

# THE WOMEN IN VISUAL POETRY: THE BECHDEL TEST



curated by  
**JESSICA SMITH**

Heaven and Hell

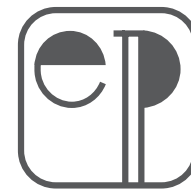


featuring  
**MICHELLE DETORIE**  
**GILLIAN DEVEREUX**  
**K. S. ERNST**  
**K. LORRAINE GRAHAM**  
**SHEILA MURPHY**  
with an afterword by  
**MAUREEN THORSON**

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ESSAY PRESS LISTENING TOUR



#18

## ESSAY PRESS LISTENING TOUR

As the Essay Press website re-launches, we have commissioned some of our favorite conveners of public discussions to curate conversation-based chapbooks. Overhearing such dialogues among poets, prose writers, critics and artists, we hope to re-envision how Essay can emulate and expand upon recent developments in trans-disciplinary small-press cultures.

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## INTRODUCTION

—Jessica Smith

Last year, I edited a large issue of *Evening Will Come*, “Women of Visual Poetry,” highlighting the work of 63 female poets who responded to the call for “visual poetry.” When Cristiana Baik asked me to curate three related conversations for Essay Press, I knew I wanted to return to the issue of gender and visual poetry.

I approached five women who I knew would have interesting things to say and gave them (us) specific assignments: noted visual poets Sheila Murphy and K. S. (Kathy) Ernst would talk about their collaborations; Gillian Devereux and Michelle Detorie would discuss their recent erasure projects; and K. Lorraine Graham and I would talk about visual poetry generally, with reference to our work. The conversations developed across multiple platforms. Sheila and Kathy emailed and called each other and their friends to map out a conversation before the recorded part of the conversation, which is transcribed here, began on the

phone. Gillian and Michelle gathered material from recordings, videos, chats and Twitter conversations before co-editing a conversation over Google Docs. Lorraine and I chatted on GChat as well as in our Google Doc, spoke in person, texted and tweeted until we rounded out a conversation from dozens of sudden ideas.

I mention the media through which the following dialogs were composed because these conversations are part of larger, ongoing conversations between the participants—of which you, the reader, are only getting a glimpse. Lorraine, Michelle, Gillian and I talk almost every day, almost all day, via social media and email, about our lives and our work. Our lives and work are deeply intertwined. We influence and inspire and take care of each other. I asked these people to participate because I know their work, their drafts and their lives intimately, and they know each others’, which leads to deeply intimate conversations, in contrast to impersonal interviews. Similarly, Sheila and Kathy have been close friends and collaborators for years. I knew their experience collaborating with each other would yield a strong conversation, since conversation is also collaborative.

Initially, my desire as an editor was to provoke interesting conversations about visual poetry among women who

knew each other's visual poetry, and knew each other, well. What emerged during the production process was different and more radical than I had anticipated. To me, the love of these women for each other and each other's work is clear in the way they speak to each other. There are excited affirmations, quick-shared revelations, and knowledgeable references to each other's work.

The homosocial has long been celebrated in poetry, but it is usually male. Think of the Romantics, the New York School, the San Francisco Renaissance, Black Mountain, contemporary visual poetry, and much of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry. History tells us that these groups are male, and females are relegated to the fringe. They're portrayed as the girlfriends, maybe, the sisters, the one crazy bitch who doesn't take any shit, the one genius spinster who keeps to herself, the token woman kept on hand to absolve the men of "sexism." Now we have something that, although not *actually* new, is burst wide open and ready to celebrate itself. Here we have women openly taking up space together, talking to each other, loving each other, and creating with each other on a daily basis.



Jessica Smith &  
K. Lorraine Graham



**Jessica Smith:** Hi Lorraine. I wanted to talk to you about visual poetry because we talked about it for *Area Sneaks* years ago and it went well. And because I think we both work with visual elements but aren't usually considered "visual poets" by the people who consider themselves "visual poets." How are you engaging the visual field in your work right now?

**K. Lorraine Graham:** I go back to terms like "plasticity" and "material" to think about the visual elements of my work, and also to the body. To read a poem with one's eyes is to engage eye muscles and synapses. As poets, we can

K. Lorraine Graham joined group chat.

**Jessica Smith**

7:12 PM

We can actually chat here too.

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:12 PM

Even better.  
Maybe this piece can just become a space where we reference all the things we've said about vispo elsewhere.

**Jessica Smith**

7:13 PM

Well, we have said a lot of great things.

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:13 PM

choose to emphasize that particular kind of bodily engagement with a text. The poem is a work on paper, or a work on the screen. Looking back at your response to my initial question in the *Area Sneaks* visual poetry forum from all those years ago, I see my current response is then more or less a paraphrase of what you said.

There's also an interview on visual poetry I did with *The Scrambler* at the same time I was putting together the forum, which reminds me of how my engagement with literary art is also an engagement with arts communities. I'm often most excited by work that is transdisciplinary or

So quotes from the interview with rob mclennan.  
Yes. We have said a lot of great things.

**Jessica Smith**

7:13 PM

I was thinking of quoting from my own interview but thought that was a little over the top not like quoting from the *Area Sneaks* conversation which was a conversation and this is like a sequel

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:14 PM

Right, I see that.

**Jessica Smith**

7:14 PM

I feel like we could say something about women and bodies and space and time.

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:14 PM

I think I put a self-quote in there.

doesn't conform to genre, even though I think most of the work I produce is generically stable. I still go back to Tina Darragh's "Project Report," for example which, lo and behold, I reference in that interview:

"Tina Darragh's work has become increasingly important to me. She's a poet I also know from Washington, D.C. and often associated with Language Poetry. In 1999 she started working on a project that eventually became *opposable dumbs*, a multigenre piece that combines reportage, theater, letters of protest, visual pieces, and notes that examine and think about pain, animal subjectivity, economics, labor unions, feminism...

Yes.

---

**Jessica Smith**

7:14 PM

you did but it's old, so it's not really you.

I **just** did this other interview. It's not even out yet.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:14 PM

The area sneaks piece and that era is indeed ancient. Ok so. Women. Bodies. Time

---

**Jessica Smith**

7:16 PM

OK I'm going to talk about Daybooks and quote this: "A lot has been said about whether women are allowed to take up space (shrinking, starving, shriveling, being ornament, prolapsing—while men have presence, power, instrumentality, and girth). Perhaps, though, less has been said about whether

Even after years of hearing her perform different parts of this piece and now reading the 2007 'project report' I have trouble summarizing it. Her work has so many possible sources that connect and expand into other possible sources. It's investigative and process-oriented, but the process and investigation are always shifting."

I spent part of my summer looking at Helen Adam's visual work in the poetry archive at SUNY Buffalo. I'm intrigued by how her work engages with pop culture. Many of her collages combine fashion advertisements with animal images and look like proto-happycat memes, and her collaged scrapbooks are full of

women are allowed to inhabit time.

Are we starved for the present moment? Restricted from it?"

This really intrigues me.

How women take up space/ time.

esp since there are so few women in visual poetry or recognized as being part of vispo's scene

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:16 PM

And how the work references or enacts that.

Alice Notley wanting to write lots of big, thick books.

---

**Jessica Smith**

7:17 PM

oh yes! say that! (you can go ahead and start sticking stuff in so you remember to say it if you want)

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:17 PM

references to and quotes from romance novels. Her works are neither “dirty” nor “clean” (see Lori Emerson’s discussion of the origin of the term “dirty concrete poetry”). They are legible: collaged image + caption. Again, they look a lot like memes. They are richly, consciously citational and rely on the interplay between image and text for their effects.

Poetry works with visual rhythms as well as aural ones. The repetition of certain images in Helen Adam’s work (cats, Scotsmen in kilts, animals, mushroom clouds) creates rhythm.

**JS:** Yes! The line is visual and aural and physical. I just did a long interview with rob mclennan about this for a *Touch the Donkey* supplement, in which I said

My recent book required a lot of labor and movement, but the finished product is meant to be soothing. Ok.

---

**Jessica Smith**

7:21 PM

Ooh talk about movement and inhabiting bodies and yoga.

I was also thinking about talking about Chinese. I started writing poetry like this after I went to China. And now I’m teaching Paul Chinese so he can think differently.

I think we can leave that in. it sounds like a conversation.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:22 PM

Blech. I think I’m trying to say what I might have already said above.

---

**Jessica Smith**

that one of the biggest artistic revelations for me was discovering Gotthold Lessing’s *Laocoon* via James Joyce’s *Ulysses* when I was a freshman in college, because Lessing gave me words to talk about the physical space of the page. Lessing describes visual art as an art of simultaneity, and music as an art of succession. Of course, music happens in space and visual art happens in time. It’s a false binary, but it’s a useful false binary. The plastic arts (sculpture, installation, architecture) deconstruct this binary by requiring the audience to move through/around them in time and space. The spacing of my poems calls attention to the fact that language

7:23 PM

You could split up the above text so it looks more like a convo  
plus i’d like to get into talking about handwriting

---

**Jessica Smith**

7:32 PM

Our conversation should really just be:  
Yes!  
Yes!  
Yes!  
Yes!

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:39 PM

Yes yes yes!

---

**Jessica Smith**

7:47 PM

Sorry about being the worst chapbook publisher ever!  
LWTLO is a cool book.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:48 PM

Ha!



isn't just successive (like music) or simultaneous (like painting) but requires both time (succession) and space (simultaneity). Spacing is often only seen as important insofar as lines break or don't break, but the way that a poem is arranged on a page can completely alter the reading. Poetry is usually seen as "lyrical" and more related to music than to art, but I think it's more complicated than that. Visual poetry calls attention to the medium of poetry, showing that written language isn't a transparent score for oral performance.

Remember those poems in *Area Sneaks*, the mod diary poems where I was cutting up my diary into 1" squares and pasting these together like a quilt (*Area Sneaks* is like the ghost of this

That's ok.  
I think I might self-publish it.

---

**Jessica Smith**

7:48 PM

you should send it to mclennan

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:48 PM

I like how it's a text that keeps resurfacing for me. Waves. obstacles.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:49 PM

Never mind about the pens. I'm going to delete that.

---

**Jessica Smith**

7:49 PM

asian pens are the best.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:49 PM

I know!

conversation)? That's kind of the birth of the visual project I'm working on now, although the current one, *The Daybooks*, is not colorful or as clearly collage. It's composed of excerpts from my diaries from the last 15 years, quotations from things I was reading, and my contemporaneous reactions to those feelings and thoughts, the way memory is a collage of elements—polyvocal and richly textured. The words on the page are fragmented. I'm going to cite my favorite Charles Bernstein excerpt (from *Content's Dream*) here:

"Thinking' as the conceptual basis of literary production suggests the possibilities

---

**Jessica Smith**

7:50 PM

my japanese student brought me an awesome erasable fine tip pen  
americans don't know what they're missing

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:50 PM

Maybe we can note that we had a conversation about pens without recounting the whole conversation.

