

THESIS  
GLOSS: AN INCOMPLETE GLOSSARY

Submitted by  
Scott Lindsten  
Art Department

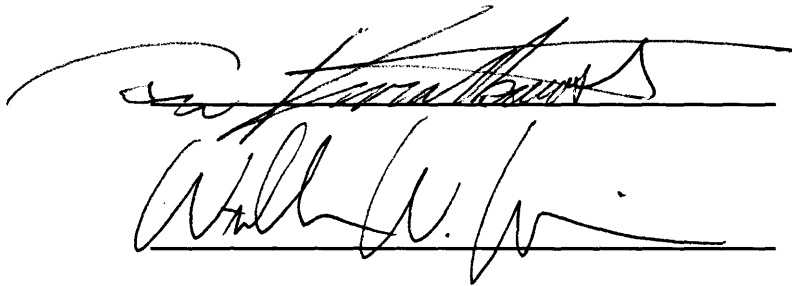
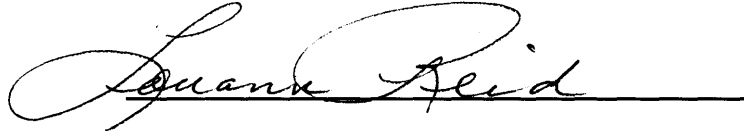
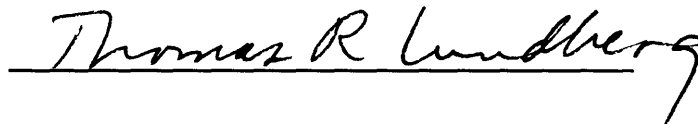
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, Colorado  
Spring 2000

Colorado State University

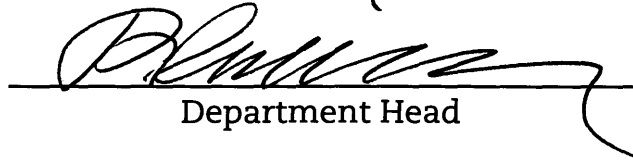
April 13, 2000

We hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under our supervision by Scott Lindsten entitled "Gloss: an incomplete glossary," be accepted as fulfilling in part the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

Committee on Graduate Work

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "William W. W.", written over a horizontal line.A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Luana Reid", written over a horizontal line.A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Thomas R. Lundberg", written over a horizontal line.A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John Campbell", written over a horizontal line.

Advisor

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Department Head

## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Gloss: an incomplete glossary

Artmaking at the end of the twentieth century became engulfed by theory. In the wake of such movements as poststructuralism, deconstructionism, and postmodernism, came a reexamination of aesthetics which incorporated an ever-broadening intellectual discourse. Many of these theories have their conception in the realm of linguistics, and language itself begins to exert its ascendancy on other fields of study—indeed, on reality itself. This written accompaniment to my thesis art exhibit examines the complex, sometimes oppressive, sometimes sublime, nature of words and language and their effects on my approach to art.

S. R. Lindsten

Art Department

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado 80523

Spring 2000

With the utmost regard (and affection for):

John Gravidahl  
Bill Wylie  
Kay Jenkins  
Linda Frickman  
Ron Kwiatkowski  
Louann Reid  
Tom Lundberg

and with love to:

my mother, Judy Gattoni  
Luis Gattoni  
my sister, Traci Lindsten  
Christine Mulcahy  
Jeff Lush  
Juhl Wojahn

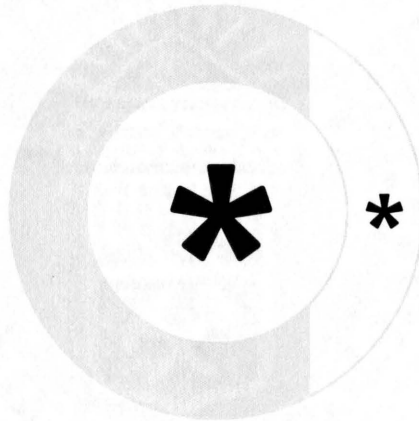
without whose love and support this project would not have been possible.

