

jean-michel wicker

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<b>jean-michel wicker</b>	<b>#picturebook1</b>	
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**Liquid, Concrete:  
concrete and screenshots**

**Concrete is the world's most-used man-made construction material, when measured by tonnage, which makes 'concrete poetry' an optimistic misnomer, to my mind. I don't consider concrete poetry to be everywhere. I think of concrete poetry as located in books, archives, museums, universities, and exhibitions, but I don't think of it as foundational to cities, roads, pipes, data centers, and prisons. Concrete doesn't have the same relationship to the literary environment as it does to the built environment, but this is an unfair approximation. Do we want our poetry to be everywhere?**

**Concrete poetry developed between Europe and South America in the 1950s and remained in its high form until the 1970s. It gave focus to the materiality of printed language, and the movement produced writing that emphasized ludic nonlinearity, the two-dimensional compositional space of the page, and typography. It appropriated the techniques of advertising in an effort to reveal the manipulative power of language within the commercialization of everyday life. A radical and internationalist movement, it attempted a poetics that challenged the emergent global expansionism of the postwar period.**

**In his 2011 text 'Time, Acceleration, and Violence',<sup>1</sup> Italian theorist Franco 'Bifo' Berardi makes the observation that the late 20th-century's predominant form of financial capitalism is prefigured in Nixon's 1971 decision to revoke the direct international convertibility of the United States dollar to gold. Known as the Nixon shock, this ushered in a wider political system that was 'constructed as an enigma' and within which 'you cannot find the truth because it is based upon the fact that the truth has dissolved.' Postmodernity, postcolonialism, the privatisation of the state and the digitisation of the militarisation of governance; Nixon cut the string holding the balloon to Earth. Colonialist-expansionist capitalism flooded the virtual realm, and here we are still fighting today, filming cops on expensive, extractive handheld computers that are screened, like our bodies, at borders, and falling asleep at 3 a.m. washed by screens that also sleep.**

**Or do we? The pleasure of the present is predicated in its ability to hold multiple futures as simultaneous, I think. I go to a bar with friends for a drink after work so that we relieve stress; we dance at a club where the floor vibrates with queer, illuminated bodies and each other is goddess; prisoners bang back on windows as we shout outside, no walls, no borders, no prisons, no binaries, and so many futures; we try to understand our love for one another, content that maybe we can't. I just hope that we don't lose each other and we haven't, not yet. How do I make money in order to**

**reproduce myself to the extent that I can produce a future—while redistributing money to produce a futurity that is rooted in something beyond myself, equity, community, abolition preceding hope. I'm a sloppy coordinate in a city that is a complex grid and I'm fundamentally alone, but time allows for change and change is movement, and grids can dissolve and melt away like a liquid.**

**What is liquid poetry? Liquidity refers to the ability of a market or company to turn assets into cash; it is predicated on immediacy. Liquid is a term that has been used to describe a poetics that is a) rooted in the digital (like the dollar escaping from the gold standard, or the artwork falling out of the window of the art institution, it exalts in a freedom that is newfound as it is unpegged from the printed page); and b) related to language's excess, that is, it is constituted by the appropriative and arbitrary, the flotsam and jetsam (and lagan and derelict) of poetry cast adrift, floating and lost in liquid, yet liquidated—repurposed as poetry by artists and poets. Broodthaers maybe understood this in his aesthetics of the ship and the shipping crate;<sup>2</sup> Moten and Harney maybe touch on this (haptically) in their fantasy of the hold, logistics and the shipped;<sup>3</sup> and liquidity is immanent when we learn from the Lakota that Mni Wiconi, water is life, and when we fight in solidarity against the ongoing water war in Flint, Michigan. Liquidity is (a) gender fluid. Liquidity is a sexuality. Liquidity maybe does or doesn't have to have anything to do with cash at all. Liquidity breathes a language with no fixed pronouns.**

**One technique that is central to liquid poetry is the screenshot. Concrete—strong, solid, and the opposite of abstract—is powerful thanks to its liquidity: its ability to move between. Concrete is produced when an aggregate is bonded together with Portland cement and water, and is a dynamic architectural material because of this fluidity. If digital technologies can be characterized as liquid, then the screenshot, a documentary form, captures this liquidity and makes it concrete. The screenshot captures the immediacy of liquidity with the instantaneity of a gesture, an immediateness permitted by the specific and premeditated confluence of circumstances that upholds the digital-industrial complex.**

**Screenshots become liquid again when they are circulated in books (like this one) and through networked computers. Screenshots become intimate, animistic things when they are shared. They capture and transfigure the conditions of their production, or they have the potential to. They are the bedrock of the meme. They are the illuminated manuscripts of the copy-and-paste generation. Spectral, the concrete and the liquid dance together.**

**1** Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, 'Time, Acceleration, and Violence', e-flux, journal #27, September 2011, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/27/67999/time-acceleration-and-violence/>

**2** Marcel Broodthaers, *A Voyage on the North Sea* (London: Petersburg Press, 1974).

**3** 'What if we thought of the experiment of the hold as the absolute fluidity, the informality, of this condition of need and ability? What if ability and need were in constant play and we found someone who dispossessed us so that this movement was our inheritance. Your love makes me strong, your love makes me weak.' Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 99.

A large, bold, blue letter 'B' is positioned on the right side of the page. The letter is a solid, vibrant blue color and has a thick, rounded font style. It is centered vertically on the right side of the page.