

Slashed Interiors: Text/Space

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Abstract

This essay explores the relationship between text and space by considering the notion of writing interiors as a form of creative practice. The research focuses on the textual and spatial uses of the punctuation mark slash (/), as evidenced in a range of text-based works by Barbara Kruger, Glenn Ligon, Dom Sylvester Houédard, Anni Albers, and other artists. The first part of the essay surveys the typographic character's varied uses in written language; the second part considers its role within artwork titles, namely how its presence shapes spatial interpretations of each artwork in question; in the third part, preceding the conclusion, the focus is on the use of the slash as a mark that is both material and graphic. The resulting interpretations support a call for a change in the conversation about the relationship between writing and interiors.

Keywords: writing, interiors, text, slash, design

Introduction

While writing about interiors may strike one as a straightforward activity, the notion of writing interiors may at first seem more oblique. People indeed write about interior spaces all the time and in all ways, from text messages to literary masterpieces, through fact and fiction, as fantasy, or objective observation. Referring to the act of writing about interiors makes a distinction between text and space; the former is understood as form, the latter its content. Meanwhile, the phrase that results from the omission of the preposition—*writing interiors* or *to write interiors*—presents us with something far less familiar: the notion that interior space can be written as if it were text, but also suggesting that writing itself can be a practice with a range of spatial consequences.

Theorist Jane Rendell uses the term *site-writing* to define a mode of critical writing that is spatially situated. In her scholarship, Rendell advances the notion that, beyond focusing on critical art practice as its subject matter, writing can be “a form of critical spatial practice in its own right” (Rendell, 2010, p. 2). If, for Rendell, site-writing enables the construction of an architecture of art criticism—as echoed in her book’s subtitle which is, in turn, inspired by Mieke Bal’s coined phrase “the architecture of art-writing”—then the interest in the relationship between writing and interiors in this essay may be best described as not only having to do with the architecture of interior-writing, but also the typography of architecture.

How does printed text, in other words, make space? What are the spatial consequences of non-narrative writing and how might spatial typography illuminate alternative ways of perceiving and conceiving interiors? This form of interior-writing—the projection of typography into space, but also its use as a tool for spatial projection—is explored through the work of Barbara Kruger, Glenn Ligon, Dom Sylvester Houédard, Anni Albers and other artists. Some of these works engage with text spatially, while others approach space textually. Together, they serve as a link between the field of interiors and set of artistic practices rooted in traditions like conceptual art and concrete poetry in order to reveal potential trajectories for interior-writing—or writing interiors—as a creative practice.

Writing in space is all around us. Wayfinding shows us where to go; branding entices us to consume; we read personal marks such as graffiti and tags as if they were wall-sized signatures. Thanks to mobile devices, the reading and writing that we do as we

navigate through space have transformed how we communicate, access information, and experience where we are. In the age of extreme customisation, we are often faced with a schism between the shared and the individual: among a group of people sitting in a room together, each one may be reading, on their digital device of choice, a radically different version of today's news. Such differences are based on subjective factors, a mixture of deliberate personal preferences and algorithmically generated data that is shaped by as much as it shapes user behaviour.

Digitisation has, meanwhile, also made text subjective in new ways. Pop linguist Gretchen McCulloch refers to the subjectivity of digital text as the typographical tone of voice. McCulloch studies how the internet is changing conventions of language, and among her interests is digital text's capacity to convey feeling. Whether through personal texts or public posts, digital communication transmits users' affect in near-real time and variables such as capitalisation, spacing, and punctuation are harnessed as indicators of subjective tone (McCulloch, 2019). Writing is as such interior not only as it unfolds in spaces that we inhabit, but also as it expresses our inner subjectivity—or interiority—in ways that are surprisingly novel.