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**gloss** /glaws, glos/

1. A word inserted between the lines or in the margin as an explanatory equivalent of a foreign or otherwise difficult word in a text; hence applied to a similar explanatory rendering of a word given in a glossary or dictionary. Also, in a wider sense, a comment, explanation, interpretation. Often used in a sinister sense: A sophistical or disingenuous interpretation.<sup>1</sup>



*figure 1*

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<sup>1</sup>During the course of my graduate studies, I've found myself awash in words. They, in turn, have made me aware of the power of language—I've glimpsed just a fraction of the massive influence linguistics has over our thoughts, actions, societal structure: our reality. I'm fascinated by the ramifications of these issues within the more focused realm of art, and find I've had to re-examine and redefine much of my former "bedrock" ideas of what it means to be an artist in light of my continuing revelations. However, I keep coming back to words themselves; in academic circles especially, they wield a tremendous amount of authority as a means of communication. Witness this document: even a visual artist is expected to discuss her ideas, motivations, intentions in a cogent, formal manner—with words, on paper, for others to access, interpret, and ultimately, evaluate.

**book** /bōōk/

1. a. Written or printed work consisting of pages glued or sewn together along one side and bound in covers.
- b. Literary composition intended for publication.

if a cheerfulest Elephantangelchild should sit

(holding a red candle over his head  
by a finger of a trunk, and singing out of a red

book) on a proud round cloud in a white high night

where his heartlike ears have flown adorable him  
self tail and all (and his tail's red christmas bow)  
—and if, when we meet again, little he (having flown  
even higher) is sunning his penguin parasol in the glow

of a joy which wasn't and isn't and won't be words<sup>2</sup>

while possibly not (at a guess) quite half way down  
to the earth are leap and swooping tinily birds  
whose magical gaeity makes your beautiful name—

i feel that (false and true are merely to know)  
Love only has ever been, is, and will ever be, So

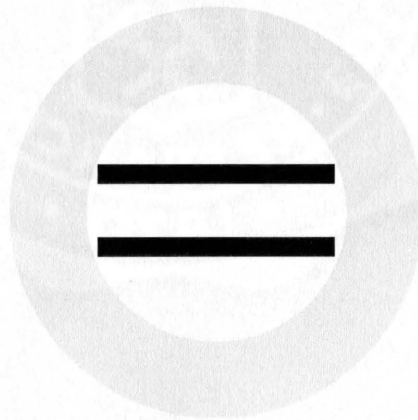
**e e cummings**

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<sup>2</sup>It is quaintly *jeune* for the artist to dismiss words as inconsequential to the artmaking process; one does so only at the risk of being made to suffer at the hands of the stultifying power they possess. Yet . . . this does not diminish the ever-raging ideological war between the prelingual (I have the nerve to add recklessly: *if such a thing exists*) and the lingual experience, a war often fought on the battlefield of art. If the visual is a unique, expressive mode, then why the expectation that words can do it justice, indeed, that words can begin to even touch upon the same experience(s)?

**thesis** /theesis/

1. According to ancient writers, the setting down of the foot or lowering of the hand in beating time, the stress or *ictus*; the stressed syllable of a foot in a verse; a stressed note in music.
2. By later latin writers used for the lowering of the voice on an unstressed syllable, thus practically reversing the original meaning, hence: The unaccented or weak part of a foot in verse (classical or modern), or an unaccented note in music.
3. A proposition laid down or stated, esp. as a theme to be discussed and proved, or to be maintained against attack (in *Logic* as distinct from HYPOTHESIS 2, in *Rhetoric* from ANTITHESIS 2); a statement, assertion, tenet.<sup>3</sup>



*figure 2*

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<sup>3</sup>For the purposes of a written thesis, the argument between verbal and visual is (mischievously) moot. I think that I'm fairly rare in that I actually enjoy careful wordsmithing as much as I enjoy crafting design; it only adds to the the incredibly rich, multi-layered aspect of life that words may be inherently flawed (in this, they are like us, and that is com-forting). In fact, I take a certain, masochistic glee in knowing that this glossary is destined to fail. There are not enough words in the world; there are too many words in the world. The surface of this page exists, as though held to the surface of a windowpane, on the deceptively stark surface of "things"—beyond which lies an infinite conceptual space.



