

**STATEMENT OF FACTS.** By Vanessa Place. (Blanc Press, 2010)

Conceptual poetry is critique, emphatically so, issuing forth by way of “allegorical” appropriation that challenges the author-composer and the reader-thinker into productively uncomfortable positions complicit with our violent culture system. What makes Vanessa Place’s *Statement of Facts* compelling is not only how it fits within this rubric, but how it pushes these very methods to their limit. Not resting with the incisive explication offered in *Notes on Conceptualisms*, her recent collaboration with Robert Fitterman, Place’s *Statement of Facts* raises provocation to a new level. First issued in a slimmer edition under Kenneth Goldsmith’s Publishing the Unpublishable, *Statement of Facts* proved to be just that. *Poetry* magazine rejected an excerpt for its Flarf/Conceptualism feature, and several publishers ultimately rejected the work, citing its difficult content, until it finally found a home at Blanc Press. Place, an appellate criminal defense attorney who specializes in sex offense cases, presents her own cases’ legal documents as poetry. Her appropriation is less Duchamp readymade than Roger Caillois’s “dangerous luxury” of mimicry—“dangerous” because, more than an offensive measure (read: I replicate a confessional lyric to comment on poetic expectations of sentiment and testimony) or a defensive measure (read: I transform myself into poetry for an alternative location from which to interrogate statuses of mastery, Law and Truth), mimicry often brings the risk of annihilation. *Statement of Facts* is a “luxury” because the appropriation presents itself as the nonspecified desires of a text that “quite literally no longer knows what to do with itself,” hence the reader doesn’t know quite what to do with it, either. While *Notes on Conceptualisms* states that “one does not need to ‘read’ the work as much as think about the idea of the work,” the claim becomes untenable given the charged content of Place’s new text. The leap over reading is fraught with the difficulty of the facts. What does it mean for a reader to forgo these narratives of assault that present contingencies of memory, guilt, innocence, and justice? Place demands that readers consider their own reasons for engaging with the work and the implications of those choices. Her proximity to the material leaves the critique-complicity balance to teeter without ever settling, reactivating ethical questions that continue to haunt appropriative techniques and that were central during the formation of gender, postcolonial and critical race studies: Who speaks? Who is spoken for? Who is silenced through this speaking? *Statement of Facts* directs these queries not only at discourses of Law and, as Place has stated, at discourses of Poetry, but also self-reflexively at its own instantiation. It brings complicity close and does not let go. It asks you to consider whether a statement of facts can ever be a factual narrative of events *sans* argument. Would you want it to be? And is now perhaps the time for argument to assert itself, again, into poetry?

--Andrea Quaid