In a world defined by the incessant flow of images, words still matter. A social media post without a hashtag will likely remain obscure; meanwhile, in the era of post-truth it is the interpretation of images and not images themselves that are often accepted for reality, and those interpretations, fake or not, are usually written and read. A picture used to be worth a thousand words; today, a single hashtag is worth millions of images. The convergence of text's spatial ubiquity with the evolution of technologies that have transformed how we negotiate writing and reading as we inhabit both physical and virtual spaces makes the study of writing interiors compelling and timely. Rather than approaching writing and text generally, this exploration focuses on the use of a specific character in a range of artworks. By examining both semantic and formal properties of the character, the aim is to understand the spatial consequences of its use as well as that of non-narrative text more broadly. The character in question is the punctuation mark /, conventionally referred to as a slash. The first part of the essay surveys its varied uses in written language; the second part considers its use within artwork titles and its impact on the spatial interpretation of those works; in the third part, preceding the conclusion, the focus is on the use of the slash as a mark within artworks that is both material and graphic.

Slash

Neither a horizontal dash nor a vertical bar, *Glossary of Typesetting Terms* describes the slanted punctuation mark / as “a diagonal line or oblique stroke sloping downward from right to left” (Eckersley, 1994, p. 95). The symbol originated in the French language where it was first used as a comma. Its diagonal form was designed to stand out from the rest of the characters, clearly marking as such distinct spaces between individual thoughts or lines of text (Partridge, 2016, p. 155). Known today as *barre oblique* in French, in English it is most commonly referred to as a slash, though it is alternatively also known as a stroke, solidus, slant, shilling mark, or a virgule.

Contemporary uses of the slash are varied. According to *The Chicago Manual of Style*, a slash may indicate a two-year span (e.g. 2019/20) and is used in all-numeral dates (e.g. 12/11/04); it occurs in certain abbreviations (e.g. miles/hour, N/A, and c/o) as well as in the role of a fraction bar; when multiple lines of poetry are quoted in regular text, slashes indicate line breaks; and, as an extension of its widespread use in computer programming, slashes appear in URLs and other paths to separate directories and file names that reflect particular hierarchies of data organisation. Most commonly, however, a slash signifies the availability of more than one possibility, option, or choice—and is as such an indicator of alternatives (The University of Chicago Press, 2017). In such a role the slash takes the place of conjunctions *or* and *and*, where it can be interpreted as either or both. For example, *in/out* might be read as an exclusive choice, *either in or out*, but it could also mean *both inside and outside*. Contextual clues can help clarify the intention with which a slash is placed between specific words, phrases, or clauses, making it easier to interpret whether it is meant to convey exclusion or inclusion.

Among the widest contemporary uses of the slash in English is in *and/or*, a term unusual for containing a symbol that stands for the same conjunctions between which it is placed. On its own the compound conjunction would read awkwardly as *and or or*, *or both*—which is why one might instead say *and-slash-or*—but embedded within a set of choices (e.g. x and y) it simply says *x or y, or both*. Used in this way the slash enables a succinct expression of alternatives in writing, while empowering the reader to make a choice in their interpretation. Its frequent appearance in texts notwithstanding, the term is thought to be too ambiguous for situations that require less interpretive freedom. *The Chicago Manual of Style* advises against its usage altogether, referring to *and/or* as a

“Janus-faced term” (The University of Chicago Press, 2017), and the complications that arise from its multiple interpretations have also been extensively debated by legal scholars (Adams & Kaye, 2006). Because it imbues phrases like *and/or* with shapeshifting character, the slash is at times considered to be a culprit of vagueness, imprecision, and unnecessary confusion in writing.

Yet the symbol’s ambiguity is also a virtue as it enables relationships between the entities that it brings together to remain open-ended, open to transformation, and thus also generative of new entities. Janus, the Roman god with two faces, personifies transitions: passages, gates, and thresholds in both time and space. Rather than to deceive or mislead, to be Janus-faced more generally means to simultaneously embody two different conditions and it can also be interpreted as a moment of transition between them. In this way, the Janus-faced slash can mark the distinction between the entities that it refers to, but it can also make room for transformation. The slash between *in* and *out* in *in/out* marks the possibility for the emergence of another kind of spatial gradient—between, not unlike but also neither inside nor outside—that has not yet been named. Such a slash offers up alternatives not within a set of known choices, but rather proposes the possibility of other alternatives that are not yet fully formed.