---

**Jessica Smith**

7:51 PM

I am building up to the Helen White thing now

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:51 PM

(ok) I'm going to get another beer.

---

**Jessica Smith**

7:51 PM

√

for leaps, jumps, fissures, repetition, bridges, schisms, colloquialisms, trains of associations, and memory; as a literary mode it would rely on concepts related to spontaneity, free association, and improvisation.”

**KLK:** I love that quote.

**JS:** I know!!

**KLK:** I haven’t made a visual poem in a long time, but I’ve recently returned to some of the reading notes/ doodles I made in the mid-2000s. I still want to publish them as a book of (visual) essays. My book forthcoming from Coconut this winter/ spring is not a visual poetry manuscript, but most of the writing and then the editing process was about how to write on a bus for a long time, and writing until I became too nauseous to

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:57 PM

too interruptive?

Nice segue

---

**Jessica Smith**

7:58 PM

I think we sutured this together impressively.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:58 PM

totally

---

**Jessica Smith**

7:58 PM

Where should we go after the Helen White thing? I will let you think about it while I go get a drink.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:01 PM

ok

I wonder if we can lean on the clean/dirty thing more? I want to make a grand argument that

continue—and then how to make poems from that experience which did not enact the same kind of masochism and desperation. My commute was my writing time. The poems became kinder when I gave them more white space. In contrast, my procedural/ archival/collaged long poem-story *White Girl* uses dense blocks of prose paired with dense blocks of footnotes to overwhelm readers.

Talking about the use of space and line breaks as being visual is pretty basic stuff, but it’s important. The line is visual and aural. I like to use space as a way of visually evoking breath.

**JS:** You know, I also think of the white space as

there’s potentially a tradition of collage and visual work by women poets (thinking of all the alicia notley collages that are in the UCSD archives). I mean. Everyone makes collages. Almost everyone makes visual things.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:04 PM

You don’t have a title? oh right. nevermind

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:04 PM

1) Meta Horror 2) The Men Are Etcetera or 3) The Rest Is Censored

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:04 PM

META HORROR obviously

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:05 PM

breath—although there are always multiple strands going on in my poems so it's not like "a breath" singular: it's like, "space to breathe." In contrast to a poem like "Veil" (to go back to Charles Bernstein) or to Steve McCaffery's *Theory of Sediment*, which are dense and breath-less, like there's not enough room to breathe, which is also a poetic effect. I also think about that white space as a place where the reader's own thoughts intervene, like the weft of the weave of the page. I think about John Cage's *Europerras* and the play on "Europe" and "your," and how he intends audiences to bring their own memories of the classical operas to the aural field as they're listening.

It's a good title, but it doesn't fit with the poems.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:05 PM

Damnit

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:05 PM

I will have to write another book called meta horror

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:05 PM

the rest is censored is my 2nd choice

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:06 PM

There are so many books now that have men in the title

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:08 PM

you can't have men in the title after The Men.  
btw I don't think we can have links in the text, so we should

**KLK:** Sometimes the white space is also a place of breath (and rest) for the writer, a way of attending to difficult material.

**JS:** Yes. And speaking of physical reactions, I also get nauseous when I'm writing—especially with *The Daybooks* project. It brings up a lot of bad memories (when you're dealing with 15 years of memories, some are going to be traumatic), and I react to them physically. In a way it still seems radical to me just to be a woman inhabiting a body and inhabiting a writerly space.

Amanda Ackerman recently wrote on the Harriet blog:

go back through later and try to give enough contextual information that people can look up the references without the links if they choose. (which they will not, of course)  
I think we should split the page of the chapbook and have this running commentary down the side.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:10 PM

Yes, actually.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:11 PM

I was looking over it to see if we said anything incriminating. I don't think so really.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:12 PM

(I am listening to Alexander Scriabin—T. put him on after realizing he shows up in a Frank O'Hara poem.) I don't

"A lot has been said about whether women are allowed to take up space (shrinking, starving, shriveling, being ornament, prolapsing—while men have presence, power, instrumentality, and girth). Perhaps, though, less has been said about whether women are allowed to inhabit time. Are we starved for the present moment? Restricted from it?"

My voice about traumatic events (perhaps deemed by some poets to be too melodramatic), about my time, bringing my fragmented personal past-time into the Public Present-Time, is somehow also radical. I feel like my insistence on inhabiting the space of the page is a step into a codified territory that is historically not mine—visual poetry, especially,

think we've said anything incriminating, agreed.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:13 PM

Nice! Go T. I remember really liking him. I rarely listen to anything but jazz and pop anymore. I used to have these great listening ears and now I'm just lazy and want things to sound nice.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:13 PM

I listen to pop, because it's full of melodrama

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:14 PM

I was thinking today about Dottie Lasky listening to rap and me listening to Regina Spektor (who reminds me of Dottie so it's full circle) and wondering how what you listen to in

seems male-dominated. Even though there are lots of female writers, there's still something to be said about female experience and inhabiting space.

**KLK:** Melodrama is a form that historically features gutsy heroines shrieking really loudly or smartmouthing, women adventurers taking up space. When I think of your "melodramatic" poems, one of which I heard you read recently, I'm reminded of how inhabiting/referencing a particular genre creates an automatic series of references, both visual and otherwise: a woman mourning and shrieking and pulling out her hair. Taking up space,

your free time affects your poetry. I mean obviously it does. So much about poetry and jazz.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:16 PM

Yes. I am struggling to write out this definition of dirty/clean.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:16 PM

what are you saying over there

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:16 PM

I will now try harder.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:20 PM

Ugh.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:21 PM

I'm thinking about how Appolinaire (whose name I

physically, visually and aurally.

We'll eventually have to have a (or another) long conversation about melodrama and lament, after we've both finished our current projects. But I also want to talk about handwriting.

**JS:** Yes! Melodrama is "you're taking up too much space—stop making a scene" (like gaslighting). We will have this conversation.

Let's talk about handwriting and also calligraphy?

**KLG:** Yes!

**JS:** OK, so we were talking privately about how I am forcing my son Paul, who's four, to take Chinese classes (he loves them by the way). And how I started writing

can never goddamn spell) said that calligrams resolve. visual poetry doesn't always resolve. calligrams are clean. in this definition.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:22 PM

Right.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:26 PM

This is like doing a multidimensional jigsaw puzzle. We are literally typing over each other. Which I guess is like a verbal conversation. I'm going to let you figure out how to get from Dirty to Alice.... I am not sure what you want to say.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:28 PM

Oh, now I'm thinking about Mina Loy's punctuation too

multilinear/plastic poetry after visiting China as a teenager, because I wanted to use the page space in ways other than top-bottom, left-right.

**KLG:** And my first long poem was a procedural translation from classical Chinese.

**JS:** Exactly. How does your study of Chinese inform your use of the page now? Or does it?

**KLG:** I've been thinking about Chinese again because I have the opportunity to speak it more in my current job. That procedural translation eventually became a long poem called "Large Waves to Large Obstacles." Chinese characters are both visual and aural,

And visual verbal rhymes: "I would an eye in a Bengal light" etc.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:32 PM

And then one gets used to the quotation marks.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:33 PM

Say that.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:33 PM

I think I am running out of brain power.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:33 PM

I know, well, me too. But we have said a lot already. I think we can wrap it up, or we can look at it again tomorrow.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:34 PM

and many radicals/roots give indications of sound rather than meaning. So the relationship between how a word looks visually and how it sounds is something I became aware of by studying Chinese.

**JS:** One thing I like about looking at Chinese, and at other languages I don't know or don't know well, is the feeling that language can still be mysterious and impenetrable and entirely physical.

**KLG:** Yes! A quick anecdote. I spent the summer after my first year of college in Beijing, translating contracts for a petrochemical company. I did most of my shopping at a covered market. I remember, very clearly, the day I realized that the sign above the market said "market." These were

Let's try to wrap it up. But we can also look at it again tomorrow.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:34 PM

This is already 2,300 words so I think we could stop now and figure out how to end it tomorrow?  
ok

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:35 PM

I broke a nail.  
Ok.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:35 PM

Aw! .

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:35 PM

Let's rest. and look at it tomorrow. I am smarter in the morning.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:35 PM

characters I knew, but I'd only registered them visually. So somehow they were mysterious and legible at the same time.

**JS:** This is what I want to do in my poetry, the "Aha!" moment I want readers to have when everything suddenly "comes together," like when you first learn to read (even in your first language) and you realize that the letters sound out the word and the word (poof) is familiar. As you become more highly literate, this feeling is mostly lost in your native language and you can only get that euphoric feeling by learning other languages.

Anyway, the moment where the language is mysterious and

My nails still look great. Paul noticed and said he liked them immediately. It was cute.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:35 PM

That is cute.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:35 PM

OK. Thank you! I think this went well.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:36 PM

Me too. Are you feeling ok now?

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:37 PM

Yes, much better.

---

**Jessica Smith**

7:54 PM

I think our meta conversation is getting more interesting than our "conversation"



impenetrable (the moment before recognition) is something that arises in visual poetry often, although I don't always like it. A lot of the visual poetry in *The Last Vispo Anthology* is "purely physical," by which I mean it doesn't carry immediate linguistic meaning, although it may use letters or other linguistic elements as material. There's no "Aha!" moment where the density becomes clear and you get a rush of familiarity.

**KLK:** One of my favorite pieces from *The Last Vispo Anthology* is (not surprisingly—to you, at least) Helen White's "Holding," which you've written about in *The Volta*. As you point out:

"It's the human context that befuddles our access to White's poem and gives it

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:54 PM

Yes.

---

**Jessica Smith**

7:56 PM

But seriously say the thing about the trace of the body.

OR I will ask about your composition methods?

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

7:58 PM

I'm kind of elaborating on my handwriting points. It's not a bad segue into my writing methods. Which are sometimes by hand and sometimes not.

