



# Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing

*Craig Dworkin (Editor) , Kenneth Goldsmith (Editor)*

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**Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing** Craig Dworkin (Editor) , Kenneth Goldsmith (Editor)

In much the same way that photography forced painting to move in new directions, the advent of the World Wide Web, with its proliferation of easily transferable and manipulated text, forces us to think about writing, creativity, and the materiality of language in new ways. In *Against Expression*, editors Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith present the most innovative works responding to the challenges posed by these developments.

Charles Bernstein has described conceptual poetry as "poetry pregnant with thought." *Against Expression*, the premier anthology of conceptual writing, presents work that is by turns thoughtful, funny, provocative, and disturbing. Dworkin and Goldsmith, two of the leading spokespersons and practitioners of conceptual writing, chart the trajectory of the conceptual aesthetic from early precursors including Samuel Beckett and Marcel Duchamp to the most prominent of today's writers. Nearly all of the major avant-garde groups of the past century are represented here, including Dada, OuLiPo, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, and Flarf to name just a few, but all the writers are united in their imaginative appropriation of found and generated texts and their exploration of nonexpressive language. *Against Expression* is a timely collection and an invaluable resource for readers and writers alike.

## Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing Details

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# **From Reader Review Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing for online ebook**

**mwpm says**

*Against Expression*

- from "Soldatmarkedet", Monica Aasprong, pg. 4

\* \* \*

- from "Removal, Move (Line of Evidence)", Vito Acconci, pg. 22-23

\* \* \*

## **The Language of Love**

Love letters  
Carried away  
Pretty Polly

The language of love  
Betrayed  
Hearts desire

\*

## **First Kiss**

First kiss  
Flowers in the rain  
The fifth kiss  
Petals in the storm

\*

## **Home at Last**

Rooms of the heart  
Beyond the picket fence

This is the house  
Where love dwells

- from "Unforeseen Alliances", Sally Alatalo, pg. 32-33

\* \* \*

abcdef  
ghijkl  
mnopqr  
stuvw  
xyz

- "Suicide", Louis Aragon, pg. 51

\* \* \*

- from "Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions", Derek Beaulieu, pg. 65

\* \* \*

- from "Nets", Jen Bervin, pg. 113

\* \* \*

### *Brie*

You may already be an anarchist. It's true. Nothing is finer, more sublime or creamy. In its long history, when you come up with your own ideas and initiatives and solutions, it should bulge slightly. Not all brie is created equal. Poetry is made by all, not one, and at our cheese counter lies a cheese monger's tip.

- from "Whole Foods", Marie Buck, pg. 121

\* \* \*

- from "Between Words", Elisabeth S. Clark, pg. 143

\* \* \*

I know God can provide us

with more than one cover story  
on the subject of black holes

It's how life was originally created  
in the hospital those weeks  
after I was electrocuted some 35 years ago  
when my mom and I emoted as we'd never had

mustering energy for the "unconscious"  
pain and frustration that we were feeling

I never discussed this with the doctor, but  
the seas don't part and mountains  
made it really difficult for the whole province  
to see pictures of the inside of my uterus

I do know that rule number one  
is never to point your camera at the sun.

Just stay home and be a mom!!!  
my last boyfriend punched me out  
in front of my 5-year-old  
and I have never been happier

a woman who learned to bend spoons from Uri Gellar  
said the my uterus performed  
the function of a small blanket placed over a cat  
before giving the cat away or putting her to sleep

Baby dust to all, Sherry

- "The Only Miracles I Know of Are Simply Tricks That People Play on One Another", Katie  
Degentesh, pg. 175-176

\* \* \*

## **One**

all about oil  
how *I* did go

some were  
down with their them

made that was  
which word would write you

as by with make could day come

but many more said

part into each who will  
use what from other

find first a one to my call

be is if has

can is if up

time of get see

and so on, no?

*in* there

like hi look been for long  
her she

(the him this your had)

so

if he at its way?

may not have now then

may not have now then

two than are these:

to when we do it out we

to when it we out

people they number

are water they or

- from "First Words", Laura Elrick, pg. 197-199

\* \* \*

## Length 1

A  
B  
C  
D  
E  
F  
G  
H  
I  
J  
K  
L  
M  
N  
O  
P  
Q  
R  
S  
T  
U  
V  
W  
X  
Y  
Z

## Length 2

AD IO SO  
AF IS SP  
AH IT SQ  
AI JE SR  
AL JO ST  
AM JR TH  
AN KC TI  
AS KM TO  
AT KU TU  
AV KY UH  
AW LA UM  
AX LB UN  
BD LE UP  
BE LO US  
BI LP VA  
BO LT VP  
BY MA VS

CA NC WE  
CC ND WT  
CF ME WU  
CH MG YA  
CM NY YD  
CO ML YE  
CT MM YR  
CU MO YS  
DA MR ZU  
DE MT  
DI MY  
DO NE  
DR NO  
DU NW  
ED OF  
EH OH  
EL OL  
EM ON  
EN OP  
EQ OR  
ET OS  
EX OT  
FE OX  
FT OZ  
FY PA  
GA PI  
GM FL  
GO PO  
HA PP  
HE PT  
HI RD  
HR RE  
IF RF  
IJ RY  
IL SE  
IM SI  
IN SL

[...]

