complicated by the false real-time of the book

Status_Anxieties
(Some Notes
on *Of the
Subcontract)*

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17-24

CONVOLUTION

– 1

Before I start, a confession: "Art is what makes life more interesting than art." I take Robert Filliou's insight to near-perfectly articulate the most important presupposition for what follows and for the poetic art working I do.

0

In my opinion, what a conceptualist work of poetry makes it possible for willing people to hold together when they somehow share an encounter with it (an encounter shared at or via a conceptual level though never regardless of the body or other drives, in agreement, dispute or anywhere in between, in the meta-formation of a shared and productive problematic) is the constitutive value of any strongly conceptualist work of poetry. → In my opinion, a conceptualist work of poetry's value as a stage for problematization is its foremost quality as a work of conceptualist poetry. ↔ In my opinion, a conceptualist poem's specific textuality is most valuable as a specific site made public in relation to which certain problematics in particular can be taken up in specific (though not specified) ways, ways that all depend on the insufficiency of the poem's form as a linguistic representation qua the choreographed invitation which that same form really is (really presents, really makes present) a meta-stage for. ← In my opinion, conceptualist poems express a conceptual invitation by choreographing tokens of representation that, so composed, present a specific site for conceptual encounters. → In my opinion, conceptualist poems don't contain their conceptual value; rather, they make a site public in relation to which it's possible to problematize concepts in specific ways. → In my opinion, what matters most is how we live with conceptualist poems, what they allow us to think and write and otherwise do, not what their presence might be in or for itself. ↔ In my opinion, the conceptual value of conceptualist poems is latent until we work with them.

1

All conceptualist forms of art working, not least the literary, are constituted by the tension between the aesthetical and conceptual qualities of whatever they give form to. What differentiates the production of concepts as art from the production of concepts as anything else is the intensity of this mutual dependency between the form's aesthetic status and its conceptual potential. In the context of the arts, "work" always refers to a thing and an action through the form of a thing (being) done; and in poetics, that oscillatory value complicates every approach we can make to disambiguating what is and is not "the work" of poetry, poems and poets.

2

My book *Of the Subcontract* is both a present text and a document of an absent process. It works like an engineer's black box, the transfer characteristics of which are opaque or even concealed, as opposed to the white box processing more characteristic of conceptual poetry before it, whereby a book's conversion of inputs into outputs is transparent because the book explains its choreographer's methodology.

3

I can't explain *Of the Subcontract*, and if I could I wouldn't. Encountering it is like reversing a car against the supposed flow of life around you, back from the digital world of transactional relations into the actual world of ink and poetry books. The whole time you're looking forwards into the rearview mirror, which is unavoidably surrounded by the blurred image of the out-of-focus windshield caught in your peripheral vision. The poems are the entirely real, but tightly-cropped and incredibly partial, image of what's behind-in-front of you as that image is reflected and framed in the rearview mirror.

0.10. *But Alas I Am Alone and Poor*
00:02:27 → \$2.45/HR → 1/2

Unlike others, I have many unaccomplished dreams,
Not 2 be a king or a supreme,
But 2 be in the world of joy and happiness,
Understand the essence of life and delightfulness,
2 play with the children of my age,
2 feel like a bird when freed from a cage,
Glee, glee, and glee and laugh every moment,
Get exhilarated and make everyone foment,
About highness of life, love and affection,
Make my utmost bestowal in this direction,
Spread education, build houses if I have money,
And make every night colourful and every day sunny,
Invite every 1 and celebrate every festival,
And make this world just like a huge carnival,
Help in exploring the lost smiles in destitute children,
Remove their difficulties, problems and pain,
Raise my voice against the injustice done 2 the people,
Help in removing the stigmas, poverty and superstitions,
This could have been possible if I had money, I'm sure,
But alas I'm isolated, alone and poor.

4

The encounter described above metaphorically is made even more complicated by the false real-time of the book, of all ink and paper books.

5

Each of the poems is some kind of performance, delegated through an act of choreography on my part and sold as a product of artificial artificial intelligence on the Turker's part. These seventy-four ghostwriters or voice synthesisers sold me what they thought I wanted (them) to say. Each poem is like an on-demand product customized with my name in perfect type, formed from a database of options whose compatibility is subject to variables of input. As a whole, the book is like a 3D-printed mass object transposed through lithography into the mirror image of a conventional collection of poems—poems that are gathered like the advertisements in my browser window, which know my web-mediated self before I do.

