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I Can't Even
String
a Sentence
Together Or
(why wear
words?)

Jonathan Boyd

This short set of thoughts, put to paper, written under {a self-imposed} duress are very much a snippet of a continual work in progress. If things asserted seem in fluidity – good – they are – the ideas and making are very much in flux. Like words, things and their meanings are endlessly deferred and these molten conditions allow an integration of practice, theory and reflection in a continual (or perhaps helioidal) revolution. Whilst I continue to »figure out« what it is I am doing these words continue a journey of reflexivity, contextualising and situating my thinking within the words of others who have helped, and at points hindered a practice. They are also an amalgamation of three different sources, my 2019 Publication »Jewellery Manifest«, the 2021 Public Lecture »I Can't Even String a Sentence Together« and the essay published alongside the 2022 Solo Show »Emergent Dialogues of the Topophilic Line«

For me

words spill out backwards
through the urgent tapping of the keyboard, letters find new, but wrong partners
and numbers take shelter amongst the letters hiding from refuge before the enviable cull via the machine mind¹ of the spell check

....
reading is worse
I am a reader
of sorts
it says so on my business card
Jonathan Boyd »Reader.«² in jewellery
What does it mean to read jewellery?
and
What does it mean to wear words?

...
I can string a necklace
but

I can't even string a sentence together.

...
but
as an artist/creative/thinker/maker
I can combine the two forms of stringing
of stringing a sentence and of stringing a necklace
slowly, each letter joined to the last by a thin line of silk, which is knotted
before the next letter is carefully threaded on.

1 »Sense is a non-existing entity, and, in fact maintains very special relations with non-sense.« (Gilles Deleuze: The Logic of Sense, 1969).

2 This U.K Job title is the equivalent to Professor without chair in the German system.

3 »Différance is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other. This spacing is the simultaneously active and passive (the a of différence indicates this indecision as concerns activity and passivity, that which cannot be governed by or distributed between the terms of this opposition) production of the intervals without which the »full« terms would not signify, would not function... the a of différence also recalls that spacing is temporization, the detour and postponement by means of which intuition, perception, consummation – in a word, the relationship to the present, the reference to a present reality, to a being – are always deferred. Deferred by virtue of the very principle of difference which holds that an element functions and signifies, takes on or conveys meaning, only by referring to another past or future element in an economy of traces. This economic aspect of différence, which brings into play a certain not-conscious calculation in a field of forces, is inseparable from the more narrowly semiotic aspect of différence« (Jacques Derrida: Positions, 1982).

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5 <https://jonathanmathewboyd.wixsite.com/web-site-1/strikethrough?pgid=ke1pkbm8-ef15251d-7d45-42e5-8d3f-869ff4b6fc0>.

6 <https://jonathanmathewboyd.wixsite.com/web-site-1/never-rant-and-circulating-gossip>.

7 »Virtual Realities are different from nonvirtual realities [...] Virtual entities are digital entities, made of computational and informational processes. More succinctly, they're made of bits. They're perfectly real objects that are grounded in a pattern of bits in a computer...Virtual reality is sometimes taken to mean »fake reality« ...that's the wrong way to define it. Instead, it means something closer to a »digital reality«. The virtual object is different from the nonvirtual one, but both are equally real... Augmented reality involves additions to reality: Reality +. Some virtual worlds are as good or better than ordinary reality: Reality +. If we're in a simulation, there is more to reality than we thought: Reality +. There will be a smorgasbord of multiple realities: Reality +.« (David J. Chalmers: Reality +, 2022)

Language, to me, is opaque. On this plane of opacity, I see the surface of meaning. But beyond this surface I cannot see through. I cannot see through to the depths and endless deferment of meaning (*différance*)³. It leads me to believe that language can never be the stable structure I was brought up to believe it was. Words exist in a vast textile reaching outwards in all directions as they seek to find purpose. I was taught to be careful with my words ... to construct meaning carefully.

But, constructed meaning always strikes me as so unstructured...

I don't trust words.

But, perhaps, this is why I like them

My practice is an investigation into languages. Visual and textual (and wearable). Of words and their meaning and **by extension** their forms.

How form in-forms meaning and how meaning in-forms form.

Language is forever self-undermining and unstable, its sturdiness never guaranteed: for example, speech and writing lie not in a hierarchy⁴ but in an eternal sibling rivalry, both holding and displaying aspects that the other cannot achieve, but in turn influencing the other in its next generation, evolution and transformation. This link between speech and text has been an ongoing influence, from 2006 works such as »Conversation Piece«⁵, through 2012's »Endless Rant on Craft«⁶ to the 2022 works exhibited in the Marzee solo show: »Emergent Dialogues of the Topophilic Line«. In these outputs the hierarchy of a phonocentric stance is gently prodded, questioned or, typically, roundly ignored.

