

I should start by saying that I have really only developed and practiced self-erasure, not erasure of texts authored by other individuals, and so the concerns are somewhat different. But I think they nevertheless help illuminate, from a different angle, some of the larger issues of erasure that Kristina raised.

I first encountered erasure in 2006 with Jen Bervin's *Nets*, which I thought was brilliant, both in concept and execution. At the time though, I didn't anticipate ever practicing erasure. I thought *Nets* was a definitive monument and innovation, and I was primarily interested in the art of writing new texts.

A few years later, I was at the Vermont Studio Center, surrounded by visual artists whose work I found conceptually exciting, and I found myself thinking about how few conceptual elements there were within the mainstream poetry of authorship. At that time, I was also struggling with a one-page poem that I found successful as a classical lyric, but which I felt dissatisfied with for its easy, emotional closure. I had already begun to complicate it with footnotes and further sequences, when I had the idea to erase my own poems. This self-erasure propelled the poem forward into what became this 150 page hybrid book, *The Book of Fools*, which was recently published.

Self-erasure does not involve the same ethical concerns or opportunities for critique as the erasure of the work of another writer. So, what does it involve, and why practice it?

First, I liked self-erasure as a conceptual innovation. I liked that it took erasure's radical undermining of both authorship and the notion of a singular text and married this deconstruction back to the tradition of authorship. It both **reaffirmed** the power of authorship **and undermined it**—undermined it, in a sense, closer to home.

I was also fascinated by the nonattachment that the practice of erasure required. I liked the idea of having to do the extraordinary difficult task of making a real poem, a good poem—only to then deface and scar-ify it, to perform loss, injury, change, and retrieval.

I also loved how self-erasure exposed the process of composition and all the alternative (aesthetic and psychological) constructions that were available within the same sea of a moment's available language.

In this way, I liked that it made tangible the underworld of the text, particularly for a book that involved both a journey to the underworld and an exploration of the gyres of plastic particulates in the ocean.

And I was excited by the many relationships that could be created between the two texts. One could distill the other text or complicate it, or offer a counterpoint, or together they could form a chord.

In my introduction to erasure, I did not originally experience erasure as a method of criticism, as an act with ethical considerations, or as a power relationship. I have since given considerable thought to all these elements. And, while these notions may not directly apply to self-erasure, the act of undermining one's own authority in creating a definitive text is in a sense a self-critical or self-chastening act.

It both foregrounds and limits one's power. I would argue that to erase one's own text is a humble act, an act that requires humility.

It places one's process of creation within the frame of the difficulty of making any singular claim upon the world.

Still, I should emphasize two things: One, I was first interested in self-erasure as a conceptual innovation.

Two, I was also interested in it for its expressive, lyric possibilities, and I was only interested in deploying it when I felt it would actually enhance the artistic power of the text.

You may notice that I am using the past tense here: It is an investigation, practice, and innovation that for the moment I am done with; I don't know if I will return to it for new discoveries in the future.

The Book of Fools is a complex book-length poem that involves many experimental lyric structures, not just erasure, and many different themes, from global injustice and borders to myth and aesthetics.

At its heart though, it is an elegy for the earth and particularly our oceans, and it marries global, ecological themes of loss—centered around the Great Pacific Garbage Patch—to personal themes of loss surrounding my mother's early death to cancer.

I cannot hope to give a sense of the full work here, but I will read a few of the self-erasure poems, and perhaps simply show a few others, and speak a little about the variety of relationships within the self-erased texts.

First, I will show you the erasure dedication in the limited edition of this book.

Now, I will read the poem I mentioned before that was where the self-erasure of this whole book began. I will read it first as a simple text and then show you it with the erasure.

[Read Poem]

Share screen

[Read Erasure. Then advance to just the erasure.]

That was an erasure that I would call a distillation, though it also refracts and magnifies new elements.

[Advance screen—Orpheus]

On the facing page is this erasure, which I won't read, but people watching can stop and read if they wish. This is one of several erasures in which I think of the original text as akin to a plastic gyre of particulates, and the erasure discovers something that might not otherwise be there, but that speaks to the whole text.

[Advance Screen. Just Erasure]

[Advance screen—The Age of Positive Thinking]

I also won't read this either. But, this piece does both: a part of it distils, another part discovers something new.

[Advance Slide to Pure Erasure and Read Erasure]

[Advance screen—Orpheus and Eurydice: An Artifact]

I sometimes faded the original text far more to make it almost unreadable, virtually censored, so as to require an almost voyeuristic strain, and to give the netted text a greater prominence.

[Advance Screen Again and Read Erasure]

[Advance screen—Exile and Detour on the Way to the Sea]

Here again [Read Erasure]

[Advance screen—Home]

This is another piece that I saw as an associative stream of consciousness gyre in which a thread of lyric was excavated, though it very much exists in relationship to a narrative that is only in the full text.

[Advance Screen, Read Erasure]

[Advance Screen: There Ought to Be a Law Against the Truth]

This poem I will read fully. And I'll take it off screen share for a moment.

[Go off full screen]

[Return to Show Screen. Read Erasure. Advance Slide.]

[Advance Screen. Friend. 44]

I will also read this poem. And I'd call this a gyre of lyric distillation.

[Read Friend]

[Advance Slide to Erasure of Friend]

[Advance Slide to The Book of Runes]

Lastly, I'll just show you this erasure, which is a direct meta reflection on the process.

Thank you.