- from "The Standard Corpus of Present Day English Language Usage Arranged by Word Length and Alphabetized Within Word Length", Gerald Ferguson, pg. 212-214

\* \* \*

apostrophe (a foreign agent who accidentally ruptured an emergency cyanide tooth cap just before your rendez-vous with a thin man in a lumber jacket)





me,

MaD E aZure TyRo,  
of wAve-  
cords,  
Plashing rOck-  
hollows e-  
rUns f-  
duNe;  
he tiDe-  
rips Esperus,  
aZure iR,  
ods And  
Panisks,  
rOm roUgh od,

aNd clouDs E aZes tuRned ple,  
As Poggio uOise,  
ad Up weeN child E aZ,  
eaRt t on A Pike bOth n oUt,  
ed,  
"ANd yo CiD E eZ stRo red,  
And Pped,  
tO erU."

CE iN moulDering Es,  
aZe luRs,  
e grAss,  
Pale mOving.

thUd,  
rf uNder n-  
golD E eZ heR e swAllows P,  
rOof,  
chUrch of iN e golD.

Eneath aZe,  
teRing,  
gusA . . .  
Pool . . .  
[...]

- from "Words nd Ends from Ez", Jackson Mac Low, pg. 370-371

\* \* \*

- from "Le livre", Stéphane Mallarmé, pg. 399

\* \* \*

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III I II I II III II I I III III II I II II I III III II I  
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III I I III II II III I II I I II III III II III I II III I

- from "Pure Poems", Shigeru Matsui, pg. 339

\* \* \*

#### [Scene 5]

abused. ago Amend, a ward ble youth,  
But know, Come, you dear Queen, he did, His son  
How's that? fool drink for give Last thing Mark An  
my bat not dry; Rankly spirits the dry  
then is they fool thou no tlements. tony?  
/ two years Under With my brave was but (4)

\*

#### [Scene 6]

each one, Here, through I count Parti so pre  
tion make this gate tackle with pec (4)

\*

**[Scene 7]**

And what Even hound in ing grey it did  
I were like a fawn lisbury! ly? From O would  
so free this time to die the leash, with Sa

\*

**[Scene 8]**

\*

**[Scene 9]**

\*

**[Scene 10]**

A bribe I do my sword refuse to pay

- from "38: The New Shakespeare", Tomoko Minami, pg. 435-436

\* \* \*

1.  
wolves drive deer  
of into the woods

leaves tremble  
at water's edge

quietly return

all subjects  
all happenings  
are imaginary

deer simply have  
moved into a home  
sweet home status

pheasant hunt  
flying squirrel

wood duckling

falling from the sky  
like a blur  
in some hurry to be gone

[...]

- from "Consider How Spooky Deer Are", K. Silem Mohammad, pg.

\* \* \*

- from "Kyoto Protocol", Yedda Morrison, pg. 451

\* \* \*

----- (----- -)

-----

MADAMDE SWANN -- ----

-----, ----- M. de Norpois -- -----, -----

Professor Cottard

-----, ----- Swann, -----

[...]

- from "All the Names of *In Search of Lost Time*", Michael Maranda, pg. 472

\* \* \*

- from "Zong!", M. NourbeSe Philip, pg. 485

\* \* \*

### **First Group of Axioms**

(axioms of connection)

I, 1 - *A sentence exists containing two given words.*

COMMENT: Obvious. Example: given the two words "a" and "a", there exists a sentence containing these two words - "A violinist gives the vocalist her a."

I, 2 - *No more than one sentence exists containing two given words.*

COMMENT: This, on the other hand, may occasion surprise. Nevertheless, if one considers the words "years" and "early", once the following sentence containing them has been written, namely "For years I went to bed early," clearly all other sentences such as "For years I went to bed right after supper" or "For years I did not go to bed late" are merely pseudo-sentences that should be rejected by virtue of the above axiom.

[...]

- from "", Raymond Queneau, pg.

\* \* \*

Had West followed up her fine opening lead by dropping  
the club king or queen on the second round of clubs, she  
would have been able to play the ten when Stayman tried to  
throw her in, Then East could have overtaken and returned  
a heart, wrecking the contract.