Who is that totally awesome new york artist who rode on the subway and then found someone to sit next to and gradually fall asleep on their shoulder? anyway.

interesting complexity. In 'Holding,' in contrast to most of the poems in *The Last Vispo Anthology*, the text is legible (it says 'holding') but the process or method of creation is illegible. Where so many of the poems in the anthology contain text that has been electronically manipulated to be illegible, seeming to celebrate Adobe Photoshop's layering and erasure tools, White's poem seems to have been manipulated to be legible while erasing the trace of manipulation. After all, nothing present in the photo can cast the shadow word 'holding.' Only our human context allows us access to this history of the photo: we know, from childhood

---

**Jessica Smith**

7:58 PM

I don't know....

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:00 PM

"It felt like I knew you"

This is just me thinking broadly about how much of the art I love foregrounds investigation and process. Specifically bodies doing those things.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:00 PM

I keep hearing a cat scratching but all the doors are open. I think we have ghost cats.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:00 PM

Awkwardly and tenderly. Lester is making happy crackling fire sounds.

---

**Jessica Smith**

shadow puppets and our memories of shadows, that the photo does not present a truthful image."

My forthcoming book from Coconut (which still needs a title) is consciously manipulated to be more legible and comfortable than the experience of producing the texts. A partial rehash of what I said above: Helen Adam's collages and Helen White's visual poems provide a fruitful way of critiquing the clean/dirty divide.

**JS:** OK, while we're talking about women's bodies and inhabiting spaces and being melodramatic (acting in ways you're "not supposed to"), let's talk about clean and dirty. What do you mean by clean and dirty vis-à-vis visual poetry?

8:01 PM

Did you see that [video of marina abramović and her ex?](#)

aww lester is such a good fire.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:01 PM

Trevor is translating something an introduction to a book for an exhibition on Manuel Casanueva.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:03 PM

I feel like we have lost interest in the main conversation. What can we do to wrap it up?

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:03 PM

(It's an artist version of a YouTube teen breakup video)

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:03 PM

**KLG:** I'll refer again to Lori Emerson's helpful history of the term "dirty concrete poetry." In "clean" work, there is a clear hierarchy of visual and linguistic elements—the visual elements are dominant. "Dirty" work has a more "amorphous" visual shape. To quote Emerson quoting Jack David paraphrasing Frank Davey's definition of clean and dirty: "In dirty concrete there can be no immediate to the whole, only a cumulative interpretation gained by painstaking labour."

**JS:** So is "dirty" here like "abject"?

**KLG:** I think that's implied. And the abject nature of the text is tied to its linguistic illegibility

Abramović?

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:03 PM

Yes

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:04 PM

Ouch!

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:04 PM

(still watching it)

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:04 PM

----> .<3

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:04 PM

Oh, that's not meant to be a negative thing.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:04 PM

it's soooo emotional baby

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:05 PM

and the unruly aesthetics of the visual elements.

**JS:** Oh maybe this is a good place to talk about Notley?

**KLK:** Yes, because what are at issue in these definitions are questions of how (il) legibility and intelligibility are framed. I'm thinking of how Alice Notley uses quotation marks, or, in text like *Alma*, overwhelming, formidable prose blocks.

**JS:** Right she is not a "visual poet," but I'm thinking about *Descent of Alette* and how it is linguistically confusing (although clearly "linguistic," not always easily meaningful), and how her punctuation decisions take the clean little prose bits and make them unruly. Her book "leaks from the edges," as Deleuze says about characters in

I think she's picking up on contemporary genres of witness. And more than that, of course.

We can wrap it up by saying something about how visual poetry—or thinking/composing visually, helps us think about bodies in space.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:06 PM

the "i felt like i knew you" project is cool.

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**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:06 PM

Yeah.

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**Jessica Smith**

8:07 PM

bodies matter

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**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:09 PM

I was going to write more. Stopping for the moment.

literature who are a little crazy in highly striated societies and thus "leak from the edges" of those societies, calling attention to their weaknesses. It's not "classic visual poetry" like McCaffery's *Carnival*, but it has a similar effect. It's a small visual effect that ends up "taking up space" in a sociopolitical sense.

**KLK:** Eventually, one gets used to the quotation marks. It's not quite an "Aha!" moment, but the text trains you how to read it, and part of that training takes the form of visual indicators.

**JS:** Lorraine, you were talking earlier today about a lecture you went to about Persian poetry and calligraphy,

There's this amazing dancer in San Diego named [Anya Cloud](#).

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:10 PM

How can she not be an amazing dancer with a name like that?

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:11 PM

And she does this thing with her collaborators where they verbally describe their improvisations/movements.

Or they will do a danced response.

I think I haven't figured out how to move between, er, movement and body.

Anya Cloud is a wonderful name. She is one of my favorite people.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:27 PM

and we are going to talk about handwriting before we get any further without talking about handwriting! Especially since you took notes on the lecture and I commented on the type of pen you were using. I frequently use these kinds of lecture notes to write poems later, rearranging sections of notes so that they're poems, really like nonfiction lecture-poems (I've written some ekphrastic poems that way in the past few years). But I rarely leave the handwriting visible. In the mod diary poems, the handwriting was a major element. But I've stopped keeping my diary by hand, and in parallel, my new diaristic poems are not in handwriting, but composed on the computer. I feel like I am more physically connected to the machine than to the pen at this point.

Do you think we're basically done here?  
We have run out of steam.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:29 PM

I think we're done.  
With the drafting.  
I'm wondering how the version of this document with chats will look.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:29 PM

I'm going to try putting them in one Word doc, I think, with columns.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:29 PM

Ok.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:29 PM

Also I found the cat that seemed to be trapped. It was a real cat.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

**KLG:** My thoughts on handwriting are quite basic. Handwriting is the trace of a particular hand attached to a particular body in a particular time and space. Though as I write this, I also want to critique that: there is a physicality to writing on a computer or typewriter—it's just that the marks of the body in time space are different. The traces of the body emerge differently. I'm interested in how composing visually or being attentive to all the visual elements of composing helps me remember and call attention to bodies and sensation.

I also have a background in dance, and I teach yoga, and I've played the flute and studied music

8:30 PM

I'm glad you talk about the way we are all having conversations with each other all the time, and that we move in and out of conversations about work and and life.  
Oh, poor cat!  
I'm glad it's free.

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:31 PM

It was Hilda. She's not good at getting herself out of situations she gets into. I sympathize.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:32 PM

Pet her for me?

---

**Jessica Smith**

8:32 PM

Yes. OK, goodnight, see you tomorrow.

---

**K. Lorraine Graham**

8:33 PM

Goodnight. xx

for years, but for whatever reason, I keep returning to the visual.

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K. Lorraine Graham left group chat.



GILLIAN DEVEREUX &  
MICHELLE DETORIE

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**Gillian Devereux:** Should we start talking about ghosts now?

**Michelle Detorie:** Sure!

**GD:** What ghostly thoughts have you been thinking?

**MD:** Well, I actually have another question before we start talking about ghosts. I've been wondering how long you've been working with erasure as a technique and what inspired you to begin experimenting with it.

**GD:** I've always been interested in fragmented texts and palimpsests. In graduate school, I became obsessed with H. D. and her approach to revisioning texts, especially ones based on Greek myth. I was very taken with the way she extracted words, images and ideas from the original myth, and then built her own version of the myth on top of this structure. She focused heavily on myths about women, and I found her palimpsest approach to be a particularly effective way to revision (here I mean revision very literally: as in to see again, or even better, to see anew) these stories

that had been told about women. We could tie this back into ghosts—the original mythological woman is like a ghost who haunts the poem that houses the new mythological woman H. D. creates.

**MD:** I have been thinking of the erased text as a haunted text: a text that is haunted by the original...

**GD:** OMG. Yes.

**MD:** And a text that I am haunting as I erase. So the erasure is a sort of palimpsest of spectral presences.

**GD:** I want to talk about haunting in more detail, but I should back up to your earlier question. I never told you anything about erasure. Palimpsest—that was a concept I really fell in love with in grad school. Two of my graduate-school professors were very invested in teaching formal structures and although they encouraged us to experiment with form, we were not often encouraged to experiment with the page itself or to push the formal boundaries found on the page (for example, margins). H. D. was one of the few poets I read in graduate school who really interrogated these constructed boundaries, and even though my work in graduate school usually produced dense, formal groupings of text, I felt a strong connection to her transgressive approach to form, subject matter and the



page itself. In school, I used to call H. D. my spirit animal, and she is probably the (dead) woman writer who has had the most direct influence on my poetic process. Now I'm really influenced by the women writers I've met online through blogs and Twitter—I'm more peer-influenced now.

Anyway, in the years after school I tried to play around with the line and to relax a little more when I wrote. I sat in on a poetry workshop Elisa Gabbert was teaching, where she showed the class Frank O'Hara's poem "[For Grace, After a Party](#)." Elisa and that poem sold me on the dropped line as a way to create more space in a poem, and I still use that technique today. Elisa also encouraged me to try and break myself out of some of my formalist habits by writing prose poems for a while, and I ended up writing a full-length manuscript of linked prose poems. Once that book was done, though, I didn't quite know where I wanted to go next. The poets I was reading, and the poets who were my peers, seemed to be making better use of the page, or the medium of the poem, than I was, and I wanted to find a way to do the same. I had also gone through a pretty tumultuous time in my life, and I needed more space not only in my life but also in my creative work. I wanted more white space in my poetry—more places for reflection, more quiet to counterpoint my text.

I started doing poetry "mash-ups," where I would force two tenuously related texts together and then start deleting more and more words from the mashed-up texts, leaving mostly images and the most interesting words. I mashed a bunch of Taylor Swift songs with a bunch of Lana del Rey songs and made these frail little poems, all girlhood tragedy and bright red lip-gloss. I had been working on these during NaPoWriMo, but they took a long time, and sometimes I didn't have the energy, so, to give myself a break, I decided to try one of the prompts Maureen Thorson had posted on the NaPoWriMo blog, which was to do a blackout poem. My first one looked like this:

XIX

The Sun



The naked child on a white horse this card is the  
 destiny and holy light the  
 endless procession coming from the walled garden the  
 transit of this world the sun  
 the light the heart of a child.  
 allusion is again the key the antithesis of  
 reflected light a little child  
 simplicity and innocence Nature  
 the restored world has dawned  
 its renewal  
 a state of perfect conformity.

I found the physical process of blacking out text extremely meditative and generative. Creating the blackout made me feel like writing. I didn't like the way the blacked out text looked on the page, though, so eventually I started erasing words by turning their font white. I loved this process and the flexibility it gave me. I loved being able to turn white text back to black, or turn individual letters in a word white. This erasure process finally let me engage with the artificial spatial boundaries of the page, the paragraph, the passage, the sentence in a meaningful way. But I came to those sources texts in a really random way, and never really thought I would ever do an erasure of a whole book.

