

THE MINUTE REVIEW

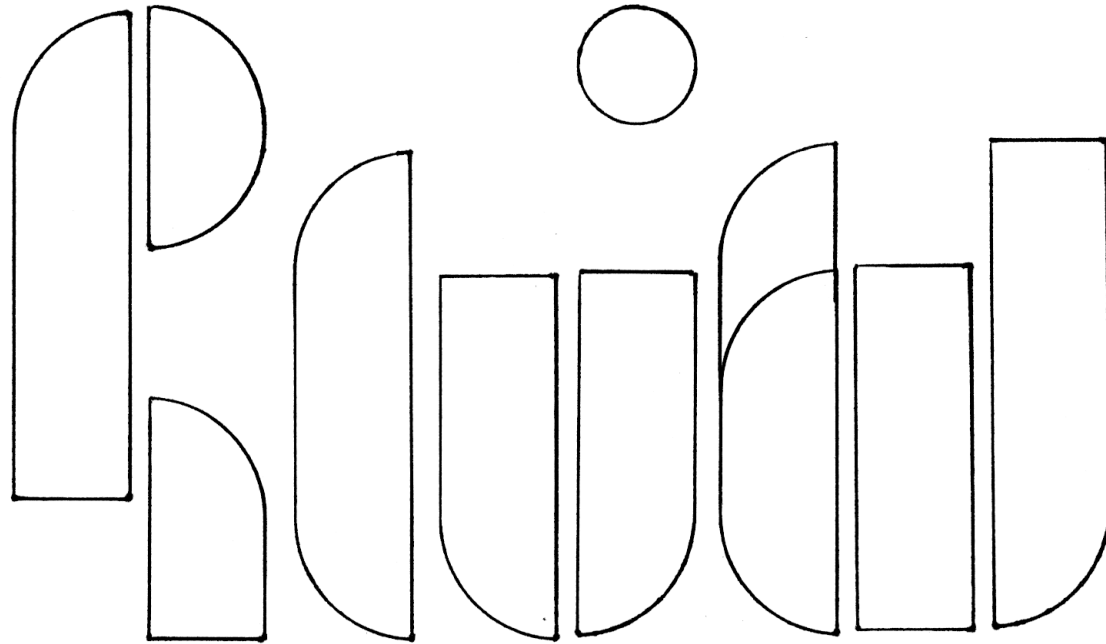
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a little magazine of poetry, prose, and reviews

