Anni Albers had an approach to writing that bore a stunning resemblance to the process of creating a weaving on a loom. Using her manual typewriter, she would write her text on ordinary white 8½-by-11-inch sheets of paper and then tape the pages together as if to create a scroll. She felt that only in this way could she achieve and judge the flow and continuity of the completed essay; at least initially, she did not want the barrier imposed by the need to turn the page.

Content, of course, was essential, but so were the aesthetics of writing. As in her textiles, she sought a mix of understatement and strength, a graceful tone, a relationship of the parts that was harmonious but never repetitious or boring.

The whole notion of language was one of her passions. She was intrigued by the appearance of hieroglyphics and of various ancient scripts. Her art reflects in a vague way the appearance, at times, of Arab or Hebrew alphabets, of Oriental calligraphy, of ancient Mayan lettering. With those alien but enticing tongues it was not the meaning that mattered so much as the timbre and general feeling: the wonderful, urgent need to communicate. That need and the music of writing sometimes transcended the specifics of the available media of expression.

But words, and the English language, were vital; she would master them as best she could. Having had an Irish governess when young, this German-speaking woman had a good start on the tongue that would be essential to her once she and her husband Josef, also German-speaking, were forced to leave their native country in 1933 and move to Black Mountain, North Carolina. Anni used to cite several specific influences as being of pivotal importance: President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who felt “like a benevolent uncle” (not that she or Josef ever met him) and whose fireside chats offered such comfort (she also liked his fine command of words and aristocratic
diction); and Alfred North Whitehead, whose command of English she found as clear and precise as his name.

Using words as she did thread, linking them and tying them together as effectively as possible, she put her marvelous aesthetic philosophy, her truest belief system, on the typewritten pages that became those scrolls. The results are both eloquent and profound. And it is more than appropriate that they are now being assembled in this new form by Wesleyan University Press, the institution that made the two marvelous books of Anni’s lifetime, that endorsed and helped perpetuate her intellect and vision some three decades ago. (It also delighted Anni that Wesleyan published John Cage, for even if his spontaneity was at times quite the opposite of her taste for planning and preparation, they were both spiritual adventurers whose pioneering approach as well as innate humor strengthened the friendship that existed between them for nearly half a century.) It is equally fitting that the person who has researched and helped assemble this volume is Brenda Danilowitz, a friend and colleague to Anni, a true scholar of her work as well as close acquaintance of the woman herself. These are some of the reasons that the pages that follow are so true to the inventive, sure, and, now more than ever, influential belief system of Anni Albers.