OF THE SUBCONTRACT

0.37. *Lord*
00:00:08 → $166.50/HR → 2/5

The guiding light,
Where there is love, there is cheer;
Where there is God, the path is clear;
Where there is choice, listen to the inner voice;
Where there is prayer, there is trust in every layer;
Let not fear rule you, or darkness cloud you;
Remember, where there is the Lord, you will win against all odds.
Do not search for the Lord around you.
He is the only one who resides inside you,
So seek the Lord within and be sure to always win.

6

Of the Subcontract treats me, the Turkers, McKenzie Wark, Darren Wershler, and you like composites of metadata. This is realist poetry of the third industrial revolution. But what kind of realism is it? It's a contemporary documentary realism, by the logic of which real-unreal is a false binary because their differences are being re-mediated under the surface of life yet augmented on its surface.

BENEFITS OF ON DEMAND, ELASTIC STAFFING

0.38. *Lord*
00:00:05 → $273.60/HR → 3/5

The guiding light,
Where there is love, there is cheer;
Where there is God, the path is clear;
Where there is choice, listen to the inner voice;
Where there is prayer, there is trust in every layer;
Let not fear rule you, or darkness cloud you;
Remember, where there is the Lord, you will win against all odds.
Do not search for the Lord around you.
He is the only one who resides inside you,
So seek the Lord within and be sure to always win.

7

If arranging language for reproduction is what typographers do, am I a compositor? *How* can contracting, composition, word processing, typesetting, editing, designing, reproduction, post-production and marketing intersect as one poetic performance that involves lots of people, equipment and institutions? Choreographing that intersection of processes, means and institutions *is* the act of self publishing, of a publishing self. *Of the Subcontract* is a performance of conceptualist (self) publishing, registered as a work of contemporary documentary literature, which articulates the mediatization of the work of poetry, poems and poets.

8

Notes 3, 5 and 6 make me anxious in a way that's only symptomatic of the status_anxieties that seem to mark this newly intense realism. Making my anxiety public, by self-publishing *Of the Subcontract* and writing notes like these, is one way of making those status_anxieties conceptually productive, a way that depends on problematizing the multiple selves at stake in this performance of publishing. It seems worth remembering that 'publish' derives from the Latin *publicare*, "to make public," via the Middle English *publicen*, "to let go of" or "get rid of."

OF THE SUBCONTRACT

0.55. *A Soldier's Prayer*
00:13:08 → $2.51/HR → 1/1

Dear God, please watch over me, I'll be wearing a camouflage
    green,
I've washed my hands in holy water and still they're not clean,
Forgive me, Lord, for thirteen straight hours I've done nothing
    but sin,
I've killed your children one after another, over and over again,
I'd like to ask for forgiveness for the sins I will make tomorrow
    because for me there might not be a next time,
When and if I wake up in the morning I'll be returning to the
    front line,
For the record I'd like you to know, I don't like to kill but I took
    an oath to my country,
If the war doesn't end soon, my Lord please reserve a space for me,
I pray I sleep peacefully without a worry or a scare,
All throughout the day I've already lived a nightmare,
God I give to you always my mind, body and soul,
I pray that I'll be a survivor of this war so a soldier's story can
    be told,
God bless my family, my fellow Americans, my enemy, and my
    friend,
Jesus keep me near the cross, I love you always, Amen.

9

Every conceptualist performance of (self) publishing is more than the publication cast in ink as the poem that becomes its static core. That core, its specific textuality, forms the present-absence of a bigger or expanded performance of publishing. Given that I'm saying in general that the primary value of conceptualist poems is their being a meta-stage for problematization, I would also say that any such poem's form, textuality or core performs in the general form of a social monad. Which is to say, the general form of such poems is their being social monads.

10

Every conceptualist performance of (self) publishing is an act of work, which produces "the work," which in turn works and is worked upon. This is how a completely incomplete praxis of publishing works like art working. The conceptualist performance of (self) publishing includes the act of inscriptive composition as just one of its processes. Consequently, conceptualist performances of (self) publishing complete an abstraction of writing-as-composition akin to other abstractions of (re)production that are part of (and party to) the third industrial revolution.

11

Always incomplete and unstable, conceptualist acts of (self) publishing choreograph irrelations between the writer, writing and the written, and between readers, reading and the read—between writers, readers, and their respective work—in a way that befits our common experiences of "the contemporary" moment, a moment in which we're simultaneously closer to and further apart from one another and the things we produce than ever before. Those products include one's selves, pluralized and fragmented as per the *sine qua non* of identity politics in this weird new contemporaneity. I can't imagine a realist poetry of the third industrial revolution that didn't somehow problematize the increasing attention paid to the irrelation between our self-identity and our ability to articulate things, our (in)ability to say something in particular from the stance of our self-identity. This contemporary crisis of poetic voice—the poetic voice in crisis—may well be *the* voice of our status_anxieties, a voice which any realist contemporary poetry surely has to somehow deal with.