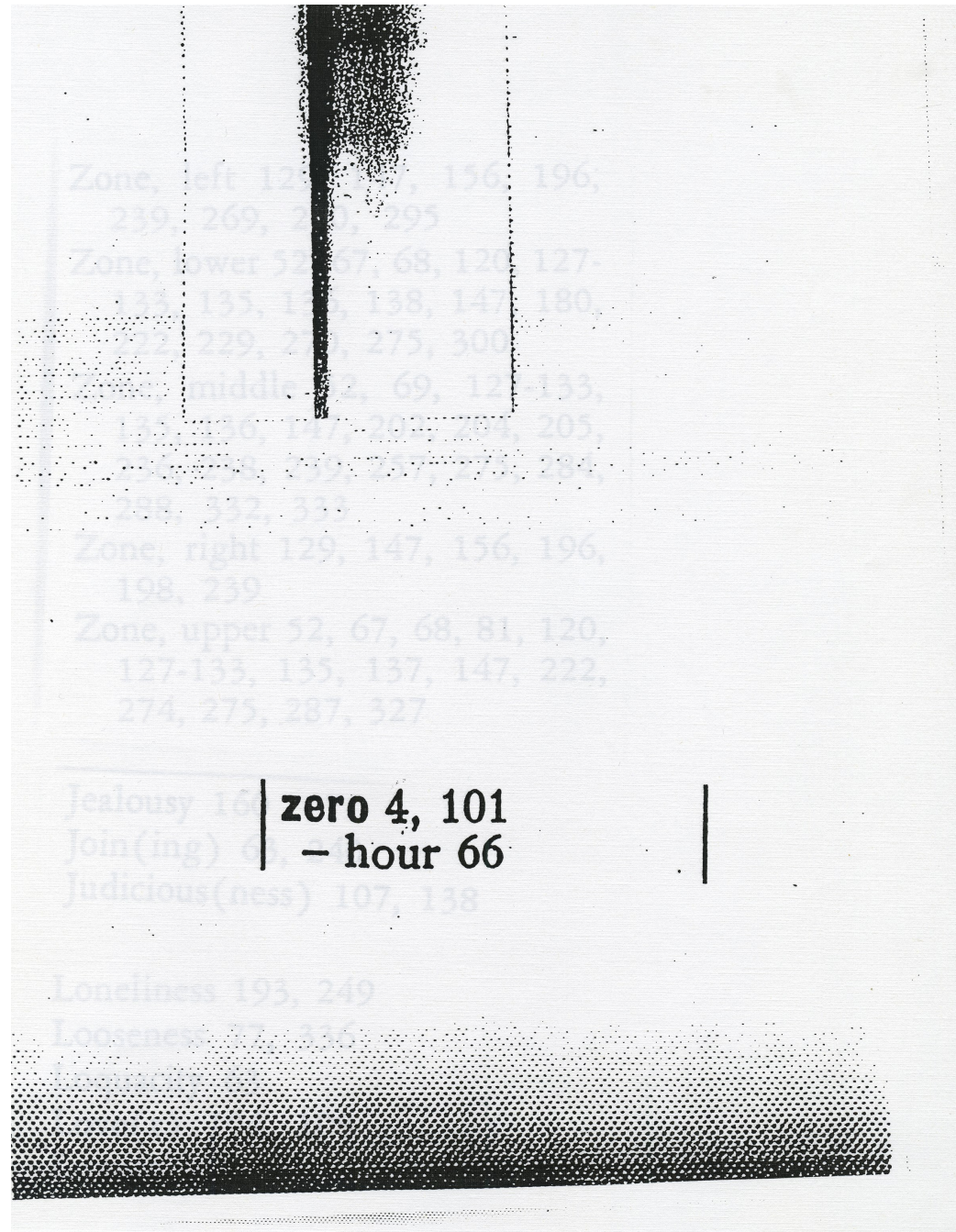
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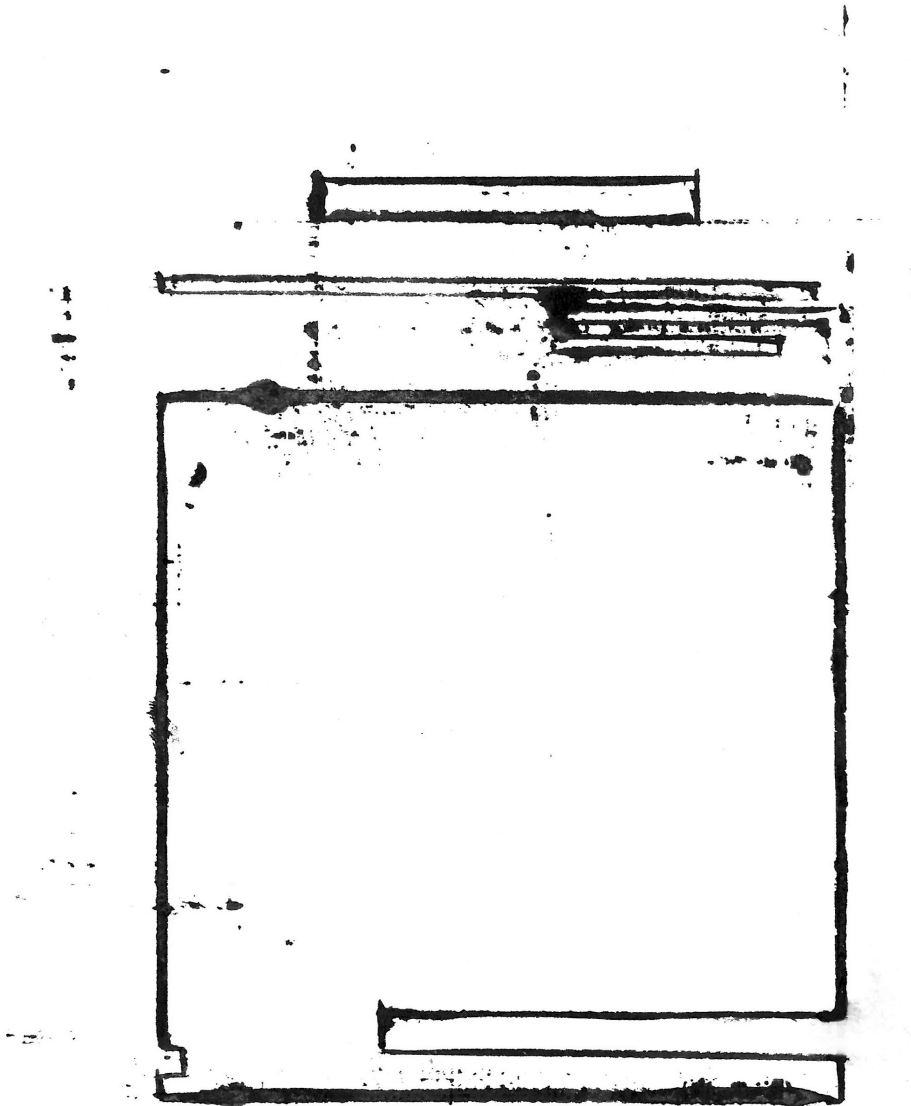
Contributors this issue: petra schulze-wollgast | Erica Baum | Rachel Smith | Sacha Archer | Greg Thomas | Luke Bradford | rob mcLennan | Derek Beaulieu | Helen Hajnoczky | Kevin Stebner | Donato Mancini | Jo Cook | Bucky Fleur