Slashed Titles

The slash is a punctuation mark of choice in texts that deal with the coupling of binary opposites. In schools of thought like structuralism, the role of the slash is to bring together binary pairs in order to ensure their stability, yet in other intellectual contexts, where such constructs are to be deconstructed, the slash is slippery, porous, and playful. Lucio Fontana’s midcentury monochromatic canvases, cut through with a knife in the manner of slashed tires—or more recently, Francis Alÿs’s *The Cut* (2015) in which the artist cuts a painting in half using a circular saw—not only take on the character’s oblique geometry, but also reflect its capacity to disrupt the status quo. A slash manages part-to-whole relationships between words, offering a series of Boolean options to include, exclude, unite, or divide them. In Gordon Matta-Clark’s seminal architectural intervention *Splitting* from 1974, a house is slashed in half vertically from its foundation to the roof. As one cut side tilts away from the other, a wedge of new open space—not unlike a slash between two words—emerges between them. Like Matta-Clark’s sectional cut through the house, the written slash is inherently spatial; it is a material fact between two words even if it has no distinct sound of its own.

In temporal terms, a slash enables simultaneity between words, working as such to overcome the linear nature of reading. Its role in negotiating part-to-whole relationships, as well as its spatial and temporal capacity, are captured by a number of contemporary artists, especially through their use of the slash as a punctuation mark within artwork titles. Slashed titles matter because, as each work is primarily text-based, the use of the slash tells us something about the relationship between words and ideas within each piece; also, as works whose lineage can be traced to the tradition of conceptual art, that is “work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or “dematerialized” (Lippard, 2001, p. vii), their titles are often the primary point of entry for accessing the ideas that support the artists’ broader intentions.

Barbara Kruger, whose work has, according to Hal Foster, persistently questioned binary thinking in contemporary culture (Kruger, Alberro & Foster, 2010) is one of the most prolific artists exploring the use of text at the scale of architecture. Among her early-career projects is *Picture/Readings* from 1978, which is according to the artist, “an early indicator of [my] interest in exterior and interior spaces and how they form us as much as we form them” (Kruger, Goldstein & Deutsche, 1999, p. 189). Laid out in book-spread format, *Picture/Readings* consists of a series of situations created by the pairing of images and text. The project exists as a self-published book as well as a series of original compositions framed for gallery display. Each situation is presented episodically in a single spread, organised to follow the title’s configuration: a photograph on the left, a typewritten paragraph on the right, with the slash that is materialised by the visible seam between the two. The photographs are of unremarkable residential buildings, framed tightly to offer only partial information—a window or two, a segment of the roofline against the sky suggesting a particular style of construction, and just enough vegetation to yield the assumption that the climate is warm. Each picture poses as a façade, a visually impermeable exterior with the window as a constituent element most vulnerable to intrusion. The view through most of the windows is obscured by daytime glare; one louvred window is partially open but the space beyond appears black; in another, fenestration is boarded up.

The coupled textual narratives are as ordinary as the architecture, but they provide the kind of interior access that the pictures do not. Written in third person, the text provides the buildings pictured on the left side of each panel with tenants. The narrator seems to know, in intimate detail, what each tenant is doing, thinking, and feeling. The reader knows that these characters are involved romantically—there are young lovers, honeymooners, and jealous spouses among

them—and that their relationship dynamic shapes the atmosphere of the moment at least as much as the architecture pictured on the left. The narrator ensures that the reader knows that the pairing of the image and the text is deliberate by referring, within the text, to the image. “She looks at the column outside of the window. It is either doric or corinthian [sic],” reads the paragraph to the right of a picture of a house with an overhang supported by a decorated column; in another spread, the character describes a palm tree pictured in front of the house, “It is densely green with a brown scaly spine” (Kruger, 1978).

