, Debra Bricker. *After Many Springs: Regionalism, Modernism, & the Midwest.* Des Moines, IA: Des Moines Art Center, 2009.
- Diao, David. *David Diao.* Saint-Etienne: Musée d'art moderne Saint-Etienne, 1989.
- Goossen, E. C. *The Art of the Real; USA, 1948–1968.* New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968; distributed by New York Graphic Society, Greenwich, CT.
- Goulet, Cie. *Abstract painting redefined: Dennis Ashbaugh [and others].* New York: Louis K. Meisel Gallery, 1985.
- Hartley, Marsden, Alfred Stieglitz, and James Timothy Voorhies. *My Dear Stieglitz.* Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002.
- Institute of Contemporary Art (Boston, MA). *The Reductive Object: A Survey of the Minimalist Aesthetic in the 1960s.* Boston: The Museum, 1979.
- Jensen, Alfred. *Alfred Jensen.* [Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1964].
- . *Alfred Jensen: The Acroatic Rectangle.* J.L. Hudson Gallery, 1968.
- . *Alfred Jensen: The Aperspective Structure of a Square: Exhibition March 11–April 4, 1970.* Cordier & Ekstrom, 1970.
- . *Alfred Jensen: The Late Works: December 2–7 January 1984.* New York (32 E. 57, New York 10022): Pace Gallery, 1983.
- . *Alfred Jensen: Paintings.* New York: Pace Gallery, 1991.
- . 1973. *Alfred Jensen: Recent Paintings, the Pace Gallery, October 27–24 November, 1973.* [New York: Pace Editions, 1973].
- Jensen, Alfred, and William C. Agee. *Alfred Jensen: The Number Paintings.* New York: PaceWildenstein, 2006.
- Jensen, Alfred, Linda L. Cathcart, and Marcia Tucker. *Alfred Jensen: Paintings and Diagrams from the Years 1957–1977.* Buffalo, NY: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1978.
- Krauss, Rosalind E. *Grids: Format and Image in 20th Century Art: the Pace Gallery, December 16, 1978–January 20, 1979, the Akron Art Institute, March 24–May 6, 1979.* New York: The Pace Gallery, 1978.
- Lane, John R., and Susan C. Larsen. *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America, 1927–1944.* Pittsburgh, PA: Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, 1984.
- Marian Locks Gallery. *The Purist Image: Ralph Humphrey, Sol Lewitt, Dorothea Rockbourne, Joel Shapiro, Christopher Wilmarth, Jackie Winsor.* Philadelphia, PA: Marian Locks Gallery, 1986.
- Marioni, Joseph, Rex Butler, David Pestorius, and Ross Searle. *Joseph Marioni: Four Paintings.* Brisbane: University Art Museum, University of Queensland, 2000.