petra schulze-wollgast



Rachel Smith—from *Traces of Reading (Babel)*



Traces of Reading (Babel) is part of my ongoing series of drawings derived from readings of particular texts. These are drawings of the first page of Jorge Luis Borges' story 'The Library of Babel.' The number of drawings in this collection continues to grow and "promise the infinite." Each drawing is visually constrained by the first page of Borges' short story and expands on his description of unreadable books in the imagined library. A collection of these works will be published by Penteract Press in Spring 2022. — Rachel Smith

Sacha Archer—*What is There and What is Not*
Review of *Clouds* by Sébastien Hildebrand
(Plaugolt SatzWechsler / Timglaset Editions, 2021)

Clouds, the seventh installment in the TYPEWRITTEN artist's book series co-published by Plaugolt SatzWechsler and Timglaset is my first encounter with the work of Sébastien Hildebrand. The booklet consists of a series of typewritten images which resemble cloud formations, each piece constructed using only the ampersand. Visually, this work is gorgeous—its varying tones of blue, the sense of openness in each piece—and that physical reaction, that sense of openness is elicited by how well the pieces depict the ephemerality of clouds. But this book is most fascinating in its contrasts and contradictions.

Watching actual clouds is a calming and hypnotic (anti-)activity because they are in perpetual motion, shifting shape with a patient liquidity—and yet, these pieces, obviously, are static. Beyond the static, plastic product, the very means of production, that of a typewriter (the giver of grids) seems the antithesis of the nature of clouds. And yet.

While this is a series of typewritten pieces, the content is found exclusively in the negative space on the page, the absence of mark. While the main body of the clouds is untouched white page, even their edges are defined less by the typed ampersands (which represent the sky) than by the varying degrees of faintness of the marks—not that which is present, but that which is absent. With that in mind, the choice of the ampersand as the sole typewritten character becomes quite intriguing. There is a poetic logic to the choice, a conjunction building and expanding on nothing, somehow precisely like a cloud. Of course, it is not the clouds that Hildebrand has defined with the ampersands, but rather the sky, the atmosphere. In fact, space/air = &, and as such, the ampersand with its absolute openness leads us to breath, to the act of breathing. Breathing & looking—at clouds.

I must mention that *Clouds* contains a brief introduction by Hildebrand in which he posits the series as a conceptual foray which “tries to reproduce the physical and temporal existence of data” which is contained in cloud services such as Dropbox. I find this a less compelling frame of consideration except in the clashing of mediums: virtual cloud storage as expressed by a typewriter, a clunky machine which manages, in this case, to express a weightlessness, regardless of frame.

Greg Thomas—*An Essential Such as Isn't*

Review of *The Matrix* and *EECCHHOOEESS* by N.H. Pritchard

(Ugly Duckling Presse / DABA, 2021)

These two reprinted titles by the African-American modernist N.H. Pritchard (1939–1996), originally published in 1970 and 1971, are works of genuine ascetic strangeness. Emphasizing typographical space and phonetic play while taking flight from semantic sense, they comprise a significant contribution to concrete-adjacent and proto-L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E movements of the 1960s–70s.

It is a truism that black voices ought to be amplified within canons of experimental literature. A more targeted and nuanced version of that statement—for which I lean on Anthony Reed's *Freedom Time: The Poetics and Politics of Black Experimental Writing*—is that Pritchard's work deserves revisiting because of the way it activates visual-material form to disrupt semantic sense (in contrast to the meditative minimalism of much concrete poetry—say, Robert Lax). In so doing, it alludes to themes and desires which language fails to express, in a way that is both mystical, in the Mallarméan sense of alluding to the space between words, and tangentially politically loaded.