If the slash in the title is materialised by the seam between the image and the text, its larger conceptual role in the work is to facilitate the exchange between *picture* and *readings* as well as between the exterior and the interior. The slash in this way punctuates—that is to say, it emphasises and accentuates—the uneven and complicated relationship between images and text; it establishes their binary relationship only to expose its asymmetries. The picture/readings pairing is doubly asymmetrical: first because one is singular and the other is plural, and second because while *picture* has the possibility of serving as either a noun or a verb, the *s* in *readings* effectively eliminates the possibility for it to do the same. The title suggests that a picture has multiple readings as if it were a text, while also implying that writing can be seen as an image. Rather than offering a choice between the two—or insisting that the two make a clear whole—the slash encourages multiple interpretations with the overall intent of disabling any clear-cut binary distinctions.

The exchange, meanwhile, is as spatial as it is linguistic, with the slash effectively serving as a porous boundary between the exterior and the interior. While the starting assumption may be that the image is exterior and the text is interior, the presence of common elements in both requires some reconsideration. Exterior columns, palm trees, and other pictured elements that also appear in the text are absorbed by the interior, in a manner not unlike the borrowed view of a traditional Chinese garden which adopts, through framing, distant landscapes as its own constituent elements. Likewise, inscribed onto the exterior is the characters’ affect—expressions of inner worlds—rendering the outside as subjective as the space inside. While the pairing of image and narrative can be understood as quasi-cinematic—as a narrated picture or an enacted script—it is also presciently constructed in the style of present-day social media. *Picture/Readings* is in its format not unlike a series of posts on an image-sharing platform like Instagram, where combinations of images and captions effectively conceal that which they claim to reveal, while what is made to be hidden inadvertently shows through.



Figure 1a-1b
Installation of
Glenn Ligon's
*Untitled (Bruise/
Blues)* as a part of
the artist's solo
exhibition *Call
and Response*,
Camden Arts
Centre, 2014
(Photographs by
Valerie Bennett)

Pairing of words is also central to Glenn Ligon's *Untitled (Bruise/Blues)*, installed at the Camden Arts Centre in London in 2014 as a part of his solo exhibition *Call and Response* (Figures 1a and 1b). The work consists of two words modelled in neon tubing and suspended in space opposite each other. The lower-case sans-serif lettering is nearly three feet in height and hovers at eyelevel. Spelt out in blue light, the words are *bruise* and *blues*. Ligon's sculptural installation is based on Steve Reich's 1966 *Come Out*, a seminal sound composition made by manipulating a sample of recorded speech into an increasingly reverberating aural pattern. The voice in the recording belongs to Daniel Hamm, one of six young black men wrongfully arrested for committing a murder during the Harlem Race Riot of 1964. *Come Out* opens with Hamm saying, "I had to, like, open the bruise up, and let some of the bruise blood come out to show them," referring to the showing of his wounds brutally inflicted

by the police. In the recording, one hears a slip of tongue whereby the second *bruise* in the sentence sounds more like *blues*, and this is further confirmed as Reich repeats the sample three times before clipping it into smaller segments. Ligon spatialises this subtle deviation in speech by converting sound recording into text, text into light, and light into atmosphere as the two signs blink on and off in the gallery according to Reich's score, an effect not unlike that of the flashing of blue police-car lights.