DATA CLEANSING, NORMALIZATION, AND DEDUPLICATION

0.68. *Life With You*

00:00:12 → $204/HR → 1/1

Crazy days and crazy nights
You're always trying to start a fight
Life with you is so blue
Sometimes I just don't know what to do
So one day I ran away
Not looking back or listening to what you have to say
A life like that is like a soldier in combat
I would rather be alone then be in this war zone
Life is great now that you're locked away
I wouldn't have it any other way.

12

Mediatization has been a diagnostic concept in communication studies for some time. Contemporary writing practices of all kinds, literary and "non-"literary, depend on digital writing media that have been mediatized in similarly layered ways. If, once, a medium was some kind of place in the middle in which things could be brought forth, and later became the means by which those things are brought forth, then now more than ever the technical and networked horizons of media-as-means seem to condition what and how we write. The mediatization of writing media (which is to say, from the augmented surface of life, the mediatization of contemporary writing) is exemplified by the default use of desktop publishing software, which collapse composition, typesetting and publishing into one automated string of actions, actions that are near-simultaneous in real time and also conceal the software-hardware-network clusterings that they work in or on. For realist poetry of the third industrial revolution, the (im)mediacy of writing media and their exhibition seem to have taken precedence over medium-neutral ideas of writing as writing content.. If *Of the Subcontract* is "about" anything, it is about the technical foreshadow being cast in front of the work of poetry, the outline of which speculatively projects the poet, the poem and poetry into the *mise en abyme* of computational capitalism.

13

That *abyme* has a metaphorical register which is overtly iconographic and derived from the interface design of desktop operating systems. The emerging iconography of cloud living and computational capitalism confuses old differences between text and image in forms like the logo.png. The style sheet for *Of the Subcontract* uses such icons in place of typographic embellishments, but my favourite icon of our moment, which was first impressed on mechanical typewriters by displacing the underline keystroke, is the underscore. Ostensibly a punctuation mark, a word divider, it now represents the impossibility of nothing, not because we can't conceptualize nothing but because computational systems can't process nothing. The underscore is a structural remove, a stage for everything that might be written above it and a connection between anything written beside it. What does the underscore become an icon for when it's transformed into a smiling arrow that points the eye from a company logo to the title of a subsidiary service, as an adjusted readymade data-form that is owned as an object-expression under copyright protection?

BELLOWS, REEDS, LEVERS; THROAT, NOSE, MOUTH

0.99. *The Cloud Speaks*
00:00:08 → $445.50/HR → 3/3

The Cloud speaks to the blue skies when it is sad,
The darkness of its anger shows when in ire.
The Cloud speaks to the breeze as it is carried away,
The flowing of its fleeces hushed with grey.

The Cloud speaks to the starry skies at night,
The darkness of its anger shushed when out of sight.
The Cloud speaks to the stars and to the moon,
The fleecing motion not to be seen in gloom.

The Cloud speaks but no one hears or listens,
The silence of the white stratus silenced in the skies.
The Cloud speaks to the wind but no one answers,
The blown cloud settles into the shape of a salamander.

The Cloud speaks and moves along on its way,
The day of the morning comes as the fleeces sway.
The Cloud speaks and then fades away to oblivion,
Then appears again silently flowing and then disappearing.

14

Since Fichte, the juridico-moral complex of intellectual property has depended on an idea-expression divide, which, for example, uses two different sets of laws—those of copyright and patent respectively—to distinguish proprietary rights over an expression from proprietary rights over an idea. What if we explored forms of poetic work, performed as acts of conceptualist (self) publishing, which choreographed a stage for writers and readers to collectively problematize the relationship of complexes like this to the work of poetry? *Of the Subcontract* and books like it seem to try to do so by conceptually orbiting around histories, theories and practices that philologically stem from the Latin concept of the *proprius*—not least ideas of properness, property, individuation, singularization and "one's own"—whilst trying not to betray the presupposition that "Art is what makes life more interesting than art."

Metalogue: What is an editor?

leslie stephen   A person whose mission is the
        suppression of rising genius.

the bureau of labor statistics   Editors plan,
        review, and revise content for publication.

wikipedia   An editor is a person who edits or
        makes changes to documents.

lautréaumont   Editing is necessary. Progress
        implies it. It holds tight an author's phrase,
        uses his expressions, eliminates a false
        idea, and replaces it with just the right idea.