**MD:** The way the source text for *The Sin in Wilderness* came to me is magical. Jessica Smith sent me a number of things she had “weeded” from her library. So this text came into my possession via the magic of friendship. And it came to me as a feral thing, a thing that had been weeded (and here I am forcing myself to not go into a digression about weeds and ferality, but want to note those terms since they so deeply inform my larger poetic project), and so I feel like there is sort of a spectral collaborating between Jessica, this text and me.

**GD:** Spectral collaboration is a cool idea. With spectral collaboration you could collaborate with the dead,

which is sort of what H. D. did when she used Greek myths as the basis for her palimpsests. She even created “fake” fragments inspired by Sappho, and also incomplete texts of (her own) Greek plays.

**MD:** It's interesting to think of Sappho's work as an erasure.

**GD:** Yeah, they're not really erasure, but if you're someone like Jessica who might erase a text and then build a new poem on top of that erasure, Sappho's fragments could function like an erasure. Or maybe they are an erasure done by nature—right up your alley! H. D.'s poem-plays look like they've been erased somehow. They read sort of like fragments (acts separated from a full-length play) and sometimes even have stage directions.



**MD:** So, in your own *Dracula* erasure project, those letters are all Mina's letters?

**GD:** Mina's letters and journals, and Lucy's letters and journals. A lot of Mina's letters are actually written to Van Helsing. One hypothesis I had going into that project was that only erasing Mina and Lucy's writing would turn Mina into this powerful figure who puts a lot of events in motion. Which she actually is.

**MD:** Oh, that's really interesting.

**GD:** A lot of depictions of *Dracula* really diminish Mina's role, but in the actual narrative she's the one who enables Van Helsing to identify and ultimately destroy Dracula.

**MD:** Erasure as a strategy for revealing—veiling to unveil.

**GD:** Yes. Exactly. My intention shifted a lot during this project. Originally I thought I would do the erasures to create a narrative about a gothic lesbian romance.

**MD:** I like that. Erasure as a type of queering.

**GD:** So the early poems read like love letters, and I kept salutations and farewells in them. It really stimulated me (in a poetic way) and energized my erasure. But then about halfway through I started erasing more instinctively, and now I've gone back and revised the earlier poems to fit my new concept for the manuscript.

**MD:** I would imagine it is different to erase a text when you know the source text well and have a relationship with it.

**GD:** Actually, yes.

**MD:** And *Dracula* is a text in a larger cultural sense. It's too intertextual to ignore, and that is a lot to consider when erasing to create your own text.

**GD:** Yeah, and I never had to worry about that before. The other texts I've erased "digitally" came to me in a very serendipitous fashion. Towards the end of that NaPoWriMo that got me interested in doing my own erasures, I began using the Project Gutenberg erasure technique to find random texts to erase. The first word I searched for was "ghost," and I found this story called "A Haunted House" and erased a large passage from it. I took out the words "ghost" and "haunted" and other

you woke  
—a ghostly couple.

lifting here, opening  
in the garden

upstairs

certain, stopping  
the house all empty, the doors standing open

drawing the curtain  
on the margin

tired

the hum  
hands empty  
slipped into the grass.  
in the drawing room

all the leaves were green

The window panes reflected apples.

the moment after  
empty.

a thrush  
the pulse of the house

hung upon the walls, pendant

stopped

short  
A moment later  
so rare,  
between us; coming  
darkened  
dropped

the trees spun darkness  
burnt behind the glass  
sealing all the windows; the rooms  
death was

The wind roars  
the beam

Trees stoop and bend  
falls straight  
the ghostly couple

the stars turned  
beat gladly.

sought the house,

spill wildly in the rain.  
opening

whispering

burns stiff and still. Wandering

Silver between the trees  
distance,

gently knocking

In winter snowtime

the rain slides silver  
shield the lantern

eyes darken

at the doorway.

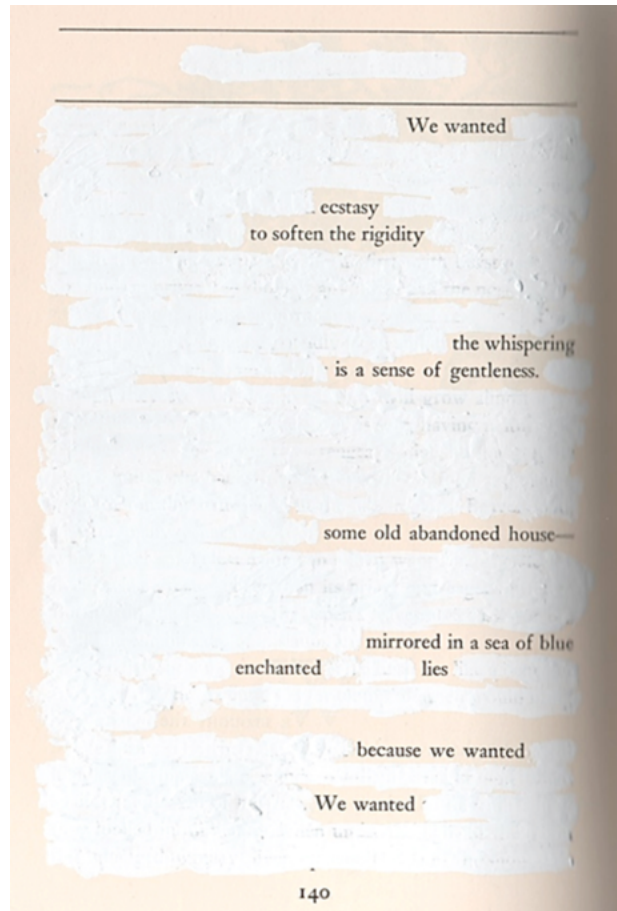
silver lamp above us  
Wild beams of moonlight

The light in the heart

but that's really different than thinking of erasure as a way to comment on something you know is in the text.



**GD:** I noticed some Gothic/Romantic moments in *The Sin in Wilderness*, like the poem on page 140.



(see [Image Glossary](#))

**MD:** It's interesting. The Gothic definitely comes out of Romanticism, and in my own work I've thought about the pastoral, which is also a product of Romanticism. Both deal a lot with violence and power, death and decay.

The fact that *The Singing Wilderness* is a memoir of the Great Lakes region, an area that was on the verge of being drastically altered (one could say "erased") at the time Sigurd F. Olsson was writing the book (the 1940s), means this memoir of the "wilderness" is in fact already an erasure (and perhaps any narrative is also an erasure, because of what is left out or occluded). But the notion of wilderness as a construction, and Olsson's romantic attachment to the geography, also makes a type of map—a palimpsest. And a lot gets left out or written over. The most obvious example in *The Singing Wilderness* being the history of colonialism. Olsson laments a disappearing wilderness, and often alludes to the "ancient" and "primitive," but does very little to reflect on or map out the culture of native peoples in a way that isn't peripheral or romanticized.

I am reminded here of Yedda Morrison's erasure project [Darkness](#). Erasure as a way to explore, experiment, expose—this process of course also has a politics.

Erasing is a type of violence, but it can also be a type of recovery.

In this way, erasure makes something about our relationship to language more transparent. We are of course working with a finite set of words when we erase, but that is always true when we work with language. We are always “picking” and “choosing” words, and arranging them in some syntactical way as a means to communicate or create. Erasure seems to amplify this process, to make it more dynamic.

Of course, if you are building over an erased text, you can add your own language/words, but that wasn’t on the table for me with *Sin*. That book became a sort of prosthesis.

**GD:** Erasing a whole book is like performing a very difficult magic spell.

**MD:** It is. I didn’t begin making *Sin* with the intention that I would do the whole book. It just became this thing that I felt I needed to do, that I was being called to do.

**GD:** When I decided I wanted to do a physical erasure of *Jane Eyre*, I felt like I had to sit with the (very densely textual) page for a while until the catalyst word presented itself to me.

**MD:** With erasure, I tend to sit with the book open for awhile, meditate a bit on the page until I’m in a sort of trance state, and wait for certain words to float up and syntactically constellate. And then I just erase the rest.

**GD:** It’s so comforting to hear that you do this! I feel like we are actually kindred souls when it comes to poetic process.

**MD:** Of course we are kindred spirits!

**GD:** When I work on *Jane Eyre*, I try not to fret if I “accidentally” erase a word I didn’t think I would erase because that “accident” seems like part of the spell.

**MD:** A lot of my practice as both a poet and visual poet is grounded in an engagement with ideas of divination and magic.

**GD:** I really respond to this lens for poetic practice. Most of my current work is centered around the idea of prophecy—how we receive and act on prophecy. So: divination, which can feel like magic, or be magic. Like ghosts. They feel magical, even though they could actually be a product of nature, of the natural world. So I guess in a way being haunted is a little like being trapped in a spell.

I just realized that when you are typing this cute little pink cursor that says “michelle detorie” appears behind each letter that you type, so it’s almost like I’m typing in a magical document...or a haunted one!

**MD:** I know. I should be making a screen capture.

**GD:** I just took a screenshot, which isn’t really the same. I also just realized that we both use rabbits for our avatars. You can’t tell from this tiny picture, but my rabbit is tethered to the Internet in somewhat distressing circumstances.

**MD:** I love that this is also an “active,” or animated text. A monster. A Frankenstein. Perhaps erasure is also a type of monster. A Frankentext.



**GD:** I remember that you tweeted about erasure being a way to haunt a text that is already haunted, which really resonated with me because of the experiences I had at the Vermont Studio Center when I decided I wanted to do a full-length erasure of *Jane Eyre*. That novel played such a key role in how I developed as a reader and a writer, and I feel like so many people don’t appreciate what an amazing book it is, or compare it unfavorably to

*Wuthering Heights* (a supremely haunted text) or don’t read it at all. So when I was in Vermont in January in the midst of all this whiteness and stillness, I had this idea that if I could, as you said, unveil the heart of the story through erasure, I would be able to bring readers/viewers an experience of the novel that captures the story/girl who inhabits the novel, an experience which could potentially lead the reader/viewer back to the original text.

**MD:** Yes! Unveiling! A metaphor that works on so many levels, and troubles notions of intention and interpretation—do we unveil the text or our relationship to it?

I’m fascinated by the way erasure really forces us to confront and clarify our relationship to the source text, even if it is as text that is unfamiliar and only becomes familiar throughout the process. I often felt like I was not “reading” *The Sin in Wilderness* (in fact, I’m not super-confident that I could actually tell you what that book is about in a way that is faithful to an assertion that one has read a book). In some ways, this felt like an act of estrangement. I had to decline the impulse to read and absorb and comprehend what was written there, in order for me to see the words.



