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ZONE: correlations (1973 2021) by BARRETT WATTEN

Zone: correlations connects twelve poetic experiments that extract and recombine language from its limitless archives, generating new meanings for public and private life in our distressed present.

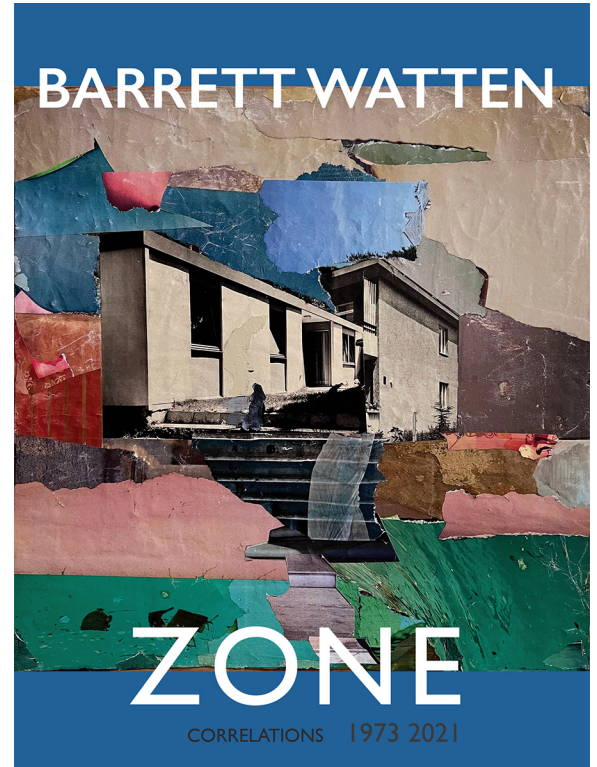
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Barrett Watten is Professor of English at Wayne State University; poet, critic, and editor of “newer” American poetries from the 1970s to the present; author of *Frame* (1971–1990); *Bad History*; *Progress/Under Erasure*; *Not This: Selected Writings/He to: Избранные тексты*; co-author of *Leningrad: American Writers in the Soviet Union* and *The Grand Piano: An Experiment in Collective Autobiography*; author of acclaimed critical works such as *Total Syntax*; *The Constructivist Moment* (Rene Wellek Prize); and *Questions of Poetics*; subject of the edited volume *Barrett Watten: Contemporary Poetics as Critical Theory* (*Aerial 8*).



comments on Watten's writing:

An essential practitioner of the Language movement, Barrett Watten has spent a lifetime writing works that lay bare the way language creates and is created by the swirling social, cultural, and political world we live in. In this monumental collection he creates long “correlative” works (collating disparate texts, his own and others’) that react to, depict, and theorize our present drastic moment. Line by line, sentence by sentence, they deliver great power and seriousness of intent.

– Norman Fischer, on *Zone*

To prove to myself that I’m not quite dead, I reread Barrett Watten’s “Plan B.” In all innocence he can call that piece of thinking a manifesto. A manifesto as stirring as the Manifeste du Sur-réalisme had been when it appeared in 1924. These texts are territories: you can walk in them, you can drive, or fly over. “Plan B,” among other things, already challenges artificial intelligence. It beats it, because I doubt that artificial intelligence will concern itself with man’s destiny.

– Etel Adnan, from *Shifting the Silence*

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Usually, when a book of poetry has a date range on the cover spanning almost fifty years, I assume I am looking at a “selected” or “collected” poems. Let the reader not be fooled: *Zone* is something new. The correlations in this remarkable book take parataxis on mind-spinning trips across time, place, genre, medium, language, and author, producing strikingly emotional results. There are affecting pieces where personal and collective losses appear, touch, and wink away; there are larger canvases on which whole literary and social histories are re-understood and put in new motion; there are notes which carry their own emotional power. Throughout, there is the characteristic Watten tone, the reader’s building sense that the cool, polished surfaces of these lines are somehow, and barely, managing to contain a kind of analytic fury

– David Kellogg, on *Zone*

Watten writes out of profound psychological insight and intellectual passion. Why the high level of abstraction? One answer, which is not however the only one, might be this: what could be taken for abstraction in his work might be better understood as affect, maybe even affect so strong that it cannot (or refuses to) remain attached to any particular image, entity, thing. Things (entities, persons, situations, events) can elicit passion, even command it, but they can’t satisfy it. They can’t even testify to it.

– Lyn Hejinian, from *Allegorical Moments: Call of the Everyday*

Most of Watten’s texts are based on the nonidentity of form and content. They resist the poetry of narrative coherence and communicative ease. His texts aim at a “resistance between reader and writer, speaker and listener,” as one of the author’s essays puts it. . . . The aim of the work is not the expression or imitation of reality, but the defamiliarization of the capitalist anarchy of production, which promises a more democratic relationship between the participants in poetic communication.

– Vladimir Feshchenko, from introduction to *Not This: Selected Writings*

Routinely red-baited in conservative defenses of traditional modes of lyric address, the most visible theorist-practitioners of Language Writing – McCaffery, Silliman, and Watten chief among them – variously and often stridently advanced the collective poetics as an anticapitalist project. / The generic logic of the politics of form associated with Language Writing crossed the wires of social politics and poetic innovation in North American poetry in ways that were routinely avowed and disavowed after 1977.

– Tim Kreiner, from “The Politics of Language Writing and the Subject of History,” *Post45*

Rarely spoken, often read, the language constituting *Zone* constructs a poetry of thought experiments for the assemblage, frame and archive thereof—to make of these Inscription and To Do list at once. With a brave critical mentality, *Zone* makes method its own radical cause.

– Marjorie Welish, on *Zone*

The value of Language writing, as demonstrated in Watten’s publications this century, is that shattering the window of language – not just looking out – was and is a beginning, among other beginnings, of thinking, if not being, “out there.”

– Tyrone Williams, from “Examples Of: On Barrett Watten’s Questions,” *Jacket2*

Barrett Watten’s *TOTAL SYNTAX* is a primary text for any understanding of the determining poetics of the world in which we live, *literally* – because poetics as politics is the determining imagination.[He] has made articulate and accessible the decisive activity of our present writing.

–Robert Creeley, endorsement of *Total Syntax*

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