**seen** /seen/

1. That which is seen or visible as contrasted with that which is unseen or invisible.

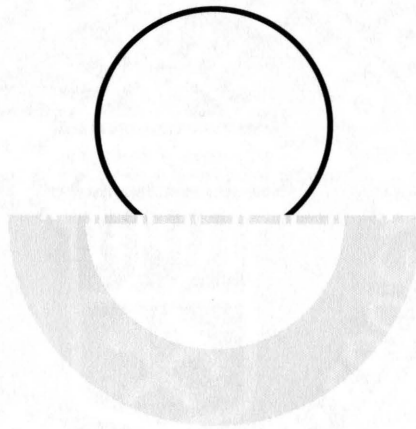
Words ultimately are an instrument of human solace—we speak them and write them to bring peace to ourselves, to tell ourselves the stories we already know. The sound of them in our heads is like the voice of a loved one, spoken softly in the darkness at bedtime, reassuring, existing more as sound than as meaning, a reminder that we are alive.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Much of these ideas hinge on the fact that we are sight-supremacists. Visual dominance, like language, has become so embedded in our existence as to be (ahem) invisible. We have created amazing mental processes for filtering through the raw tonnage of information that falls through our twin apertures on a daily basis, so much so that we require greater and greater qualitative stimulus to begin to get our attention. Enter the Monster B (beauty, but which also seems synonymous for *bête noire* in certain circles) to wreak additional havoc. Beauty would seem to be an ideal candidate for a pro-prelingualism argument, but because it so strongly compels communication it has become the favorite chew-toy of language dogs worldwide. And as such, has come to be co-opted by too many factions to count, resulting in myriad definitions and making any transcendent references to universality problematic, to say the least. Would I like my work to be “beautiful?” Of course; but I don’t suppose for an instant that everyone (possibly anyone) has the same subtle *signified* for that particular *signifier*.

**meta-** /métə/

1. Denoting change of position or condition (metabolism).
2. Denoting position:
  - a. Behind.
  - b. After or beyond (metaphysics).
  - c. Of a higher or second-order kind (metalanguage).<sup>5</sup>



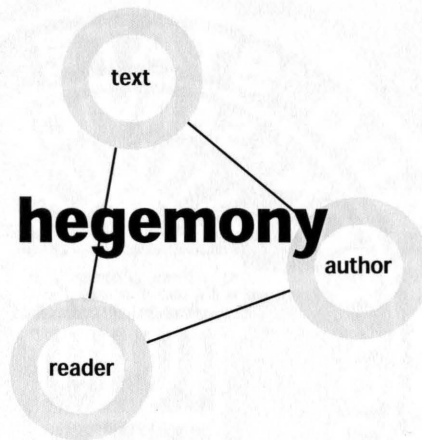
*figure 3*

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<sup>5</sup>A linguistic theory that I find resonating in my artwork is the idea of “present/absence.” Codification of words as symbols relies as much on what is not said, what is excluded from representation in order to point more clearly at that which is present. It occurs to me that I’m as interested in withholding information in my pieces as in presenting it. Limited access through the use of fabric, doors, and other devices necessitates a choice on the part of the viewer to more actively investigate content. A sense of discovery heightens one’s stimulus and hopefully moves one into a “meta” zone, in which questions are raised about the strategies themselves. Why was the information initially withheld? How does its subsequent discovery influence the “original” interpretation? What about the viewer who doesn’t choose to participate as fully? Is there other, hidden information that I have yet to find?

**prosody** /prosədee/

1. The science of versification; that part of the study of language which deals with the forms of a metrical composition; formerly reckoned as a part of grammar, and including also the study of the pronunciation of words (now called phonology or phonetics), esp. in relation to versification.<sup>6</sup>



*figure 4*

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<sup>6</sup>One concept I seek to investigate is hidden order. I crave a certain sense of structure, and seek to discover what, if any, underlying network supports a given aesthetic experience. That such a structure may not be immediately apparent to the average viewer (or may never be consciously noted at all) does not deter; in fact, I find these types of occurrences the most intriguing. As in chaos theory, which seeks to decipher the disorderly through the investigation of increasingly complex orders of pattern, I'm intrigued with the tracing of unseen underpinnings, the spidery blueprints that the final, completed construction gives little overt indication of. I think that much of my interest in poetry and linguistics is derived from these ideas; I love examining the syllabic, metrical, or rhyme-scheme patterns in works of literature, and wonder how they can be mirrored in my art. Of late, I have been fascinated with  $\pi$ , the Fibonacci Sequence, and the "Golden Mean," all closely related and exhibiting similar mathematical properties. Though not formally trained in math or physics, I am endlessly fascinated by the visual manifestation of these invisible principles.