This is perhaps related to the way you used the search function in web-based documents as a way to guide your erasure (or haunt the text). Which is connected to a general observation about your erasures: you've engaged a variety of applications of the technique. You've explored erasure via different media: print, web, digital. How do you choose the medium of erasures for different projects? How did you choose the medium for *Jane Eyre*?

**GD:** I wanted to erase a physical text, and I had spent a long time hunting down an edition that I thought would work well as an erasure. Then I bought a bunch of copies, and I bought a bunch of Wite-Out tape, which I thought I would enjoy using, because it's a little more precise than Wite-Out. I thought I would be more comfortable using it.

I had been following your progress with *Sin* on Twitter and Facebook, and I felt so jealous not of your physical progress through the text but of the way you embraced the process. I loved how messy and wild some of your pages looked. It seemed to fit the project, but it also seemed to suggest that you were uninhibited in your erasure process. You seemed to be buying and applying liquid Wite-Out with wild abandon (there's the word "wild" again, bringing us back to discussions of the feral) and joy. I really envied you. Your process seemed

so free and open, and the erasures you produced were such perfect capsules of poetry and wilderness. I was inspired by you, but I knew I could never replicate your process.



**MD:** To return to the notions of the pastoral and ferality, there are ways in which both the weeding of the book from the library (the way Jessica weeded my source text for *Sin* from her library) and the erasure of that book are a type of re-wilding. But the thing is, you can't really re-wild something that has been domesticated (which is of course different from tamed). It can be feral, but feral is not the same as wild. To equate wildness with ferality is an elision that makes the term less politically potent. A feral thing will always be in some way inscribed by the process of domestication, just as an erasure will always be in profound relationship with the source text. But erasure can be an intervention. It can change the conditions of the text. It's both a new text and a new reading of an existing text.

**GD:** This reminds me of a Twitter conversation we had a long time ago, when we were debating whether or not zombies and vampires were feral. I think you said vampires were feral—which means both of my book-length source texts deal with aspects of the feral,

while yours focuses more on the wild. And I agree that an erasure is both its own text and a re-reading or revisioning of the source text. I definitely wanted my *Jane Eyre* project to be guided by my own relationship with the text.

I also knew that I didn't want to consciously try to construct a narrative that would hold the erasures together. My idea for this project was that it would be a book-length erasure. In my dream reality, people would read it straight through, and it would function like a ghost text of the novel—the narrative beneath the narrative, the world within the world. But I worried that if I thought about that end goal too much while I was erasing, that would have a negative impact on my process and somehow ruin the poems. So I knew I wanted to only erase one page at a time and that each page would be its own intact unit.

So I spent a lot of time that first day sitting with the text in my lap, looking out the window at the frozen river and listening to the kind of music I imagined Jane Eyre might listen to if she had an iPod to listen to as she wandered along the moors, and all at once a certain word jumped out at me, and I felt like I could start the erasure, and in the end I had so few words left. I loved what I had done, and I loved it most, I think, for its sparseness.

But I realized right away that the Wite-Out tape wasn't going to work. It created this weird blocky effect in the text, and using the tape made me feel super anxious, and it looked super messy, but the messiness didn't serve the text the way it seemed to serve *Sin*. I think early on in the novel Jane's aunt or cousin actually refers to her as "a feral creature," but for most of the novel Jane holds her wildness in and keeps to the periphery of things. The first few pages I erased have so many references to watching and being watched. She is like a ghost in school and at Thornfield Hall, and I wanted the erasures to reflect that quality.

**MD:** All the ghost talk keeps bringing me back to this from Emily Dickinson: "Nature is a haunted house—but Art—is a house that tries to be haunted."

**GD:** Hmm. Both of my source texts also have haunted houses. And, in a way, my studio felt a little haunted too. It probably influenced this project more than I realized.

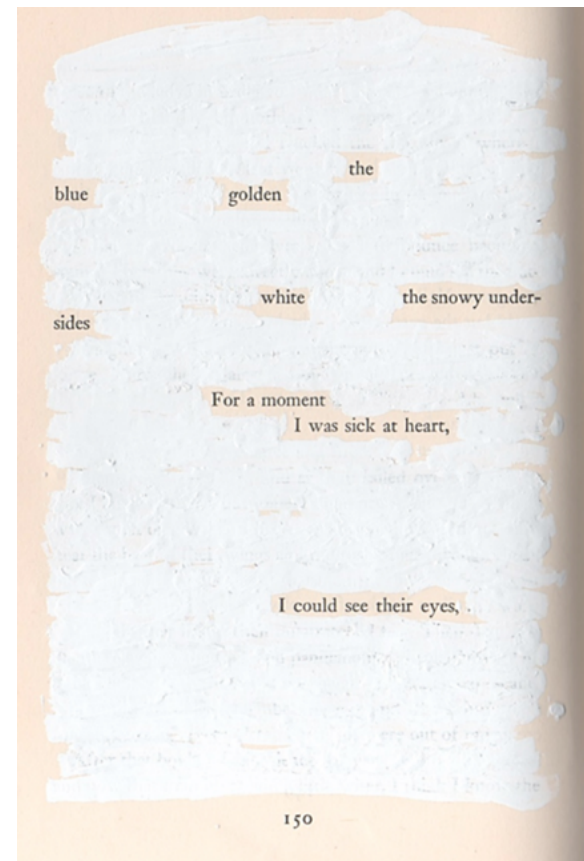
It's funny because the whiteout method I eventually decided on, a Permapaque paint pen which produces a very soft, semi-transparent white wash, had a ghostly effect on the text, which I really liked. The paint blended in well with the page, so the erasure felt more organic and natural, but you could see the original text through

the first coat. I ended up doing multiple coats on every page, and even when I'd added all the coats I wanted to, if you looked hard enough in places you could see a very faint "ghost" of the original text. That ended up being the best part of this method for me. I liked the idea that the ghost of the original narrative existed in my erasure. Your tweet about haunting a text made me think that perhaps the original story was haunted by my revisioning of the story. I wanted my erasure to reveal a ghost girl (a ghost "I," or even more interesting, a ghost eye) hidden within the original novel, and I ended up creating a second ghost. I don't think I would have thought so hard about my whiteout process—and its relationship to my revisioning of the text—if you hadn't shared details about the physical erasing you were doing with *The Singing Wilderness*.

**MD:** The physicality of erasure is definitely one of the things that appeals to me. Since the book I am working with is an older book, the pages are nice and thirsty, and I really enjoy the way it feels to layer on those wet coats of Liquid Paper. Sometimes I like to make it all globby. Sometimes I want it to be thin—almost transparent (like a ghost!). There are times when I played with the notion of the "thinly veiled" word, while also thinking of the whole process of erasure as a veiling to unveil. But as you mention, this unveiling also unfolds all these other specters.

I experimented with every brand and type of correction fluid (I apologize if you've tried to buy it in Santa Barbara—I'm pretty sure I bought it all). The tape didn't work for me. It was too neat, which actually made it too messy.

Here is another page from *Sin*:



(see [Image Glossary](#))

I did feel sort of un-self-conscious in the early stages of erasing *Sin* (from October to December 2013). I was experimenting, and the project just seemed to be making itself. My relationship to the text was not so much one of “author” as that of scribe, and so I felt very relaxed about sharing it as I worked on it, and it was really neat to know people were seeing it, and I enjoyed having access to the responses folks were sharing in comments and messages. But then something turned for me around the New Year. I was using the holiday vacation to work in a very focused way on the project (I’m talking hours and hours every day), and suddenly I just felt like I was posting my secret diary on Facebook, so I took most of it down.

**GD:** That’s interesting to me because I felt this huge need to keep my *Jane Eyre* project top secret. But I told some of the people at the Vermont Studio Center about the project, and as people became interested in it, and shared their ideas/thoughts about it, I actually became more passionate about the project. Although I should point out here that I’ve only shared one or two pages with one or two people, and I haven’t put anything up on the internet.

**MD:** Honestly, the way people responded to *Sin* was really unexpected. I thought a small handful of my poetry friends would be interested, but people who

otherwise never respond to my posts were liking and commenting. I especially noticed that folks who do not really have a relationship with poetry were commenting and sending me messages about the pages I was posting—saying that they couldn’t wait for the next one to be posted, and that they couldn’t wait to read the whole thing at once, and (my favorite) that seeing the pages made them want to experiment with the technique.

**GD:** I believe it! I don’t know if I ever would have tried physical erasure if you hadn’t made it look so magical.

**MD:** I love that this is one of the effects of showing people an erasure poem—almost everyone wants to try it, to play. It makes me so happy, and there is sort of a utopian fantasy there, imagining erasure poetry as something like the “paint your own pottery” trend.

This also troubles assumptions around procedural techniques being clinical or cold or cerebral. People really seemed to be connecting with the book emotionally. People sought me out at readings to say how reading the posts affected them, resonated with them. That had never happened to me before.

I think this also speaks to the feminist nature of the project. I feel like you and I are both engaged in

a project of erasure as a feminist practice. A kind of *écriture féminine*. I think this is especially true of your book-length engagements.

**GD:** This is a really astute observation, and I think my relationship with you and my relationship with Jessica has helped me feel more comfortable not just with experimentation but also with informing my practice with my beliefs. The two of you have helped me see how that type of informed practice actually enhances and, in some ways, guides the creative process.

**MD:** It is interesting to hear you talk about your intention with the *Jane Eyre* erasures and how that was informed by your relationship with the text—how you didn't want to "project onto it," but is also a book that, as you say "played such a key role in how I developed as a reader and a writer." Can you tell me a little bit of how you came to the *Dracula* erasures? I understand that is also a text you know well.

**GD:** I didn't read *Dracula* until 2009. I had been in a PhD program, which I left partly because they did not yet have a faculty member who could support my thesis project (which involved computer programming), and partly because I had become very unhappy. I moved to Boston but didn't really know anyone, and I was still unhappy. This was around the same time as the Charlie

Brown's dad incident—my extreme reaction to that revelation sort of exemplified how easy it was for me to feel someone had betrayed me (by not telling me about this barber, by not living up to my expectations). I spent all my time alone reading, and, on a whim, I started reading *Dracula*. I think I was destined to read that book at that time. It felt so raw and fraught. Fraught with peril and certain types of betrayals. And I noticed that a lot of the peril/betrayal was a result of the characters' choices, so a lot of the danger in the book is caused by the characters themselves rather than Dracula. It's also a very romantic, passionate novel. It definitely haunted me. I think I just wanted to work on a project that frightened me. This is a digital erasure project, which intensified the haunting. I kept whiting out text and then turning it back to black, trying to find the right version of each poem. And I've revised almost every erasure, some quite heavily. I think I felt compelled to find the exact right revisioning of each letter or journal entry once I realized how overshadowed the female characters, especially Mina, were, which sort of irritated me. Sometimes this even made me really mad, and that fueled the project. I didn't start out intending to create a manuscript, but about halfway through the process I knew I wanted to create a full-length book of poetry out of these erasures that put the focus on the female.

