

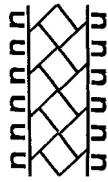
# Kern

derek beaulieu

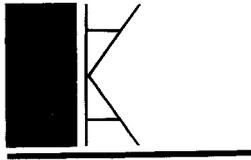
Global Poetics Series  
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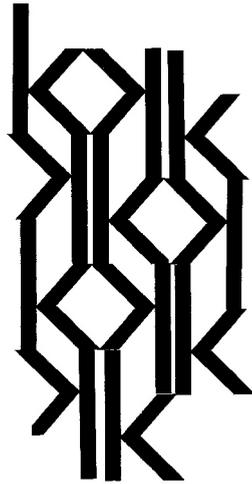
Kern

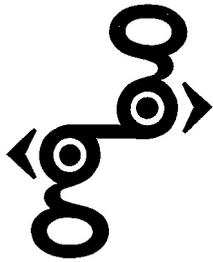






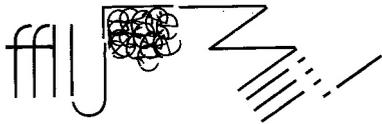


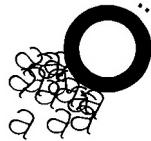












## Author's Note

*Kern* is made by hand using dry-transfer lettering without the use of computers. Ubiquitous in graphic design, technical drafting, and advertising from the early 1960s to early 1990s, dry-transfer lettering was used in order to standardize graphic elements, eliminate the individuality of the artist's hand, and speed up the creative process. At one point a specialized tool with an expensive price tag, dry-transfer lettering has been relegated to use by artists and hobbyists.

Dry-transfer lettering has the disadvantage of being unforgiving. Once a letter is placed upon the page or canvas, that letter is permanently affixed and cannot be moved or replaced. I construct these poems without the aid of plans or sketches; the work builds gesturally in response to shapes and patterns in the letters themselves one letter at a time, each placed by hand. The resultant poems, if executed with the same care given to projects by the best graphic designers, are logos and slogans for 'pataphysically impossible businesses.

Like logos for the corporate sponsors of Jorge Luis Borges's Library of Babel, *Kern* uses the particles of language to represent and promote goods and corporations just out of reach. *Kern* presents moments of poetic nostalgia for the signposts of a non-existent past; they fitfully recall an ethereal, ephemeral moment. In our dreams, the resolution of the oneiric landscapes is only so clear—much of what our mind establishes as the backdrop for our antics is only as clear as need be. These poems are the street-signs, the signage, the advertising logos for the shops and corporations that are just beyond reach. They are not islands of meaning—semantic or corporate.

Like Gomringer, I believe that Concrete poems should be as easily understood as airport and traffic signs, but instead of leading the reader to the toilet, the directions they impart are spurious if not completely useless. Concrete poems need to be cognizant not of readability but of lookability. Airport signage is designed for instant and momentary recognition and comprehension as ultimate goals; viewers need not read, they only need momentarily stare and receive.

*Kern* attempts to refuse linearity in favour of the momentary. Way-finding signage is designed to be easily understood in a moment; it operates without the need to read; it only requires consumption. Designed to be cogent, smoothly digested, and transparently communicative, way-finding signage and traffic signs work extralinguistically. Instead of leaving logos and slogans to the worlds of advertising and graphic design, I think it better suits poets to craft work which is responsive to a new reading milieu. These poems perform a poetic intercession into the language of signage and complicate the need to "panlinguistically" communicate in favour of co-opting the discourse, and the form, of the advertising logo and the plastic. *Kern* progresses from the logo and the slogan into increasingly large fields of semantic detritus, building into field-wide explosions of engulfing, unending recombinant material. *Kern* occupies the page in the same way that the Nike swoosh sits on a shoe, or how the neon overwhelms the Tokyo streetscape...

# Acknowledgments

The poems in *Kern* have been published in magazines and journals, books and chapbooks, as 1" buttons, t-shirts, broadsides, and have been projected on the sides of buildings—often at the same time. My thanks to the editors, curators, and administrators of those spaces.

Vanessa Place, Teresa Carmody, and Andrew Wessels at Les Figues have provided amazing opportunities and have made making this book a real pleasure—thank you.

My great appreciation for the friendship, support, conversation, and camaraderie of Gregory Betts, Christian Bök, Amaranth Borsuk, Kit Dobson, Johanna Drucker, Craig Dworkin, Lori Emerson, Rob Fitterman, Kenneth Goldsmith, Jeff Hilson, Peter Jaeger, Simon Morris, Marjorie Perloff, Sina Queyras, Jordan Scott, Nick Thurston, Tony Trehy, Darren Wershler, and Eric Zboya.

Thank you to my parents and family.

And finally, Kristen: thank you, my love.

## About the Author

derek beaulieu is the author or editor of 15 books, including *Please, no more poetry: the poetry of derek beaulieu* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013) and the conceptual novels *flatland: a romance of many dimensions* (information as material, 2007; UbuWeb, 2011) and *Local Colour* (ntamo, 2008; Eclipse, 2012). He is the publisher of the acclaimed no press and is the visual poetry editor at UbuWeb. beaulieu has exhibited his work across Canada, the United States, and Europe and currently teaches at the Alberta College of Art + Design. derek beaulieu is the 2014–2016 Poet Laureate of Calgary, Canada.