

# A Midwestern Poetics

## Selections From a Journal

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From Leszek Kolakowski's *The Presence of Myth*: "Philosophical culture has lived with a desire to discover words which would describe without ambiguity the conditionality of the world of experience—in other words, the desire verbally to illuminate Being, about which it is known that it cannot be grasped as an object and that its presence is not made up of the presence of objects." *The desire verbally to illuminate Being*. Isn't this exactly what poetry is for?

Sugimoto's photographs of tools, the simplest of tools—a quick-release lever, for instance. I think of the sculptures of my youth, the iron and steel of the machine shop, the lathes themselves, that offered fleeting glimpses of what I could much later call, without embarrassment, art. I think of Donald Judd's aluminum boxes in Marfa, Texas. Which is the greater art—Judd's conception of the placement of the boxes, whose ranks fill an armory, or the beautiful machine work done on the boxes by Jose Otero of Bernstein Brothers? I can imagine a professional art critic claiming that Judd's part was art, but Otero's work was craft. I think that would be a false distinction.

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Wittgenstein: “Do not forget that although a poem uses the language of information, it is not involved in the language-game of giving information.” It is not the purpose and certainly not the magic of poetry to speak *about* the thing (information), but rather *to speak the thing*, to perform the impossible task of making the absent present—palpably, tangibly present.

1. Poetry is about everything you cut class for.
2. Poetry is the only way we have of talking about experience without diminishing it.
3. Poetry is the most precise form of expression that the language gives us.
4. Poetry is virtual reality.

The TV weather report tonight: “Tomorrow will be a continuation of today.”

Reading Heidegger: Poetry as the only way to speak *dasein*, *being-in-the-world*, since it cannot be spoken about without distorting it (with the exception of H. himself, of course, who tried to invent a new philosophic language in order to avoid such distortion).

Malraux: “What makes the artist is the circumstance that in his youth he was more deeply moved by the sight of works of art than by that of the things which they portray.”

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