**MD:** I like how your practice also performs the way digital environments have expanded our sense of a text's malleability. I have discovered the wonders of digital erasure in the revision process.

While revising *Sin* (I'm working with several copies), I have redone erasures (digitally) so that I can expose a word I erased the first time, but in a 240-page book, that has only happened on five or so pages. Mostly I'm just revising to make the erasures less messy and more legible.

**GD:** I love erasing my own erasures. I'm much more ruthless when I revise them, and I've seen that ruthlessness carry over to revisions of poems written entirely out of my own head, with good results.

**MD:** Yeah, erasure is a good way to practice that. Originally my intention with revision was to make the erasure less messy and more legible, but now that I've had a few months away from the manuscript, I actually feel like the parts where the text is unintentionally illegible are important. As important as the way the white space of the erasure scores the page—creates a visual rhythm. Sometimes we can only see things a little bit. Sometimes we only want to see things a little bit. Sometimes we can't see things. Sometimes we don't want to see things.

**GD:** I'm finding that the poems I write without using erasure now have some characteristics of the erasures I have done recently. Do you ever have a similar feeling about your own work?

**MD:** I definitely think of *The Sin in Wilderness* as a sort of sequel to *After-Cave*. Actually it is more of a prequel. But it makes sense to me that after passing through *After-Cave* I suddenly found myself in the midst of erasing an entire book.

**GD:** What book will you erase next?

**MD:** I'm not sure. Jessica sent me a great batch, and I've poked around in a few, but I'm not sure which one I will commit to. I guess I'm going through a promiscuous phase before settling down.

**GD:** I have a lot more questions about you haunting a text that I might have to save for another conversation.

**MD:** For now I'll respond with this poem from *After-Cave*.



It's obvious: the whole  
world is haunted. Consider  
the disasters and broken  
spaces:

edge of a hole  
where a paw marks the edge  
of our map. A chart of stars  
for a fur-bird to make a course  
through blue, black—all the hues  
we love to lack.

Our lack is a fence  
the same shade as ash.

(see [Image Glossary](#))



Sheila Murphy &  
K. S. Ernst

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**Sheila Murphy:** Well good morning.

**K. S. Ernst:** Good morning, Sheila. It's just great that Jessica Smith and Essay Press are affording us this opportunity to talk about collaboration in visual poetry.

**SM:** I couldn't agree more.

**KSE:** I don't think we ever talked about this, but at what point in your writing did a door open that brought you into visual poetry?

**SM:** We both attended the Ohio State University Symposium in 2002, and, at that point, I had been exposed to visual poetry, in terms of many of the people (yourself obviously at the top of that list) involved in the symposium. I sort of acquired a guilt-by-association membership in this venture, and was very excited about works by John Bennett and Scott Helmes, and by none more than your two-dimensional and three-dimensional pieces that were so wonderful. I believe that it was not too long after that symposium that we were encouraged to submit work, and the wonderful

Bob Grumman was guiding me along on some pieces. mLEKAL aND was collecting work on what emerged as [Spidertangle](#).

Spidertangle became a phenom, and we were all kind of there, although you, John, Scott, Bob and others were leagues ahead of my own involvement in visual poetry. The genre began to be very important to me. In 1999 some very dear, local friends, Ron Dickson and Karen Bowden, were working with Beverly and me. They would give me some paints and paper (just to keep me occupied) and have me sit in their kitchen while Ron and Beverly were doing something fairly abstruse. I found that I was thrilled about visual art. This further led into me gaining a possible place in visual poetry, and as a written poet I was pretty well established at this point. So, long answer to short question: I began to find it stimulating. You may not remember this, Kathy, but you wrote me a note saying that you really liked something that I had sent to Spidertangle at that point, and I thought, *Whoa, this is pretty exciting*. That evolution, as I've described it, piqued my interest, needless to say. Now what about you? Your history in visual poetry is longer.

**KSE:** Yes it is. I was writing textual poetry to start out, back in the late '60s, and I just got more and more interested in the white space in the textual poetry. I

realized I could control the way the reader came to the word and interacted with the textual poem by my use of white space. Then at some point the white space became equally (or maybe more) important to me than the words, with my other background in painting. I started to see the white space the way you would see white space in a painting, not just as a control in the rhythmic aspect of a textual poem. Then I came upon visual poetry, some of the really early anthologies, and I said, *Wow, this is for me*. My first actual published poems in little magazines were visual poetry, and of course that's always a good incentive for succeeding in a particular direction. Also, I continued to publish textual poetry as well, and I can't even tell you when I stopped with that and just went more to visual poetry. As to how my visual poetry evolved, certainly my approach changed over time. Initially I started just using the typewriter, because that was all you had (besides your hand) that made the marks of the alphabet. I combined that with drawings and ink, and then I discovered press-apply type and was able to use different fonts and different sizes. The biggest milestone for me, and I think no doubt for everyone else, was the advent of the computer.

**SM:** Oh, all those fonts. *[Laughing]*

**KSE:** It's interesting: when I told a couple of my friends that we were going to do this, I asked, *What would*

*you like to know of people having this conversation?* And they gave me an interesting question. They said, *Stereotypically, artists are thought of as working alone and having these strong ideas of how they want to go about their work and how their end product should look. What made you want to collaborate with another artist, and how on earth do you manage to get along?*

**SM:** I love that question.

**KSE:** And I said to them, and I'll say to everyone else, too, that while there are some weird people in the arts, most are not. I got involved with collaboration via the mail-art movement. I loved the idea that another artist could just send me something without it being juried first. I really loved that I could see what someone else did just a day or two before, without having to wait a year or more for it to show up in a show. And, of course, many of the pieces I received also had the instruction, *Do something to this and send it back*. I think (and I'd like to have your input on this) we've managed, you and I, to get along by giving each other complete artistic freedom. Even if we were doing a cohesive story, such as *2 Juries + 2 Storeys = 4 Stories Toujours*, in *Xerolage* 55. For that we set up some ground rules that would make the pages look like they belong together. We had the rule to use the same boxes on each page, to use the same font throughout.

Our book *Permutoria*, on the other hand, was the compilation of various kinds of work that we did together, so it wasn't seamless and there weren't any rules at all. Another important characteristic is that we ask each other a lot of questions as we go along. Asking questions is a good way of understanding where the other person is going, and also of offering criticism. And, by the way, I think that we're really good in this aspect. We always criticize the artwork, not each other as an entity. The artwork is an entity separate from each of us. I might say, *You know, Sheila, I was looking at page five, and while it looks fine by itself, it doesn't seem to me to work well in the two-page spread. Do you think we need a large black spot here?* And you might say, *Well, not a large black spot—if it's going to be black it should be small and if it's going to be large then it should be gray*, you know that kind of thing. We're always working together to solve problems that come up.

**SM:** Yes, I see it similarly, Kathy. We're working on *Underscore*, finishing right now, and you've done a lovely cover. It's a treble clef with crows in the spots where the notes would be. Talk about splendid. It's really very beautiful. We worked very closely on the page spread, and I think that when we do work together you have a gift for stimulating artistic freedom and confidence. I found that I was ever so slightly tip-toey as I moved into

visual work, while having absolutely no fear in written work. I wouldn't call it fear, but "tip-toey trepidation" in terms of the visual element. You really made that go away very quickly, so that the same enrichment was there for me in visual poetry that I felt in the other sphere. Now I still am a little more word-predisposed, but also I think that with marks on the page, which I've been obsessed with pretty much forever, you have many strong ideas of how things can be transformed into actuality in the realm of the visual.

This applies equally to our canvases—which I will introduce here, because I think that's important. We do things together in person. We really got into that for quite a period of time, making physical things and of course photographing them soon after, also adding feathers and fabric and textures and all these wonderful elements. Large canvases, small canvases. And we have them in our respective studios, to which we've ventured back-and-forth, from New Jersey to Arizona. That's been merriment on parade, as have our efforts that we create back-and-forth via computer or physical mail. It's quite exciting. Although we're managing to make that happen and allow a lot of freedom, the process is not difficult. Rather, it is stimulating, because the combination of personalities, I suppose we would say, tends to work extremely well. I think that I might want to

transition us into describing how we do work in terms of process, and I can open that up to you, Kathy.

**KSE:** I'll talk about our initial digital collaborations. We've done a lot of them and really that's how we started out. In the digital collaborations generally one of us starts something and sends it to the other person via email, and then we send it back-and-forth as much as we feel we need to. Or if we feel like we need something fresh and crisp, we've been doing what we call a "one-off," where one person starts something and the other finishes and that's it. Just one back-and-forth like that. As you said, we do visit each other's studios in person, but of course that requires a plane trip, so it doesn't happen all that often. When we are together we're usually working on a shared piece, often a new aspect of it, or sometimes it's like, *Gee will you hold this while I push that over there and add this glue and whatever?* That kind of thing. Or a lot of the time while that glue is drying we'll be starting on another piece, and towards the end of our visit we may have several things going and then we may separately be finishing pieces.

**SM:** That's a nice way to describe it, and I think what's interesting is I remember various signature comments like, *Madam has pressed a bit hard on the pen.* [Laughing] Or *Dear Abby, Pip, pip. I seem to have cut*

*a hole through the canvas.* It's very interesting that this leads us to that rule situation—which is a question about whether we're rule-free or we set up certain boundaries. You could sort of introduce that for us.

**KSE:** Well we try to stay rule-free except in cases, as I noted before, where it's necessary to have ground rules that contribute to the coherence of the work, such as in a book that's going to comprise "X" number of pages. For me the fun thing about collaborating in a piece is to not have rules, and to play off the other person and see how you can be stimulated in what you're going to come up with.

**SM:** Yes, and it's a fun process. I think I would venture to say that from our mutual levels of confidence we see it as highly engaging—if I can speak for the entity that is known as KSEM (and that's probably a decent transition here for us, to what is KSEM, and what it represents to us). It may have been your observation, Kathy that your initials are K. S. E., and mine are S. E. M, and you combine them and you have KSEM, and that's kind of how we think of it. It's a separate individual, a separate entity as you mentioned earlier in terms of the work. This kind of unity produces different work from work that is ours individually. It was just kind of meant to be, and offers an interesting element.

