



# Reading the Illegible (Avant-Garde & Modernism Studies)

*Craig Dworkin*

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A poet takes another's text, excises this, prints over that, cancels, erases, rearranges, defaces--and generally renders the original unreadable, at least in its original terms. What twentieth-century writers and artists have meant by such appropriations and violations, and how the "illegible" results are to be read, is the subject Craig Dworkin takes up in this ambitious work.

In his scrutiny of selected works, and with reference to a rich variety of textual materials--from popular and scientific texts to visual art, political and cultural theories, and experimental films--Dworkin proposes a new way of apprehending the radical formalism of so-called unreadable texts. Dworkin unveils what he describes as "the politics of the poem"--what is signified by its form, enacted by its structures, and implicit in the philosophy of language; how it positions its reader; and other questions relating to the poem as material object. In doing so, he exposes the mechanics and function of truly radical formalism as a practice that move beyond aesthetic considerations into the realms of politics and ideology. *Reading the Illegible* asks us to reconsider poetry as a physical act, and helps us to see how the range of a text's linguistic and political maneuvers depends to a great extent on the material conditions of reading and writing as well as the mechanics of reproduction.

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