The slash that appears in its title plays multiple roles throughout the work. To begin with, its notational purpose is to capture a slip-of-tongue, the discrepancy between intention and utterance, as well as to enable the possibility of transcribing speech in multiple ways in order to capture, rather than eliminate, ambiguity. The words' meaning suggests a relationship between citizens (the ones who have been bruised) and the police (the blues) and the slash serves as a foil for examining the asymmetries—the imbalance of power and the injustices that accompany it—between the two. In a number of his other works, Ligon has used symmetry as a formal device that exposes the inequality between the sides that it organises, but also in order to establish a sense of reverberation—a continuous, rhythmic, back-and-forth pattern that is destabilizing and transformative in its effect. In this particular piece, symmetry is achieved through the arrangement of words in space rather than by mirroring their form. The slash between *bruise* and *blues* as such is also the space between the two signs, the area that one is able to inhabit, move through, and from which one can perceive the backward, unlit form of the signs as they face outward. It is a space that both connects and disconnects; a space of perception, but not of legibility; it is a space of retrospection as one looks back at the words, but also one of immersion. Placed between the signs, the viewer becomes a character—the figure of the slash between two words.

The slash is also temporal; it is an on-and-off switch between words, the mechanism of blinking lights that transforms the words into a rhythmic glow. The intensity of the blue-hued neon changes depending on the time of day. The light that emanates from the two signs competes with the daylight—the only other light source in the gallery—for much of the day, but as the sun sets outside (the exhibition took place from October to January, a period when sunsets in London are as early at 15:51, while the gallery is open daily until 18:00) the blue light comes to dominate the space as if it were a police scene at night. In working to dismantle binary distinctions, the work's ultimate accomplishment is the blurring of the distinction between past and present. The present moment—the visceral, tangible experience in real time and space defined by words that are experienced, rather than merely read—is inspired by

a layered and mediated reference to the past, while also asserting that the presence of brutality that we relegate to historical events are still very much a part of present-day reality.

Slashed Surfaces

The slashes that cut through Kruger and Ligon's titles are spatialised by implication rather than through direct physical presence in the works themselves. In another set of artistic practices, with common roots in typewriter art and concrete poetry, the slash appears as an explicit, materially tangible, graphic mark. Defined primarily by the tool—the mechanical typewriter—typewriter art is as old as the now largely obsolete writing device, with origins dating back to the nineteenth century (Tullett, 2014). Concrete poetry, the international artistic movement known as such since the mid-twentieth century, overlaps with typewriter art because of its emphasis on typography, resulting in frequent use of the typewriter by many of its practitioners. Also referred to as visual poetry, the work of concrete poets privileges optical appearance over meaning in an attempt to accentuate poetry's physical presence through typography, layout, and the materiality of printing. Such poems are made not only for reading, but rather as multi-sensory experiences. Concrete poetry aspires to free writing from its strict semantic duty, instead honing in on its capacity to produce images, patterns, textures, and sounds.

As much as the work of text-based artists emerging from the lineage of the 1960s and 1970s conceptual practices demonstrates an interest in dematerializing the traditional art object, concrete poems embody their authors' determination to imbue poetry with a sense of physical presence. While conceptual artists have generally worked to undermine the notion of the artist-as-maker, canonical concrete poets, such as Ian Hamilton Finlay, insisted that the person that creates poetic content and that one who puts it into print—the designer or typographer—are one. The desire to amplify poetry's physicality and maximise its spatial consequence is hyperbolically embodied in works such as Mathias Goeritz's *el eco del oro* (1961), a freestanding screen made of o-shaped metal rings referred to as "a concrete poem in iron" (Williams, 2013, p. 135).

Within the typographic range of the Latin alphabet and its accompanying digits and punctuation marks, characters like O and I—but also pluses, minuses, periods and dashes—are particularly abundant in typewriter art and visual poetry, and this is particularly true of works that emphasise graphics instead of sound. Given their elemental abstract form, such characters are easily repeated and aggregated into larger gestures, including intricate line-work,

geometric patterns, hatching, and even entire surfaces of dense tone. The slash is an especially useful character for converting text into drawing because of its capacity to generate diagonal lines which, in turn, undermine the linear orientation of typewritten text. It is thus in the work by artists pursuing mechanical writing as a form of drawing that the slash is perhaps most ubiquitous.

