



[...] flows through the line-break or ends at it.

“[Momentum] takes existing forms, textures and colours into new works, allowing each work to inform the next in multiple directions.”¹

When W. H. Auden, tasked with writing a poem—

A sentence is held together by “a syntactic force... [that] binds the elements of the sentence together, running through it like an electric current”.² Enacted by the moving eye in the process of reading, each reader’s bodily action becomes the energy that enlivens the text.

—in memory of W. B. Yeats, wrote, “By mourning tongues / the death of the poet was kept from his poems,”³ I understood him to be not only referencing this electric current, but also showing how it might carry on, infinitely sparked by each reader.

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Aby Warburg’s *Pathosformel* traces pictorial resonances of affect, emotions and psychological intensities, across very different places and times.⁴ His work was driven by the recognition that these things that we feel very deeply have a degree of universality in their bodily expression, which is traceable in works of art. In Sharna Barker’s *Momentum*, there is—

“Line-break”, “line-end”, “syntactic cut”, “midline break”, “caesura” — all of these terms point to the moment when the reader must move across a gap between or within lines of a poem. At this moment, the reader often hesitates about whether the syntax, the structure and momentum of the sentence, flows through the line-

¹ Sharna Barker, writing sent to the author, April 19, 2021.

² Frank Kjørup, “Exploring the conceptual implications of poetic *line-break*: from terminology to phenomenology,” *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 42, no. S1 (2010): 34.

³ Auden, W. H. “In Memory of W. B. Yeats.” In *Another Time*. New York: Random House, 1940, quoted in Ann Townsend, “A Mind for Metaphors.” *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 83, 1 (Winter 2007): 224.

⁴ Amy Sillman, “Shape: A Conversation,” *October* 172 (Spring 2020): 138.

*break or ends at it.*⁵

—a reciprocity of gesture and affective form⁶ that gives a similar sense of interconnected atemporality.

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In the era of the Anthropocene, human activity does not, and can no longer be considered to, occur in a vacuum; “the effects of our activities always bleed through.”⁷ It is common amongst Anthropocenic arts writing to instrumentalise this infinitely fracturing multiplicity—

There’s a moment when the line breaks and the reader has to hold the previous line in their head, waiting for the next one. They have to hold space for what will come next.

—to better understand it.⁸ Writing like this “frequently reads like a collage of fragments assembled by the author [...] because the act of collecting such things constitutes an assertion of the continuousness of the world.”⁹

In a method of making informed by an iterative engagement with chance and its effects, each artistic decision becomes both an action and a reaction. Like life, each time you start again from where you are, not from the beginning. Each decision made, rejected, reconsidered, is centralised rather than relegated to the periphery. It’s not just the experience that’s documented, but the process of negotiating that experience, the process of becoming. And it’s fleshy and raw and strange and full of discrepancies.

⁵ Kjølrup, “Exploring,” 27.

⁶ Sillman, “Shape,” 138.

⁷ Liz Linden and Susan Ballard, “Art Writing and Allegory in the Anthropocene,” *October* 175 (Winter 2021): 92.

⁸ Linden, “Art,” 94.

⁹ Linden, “Art,” 98.

Paradoxically, a lack of consistent or durational truth, or a multiplicity of truths, can feel truer. The honesty of truth in flux becomes a safe place to anchor for a while. “[Resting] here, [...] allowed them to be viewed through one another, also permitting glimpses of passing spectators and the surrounding environment”.¹⁰

¹⁰ Denise Birkhofer, “Eva Hesse and Mira Schendel: Voiding the Body — Embodying the Void,” *Women’s Art Journal* 31, no. 2 (Autumn/Winter 2010): 6.

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Artworks that hold space for a reciprocity between the work and the body have a different relationship with time. As the observer moves within that space, "the perception of the work is made infinitely changeable",¹¹ chance and atemporality are enmeshed in the act of experiencing.

For Yves Alain Bois, "[Eva Hesse's] 'tenuous bodilyness' is most akin to a recently detached toenail, part of the body and retaining something of its aura."¹²

*"Poetry asks its readers for a species of double vision, as two things become a third and yet continue to remain themselves."*¹³

Later in the poem, when Auden wrote that after "the current of [Yeats'] feeling failed; he became his admirers,"¹⁴ I felt some form of reassurance. I already understood what he meant here. He was not only referencing that same electric current, but also showing how it might carry on, infinitely sparked by each reader.

Viewed together, there are kernels of sameness and constancy that only reveal themselves once there have been a series of iterations.

*"[The] line break at the end of [the] line [...] momentarily encourages the reader to regard the syntax as complete".*¹⁵

*"[K]nowledge is momentary [...] our only assurance is that the next poem's truth will have mutated."*¹⁶

At this moment, the reader often hesitates about whether the syntax, the structure and momentum of the sentence, flows through the line-break or ends at it.

words by Emmalyn Hawthorne

¹¹ Birkhofer, "Eva," 5.

¹² Birkhofer, "Eva," 5.

¹³ Townsend, "A Mind," 225.

¹⁴ Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats", quoted in Townsend, "A Mind," 224.

¹⁵ Kjølrup, "Exploring," 29.

¹⁶ Townsend, "A Mind," 227.