

Representing Speech in Conceptual Poetry

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ABSTRACT: This article traces the representation of speech in contemporary American poetry through three stages: (1) New York poetry, with its drive toward the “natural,” the actual act of speaking, here represented by Frank O’Hara’s “Lana Turner Has Collapsed!”; (2) Language poetry, in which citations, taken from multiplex sources, jostle with the lyric speaker’s own speech forms in a collage composition, here represented by Charles Bernstein’s “Lives of the Toll Takers”; and (3) Conceptualist poetry, where the entire composition is taken from external sources, but structure is created by deletion and rearrangement, here represented by Kenneth Goldsmith’s “World Trade Center.” Goldsmith carries the representation of speech to a kind of writing degree zero, but recent poets are also devising Conceptualist forms that reinvent the lyric; my example here is Craig Dworkin’s *Pine-Woods Notebook*, which I call a Conceptualist lyric in its use of cited words and phrases for personal ends.

THE TERM *Conceptual poetry* is something of a misnomer. In the art world, Conceptualism, usually said to have been born in the 1960s but in fact going back at least as far as Marcel Duchamp’s *Readymades* of 1915–17, is by no means contested; on the contrary, it has remained the dominant art concept of the past half century: such later twentieth-century movements as Fluxus, Minimalism, Earth Art, and Performance, Installation, and Light Art are Conceptualist in their subordination of the material object to a set of generating ideas. Broadly speaking, Conceptual art plays down the visual dimension of painting or sculpture in favor of an overriding concept and the use of verbal text—the placement of a few words or sentences, say, on a canvas or page, as in the work of John Baldessari or Lawrence Weiner. Logically speaking, if a Conceptual painting is one that defies expectations by subordinating what Duchamp called the “retinal shudder”¹ to language, then a Conceptual poem should be one that substitutes visual

¹ Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (New York: Viking, 1971), 43.

text for verbal composition. But how can there be a poem without words? Not surprisingly, then, critics have been skeptical of the very idea of “Conceptual writing.” Indeed, the term continues to cause outrage in poetry circles. In 2005, when Kenneth Goldsmith published a manifesto-piece called “Paragraphs on Conceptual Writing,”² which was, in fact, simply a recycling of Sol LeWitt’s now-classic 1967 essay “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,”³ substituting the word “author” for “artist” and “writing” for “art” throughout, the poetry community, unaware of the piece’s origins,⁴ raised all sorts of objections to the Conceptualist thesis, thus proving Goldsmith’s point that what had been acceptable in the art world since 1967 could cause consternation among poets and their critics some forty years later. Poetry, by this argument, is way behind.

But how *does* the term transfer from the visual to the verbal arts? In “The Fate of Echo,” his introduction to *Against Expression*, the anthology of Conceptual writing he edited with Kenneth Goldsmith, Craig Dworkin addresses this very issue.⁵ As in the case of the visual arts, he suggests, “the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work,”⁶ but since writing cannot by definition do without language, Conceptualist poetry refers, not to the substitution of image for the expected word, but to the unique link between conception and the text itself.⁷ The basic material remains the written word, but it is now subordinated, as in Conceptual art, to an overriding idea. The word, moreover, is often appropriated from an external source.

Idea and appropriation go hand in hand. For in Conceptual poetics, *choice* and *framing* are central to whatever imaginative transformation takes place. As Duchamp put it in his “anonymous” editorial for *The Blind Man*, defending his submission to the Salon of the Independents (1917) of a urinal labeled *Fountain by R. Mutt*, “Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands *made* the fountain or not has no importance. He *CHOSE* it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object.”⁸

How does the representation of speech work in the “Conceptual” context? I want to talk here about a recent book by Kenneth Goldsmith, entitled *Seven American Deaths and Disasters* (2013), that, like many of Goldsmith’s works, appropriates *actual speech*, in this case the recorded speech (and *only* that speech) of anonymous radio announcers and DJs. But before we look at Goldsmith’s chapter “World Trade Center,”⁹ which reproduces a set of TV and radio broadcasts that covered the disaster of 9/11, let’s look at some earlier examples to which it relates.