Pritchard's connection during the 1960s to New York's Umbra group, which grew out of the *On Guard for Freedom* black-nationalist magazine, is sufficient to suggest the activist connotations of his practice. But his thematic range is that of an esoteric rather than a radical in the vein of, say, Amiri Baraka. Early poems from *The Matrix*, such as "Sub Scan," have a loosely diagrammatic quality. In this case, we assume, the eyes and ears are mapping the thronged spaces of a subway carriage or concourse, the perpendicular visual suggesting a cross-section or x-ray:

an old hat
6 shoes
hair
squeaking
signs
couples
part
though
apart
moving
doors
met

Elsewhere, in “Outing,” one of a number of water-side scenes, graphic and phonetic exuberance pay homage to the poem’s non-human subjects:

flocksflocksflocksflocksflocksflocksflocksflocksflocksflocks

ooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo

geeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeessssssssssssssssseeeeeeeee

a r b o r e s n e a r t h e s h o r e

The tricky-to-parse last line hints at the more daring ways in which visual placement, including the stretching, snipping, and splicing of words, will be utilized later on in the text, becoming a vessel for trans-semantic play. Rhythms and rhyme-patterns start to emulate jazz music, while language seems to reach for the essence of a visual scene, as if relaying its emotional and cognitive import beyond its material components and grammatical trappings. Here is the opening of the catachresis-speckled “Epilogue”:

F O L L O W I N G T H E C A L M
H A R K E N I N G C R Y S T A L S S P R E A D
T H E I R L I G H T
G O N E W A S S W E P T A W A Y
T H E O T H E R S W A N D E R E D O N

“Gone was swept away:” throughout Pritchard’s work, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions become nouns, while qualifying statements are offered without a prior subject: “the others wandered on.” It is perhaps this mirage-like physical detail which leads some critics to speak of Pritchard’s work as religious in tone. Between “Signs” (1965–67) and “Objects” (1968–70), the second and third sections of *The Matrix*, Pritchard seems to have seized on a kind of revelatory repetitive quality, carried through to the more boldly visual poetics of *EECCHHOO-EESS*. The long-form “Aurora”, the final work in “Signs”, serves as a threshold piece, stringing a single, gnomic phrase—“there are only pebbles now, soft beneath our feet, & the hour is knew and the lights few, though somewhere isn’t that horn a matter that scorn is worn...”—over dozens of pages, through incantatory recurrence, and across oceans of white space, until it gradually disperses in a foam of letters and words.

It’s not clear if “Objects” and *EECCHHOO-EESS* were composed in more direct response to the international concrete poetry movement, but sequences from the latter, such as “Frog”, pull out all the typographical stops. Words are printed backwards, fill unmarginated double-spreads, are blown up, strung out in vertical and horizontal bands. At the same time, pieces like “carbon” probe new depths of gnostic introspection:

eitwa hen heli sneat
lethe this ta
heta ubur heno heno
purte kanda gews

Is there a demotic African-American register buried in these verses? Are these charged anagrammatic codes of some kind?

That the potential cultural and political subtexts of Pritchard's experiments—the marginalization of black experience in the American-English lexicon, or, as Reed notes, the unswerving essentialism of some mid-century black-activist thought—are never brought to the surface does not mean they are not there, as deep presences within his work. Perhaps the five-word vertical poem “Point” gets close to the point:

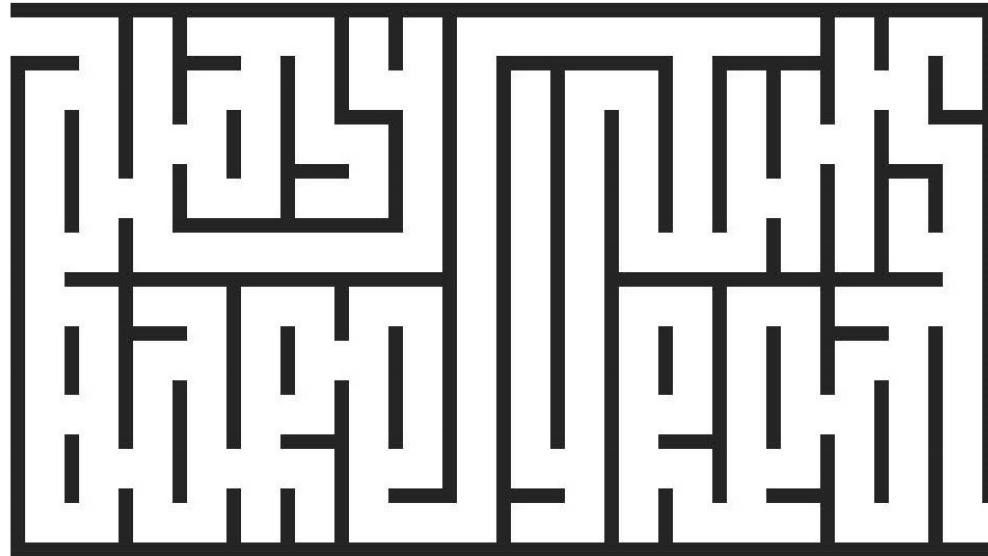
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rob mclennan—Review of *RAIN* by Mark Truscott