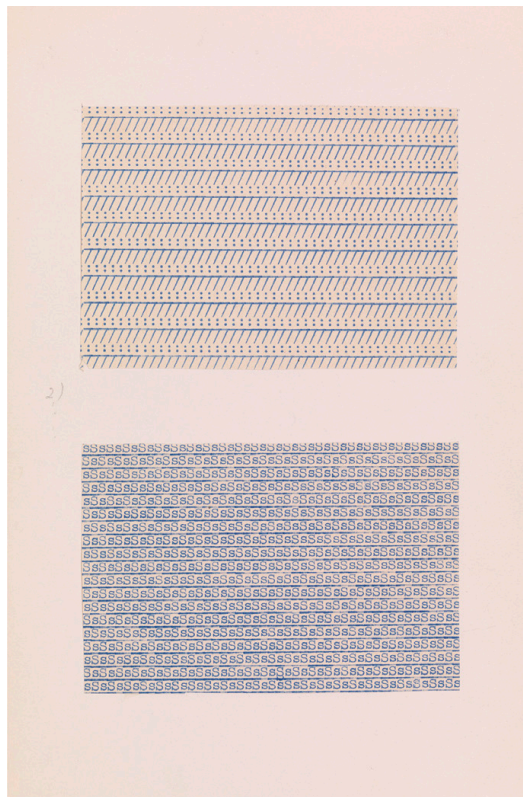
In one such work, Simon Parritt's *Grid 4* (1971), four overlapping triangles are drawn using a combination of slashes and dashes. The surface of each triangle is hatched using a combination of straight and diagonal lines, creating a dense lattice-like effect in areas where the triangles overlap. Another work by Parritt, titled *Cityscape* (1972), is a typewritten skyline with an architecture built from slashes, dashes, and colons. Coaxing the typewriter to produce images that resemble architectural drawings is a reoccurring effort shared by many artists, among the earliest of which are graphic experiments developed by Josef Albers with his students at the Bauhaus in the 1920s. Referring to them as "construction exercises" (Riddell, 1975, p. 12), Albers had his students produce oblique views of abstract volumes using a combination of typewritten slashes and dashes. In one such drawing, an inverted pyramid is described by a series of equally spaced parallel lines, a ruled surface in wireframe mode recalling the aesthetics of early digital graphics.

Such typewritten techniques of oblique drawing would reappear, and flourish in their own right, a few decades later in the work of Dom Sylvester Houédard. A Benedictine priest, artist, and poet, Houédard helped introduce concrete poetry to Britain in the early 1960s (Riddell, 1975) and himself contributed to the genre through works that he called *typestracts*, a term coined by combining *typewriter* and *abstracts* into a single word. His typestracts—crafted with the use of a series of improvised typing techniques on an Olivetti Lettera 22 typewriter—vary in form, color, and pattern, but among the most striking and spatially sophisticated are those that approximate architectural drawings.

One typestract, titled *a particular way of looking* (1971) appears as an elevation-oblique drawing depicting a zigzagging form made from a folded plane. Freestanding in appearance, the form is hatched using an alternating pattern of blue and red lines, making sense of which face of the folded plane is the front and which is the back. The viewer gets a sense of gravity and ground because of a diagonal line that nearly bisects the composition's picture plane, suggesting a seam where the floor meets a wall. In the background, a separate patch of hatching is also oriented diagonally to reinforce a sense of depth. Houédard constructed a composition of an object in space, but the resulting typestract also gives one a measurable sense of space

defined by the object, a quality inherent to oblique drawings (Scolari, 2015). In another typestract from 1972 (Riddell, 1975), a similar diagonal line establishes the space of the drawing in the manner of oblique projection. A rectangular prism typed up in blue seems to float in the air, its faces carefully rendered using a combination of horizontal and oblique dashes as if to simulate lighting effects across the volume's surfaces. A sense of disorientation—which way is up?—reflects the process of typewriting on paper, which had likely required that the sheet be rotated multiple times in order to overcome the limitations of the machine's conventional use.