**antithesis** /antíthisis/

1. Rhet. An opposition or contrast of ideas, expressed by using as the corresponding members of two contiguous sentences or clauses, words which are the opposites of, or strongly contrasted with, each other; as 'he must increase, but I must decrease,' 'in newness of spirit, not in oldness of letter.'
2. The second of two such opposed clauses or sentences; a proposition opposed to a thesis; a counter-thesis or -proposition.
3. By extension: Direct or striking opposition of character or functions (between two things); contrast. Const. of, between (with obs.).<sup>7</sup>

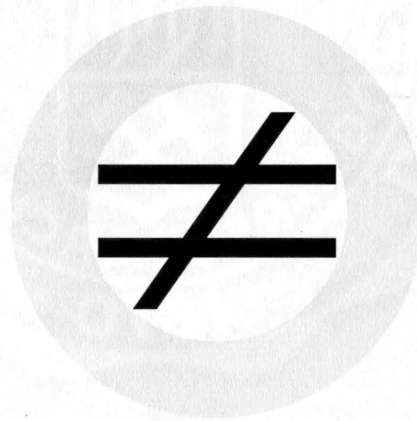


figure 5

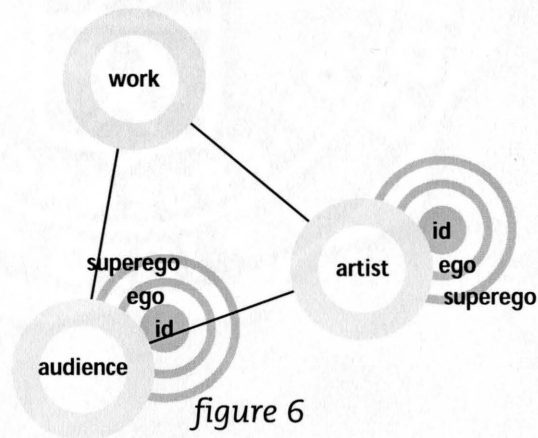
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<sup>7</sup>Ideas of "beauty" are made more difficult by capitalism, of course, and the recognition that seduction sells. Having become industrialized, civilized, and ultimately hooked umbilically to media, have we and our culturally derived criteria for beauty eclipsed previous paradigms? Madison Avenue has its own set of back-alley aestheticians who are attempting to define the standards of beauty even as we speak, and it becomes practically impossible to escape their visual testing grounds. As a graphic designer, I'm part of the problem and, potentially, part of the cure, but as we become more efficiently "trained" by our plastic culture, is it even still possible to regain an "honest" consensus? How badly tainted are we by the immersive environment in which we formed our almost autonomic responses to visual stimulus?



**subject** /súbjikt/

1. Matter, theme, etc., to be discussed, described, represented, etc.
  2. Field of study.
  3. Gram. Noun or its equivalent about which a sentence is predicated and with which the verb agrees.
  4. Any person living under a government.<sup>8</sup>
  5. Person or animal undergoing treatment, examination, or experimentation.
- adj.** 1. Owing obedience to a government, colonizing power, force, etc.
2. (foll. by to) Liable, exposed, or prone to.
- adv.** (foll. by to) Conditionally upon.
- v. tr.** /səbjékt/ (foll. by to) make liable; expose; treat.



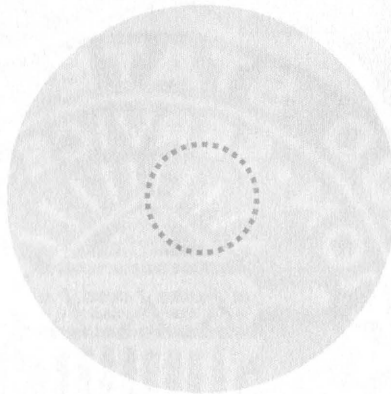
<sup>8</sup>It is a poignant human characteristic that we seek out forces greater than ourselves to which we may subjugate ourselves. Voluntary surrender is a complex dynamic, which can empower as well as demean (see Dave Hickey's *Enter the Dragon*), and is wound inextricably with desire and dependence. While I have achieved moments of "reckless abandon" in my personal life, I don't know whether such an element exists in my art—I get too intimately involved with my conceptual goals, and too invested in the attempt to control my media. The cerebral fallout of conceptually-based art moves away from the sensual: in the Cartesian split between mind and body, I tend to address these intellectual aspirations with a lack of physical involvement, I forget, sometimes, that I'm allowed to woo the viewer, to do my best to seduce them.