Whilst those earlier works utilised and promoted overhead, everyday conversations (ers, ahs and hmms verbatimly rendered) these recent works use Virtual Reality (Reality +⁷) to find a space between speech and text. A performing of words somewhere between speech and writing, and somewhere between writing and drawing.

In the performance of these works there is a sense of (un)folded and creating form through a relational correspondence that I had not foreseen or had cared to define in advance. As my arms reach out and away from the body a line emerges (is drawn) which continually transforms through gesture, into words in space. Their emergence (the writing/drawing), is the artwork, the action, and the output. These things (the jewellery produced) are less defined by their object-ness, rather they are better defined as an event.

If artworks such as these are events (or even a process) (or a formation of thought through embodied creation [a creation that oscillates between writing and speech, between writing and dance, between performance and craft]) then what are the artefacts that are the left behind from such a process?

Jonathan Boyd | I Can't Even String a Sentence Together Or (why wear words?)

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Schmuck mit Schrift und Sprache

They are this, the left behind.

That is, they are a remanent of an event.
A reminder.
Left as the remanent of a temporal activity which has ceased to be.
They are fossilisations of gesture⁸.

Other acts of performativity (in making/being) are a part of daily lives partly through our relation to text, especially in how we react to out tattooed urban environments- how these words change our public identities. In »The M8 Intersection at Charing Cross as a Metaphor for My Heartbeat« (2016) (a surprising heartfelt paean to a motorway intersection Glasgow Scotland) words manifest from a font of the city, i.e. those types of lettering forced on us through the bombardment of advertising.

**ALL THE STUFF YOU SEE
AND WHICH IS FORCED UPON YOU
ON A DAILY BASIS**

Objects such as »The M8 ...«, are then, also pieces of writing. Situated in a lineage of »concrete poetry« they become types of a »concrete« concrete poetry. A concrete poetry made solid. And when the objects are worn, the wearer develops a continually changing relationship with the text. One where nonlinear patterns of reading occur with each wearing. Jewellery, it always strikes me is not just a language, but it is also inescapably entwined with the language of words.

The ring, for example is so historically tied up with human communication and symbolism that we can look back to ancient parallels and paradoxes of the worn object with a contemporary affinity. Roman philosopher Pliny the Elder referred to the ring using the term *symbolum* which places jewellery under the same semiotic analysis as words in themselves.

⁸ With knowing nods to the importance of sedimentary (fossilised) materials; stones/ electroforming/laser-sintering which are common in jewellery production.

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Why wear words then?

Well...
we do, don't we? With every spoken utterance, item of clothing and our continual embodied engagement through the Internet of Things, we wear words. Like jewellery, our words contain intoxicating and fascinating materialities, whether that is the soot-made ink laying and seeping in amongst the fine fibres of wood on the surface of paper or the materiality of our spoken words which exist as shifts of sound waves which stretch outward from the body through a mixture of exhaled carbon dioxide and the movement of oxygen and hydrogen molecules. We wear words through our speech and here, even the spoken word is materially and temporarily a decorative concern.

What, then does it mean though to wear words?

At an (unusual) loss for words, or, possibly for the right words on why I make words to wear I turn instead to those words of metal artist, friend, mentor and colleague Professor Michael Rowe who described my work as such:

»In jumping from the printed page to the site of jewellery, the written word migrates to a completely other field. Words and phrases freed from their grounding on paper and vellum now settle on the body as chains and brooches... standing in a »conversational« relation between people they rehearse a primal encounter – two people come face to face and a communication takes place.« (Rowe, 2019)

Schmuck mit Schrift und Sprache

Jonathan Boyd

Anhänger »Untying This Mess«

Oxidiertes Silber
2019



Brosche »On Knotting #1«

Oxidiertes Silber
2022



Anhänger
»Performing words in space«

Oxidiertes Silber, gelbes Nylon
2022



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Halsschmuck
»Fossilations of gesture«

Oxidiertes Silber mit Gamerhead-Logo
2022

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Halsschmuck im Etui unten
»The grass is always greener«

Oxidiertes Silber, UV-bedrucktes Aluminium,
orangefarbenes Acryl, Karton, Papierausdruck
2019



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Großer doppelter Anhänger
»Very little
common ground«

Silber, blaue und rote Kordel
2019



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Halsschmuck und Buch »I can't string a sentence together«

Silber, Seide, Homers Odyssee, blaue Acrylfarbe
2019



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Halsschmuck im Etui »The m8 intersection at charing cross as a metaphor for my heartbeat«

Silber, orangefarbenes Acryl
Etui: Leder, von Hand bedrucktes Papier
2016



bitte öffnen

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Broschen
»Yield« und »Everything must go«

Silber, UV-bedrucktes Aluminium, Stahl (yield)
2019



EVERYTHING
MUST GO