- "Untitled Poem", Aram Saroyan, pg. 522

\* \* \*

|'s the song of th|'story of the |  
which H.c.E. |'s  
|n allways be-|n'-coming  
through the h|men of the-m-others.  
With|n th|story Anna Livia Plurabelle  
represents the plurable flood  
of warm wordy worders  
that flow |n 2 the |  
when th|s love(ly) h|men bursts forth  
|n 2 songs, th|'song's of the-m-any-|'s  
flow-er-ing vo|dSe.

and just as the |'nwraptides |t'Self  
in th|s h|men  
so H.c.E. |'mmerses h'Self  
in the Worders of (the) L|ffe,  
the river |t'Self;  
that |'s the fonte of th|'s outpouring of worders,  
that |'s the sauce

of the|'s HCE's-Coming  
+|'me--Coming  
h|'men-COm|ng-Epic

Ou|, Ou|, Ou|, Ou|  
all the way home  
Ou| = O+ |  
O+ | = O  
O + | =

e|es

- "Finnegans Wanke", Christine Wertheim, pg. 567

\* \* \*

the most common words with *a*

alms  
the angel  
the archbishop  
the archduke  
the arc  
at least  
until

the most common words with *c*

piece of paper  
the cymbal  
tin  
whole  
the price  
a hundred-weight  
the number  
the way  
the brick  
gypsy  
the target  
czar  
czarin  
the imperial clock

[...]

- from "11 abecedaries", Wiener Gruppe, pg. 571-572

---

## **Dennis says**

This is the best resource for conceptual writing by two of the leaders in the field! I'm going to use it for my class on contemporary forms.

---

## **Alex Lee says**

What writing isn't conceptual? All writing starts from a seed, or even a series of seeds, the synthesis of which is at its root, an idea...and the demand of writing be that it be coherent, consistent and end by wrapping up the displacement that started it, resolving aesthetically as pure balance. All the accounts equalled, and that's the bonus of being complete. The simplest of such balances, of course, is morality.

Nonetheless, this writing is conceptual in the sense that other, more traditional forms of writing, are not. Kenneth Goldsmith offers an interesting essay at the start, comparing photography and painting with the internet and writing. The internet, with its textual basis (but also mixed media) releases writing from its traditional prison of realism -- of trying to be a representation of the world just as photography released painting from its post-renaissance vanishing point perspective prison...and since the internet is laid over the real world, writing as a whole, with its books and non-specific ties to the planet becomes dated.

So in this sense, the title could have been called as much "against expression" just as the Abstract Expressionist painters were expressing much. The difference, of course, is that in this impressive volume, the writing is centered on writing as a concept, rather than writing as an invisible craft to create coherency, realism and so on as a deferral to another dimension.

In this sense, while much of the writing in this volume seems unanchored from the real world, at its root is always an angular concept that ties it back to how this writing is generated, as the writing itself is the item of interest.

What's interesting is that even without the intention of creating immersive worlds, automatic writing, writing that highlights only "foot prints" of other forces in the real world, such as word choice, events like 9/11, or various other assorted, curated arrangements, we the reader still persist in creating worlds in which we meander. Traditional immersive writing ecologies, such as narrative-time-space are eshewed for the inner voices of language, the collective roar of a non-singular plurality that does not intend as much as it unconsciously desires...and in that desire creates great social distortion -- of facts, relationships, defiguring much of what we do as humans on a daily basis. Much of the writing here, while unreadable, acts as a record of our own distortion... sometimes playful, sometimes sad, sometimes anything you want, this text, devoid of much intent of narrative or morality allows us a partial 3rd point of view on ourselves, so that we can see in our shadow most of all, what we are obsessed in seeing.

It's funny that often the introduction to the piece grounds the conceptual writing as being meaningful only because it is linked in reference to an hereto unseen axis outside writing. Nonetheless, I still find problematic the title; is this expression or is it against expression? What is expressed; writing always has with it, a pre-linguistic figural meaning that is included in the act of registering language.

All in all, an inspiring collection.