Let me begin with the 1960s, when a major—perhaps *the* major—poetic criterion was “authenticity.” The reader was to feel that the poet was giving voice to his or her spontaneous

² Kenneth Goldsmith, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Writing,” in “Kenneth Goldsmith and Conceptual Poetics,” ed. Lori Emerson and Barbara Cole, special issue, *Open Letter* 12, no. 7 (Fall 2005): 98–101, http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith/conceptual_paragraphs.html.

³ Sol LeWitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967).

⁴ The editors of the *Open Letter* issue themselves seem unaware that Goldsmith’s “Paragraphs” is a parody; see their introduction to the issue, 7–9.

⁵ Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith, eds., *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011).

⁶ LeWitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art.”

⁷ Craig Dworkin, “The Fate of Echo,” in Dworkin and Goldsmith, *Against Expression*, xxxvi.

⁸ Calvin Tompkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 185.

⁹ Kenneth Goldsmith, *Seven American Deaths and Disasters* (New York: Powerhouse Books, 2013), 127–54. Hereafter, page numbers for citations from this book will be given in parentheses in the text.

feelings and addressing the reader using words one would actually use on the occasion in question. Here is Frank O'Hara's "Poem (Lana Turner Has Collapsed!)" of 1962:

Lana Turner has collapsed!
 I was trotting along and suddenly
 it started raining and snowing
 and you said it was hailing
 but hailing hits you on the head
 hard so it was really snowing and
 raining and I was in such a hurry
 to meet you but the traffic
 was acting exactly like the sky
 and suddenly I see a headline
 LANA TURNER HAS COLLAPSED!
 there is no snow in Hollywood
 there is no rain in California
 I have been to lots of parties
 and acted perfectly disgraceful
 but I never actually collapsed
 oh Lana Turner we love you get up¹⁰

This poem first became notorious because of the circumstances of its composition: at Wagner College on Staten Island, where O'Hara gave a joint reading with Robert Lowell, O'Hara began by informing the audience that he had written "Lana Turner" on the ferry coming over from Manhattan. Lowell evidently rose to the bait, declaring that *he*, for one, did not compose his poems en route to the reading.¹¹

But O'Hara's seeming spontaneity was, in fact, carefully orchestrated. By 1962, when O'Hara wrote his little lyric, *Lana Turner*, the glamorous "sweater girl" of the forties and femme fatale of such film noir as *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, was a has-been; her career had been badly damaged by her affair with mobster Johnny Stompanato, who was killed in 1958 when Lana's fourteen-year-old daughter, Cheryl Crane, caught the two fighting and killed Stompanato with a kitchen knife. It was like a scene from a "B" movie.

"Lana Turner has collapsed!" The tabloid headline, real or invented, is thus wonderfully absurd, "collapsed" being a curiously empty verb. One can, after all, collapse from exhaustion or a heat stroke as easily as from a heart attack. The silly announcement (probably not the real headline at all!) becomes the occasion for the poet's account of his stressful morning—an account made surprisingly immediate by its address to a nameless you, whose statements are presented as indirect discourse. "Trotting" in line 2 is an odd word choice—animals trot, people don't—making the poet look silly as he confronts the rain, snow, and possible hail: "you said it was hailing / but hailing hits you on the head / hard." The line break and alliteration of *h*'s gives the account an off-tune note. Rain and snow are bad enough, snarling the traffic, and Frank always seems to be late for a lunch date. *But, so, and, and* . . . we can see the "I" getting more and more exasperated when—lo and behold—he sees that headline, LANA TURNER HAS COLLAPSED!

¹⁰ Frank O'Hara, *Lunch Poems* (1964; San Francisco: City Lights, 2014), 62.

¹¹ Marjorie Perloff, *Frank O'Hara: Poet among Painters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 13–14.

It acts like a tonic, making the bad weather suddenly palatable. After all, “there is no snow in Hollywood / there is no rain in California” (at least not in the poster version). The logic of these statements is wholly absurd, suggesting, as they do, that if Lana Turner has collapsed, even in sunny California, the poet trotting about in hail and snow is somehow above the fray: “I have been to lots of parties / and acted perfectly disgraceful / but I never actually collapsed.” Maybe things aren’t so bad after all! And so it’s time for the grand gesture: “oh Lana Turner we love you get up.”