Figure 2
Anni Albers,
Studies made on
the typewriter,
n.d. Typewriter
printing in blue
ink on paper
mounted on
board, 10 5/8 x
6 5/8 in. (26.9
x 16.8 cm),
The Josef and
Anni Albers
Foundation,
Artists Rights
Society (ARS),
New York
(Photograph
by Tim
Nighswander/
Imaging4Art)



The relationship between figure and ground is explored in another iteration in blue and red, also from 1972 (Riddell, 1975), but in this one the ground is a finite plane demarcated by red diagonals. Two stray diagonal lines, meeting at a corner, suggest that another ground plane is suspended midair. One may wonder if perhaps these lines are made in error, but the visual effect nonetheless is that of a space that exists in a kind of sandwich defined by two outer planes with structures that schematically resemble a housing block and a clock tower between them. These text-objects are spatial in a way that is familiar because of their relationship to architectural representation. Because they use the oblique slash in order to follow the logic of oblique projection in drawing, they are legible both as objects and as drawings of objects, enabling the viewer to project

themselves inward as if to inhabit them. Yet, unlike an artifact belonging to the realm of architectural representation, Houédard's typestracts need not reference another reality—at another scale, another time, or another place—but instead, however delicately, exist on their own, straddling the fragile line between writing and drawing, surface and space.

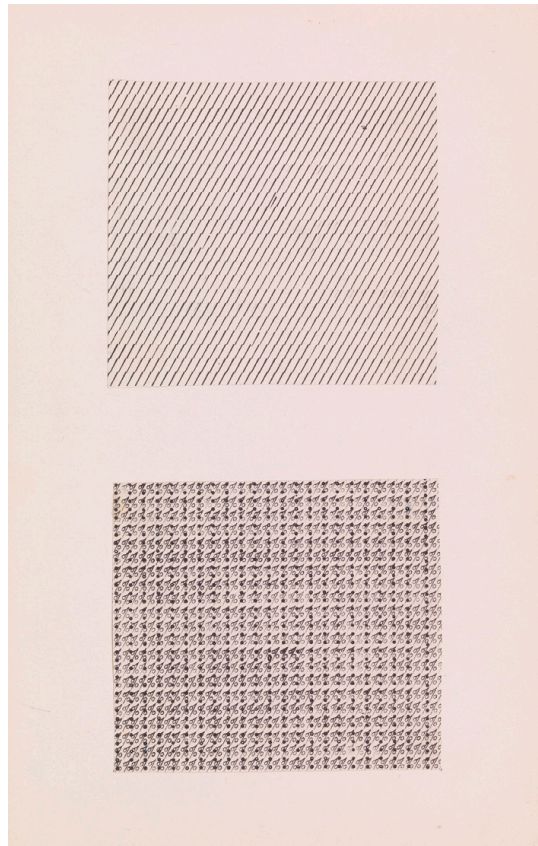


Figure 3
Anni Albers,
Studies made on
the typewriter,
n.d. Typewriter
printing in black
ink on papers
mounted on
board, 10 5/8 x 6
5/8 in. (27 x 16.8
cm), The Josef
and Anni Albers
Foundation,
Artists Rights
Society (ARS),
New York
(Photograph
by Tim
Nighswander/
Imaging4Art)

When Anni Albers made her own typewriter drawings, she made them from the point of view of a textile artist. Albers suspected that these mechanically produced ink-on-paper artifacts would be regarded as autonomous works of art when in reality they were a byproduct of an iterative artistic exploration. In her book *On Weaving* from 1965 she says of the typewriter experiments, “These varied experiments of articulation are to be understood not as an end in themselves but merely as a help to us in gaining new terms in the vocabulary of tactile language” (Albers, 1965, p. 64). Yet, because of their relationship to textiles, these artifacts are perhaps as close to writing interiors as one can get from the standpoint of mark-making in space at the one-to-one scale. Albers’s texts are in fact textiles as much as textiles are capable of being texts.