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## Diego Mora says

En su prólogo, Kenneth Goldsmith compara la escritura conceptual contemporánea a la revolución impresionista en la pintura como respuesta a la popularización de la fotografía. En este caso, el disparador vendría a ser Internet. El autor propone que el plagiarismo es parte de esta tendencia, lo llama copy-paste, y ve antecedentes directos en el cut-up. Menciona los recursos de la web para transformar el texto en muchas cosas, usando editores de texto, de imágenes, de audio y distribuyéndolos en masa por email o a través de blogs. Craig Dworkin por su parte, dice que la escritura conceptual debe rastrear a partir de Duchamp, a partir del cual utiliza ejemplos de éste y de otros artistas plásticos que poco a poco aplicaron sus conceptos en la escritura. Tanto Goldsmith como él se sustentan en el Wittgenstein que decía que no es el texto sino cómo se usa. Y dice Dworkin: "The textual proposition of conceptual art undercut the presumption of a unique art object; a significant move in the restricted economy of art's commodity system, the force of that negation is obviously lost in a modern literary context, where editions are the status quo" (xxxvi). Robert



Smithson lo describió así: "Language to be looked at and/or things to be read" (xxxvi).

"The opacity of language is a conclusion of conceptual art but already a premise for conceptual writing" (Dworking, xxxvi).

"The guiding concept behind conceptual poetry may be the idea of language as quantifiable data" (Dworking, xxxvi).

"My sense of language is that it is matter and not ideas-i.e., 'printed matter'" (Dwan Gallery advertising, 1972).

Monica Aasprong: "Soldatmarkedet", libro hecho solamente con la letra t.

Walter Abish: "Skin Deep", compuesto de citas anónimas.

"Conceptual art is good only when the idea is good." –Goldsmith (xxii).

---

## **Yigru Zeltl says**

Even I must say this: "Against Expression" is not "the" perfect anthology.

First things first: it is obviously rather partisan, in a trojan horse kind of way. It is not just of, but (especially) "for" conceptual writing (and in quite a polemic way, as if expression is necessarily excluded by the use of conceptual techniques). There are quite a few "avant la lettre" examples of what they consider conceptual writing (Diderot, Mallarmé, Tzara, Duchamp, Warhol are all here, but concrete poetry, for instance, just gets a mention), but the focus is on the recent or very recent people, some of them, of course, directly connected to the two editors, who also mean to promote in this way their cause...

The analogies used to explain why conceptual writing is bound to become a major thing of the present/future, in fact, are rather flawed: it doesn't look that certain that literature will change itself under the pressure of the Internet as much as painting was reinvented with the coming of photography. Then "literature" is not really that many decades behind visual arts. Besides Kosuth and Warhol, there are quite a few other contemporary artists who delved into writing, at least within the medium of the artist book. In fact, Kenneth Goldsmith himself actually comes from the same art world-slanted air. French artist Bernar Venet did in the '60s-'70s some of the same things as Goldsmith (<http://hyperallergic.com/228238/the-1...>). Otherwise, there is some truth: it is much easier to practice conceptual writing now and make a reasonable aesthetic out of it - indeed, it shouldn't even be seen as so groundbreaking, but I don't see it as a rehash of Duchamp or Art & Language either.

Then there are so many authors, especially not English-speaking authors, that were left out (most of those in the book are from Canada, the USA and the UK - much less France and the surprisingly prolific Scandinavian countries. (For authors from some more parts of the world, please consult my "Bibliography of Conceptual Writing". And now sorry for the shameless plug!)

Of course, the female-to-male ratio also makes this index questionable, but now we also have the anthology "I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing By Women", which improves things quite a bit and comes with arguments that ought to be taken now in consideration.

All of these being said, "Against Expression" is, alongside "I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing By Women", "Notes on Conceptualisms" by Fitterman and Place, Perloff's "Unoriginal Genius" and a few other books, a still great resource for the time being. For me, at least, it was a re-introduction to experimental writing that met my writerly needs in a time when I was looking for something like this. It really made me

re-evaluate my commitment to literature, my priorities... No, I didn't give up entirely on "lyrical poetry", but conceptual means give me now the access to do approaches I wanted to do ever since I started writing, but was not bold enough to go this far.

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### **Anthony says**

Meh.

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### **Mills College Library says**

808.8011 A259 2011

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### **Matthew Bankuti says**

I'm giving this book four stars, but I'm honestly sort of unsure if that is appropriate. I HATED a lot of the content, but I found that I enjoyed learning about conceptual writing regardless and that this anthology was a good introduction to the realm of conceptual writing despite my feelings towards much of it. A lot of the stuff in here is pretty silly on a conceptual level, and it is bizarre to have some of it presented as anything other than silly with such conviction, but there were a few works that I legitimately enjoyed both conceptually and as written works (however rare they may have been).

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### **John says**

While conceptual poetry may not be for everyone, those who work and read in this area will find this book one of the only guidebooks to the body of work that has been produced. The book covers a wide period of literature. The book covers Mallarme to Oulipo to Warhol to contemporary works.

Some of the entries could have used more context, but there is a dense collection within the cover.

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### **Ellen says**

I can't say that conceptual writing will ever be my thing, but this seemed to be an interesting collection of it.

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