Nothing about this seventeen-line poem, with its breathless, run-on lines capturing the tempo of midtown Manhattan, is dated. Lana Turner remains a potent Hollywood legend (witness Calvin Bedient’s literary magazine by that name), and the moment of everyday life represented—the way an unexpected external stimulus can suddenly break a mood—is made so real we can see and feel it. The feat of such writing is *not saying too much*. Information is kept to a minimum—think how the poem would be spoiled by the details of the Stompanato story—and generalization is avoided. We overhear the poet speaking to himself in “natural” speech rhythms. A lesser poet would tell us what he or she has learned from contemplating the headline or would pontificate about the hollowness of Hollywood glamour. A lesser poet would explain how and *why* he “acted perfectly disgraceful.” Perhaps someone insulted him? Perhaps he was involved in a lovers’ quarrel? Who knows? O’Hara knows better than to dwell on such disclosures: his aim is to portray a situation with which anyone, straight or gay, can identify. And so he gives us that final campy gesture, “oh Lana Turner we love you get up.” The addressee of these lines is of course the reader, won over by Frank’s charm and good humor, and ready to laugh with him. How terrible life, but how funny! And, let’s all remember, “we” do get up again!¹²

Frank O’Hara’s poetry achieves this calculated spontaneity by its delicate adjustments of *tone*—the relationship of speaker to addressee to which we, as readers, are privy and complicit. It was a great feat—and John Ashbery’s poetry creates similar effects—but within a decade New York poetry, as it was called, had become fairly routine, as poet after poet played the game of recounting the day’s sights and activities as witnessed on the city streets. By the later 1970s, in any case, authenticity had become highly suspect: it was the heyday in the United States of the Poststructuralist turn. By the time the Language poets came on the scene, “natural speech” had become a phrase of opprobrium. In “Stray Straws and Straw Men” (1976), the *chef d’école* of the Language school, Charles Bernstein, declared emphatically, “There is no natural look or sound to a poem. Every element is intended, chosen. That is what makes a thing a poem.” And again, “There are no thoughts except through language, we are everywhere seeing through it, limited to it but not by it. Its conditions always interpose themselves: a particular set of words to choose from (a vocabulary), a way of processing those words (syntax, grammar): the natural conditions of language.”¹³

In the *writerly* poetry occasioned by this aesthetic, the representation of speech thus takes a rather different turn. In Bernstein’s “The Lives of the Toll Takers” (1994), for example, the collaged phrases recorded are no longer simulations of actual speech like “you said it was hailing” but rather echoes of already-existing speech formations—poems, songs, advertising jingles,

¹² For a slightly different version of this discussion of O’Hara’s poem, see Marjorie Perloff, “Reading Frank O’Hara’s *Lunch Poems* 50 Years Later,” *Poetry*, January 2015, 386–88.

¹³ Charles Bernstein, “Stray Straws and Straw Men,” in *Content’s Dream: Essays, 1975–1984* (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1986), 49.

citations—often recharged for comic or satiric effect so as to simulate, not actual speech itself, but the *feel* of what is heard, processed, absorbed, in everyday situations. For example:

Phone again, phone again jiggityjig.

I figured

they do good eggs here.

Funny \$ making a killing on

Junk bonds and living to peddle the tale

(victimless rime)

(Laughing all the way to the Swiss bank where I put my money
in gold bars

(the prison house of language]¹⁴

The first line above plays on the nursery rhyme “To market to market to buy a fat pig / Home again, home again, jiggity jig.” “Phone” replaces “home” because in our market economy it is the “right” phone call that makes the trade, never mind going to market to buy something to eat. “I figured / they do good eggs here” simulates the words of a fellow marketer explaining why he or she chose a particular restaurant for breakfast. Even this choice has been “figured” or calculated. “Funny money” (“\$”) is literally counterfeit, but in our culture all money is, in one sense, “counterfeit”—an empty signifier with nothing to back it up. “Living to peddle the tale” is a variant on the cliché “living to tell the tale,” the verb “peddle” supporting the “junk bond” motif in what is a “victimless rime” (rhymes with “crime”). Indeed, here the “crime,” like the rhyme, is victimless in that the victims of Wall Street crime are anonymous and too numerous to specify, making it possible for the winners of the game to “laugh all the way,” not just to the bank, as the clichéd expression has it, but “to the Swiss bank,” where they can put their money “in gold bars.” Swiss banks, we know, are the banks of choice for rich investors. “The prison house of language” (Fredric Jameson’s famous title of his study critiquing Russian Formalism) is indeed the house of high finance that imprisons us all, the market discourse of the *Wall Street Journal* and its cognates. In this context, the toll takers of the title are not only those actual money collectors on the highways, performing their mindless routine, but also those whose “taking” of their fellow citizens inflicts such a huge toll.