- Martin, Leslie, Ben Nicholson, and Naum Gabo. *Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971.
- Morris, George L. K., Willem De Kooning, Alexander Calder, Fritz Glarner, Robert Motherwell, and Stuart Davis. "What Abstract Art Means to Me: Statements from Six American Artists." *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 18, no. 3 (1951).
- Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute. *1913 Armory Show; 50th Anniversary Exhibition, 1963*. 1963.
- Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago, IL). *Wall Painting: Marcia Hafff, Richard Jackson, Lucio Pozzi, Robert Ryman, Robert Yasuda: An Exhibition Organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, March 23–May 13, 1979*. Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1979.
- Museum of Modern Art (New York). *The New American painting: As Shown in Eight European Countries, 1958–1959*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959.
- Museum of Modern Art (New York), and Dorothy Canning Miller. *Sixteen Americans*. New York: Distributed by Doubleday, 1959.
- Museum of Modern Art (New York), and William Chapin Seitz. *The Responsive Eye*. 1965.
- New York University, A. E. Gallatin, James Johnson Sweeney, and Jean Hélon. *Gallery of Living Art, A.E. Gallatin collection, 100 Washington Square East, New York*. 1933.
- New York University, A. E. Gallatin, George L. K. Morris, James Johnson Sweeney, and Jean Hélon. *Museum of Living Art, A.E. Gallatin Collection. New York University*. [New York: G. Grady Press, 1940].
- P.S. 1 Museum. *"Abstract painting, 1960–69": Jo Baer, James Bishop, Sally Hazelet Drummond, Marcia Hafff, Al Held, Ralph Humphrey, Will Insley, Lee Lozano, Robert Mangold, Brice Marden, Agnes Martin, David Novros, Doug Ohlson, Robert Ryman, Tony Smith*. Long Island City, NY: Institute for Art and Urban Resources, 1983.
- Parkinson, Gavin. *The Duchamp Book*. London: Tate, 2008.
- Peltomäki, Kirsi, and Michael Asher. *Situation Aesthetics: The Work of Michael Asher*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010.
- Prokopoff, Stephen S., and Robert Pincus-Witten. *Post-Mondrian Abstraction in America: March 31 to May 13, 1973, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois*. Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1973.
- Samet, Jennifer, and Irving Sandler. *The Jane Street Gallery: Celebrating New York's First Artist Cooperative*. New York: Tibor de Nagy Gallery, 2003.
- State University College at Potsdam, NY. *Abstraction, Alive and Well: An Exhibition of Current and Innovative Directions in American Abstraction, Art Gallery, Brainerd Hall, State University College, Potsdam, New York, November 14–December 16, 1975*. Potsdam, NY: State University College, 1975.
- The Suburban, The Early Years, 1999–2003*. Michelle Grabner, 2003.
- Van Wagner, Judy K. Collischan, and William Zimmer. *Abstract Painting as Surface and Object: Heidi Glück [and others]*. Greenvale, NY: Hillwood Art Gallery, 1985.

Wei, Lilly. *After the Fall: Aspects of Abstract Painting Since 1970 : March 27 September 7, 1997*, Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art. Staten Island, NY: Snug Harbor Cultural Center, 1997.

Whitney Museum of American Art. *Lyrical Abstraction*. 1971.

Whitney Museum of American Art, and John Gordon. *Geometric Abstraction in America*. New York: Published for the Whitney Museum of American Art by Praeger, 1962.

Whitney Museum of American Art, and Maxwell Lincoln Anderson. *American Visionaries: Selections from the Whitney Museum of American Art*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2001.

Whitney Museum of American Art, and Richard Marshall. *Immaterial Objects: Works from the Permanent Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1991.

APPENDIX 2

Titles included in *Semiotext(e): New Series, 2014*.

- Baudrillard, Jean, and David L. Sweet. 2014. *Architecture: Truth or Radicalism; Followed by Is there an Architectural Pact?* Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Bellmany, Dodie. *The Beating of Our Hearts*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Benderson, Bruce. *Against Marriage*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Berardi, Franco. *Neuro-totalitarianism in Technomaya Goog-colonization of the Experience and Neuro-plastic Alternative*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Cortazar, Julio. *Fantomas Versus the Multinational Vampires: An Attainable Utopia*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Doyle, Jennifer. *Campus Security*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Fletcher, Jim, and Harry Matthews. *Week One*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Gonzalez, Veronica. *So Far From God*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Guattari, Emmanuelle, and E. C. Belli. *I, Little Asylum*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Guyotat, Pierre, and Noura Wedell. *Independence*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Hainley, Bruce. *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Indiana, Gary. *A Significant Loss of Human Life*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Jones, William E. *But our Life Depends on What's Real*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Kelsey, John. *Drowning Devourers of the Deep Plane*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Kraus, Chris. *Lost Properties: Some Arguments for and Against the Dematerialization of Art*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- L Lazzarato, M., and Joshua David Jordan. *Marcel Duchamp and the Refusal of Work*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Lefebvre, Henri, and David LeHardy Sweet. *The Missing Pieces*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Lotringer, Sylvère, and Ames Hodges. *The Miserables*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Marazzi, Christian, Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, Andrea Casson, and Pauline Stella Sanchez. *The Linguistic Nature of Money and Finance*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Myles, Eileen. *Street Retreat*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Reines, Ariana. *The Origin Of The World*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Gonzalez Rodriguez, Sergio, and Marco Vera. *Extreme Violence as Spectacle: I Within*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Taïa, Abdellah, and Noura Wedell. *Arabs Are No Longer Afraid: Texts on a Revolution Underway*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.

