

# Gates

ANNA VAN DER PLOEG & DAVID DANIELS

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*Sometimes the words tell the shapes what to be and sometimes the shapes tell the words what to be.*

- David Daniels

David Daniels was a self-taught American poet born in 1933 in Newark, New Jersey, died in 2008 in Berkley California. His work consists of many hundreds of shaped poems painstakingly typed out on various versions of Microsoft Word and self-published as PDFs on his website. Lining the walls of Winona is a selection of 64 such poems, from his magnum opus, *The Gates of Paradise*, which he wrote between 1988 and 2000. Daniels refers to each of the 350 poems in the collection as “gates”. He is interested, he says, in opening “[him]self and other people up and seeing what is inside.”

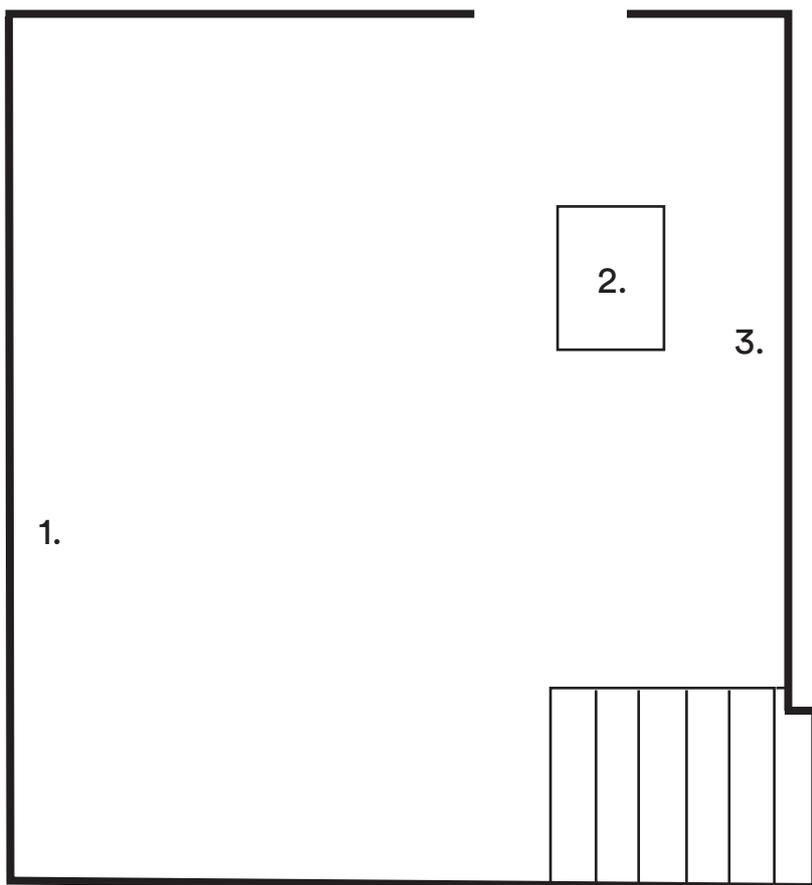
What is prescient in these poems is Daniels’ early realisation that, despite appearances, MS Word is a tool of the hand made. Already at the beginning of personal computing, he had understood the possibility of the medium as a kind of folk art, equivalent to needle-point or mosaic where simple and available tools can be turned toward extremely complex ends, not by grand design but through the moment to moment decisions of someone familiar with the medium. He understood, too, a kind of short circuiting that was then occurring between the intimate space of the personal computer and the planetary scale of networked computing, both of which were rampantly accelerating around him in California in the time these poems were written.

The poems speak to both scales simultaneously. They are cosmic in their outlook, dealing endlessly with themes of transformation, alchemical shifts in the state of matter, and testimonies of animate objects (“if  $x$  could talk”). At the same time, they are prosaic and personal. They speak the languages of folksy aphorisms, sexual frustration and bad jokes. The poems might be said to share in a certain cabalistic tradition of Jewish writing in which language can be endlessly broken down into smaller parts and rearranged atomically, not to in order to form “meaning” per se, but to create junctions of sense and sudden realisations. There is a leitmotif (present in almost every poem) which acts as the poems’ eternal return. It goes: “Stars shine bright on shatter light.”

Elsewhere in the space are three sculptural works by Anna Van Der Ploeg. On the floor, an a4 poster from a community notice-board has been scaled up massively in the manner of an allegory. Across from it, a painting without image squares off against a book made from holes. Anna says the book is a scale model for some larger, future sculpture. There is a sort of theatre happening here.

This book might be the central image of the show. A language made of holes, a syntax of gaps, a grammar of subtractions (Could we call it a punchcard?). The book is a space through which language has to navigate, a set of shapes through which it must squeeze itself, and a collection of leaks through which it might escape. There is nothing to keep language there. And the book and the painting are like lovers. They belong to one another and yet they don’t. They wear the names of two folk singers, endlessly singing to the absence of the other in the way that singers of love songs do.

*Well, I’ll be damned  
Here comes your ghost again [...]  
You who are so good with words  
And at keeping things vague  
‘Cause I need some of that vagueness now.*



Anna Van Der Ploeg:

1. *Chart without Legend*, 2022

Paint, carved plywood.

2. *Baez*, 2022

Found book, wood, paint.

3. *Bob*, 2022

Rabbit-skin glue on stretched cotton.

David Daniels:

Selection of Poems from *The Gates of Paradise*, 1988-2000

Laser print on paper

## WINONA

RUE VAN MEYEL 49  
1080 BRUSSELS

 [winonamonamour@gmail.com](mailto:winonamonamour@gmail.com)  
 +32 491 74 42 11 / +32 456 41 62 76  
 [winona.cloud](http://winona.cloud)