Bernstein’s poetic language is replete with puns, double entendres, nursery rhyme and song echoes, bits of popular culture, proverbs, allusions to academic jargon, and so on. Highly syncretic, complexly figured, “Lives of the Toll Takers” is a difficult poem that demands—and rewards—deciphering and interpretation. As in the case of O’Hara and New York poetry, the emulation of Bernstein’s brilliant poetry by lesser Language poets could result in unnecessarily opaque—and even formulaic—works in the drive to defy normal syntax and “the referential fallacy” at any cost. Within the next decade, as digital culture and the Internet became normative,

¹⁴ Charles Bernstein, “The Lives of the Toll Takers,” in *All the Whiskey in Heaven: Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 151.

poets began to rebel against what often looked like, not just loading, as in Keats's metaphor, but *overloading*—"every rift with ore." Individual invention, of pithy phrase, line, verbal construct, gave way to increasing reliance on Other People's Words, on appropriation, citation, retyping, erasing, recycling, sampling, archiving—on all those acts of language manipulation that transform its content and purpose. In terms of classical rhetoric, *inventio* and *elocutio* are supplanted by *dispositio*—choosing, framing, reconstructing.

Much of what passes for "Conceptual poetry" is not very interesting. It is a form of writing that *seems* easy: just take a text—say, the testimony of a Guantanamo prisoner or an SS officer—and put it through some computer program or database, superimpose it on some other text, or apply Oulipo rules to it, and presto, a Conceptual poem! But at its best, Conceptualism has given us some fascinating texts: consider Kenneth Goldsmith's 2013 book *Seven American Deaths and Disasters*, to which I now turn.

Seven Deaths is described by its author on the jacket flap as "a series of prose poems that encapsulate seven pivotally iconic moments in recent American history: the John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, and John Lennon assassinations, the space shuttle Challenger disaster, the Columbine shootings, 9/11, and the death of Michael Jackson." "Impartial reportage," writes the author, "is revealed to be laced with subjectivity, bias, mystery, second-guessing, and in many cases, white-knuckled fear. Part nostalgia, part myth, these words render pivotal moments in American history through the communal lens of media."

"World Trade Center," which I found myself rereading on the thirteenth anniversary of 9/11 in 2014, is taken from a variety of sources listed under "Technical Notes" in the back of the book. It begins with a CNN television report that then breaks down and gives way to radio broadcasts from the New York stations WABC, WOR, WFAN, and WNYC, although the stations aren't specified in the text itself, which is presented as a seamless narrative. In his afterword, Goldsmith makes clear that the piece was written by "surgically extracting punchy excerpts which seemed to embody the spirit of the fuller tapes; stumbles and stutters were left intact. During these readings I embodied the voice of those radio announcers, re-enacting—and reclaiming—the soundtrack I heard on Bleecker and Sixth" (175)—where the poet himself was evidently standing, watching the spectacle in utter disbelief.

At first, I was skeptical of Goldsmith's claim that this and the six other radio/TV transcriptions could be called "prose poems." But the appellation turns out to be perfectly just. The main device is a kind of fugal repetition, of words being introduced and repeated again and again, only to be dropped when their validity is called into question. Thus, the first part modulates certain phrases with what are almost Gertrude Steinian inflections:

Did you see any *smoke*
Smoke continues to *billow*
Black smoke is *billowing* from what appears to be all sides
 You can see the *smoke billowing* out. There are flames *billowing* out there

But then:

I don't see the building because there's an awful lot of *thick smoke*.¹⁵

¹⁵ My italics.