Tillman, Lynne. *Men and Apparitions: Tales from the Picture People*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.

Duvert, Tony, Bruce Benderson, and Eli Langer. *The Undiscoverable Reading*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.

Von Schlegell, Mark A., and Frances Scholz. *Fainnie Azul*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.

Wang, Jackie. *Against Innocence*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.

Weil, Simone, and Ames Hodges. *Note on the Abolition of all Political Parties*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014.

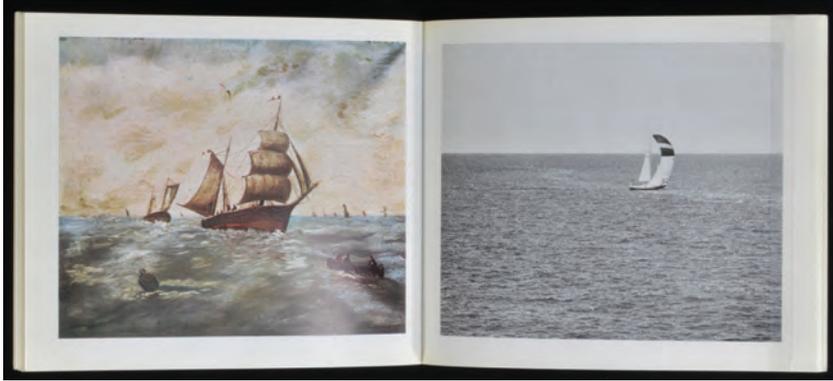


Plate 1: An opening from *A Voyage on the North Sea* showing on the left a photograph of Broodthaers's purchased flea-market painting and on the right the artist's photograph of a modern day sloop. Photograph by Hannah King.

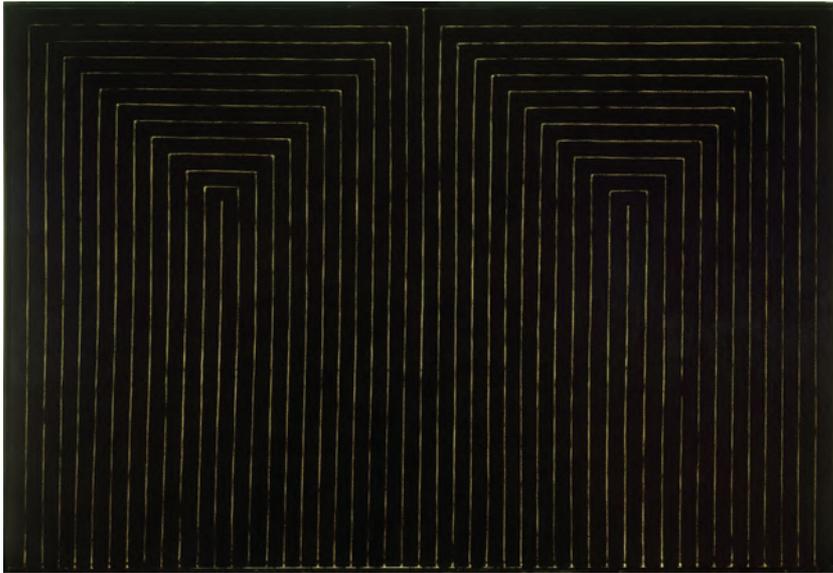


Plate 2: Joseph Stella, *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, II*, 1959. Enamel on canvas, 7.5 × 11.75 ft. Museum of Modern Art. © 2015 Frank Stella / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Plate 3: Ad Reinhardt, *Abstract Painting*, 1963. Oil on canvas, 60 × 60 in. Museum of Modern Art. © 2015 Estate of Ad Reinhardt / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Plate 4: Etel Adnan, December from My Window, 1993. Ink and watercolor on paper. Courtesy of the artist and Callicoon Fine Arts, New York.



Plate 5: Etel Adnan, Five Senses for One Death, 1969. Ink and watercolor on paper. Courtesy of the artist and Callicoon Fine Arts, New York.



Plate 6: Channa Horwitz, *Sonakinatography Composition Number Three Variation Three*, 1993. Casein and ink on mylar; 67 × 47 in. Photo by Robert Wedemeyer, courtesy of the Channa Horwitz Estate and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles.