



Richard Kostelanetz

Micro Stories

Editing
Design
Afterword
by Louis Bury

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*In memory of Raymond Queneau and Georges Perec,
smart writers' smart writers*

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Afterword © Louis Bury





Preface

A principal theme of my creative work has been the exploration of esthetic extremes, or literary options that have scarcely, if ever, been tried before. Thus, I have published poems with minimal verbal content, other poems whose materials were exclusively numerical, extended nonsyntactic prose, etc. Within the realm of fiction, I have produced, among other departures, narratives with only one or two words to a paragraph, stories whose development comes from the changing visual patterns of their words, narratives composed exclusively of photographs without captions, circular stories that flow from point to point but lack definite beginnings or ends, sequences of nonrepresentational line-drawings whose metamorphosis from image to image evokes narrative, and whole books composed of single-sentence stories.

As an admirer of minimal visual art almost from its beginnings, it was perhaps inevitable that I would eventually explore in fiction the same esthetic of doing more with much less, creating word-pieces whose ostensible content would be as slight as possible and yet suggestive. (Most fiction we know functions in precisely the opposite way, with plenty of ostensible content for only modest suggestiveness.) I also respected a certain strain of Conceptual Art for suggesting large esthetic experience entirely within a few words. Since the epithet “minimal” implies a great degree of reduction, pursuing freedom within a severe constraint, the false use of “minimal” in some circles recently, to characterize a certain strain of considerably more verbose post-Hemingway short stories, is nothing less than vulgar.

Different as these fictions are, they probably cannot be read in conventional ways—from beginning to end, in a few sittings. So many different stories in too short a time can exhaust





even the dogged reader. Let me suggest instead that the reader take as long to read each of these stories as he would a page of continuous prose; and then that they be dipped into, much as, say, *Finnegans Wake* must be dipped into. My suspicion is that different stories will have different value to different people. If you don't like one, go on to the next. One way I as their author sense these stories are interesting is that, though the selections here were culled from a longer manuscript, I myself do not yet know for sure which are better and which worse or why; they simply exist too far beyond even my own experience of critical discriminations. That impression at once intimidates and pleases me. May reading them be for you as much as a discovery as writing them has been for me.

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New York City
2010





One might almost regard it as an axiom, from the viewpoint of pure art, that there is no such thing as a subject, style alone being an absolute mode of seeing things.

-- Gustave Flaubert, Letter to Louise Colet (Jan. 16, 1852)

Simplicity of shape does not necessarily equate with simplicity of experience. Unitary forms do not reduce relationships. They order them. If the predominant, hierarchic nature of the unitary form functions as a constant, all those particularizing relations of scale, proportion, etc., are not thereby canceled. Rather they are bound more cohesively and indivisibly together.

-- Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture" (1966)

What is the objective of our work? To propose new "structures" to writers, mathematical in nature, or to invent new artificial or mechanical procedures that will contribute to literary activity: props for inspiration as it were, or rather, in a way, aids for creativity.

-- Raymond Queneau, "Potential Literature" (1966)





Liberty.





Perjury.





A n n e x a t i o n .





Virtuosity.





Realign.





Stultify.





Kill for peace.





See, saw, seen.





Hocus Pocus.





D
e
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g
e
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Come hither,
sweet.





Act of God.





Defame.





Lasso.





Twit.





A/Emend.





Wrench.





T^um lt.
u





AFTERLIFE .





Vacant.





Predictions.





Rapacious

appetite.





Zig

-

zag.





Expropriate.





First love.