**KSE:** Yeah, I thought of it as our initials doing a collaboration by themselves.

**SM:** Yes, they didn't even care about us.

**KSE:** They just went off and that was how it was going to be. It worked out really well and it's a great way to sign the work.

**SM:** Yes, and I think what's interesting is sometimes people are individually oriented. They'll say, *Which part was yours?* For me, there is certainly far more than an additive function when two people work together. And when you're committed to building some collaborative pieces, you certainly are not interested in scalping the thing, going back and cutting it up, because that defies the point.

**KSE:** Absolutely, and sometimes there will be something that is very characteristic of you, like the sort of broken letter parts that you do, that I refer to as "Sheilagraphics." Other than those I can't tell a lot of times, even with the writing part. Once we've melded it together it's sort of, *Did she write that? Or did I write that, or what?*

**SM:** Right.

**KSE:** And that's how it should be as far as I'm concerned. As you mentioned before I do think of you as more the wordsmith, and of me as somewhat more of the graphics person, maybe since that was my profession during my working life.

**SM:** You know what's interesting? As you point that out, people may want to know that when we're doing a book (we're just finishing our third), we generally build a big text initially. We talk about a few things conceptual, then we start packing up text. Bang, bang, bang, back-and-forth, and we have a big chunk of text from which we liberally borrow as we build pieces. You will often say, as you did with *Underscore*, which is about to be released, that you wanted to see crows. They fit what we were doing, so that emerged as a visual element and the text had a relationship to that. The notes had relationships to that, as did the various placements of the textual pieces, the visual pieces and so forth. All that came together, and it was very interesting to me because then we'd start and say, *OK, who's going to...* we'd do "starts" as we call them. You'd send me some starts, I'd send you some starts. Sometimes there's a variability there, but we start with a kind of foundation and we borrow from it and then we go off into the ether and bring in something entirely different, which I often do with words. I'll take a text and then I'll go into this sort of free-associating thing and build out more text.

You, in turn, do that with text and visuals, and I will have some visuals that I do differently, which really starts us in another direction, and that's one of the ways our work can happen.

**KSE:** Well, what would you say in terms of discoveries you've made from collaborating with other people?

**SM:** Well, overall I'm a collaborating person in other activities too—such as poetry per se, the words only, with Douglas Barber for a very long time, for example, and we have two books out together. You and I are doing visual poetry, and the discoveries from what you and I do are interesting in that there's something that I wouldn't classify as words or visual imagery, but would call a blend that speaks in a way that neither discipline can quite do. I remember from some of the aesthetics courses I've taken, an important principle. If you could do something (rather than say the same thing), with the same impact, by using another art form, this might call into question the original medium chosen. In my view, what we do requires the way we work, the methods we use, to gain the desired effect.

**KSE:** You know, for me, I'd have to say, and you're going to laugh, that I discovered that I can actually work in black and white.

**SM:** *[Laughing]*

**KSE:** I hated working in black and white, and that may sound simple, but it was a huge thing for me. The fun part of collaboration for me is actually getting to become the other person. You know, getting into your head for a bit, and, while I'm still me, I get to see what it's like, artistically speaking, to be you, and to move the collaborative work in a direction I wouldn't have thought of on my own. So collaboration, you know, is full of surprises. I love to be surprised, because that enhances me, provides creative flow. The worst thing you can have in any creative endeavor is tedium, I think.

**SM:** Oh, dear god, tedium.

**KSE:** And the difference in the work created by working with you, I feel, and by working with someone else, on another collaboration, isn't really something I can describe in words. You have to look at the work and you'll see it right away.

**SM:** The work shows itself.

**KSE:** Yes, it's how it looks. That's another question that is sort of interesting to me, in that someone had asked whether collaboration could or should stand up to the same rigorous standards that individual work must. My

answer to that is: absolutely. An artwork is an artwork is an artwork.

**SM:** Sure.

**KSE:** How it first strikes you is really the important thing. You don't have the artist standing there next to it explaining what he or she really meant to do. It's got to stand on its own. Later, you may have the chance to read about the artist and learn how that artwork came about, but, while information about its creation and creators is interesting, it's the initial impact that the artwork makes on the viewer that's the crucial thing. You see, to me, the word "artwork" refers to a work that has been created by an artist, while the word "art" refers to the experience of interacting with that artwork.

**SM:** Lovely distinction.

**KSE:** Art happens in two instances in the life of an artwork, whether that artwork is writing or painting or whatever it is. The first time art happens is when the artist conceives of and creates the piece. The second time it happens is when the piece affects its viewers, or listeners. You know the piece itself is the artwork, and it must be able to stand alone and interact with the viewer on its own two feet, so to speak, without somebody there to apologize for it.

**SM:** That's beautifully stated. I feel the same. I believe that its rigor must be there. I would also say that it's worth looking at the impact of the collaboration on our personal lives and not just our artistic lives. Is there something interesting about the intersection of friendship and art? For me this intersection is quite a powerful feature, in that our work together is literally quite fun, for one thing, also very stimulating intellectually, stimulating aesthetically and with very good open feeling, but also there's a discovery process that helps us inaugurate new works at most points. In fact we've almost had to hold ourselves back in terms of saying *Let's do this, let's do this, let's do this*. And we've done a lot of work over the past several years. We've been at this for a while, so really anything that we start keeps on rolling. For me it's a marvelous, exciting venture that I just have incorporated into my being. There's nothing but natural, clear, artistic stimulus alongside a wonderful and hugely enriching friendship.

**KSE:** You know, I had kind of made a little list of things connected with that thought, and you touched on all of them. I have to say that the last item on my list was: most of all, I discover truly wonderful friends.

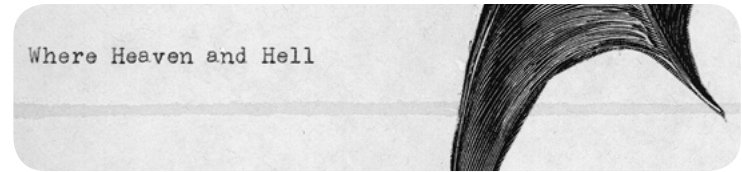
**SM:** Yes. That's a wonderful feeling. It really is. I think that the visual-poetry community, if I may, in addition



to our sparkling selves [*Laughing*] the community itself is a really enriching feature we've both commented on many times.

**KSE:** Yes. It's a really wonderful community of people, and I'm so happy to have made all the friends I've made in that community and to be a part of it. I just am so honored to have known a lot of those people you mentioned earlier and some people that we haven't mentioned. I just love the people in the visual poetry community. They couldn't be better.

**SM:** I feel the same. This might be a good place for us to stop, and again, we express our thanks to Jessica for this opportunity.



## Afterword

### So What Did You Say Next?

—Maureen Thorson

"Visual poetry" is accordion-like. Along its sinuous, pleated lengths you may find open-field poems, paintings and sculptures incorporating text both legible and not, illustrated poems, captioned illustrations, erasures, palimpsests, altered books and digital manipulations. It encompasses visual art to which text is integral, and poetry that draws attention to and plays on the visual nature of text. In visual poetry, words are seen and not only heard.

Such an expansive art naturally attracts a wide variety of poets and artists, including many women. But as with the arts generally, ensuring attention to women's visual poetry commensurate with their participation and contributions is an ongoing effort. The conversations presented here foreground women's engagement across the breadth of visual poetry, rendering their presence visible and focusing attention on the vibrancy of their work.

But these conversations do something more as well, by explicitly documenting women artists' interactions with one another, and how these inform the work that they individually and collectively produce. No artist creates in a vacuum. All poems and paintings necessarily engage with other artists' work, whether by overt reaction, through imitation and expansion on styles and techniques, or merely due to shared interests and subject. Each artwork is part of a conversation between the artist and her forbears and contemporaries. And though I write "her," in reading these discussions I was struck by how unusual news of these correspondences and connections among women artists and women's artwork still remains.

As Jessica Smith notes in her introduction, the idea of coterie is integral to the narrative myths of many artistic and literary movements or schools. Artistic coteries have historically been portrayed as mainly, if not, exclusively, male (as in the "dudes drinking neat whisky in Paris" theory of art). Yet women artists have always been present, even if official histories have relegated them to set dressing around the edges of an in-crowd. And their work is no less dependent than that of their male counterparts on the invigorating forces of friendship, the exchange of ideas and techniques among rivals and companions. More difficult than Diogenes' quest for an honest man, I think, would be to find a worthwhile poet

who has read and reads no poetry, a worthwhile artist that has seen no art and doesn't care to look. No real artist, male or female, stands alone. Art begets art, and is begotten by it in turn.

The visual poets here are part of art's long, ongoing and polyvocal conversation. They discuss without dissimulation their admiration and respect for one another, sharing ideas and techniques, building the foundation for further collaborations, new poems and artworks, and pushing both their media and their messages forward. They are avant-garde in the best, literal sense, at the forefront of genre-bending, hybridizing processes.

As such, their conversations are not merely documentary—these talks invite answers, rejoinders and further discussion. Michelle Detorie quotes Emily Dickinson to the effect that nature is a haunted house, but "art is a house that wants to be haunted." Artists, then, are those who call the ghosts home, creating, if they are successful, a presence that lingers, life-like, after the artist is gone. For me, the conversations presented here engendered that feeling of continuing presence. As I read and re-read them, I carried their words into myself and my ways of seeing (and seeking) art.

Reading K. S. Ernst and Sheila Murphy's conversation, and reviewing images of their collaborative work, I

found myself sketching out large, tumbling letters on random scraps of paper. Michelle Detorie and Gillian Devereaux's conversation had me scanning my shelves for likely texts to erase, and digging through my files for an old, abandoned palimpsest. After reading Jessica Smith and K. Lorraine Graham's discussions of visual poetry, embodiment, I found myself musing on how collage techniques can inform line placement and arrangement in otherwise "traditional" poems, and prodding some of my own current drafts into new and previously unlikely places in that regard. Some of these projects may be abandoned, collapsed, merged or mutated in new directions, but it remains that reading these women visual poets' conversations not only informed me, but inspired me to think in more visual ways about my own work.

Many years ago, while absently clicking links across the Internet, I stumbled across a description of the *dísir*. These Norse goddess-spirits, sometimes benevolent and sometimes otherwise, appeared to mortals in connection with their individual fates (which often meant, given that we're talking about Vikings here, during battles). I'm not much for melodrama—although, keeping Jessica Smith and K. Lorraine Graham's discussion to heart, one woman's melodrama is another's sincere expression. So here's my version of the latter.