And soon the descriptive terms give way to the more abstract “explosion”—a word used again and again, as the awful realization that there has been a second explosion sinks in (135). “Explosion” is in turn replaced by the verb “collapsed,” soon accompanied by simple negatives: “I can’t tell,” “I don’t see it,” “I don’t see the building.” And finally all attempts to *describe* what is actually happening give way, on WNYC, to the first speculations as to who might have done it, whether it might have been Osama bin Laden, and what the fate of America will be.

The language of “World Trade Center” is entirely appropriated, but it is also carefully chosen and structured. It begins, as these broadcasts actually begin, on a low key:

This just in. You are looking at obviously a very disturbing live shot there. That is the World Trade Center and we have unconfirmed reports this morning that a plane has crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Center. (127)

A plane crash, “devastating” (the word is repeated a number of times) but evidently accidental. For the first few pages the emphasis is on “crash.” What kind of plane is it? Did it have difficulty flying? A question deeply ironic in the context, especially since the eyewitness, Sean Murtagh, the vice-president for finance at CNN whose office is “on the twenty-first floor of five Penn Plaza,” immediately says, “yes it did. It was teetering back and forth, wingtip to wingtip, and it looks like it crashed into, probably . . . maybe the eightieth to eighty-fifth floor” (128). The reporters can’t fathom it: they’re wondering why the plane doesn’t come out of the other side of the tower, and only after much pointless information from eyewitnesses as to which of the two towers was hit and which one has the top-floor observation platform, the news of the second explosion and the collapse of that tower comes in the following passage:

We just received word that the south tower has collapsed!
 OK.
 Wow.
 The. South. Tower . Has. Collapsed.
 You’d almost think there was some type of secondary explosion.
 Ugh! Oh! I mean that’s . . . that’s . . . that’s . . . that’s . . .
 That would . . . that would . . . that would . . . And you have to wonder how that
 Let’s just think about this logically.
 There is no logic.
 Oh my God!
 . . . uh . . . uh . . . a hijacked air . . . air . . . airliner. (138–39)

Here, finally, twelve pages into the text, the word “hijacked” appears for the first time, soon followed by “catastrophic,” as the news of the Pentagon attack and the attack over Pennsylvania comes in. It finally dawns on the radio team in question that “the United States, uh, could be under attack.” “I don’t know about you, Joe,” says Ed, “but I got the shakes” (140). What to say? It’s the moment for cliché to weigh in: “this is a day that will live in infamy,” one announcer declares. “The morning of this day . . . the 11th of September 2001 . . . will live in infamy.” To regurgitate Roosevelt’s famous words about Pearl Harbor is comforting—but only for a moment before the recognition sets in that “[t]here are no words at all to express this” (141).

In part V of T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (“The Fire Sermon”), there is a reference to bombing during World War I in the lines “Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air / Falling towers

/ Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London / Unreal.” Substitute New York for those cities and it is all quite real—or surreal—enough. Talk of *explosion* now gives way to *negation*: “the north tower...has collapsed. / Oh, yes, it’s not there! / It is not there. It is not there” (142). “We can tell you that there are no towers standing.” And now finally, sixteen pages into the composition, the word “terrorist” occurs. Terrorist attacks, “war zone”—a situation beyond description. In such situations, language breaks down, the World Trade Center, we hear, “has collapsed in clubble...uh...in rubble” (144).

What to say when there is nothing one can say but must keep talking for no better reason than that one is *on the air*? And how can these unpracticed disk jockeys or other radio heads get at the “truth” behind the momentary images? Description now gives way to theorizing. Who did it? Was it an Islamic terrorist group? But look at the Oklahoma bombing, which turned out to be the work of homegrown, blond Neo-Nazis. Then again, Lawrence Eagleburger says . . . The talk turns to Osama bin Laden, as the unspeakable inevitably gives way to rumor and speculation. And then in the final section (VII), the whole event is framed and distanced. A radio head named George informs his listeners: “This afternoon they’re not letting reporters anywhere close to the area where the two World Trade towers collapsed earlier today. I’m standing right next to the Manhattan Bridge” (154). And the piece closes with these words:

And just below me is a park right near the edge of Chinatown. And while there’s continue to chat as if nothing is going on. Their markets are open. They’re shopping, they’re...they’re... they’re buying their fish. Uh, it’s...it’s as if this little corner of New York City was totally unaffected, but you know, it’s at the top of their minds. They’re pointing up in the air periodically and they’re continuing with their card games. So it’s, uh, just a little snapshot of, uh, a piece of New York as they deal with this immense tragedy. (154)

The irony of the hyperreal! In almost every account of 9/11 available, whether by journalists or poets, by “ordinary” bystanders or government officials, the text culminates in horror and despair, often laced with moralism. But the fact is that in the cavern of Wall Street and its surroundings, the tall buildings make it impossible to see anything at a distance, and so local neighborhoods like Chinatown are self-contained and protected. The “billowing smoke” evidently didn’t reach this area. Ironically, although no one can get either into Manhattan or out of it, although smoke and fire can be seen from miles away, in Chinatown, George tells us, people are playing cards and buying fish. Life, even in this instance, goes on.

Goldsmith’s “World Trade Center” condenses roughly nine hours of broadcasting—from 9:00 A.M. (the first crash occurred at 8:46 A.M.) to about 6:00 P.M.—into less than an hour’s worth of actual reading time (twenty-seven pages) but keeps the exact wording and broken rhythm of the original “jerky, jittery texts” that Goldsmith transcribes. The poet has not invented a single word. But he has selected his text fragments very carefully. We thus have the sensation of witnessing the event *as it happens* and as it is mediated; we are *there*, knowing no more than what the broadcast teams can tell us. What thus emerges for our contemplation is a tale of horror much worse than that of a natural disaster. For the most blatant failure, we learn, is one of *intelligence*: how could no one have known what was happening? The shrewd suppositions about bin Laden near the end only make it worse. The government was, not only literally but figuratively, “in exile.” And security at the World Trade Center, whose towers had already been the object of attack some ten years earlier, seems to have been nonexistent. Then again, at this media moment, who knows?

Goldsmith's Conceptual prose poem, I would argue, gives us a much more vivid presentation of what it felt like to experience the events of 9/11 than a more conventional lyric poem or short story could do. The "real" speech of the protagonists—so bland, repetitive, fragmented, unimaginative—doesn't summarize or draw moral lessons. It simply *is*, its very momentum defining the public consciousness of the moment. Part parody ode, part satire, part science fiction, and part reportage, the speech reproduced in "World Trade Center" is nothing if not *moving*. You, dear reader (or listener), are there, living through the events. The poet need not comment in his own person for you to experience the uncertainty, fear, and horror.

Conceptual writing like Goldsmith's is thus very much of the moment. But it is perhaps best understood as a clearing of the ground—the mediated ground—before the return to lyric sets in. Charles Bernstein has recently written some wonderful ballads about the death of his daughter Emma. Goldsmith himself is about to bring out *Capital*, his version of Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, a kind of ode to New York made up of found text. And Goldsmith's coeditor of the Conceptualist anthology, Craig Dworkin, has just published a long poem called *The Pine-Woods Notebook*,¹⁶ a meditation on all the possible meanings of the monosyllabic words "pitch" and "pine," so as to see how and where the two intersect. To define the inspired by the dictionary in its elaborate exfoliations, *The Pine-Woods Notebook* is at once esoteric and familiar, a mock-epic version of such Romantic conversation poems as Coleridge's *The Lime-Tree Bower: My Prison*. Its short lines or strophes, separated by white space, take the form of individual aphorisms or textbook scientific descriptors, speech rhythms and contours being notoriously absent.

In keeping with the Conceptualist model, many of Dworkin's declarative sentences are appropriated, in translation, from other texts. But his is hardly the simulation of actual speech, much less recorded speech taken from TV and radio discourse. Indeed, the language of *The Pine-Woods Notebook* is resolutely literary, a set of subtly sounded phrases and sentences generated by what is primarily an etymological project. Call it Conceptual lyric. In 2015, then, we seem to be coming full circle to the writerly text one associates with poeticity. But it is writerly with a difference: the digital age demands a more collaborative poetry, in this case one where both author and reader turn to the Internet to look things up and thus create meanings. In the words of *The Pine-Woods Notebook* itself, "The several denotations are seduced to commute." A

¹⁶ Craig Dworkin, *The Pine-Woods Notebook* (forthcoming).