In one such study (Figure 2), there is an alternate pattern in blue ink of a horizontal dash followed by a row of slashes with two rows of dots below, creating a pattern that repeats vertically. Another one

(Figure 3), also using the slash but in black ink, is even simpler; an offset pattern of slashes that, when aligned with the marks above and below, form continuous diagonal striations across the surface of the paper. The slash serves as a tool for engaging with but also overcoming the limits of warp and weft in weaving, an element that changes the direction of the pattern by working with given constraints. Although they are dimensionally flat and relatively smooth, they give the viewer a sense of texture and prompt an urge to stroke the surface of the paper in the hopes that it is plush. In these textural studies, text is simultaneously mute and vibrant. It communicates nothing semantically or architecturally, yet it is in its own way full of energy and life. Albers's disclaimer aside, this work is able to be itself—not as a writing *about* a textile or a drawing of a textile, but rather the textile—and maybe even interior—itsself.

Conclusion

The notion of writing interiors brings into question how space is made – what activities, actions, and artifacts are capable of defining, dwelling in, and describing interiors beyond convention. Defined by a rich overlap of multiple disciplines, the field of interiors is a stage where questions—and conflicts—of design methodology, technique, and media routinely take place. Following a certain architectural tradition, to design an interior is to draw it; a technologically updated position may prefer that it be digitally modeled or parametrically scripted. Another approach may include working at full scale—with few or even no drawings or models—in the manner of a collagist or a *bricoleur*, whereby a mixture of readymade and customised products is spatially arranged according to a set of criteria. Yet another of many approaches is to insist that the making of interiors start with research conducted through surveys, focus groups, or other scientific methods used as a basis for evidence-based design.

At its most dogmatic, each of these approaches claims that its methods directly yield the most robust design results, even if in actuality the most potent spatial innovations come out of multi-pronged, often oblique, explorations rather than singular, direct paths. The field of interiors is neither singular nor monolithic; it is complex. Intervening, working with, and sufficiently transforming complex situations cannot be accomplished directly, but rather, as economist John Kay has argued, generally benefit from oblique approaches (Kay, 2010). For design, this means an incessant questioning of means and methods, a fierce, pluralistic, exploration of alternative trajectories, and an embrace of open-ended inquiries and experiments that enrich the environment within which innovation may emerge. Writing, text, and typography are compelling because

they cut across a number of conventional approaches to the field of interiors—from drawing to script-writing to social surveys—yet do so at an unexpected angle. To write interiors, in other words, is to navigate the field obliquely.

The slash embodies obliqueness in form and behavior. This examination of works by Kruger, Ligon, Houédard, and Albers yields an understanding of the slash as a type of switch—the ultimate mechanism for binary tinkering—that calibrates a range of spatial conditions. In Kruger's piece, the switch modulates the porosity of the boundary between inside and outside; Ligon's installation uses the slash as the electric switch that turns the neon on and off in relation to one another; for Houédard, the switch is perceptual, a flickering between the two-dimensional surface of paper and the three-dimensional space of the typewritten compositions brought to life by the oblique slash; and Albers's studies leverage the switch of direction from straight to diagonal in the exploration of novel textural effects. As a switch, the slash provides a code, a non-narrative form of writing capable of producing space.

Linguist Anne Curzan has studied the use of the slash in contemporary slang, particularly ways in which the punctuation mark increasingly—and somewhat surprisingly—appears as a fully spelled out word, *slash*. Curzan notes that in its new life as a word, a slash is more than just a punctuation mark; while it can still take the place of a conjunction like *and* or, the word is also used to signal a follow up to a thought or a topic shift (Curzan, 2013). In the spirit of this emergent trend, the slash may signal a shift—or a switch—in conversation about text and space, about the notion of writing interiors as a practice, and about the importance of oblique approaches to the field of interiors.

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