I won't make the case that any of us are goddess-spirits (though if you want to call yourself one, well, you do you). But still, we are all, in some way, one another's *dísir*. Our fates are connected. No man or woman is an island. Artists especially can do nothing without reference and reliance on those who are traveling alongside. An artist's fate, if she is lucky, is to encounter the right art at the right time to make new breakthroughs, new ways of thinking and new ways of expression. If she is very lucky, this means encountering the right artists—not just as contemporaries, but as friends. This chapbook's conversations reflect that experience among the conversants, but also represent an opportunity: a possibility that other artists, new and old, will discover these talks and find some part of their own fate lurking there, engendering further innovation, invention and countless conversations in years to come.

# IMAGE GLOSSARY

XIX

The Sun



The naked child on a white horse this card is the  
 destiny and holy light the  
 endless procession coming from the walled garden  
 transit of this world the sun  
 the light  
 the heart of a child.

allusion is again the key the antithesis of  
 reflected light a little child  
 simplicity and innocence  
 Nature  
 the restored world has dawned  
 its renewal  
 a state of perfect conformity.

[\(back to interview\)](#)

you woke  
 —a ghostly couple.

upstairs

lifting here, opening  
 in the garden

certain, stopping  
 the house all empty, the doors standing open

drawing the curtain  
 on the margin

tired

the hum  
 hands empty  
 slipped into the grass.  
 in the drawing room

all the leaves were green

the moment after  
 empty.

a thrush  
 the pulse of the house

stopped

short  
 A moment later faded  
 so rare, sunk beneath the surface

the trees spun darkness  
 burnt behind the glass

death was  
 between us; coming sealing all the windows; the rooms  
 darkened the stars turned sought the house,  
 dropped beat gladly.

The wind roars Trees stoop and bend  
 the beam falls straight  
 whistling the ghostly couple

spill wildly in the rain.  
 opening

burns stiff and still. Wandering

Silver between the trees  
 distance,

In winter snowtime

gently knocking

at the doorway.

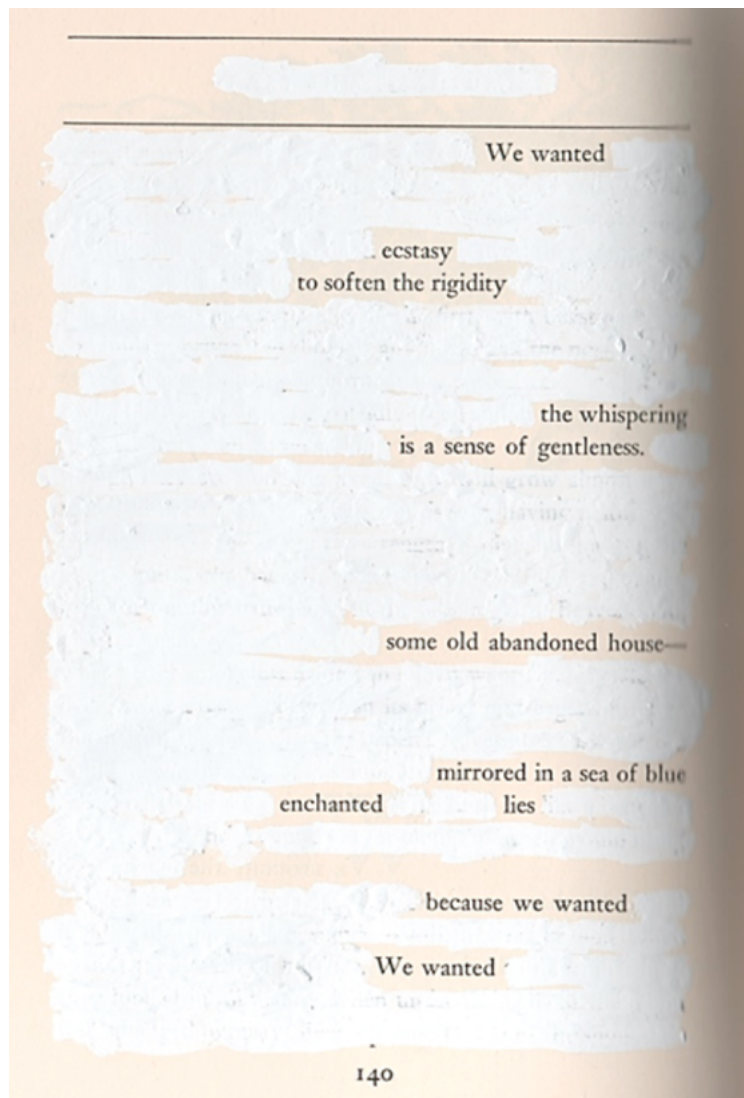
the rain slides silver  
 shield the lantern

eyes darken

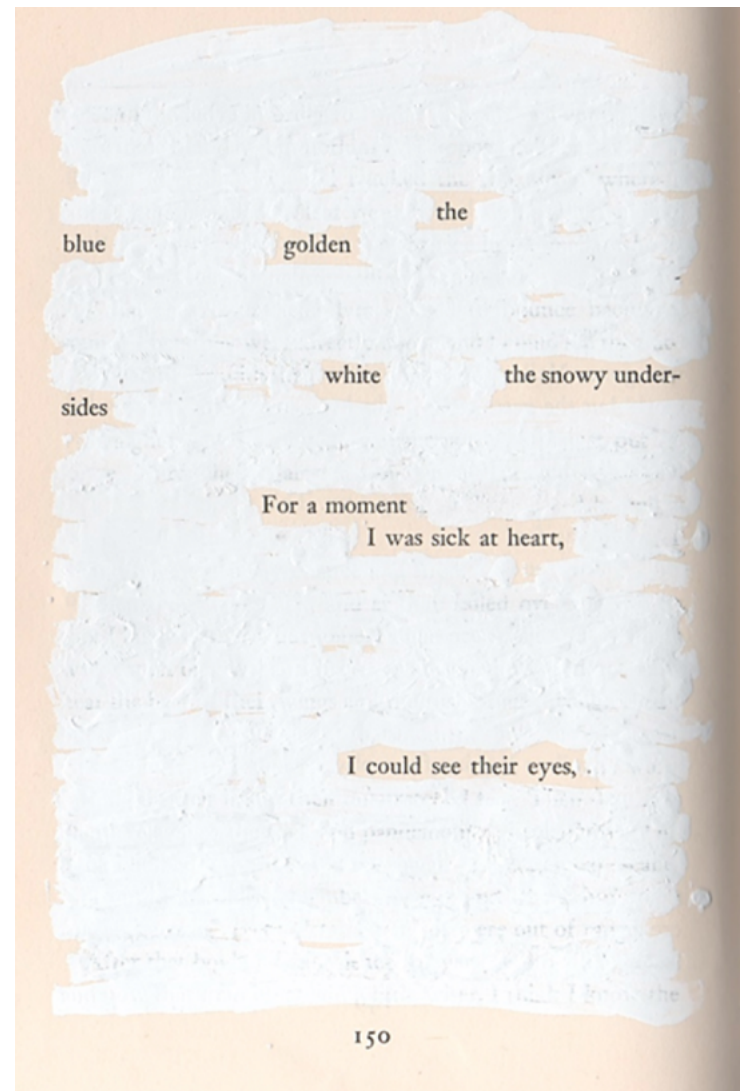
silver lamp above us  
 Wild beams of moonlight

The light in the heart

[\(back to interview\)](#)



[\(back to interview\)](#)



[\(back to interview\)](#)

edge of a hole  
where a paw marks the edge  
of our map. A chart of stars  
for a fur-bird to make a course  
through blue, black—all the hues  
we love to lack.

Our lack is a fence  
the same shade as ash.

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## MICHELLE DETORIE



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GILLIAN DEVEREUX



**Gillian Devereux** received her MFA in Poetry from Old Dominion University and directs the Writing Center at Wheelock College in Boston, where she also teaches creative writing. She is the author of *Focus on Grammar* and *They Used to Dance on Saturday Nights*. You can follow her on [Twitter](#) and [Tumblr](#).

K. S. ERNST



Much of **K. S. Ernst's** work is painted, collaged or digital. In addition, she uses three-dimensional letters in freestanding sculptures. Her recent books include *Drop Caps*. Books with Sheila E. Murphy are *Permutoria* and *2 Juries + 2 Storeys = 4 Stories Toujours*. Among places Ernst's work can be found are The Brooklyn Museum, Ohio State University, The Sackner Collection, SUNY Buffalo and Yale University.

K. LORRAINE GRAHAM



**K. Lorraine Graham** is the author of *Terminal Humming* from Edge Books, and a second collection forthcoming from Coconut Books in 2015, which will be called 1) Meta Horror 2) The Men Are Etcetera or 3) The Rest Is Censored. Occasionally she gets excited about transnational theory, network analysis and the relationship between technology and affect. Her current writing projects are about debt, anxiety and operatic suffering. She suddenly lives in Washington D.C. Wherever she lives, she lives with Lester Young, a pacific parrotlet, who is featured regularly on her [Tumblr](#).

SHEILA E. MURPHY



**Sheila E. Murphy's** poetry has appeared over the past few decades in a wide variety of full-length books and other publications. In 1999, she began engaging with visual art, and has been active in visual poetry, both individually and in collaborative work, since the early twenty-first century. Her *Letters to Unfinished J.* received the Gertrude Stein Award from Green Integer Press. Murphy has led her eponymous consulting firm, Sheila Murphy, LLC, since 1994. Her expertise in organizational and executive leadership affords her considerable learning that she believes benefits her artistic endeavors.



JESSICA SMITH



**Jessica Smith**, Founding Editor of Foursquare and name magazines, serves as the Librarian for Indian Springs School, where she curates the [Indian Springs School Visiting Writers Series](#). A native of Birmingham, Alabama, she received her MA in comparative literature, and her MLS from SUNY Buffalo, where she participated in the Poetics Program. She is the author of numerous chapbooks, including *mnemotechnics* (above/ground 2013), and two full-length books of poetry, [Organic Furniture Cellar](#) and the forthcoming *Life-List* (Chax).

MAUREEN THORSON



**Maureen Thorson** is the author of two books of poetry: [My Resignation](#) and [Applies to Oranges](#). She is also the author of a number of chapbooks and pamphlets, including *The Woman*, *The Mirror*, *The Eye*, forthcoming from Bloof Books in 2015. She lives in Washington D.C., where she is the poetry editor for *Open Letters Monthly*, an online arts and literature review.



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