**gloss** /glaws, glos/

1. To put a gloss upon.

a. In immaterial sense: To give a fair appearance to; to veil in specious language. Also with over, and in indirect passive.

b. In material sense: To render bright and glossy; to glaze.<sup>9</sup>



*figure 7*

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<sup>9</sup>Language has an inherent glossiness to it. Weak or ill-considered ideas can be spoken or written in such a way as to appear smooth, attractive, slick. The seduction of such a surface lures us and our senses in a biologically derived way, we lust over the external properties, blinded against the dark void of content by the ecstasy of their shiny, glowing skin and the primacy of our own desire.

**symbol** /simbəl/

1. Thing conventionally regarded as typifying, representing or recalling something.
2. Representative mark, sign, logo, etc.<sup>10</sup>

[...] If you catch him,  
hold a flashlight up to his eye. It's all dark pupil,  
an entire night itself, whose haired horizon tightens  
as he stares back, and closes up the eye. Then from the lids  
one tear, his only possession, like the bee's sting, slips.  
Slyly he palms it, and if you're not paying attention  
he'll swallow it. However, if you watch, he'll hand it over,  
cool as from underground springs and pure enough to drink.

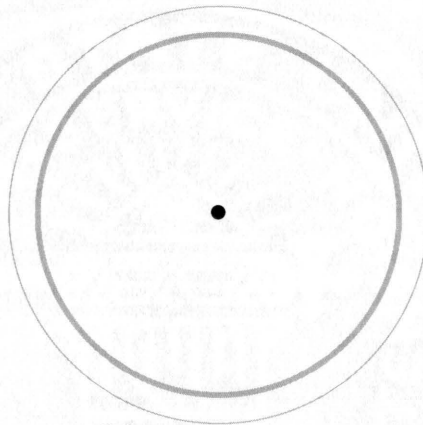
**Elizabeth Bishop**

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<sup>10</sup>I am in awe of the perfect circle. It is the Platonic egg whose yolk contains all the stuff of our intellectual awakening, an infinite unbroken band. At the moment of our comprehension of the circle; then we knew the divine. It manifests the fullness of paradox, as well: even as it envelopes, it excludes; even as it unifies, it creates demarcation between inside and outside, between acceptance and rejection. Cycle[completion: return:revolution]; Corona[unseen energies: aura:halo]; Eye[passage:access:boundary]; Void[lack:invisibility:space]; Focus[center: origin:core].

**space** /spays/

1. a. Continuous unlimited area or expanse which may or may not contain objects, etc.<sup>11</sup>
- b. Interval between points or objects.
- c. Empty area; room.



*figure 8*

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<sup>11</sup>Only in three-dimensional space do objects exist, and yet we are so adept at creating space where none should be found. Deep, representational space can create whole vistas which can evoke satisfying physiological responses within us, as though we were folded into their reality. A cast shadow exists on a flat surface, yet we intuit the distance the silhouetted object is from our vantage. Virtual space, ordered generation of pinpricks of light on our computer screens, creates deep three-dimensional and conceptual space. The further we advance into virtual space, the less three-dimensional space we require.



**sign** /sīn/

1. **a.** Thing indicating a quality, state, etc.; thing perceived as indicating a future state or occurrence.  
**b.** Portent.
2. Mark, symbol, etc.
3. Gesture or action conveying information, an order, etc.<sup>12</sup>

signifier

signified

sign

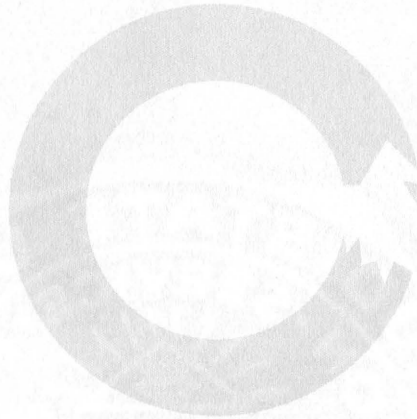
*figure 9*

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<sup>12</sup>This is a document of my struggle with the notion of definition. To define is to establish “correctness,” an act of authority, which carries implications of power, which wreaks changes upon us and our existence (often rudely, without asking our permission). There is power-envy present in artmaking—why should I expect anyone else to adopt my way of seeing, to agree with my strategies for establishing meaning? Does a visual iconography exist that can express specific concepts unambiguously? Should the same functions even be asked of imagery, or does it exist in another state of being entirely, like the elements—each inherently unique and unalloyed? What happens when the accepted set of definitions enters a state of flux? In the liminal phase of communicative strategies (when the word “beauty” blurs into a field of gray between you and me) is it possible to glimpse the new paradigm of normalcy waiting on the other side?

**lacuna** /ləkyŏnə/

1. Hiatus; gap.
2. Missing portion, esp. in a book, etc.<sup>13</sup>



*figure 9*

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<sup>13</sup>Art is more about absence than presence. The number of physical attributes that can be seen, experienced, and subsequently catalogued for a given work of art, is a finite number. More exists in exclusion than in inclusion. Mystery resides in the unknown and the unknowable. I want much to be missing from my thesis exhibit. I want the viewer to feel bombarded with information, but to still not have enough. I want the piece to feel incomplete, yet to compel its audience to take on the task of filling that void.

**meaningful** /meeningfōol/

1. Full of meaning; significant.
2. Logic Able to be interpreted.<sup>14</sup>

*ochite kita ame wo miagete sono mama*  
*no katachi de fui ni,*  
*kuchibiru ga hoshi* ⊗

### **Tawara Machi**

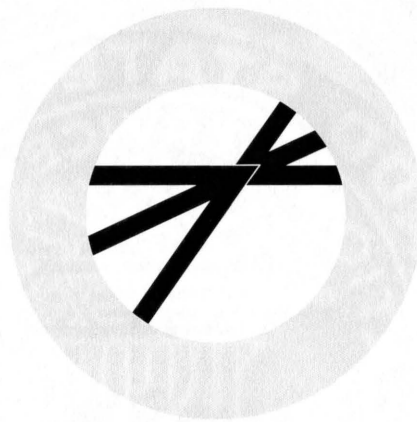
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<sup>14</sup>The word significant contains the four words *sign, if, I, can't* in order. In American English, this forms a plausible sentence which could be uttered under any number of circumstances: "Sign, if I can't." Sign seems to indicate the use of a signature, or the written mark which indicates identity, a mark which carries considerable cultural authority. It allows legal access to possessions, and is often used to settle disputes of ownership. If one person grants another the authority to sign for her, the second person exerts an equivalent portion of power in a specific legal circumstance as would the first. Why wouldn't the first be able to sign? Injury, incapacity? Absence? Death? Loss of faculty? Illiteracy? What moral obligations would the second person be under in accepting such power? Would they execute their charge prudently? What is at stake? Are they signing for flowers or a bank draft? A work of art? In what circumstances could one person not sign for another?

⊗ Gazing upward in the falling rain/suddenly/I long to be kissed/in this very stance

**synthesis** /sínthisis/

1. In philosophical systems influenced by Hegelian ideas, the final stage of a triadic progression in which an idea is proposed, then negated, and finally transcended by a new idea that resolves the conflict between the first and its negation.<sup>15</sup>



*figure 10*

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<sup>15</sup>Words and images seek to express ideas, feelings, emotions. To communicate the effects (if any) of visual artifacts, we must use language. Words employ different strategies to create meaning than images. Poems are often described as “imagistic.” Words are inherently limited. Words create their own reality. Language is self-referential. Meaning includes absence. The physiological act of seeing is mundane. Beauty exists. Words beget images. Images beget words. The written word has more authority in our culture than imagery does. Images can be instantly understood. A picture is worth a thousand words. The pen is mightier than the sword. A dictionary, sitting on a lectern, open exactly to the center, gives the definition for “masochism.” A dictionary is a book. Scott Lindsten’s Master’s Thesis Exhibit, entitled “Gloss,” is called, by the artist, a book. It employs words and images. It is “meaningful.”

**move** /mōōv/

1. tr. & intr. Change one's position, posture, or place, or cause to do this.
2. tr. & intr. Put or keep in motion; rouse; stir.
3. tr. Affect (a person) with emotion.
4. tr. Stimulate; provoke; prompt or incline.<sup>16</sup>

Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels'  
hierarchies? and even if one of them pressed me  
suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed  
in that overwhelming existence. For beauty is nothing  
but the beginning of terror, which we still are just able to endure,  
and we are so awed because it serenely disdains  
to annihilate us. Every angel is terrifying. [...]

**Ranier Maria Rilke**

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<sup>16</sup>What does it mean to move through an artwork? The traditional ideas of viewership are relatively passive; the audience standing, looking, observing . . . shuffling along. We often speak of certain works of art moving us; evoking an emotional response that, in turn, manifests itself physiologically. The stomach tightens, tears well, a thickness forms at the back of the throat—what inside us is moving? The growing awareness of other orders of matter and their seemingly magical presence in our expanded reality—quarks, leptons, neutrinos—gives rise to an awareness of unseen dynamism, boiling just below the surface of things. We and our world are constantly teeming . . . dancing.



**object** /'ɒbjɪkt, -jekt/

1. Material thing that can be seen or touched.<sup>17</sup>
2. Person or thing to which action or feeling is directed (*the object of my desire*).
3. Thing sought or aimed at; purpose.
4. *Gram.* Noun or its equivalent governed by an active transitive verb or by a preposition.

/əb'ʃjekt/ v.

1. *intr.* Express or feel opposition, disapproval, or reluctance; protest.
2. *tr.* State as an objection.

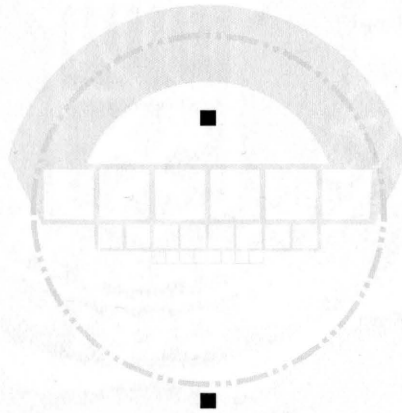


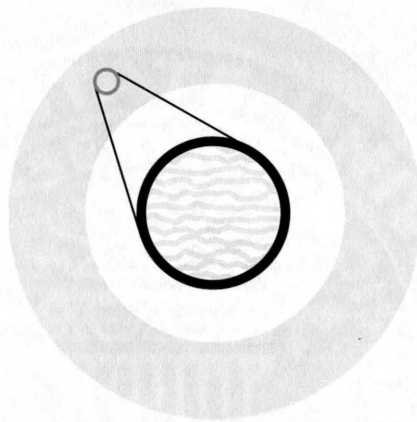
figure 11

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<sup>17</sup>We are consciousness extruded into an objectified world. We often seek objectivity, yet reject objectification of the human spirit. We try and draw the conceptual line in the sand between that which is "us" and that which is "not us." Where does feeling life begin and at what level of awareness does it warrant our respect? Artists elaborately manipulate matter and its appearance, subjects gladly give themselves over as objects in order to realize the performance of a set of expressive commands. (At the symphony, I am as awed by the unified dance of the bows in the violin section as I am by the temporal, acoustic disturbances they produce—could a master violinist be shown their own hand and bow movements on videotape, without accompaniment of sound, and guess the note played? Would she "hear" the sound in her mind?) What are the ramifications of art objects? Power, thought, change? If power, who gains, who loses? Who objects?

**gloss** /glaws, glos/

1. trans. To insert glosses or comments on; to comment upon, explain, interpret.
2. trans. To veil with glosses; to explain away; to read a different sense into. <sup>18</sup> Also with away, over (the latter perh. influenced by GLOSS sb.2).



*figure 12*

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<sup>18</sup>The lighted paper panels are pages. The gray inner walls represent conceptual space. The red outer walls evoke fear. The light emanated from within is hope. The distance from the pages to the wall corresponds exactly to the ratio of the golden mean. The floor represents groundedness. The space above and below each panel calls to mind lack, access, space. The crappy walls of the gallery speak of apathy and artistic indifference. The electrical wall sockets represent power, industry. The carpet is hedonism. Wood = trees. Paint means adornment. Eleven is an odd number. There are two sides to everything. Love hurts. The entire space, at night, after everyone has left and the lights are turned off and the doors are locked, is death. Or infinity. Or nothing.