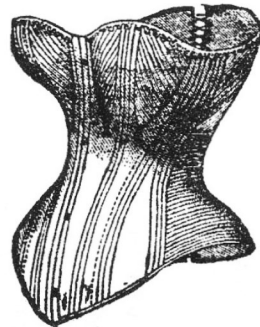
(knife | fork | book, 2022)

The gracefully-produced three-poem chapbook *RAIN* (2022) furthers Toronto poet Mark Truscott's deep engagement with the condensed lyric (across, to date, three full-length collections and a couple of chapbooks), although more straightforwardly-lyric than some of his prior works, which echoed structures akin to the work of Cameron Anstee, Marilyn Irwin, the late Nelson Ball or certain pieces by Michael e. Casteels, jwcurry, Stuart Ross and Gary Barwin, etc. There is something curious about the thickness of his lines and phrases. "If a pattern settles into / freshly relevant contours," he writes, to open the poem "LEAVES," "think / breeze perhaps, though the world / may be opening there too (by / way of changes shaped solely / within). And where are you?" He composes three poems each less than two dozen lines long, but from a writing history made up of poems short enough that eight or ten of his prior pieces combined might only achieve the same word count as a single piece here. He writes on physical features of leaves, rain and water, each poem akin to a single, experienced moment, slowed-down and stretched. "The chaos of rain / is the desperation / of a crowd hemmed in." he writes, to open the third and final poem in the collection, which also happens to be the title poem. "We can watch it / through the window. / I've seen it / on the front page." The shutter clicks, one might say, and there it is. How to write deeply on something so thoughtfully, strikingly condensed?



The Flexible Hip

FLEXIBLE HIP CORSET.

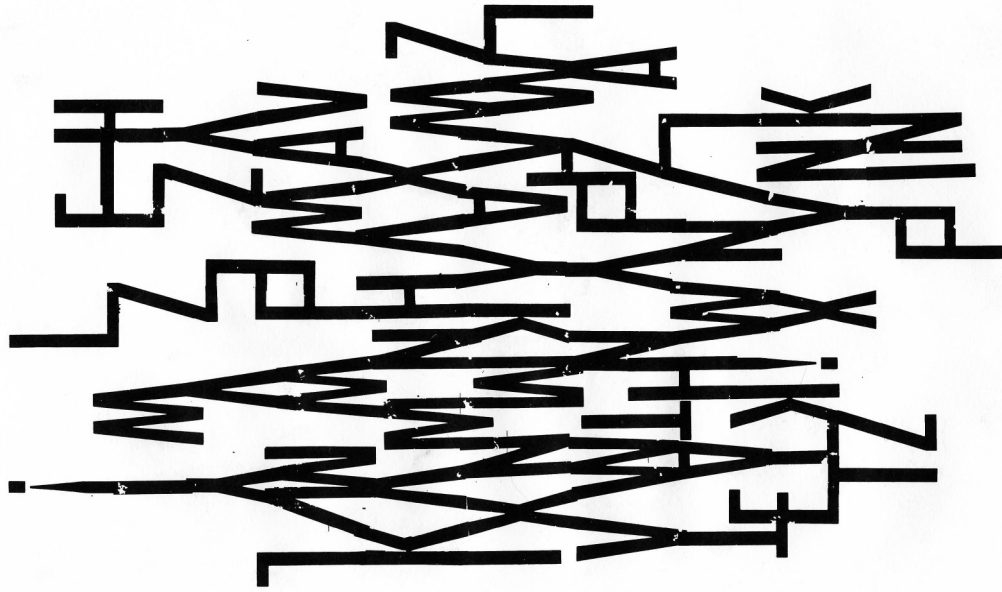


This corset is constructed after the analogy of the human body, the bones over the hips passing, like the ribs, around the body. By this arrangement severe strain across the bones is avoided, so that it is **IMPOSSIBLE** for the corset to break down over the hips. The point of greatest weakness in other corsets becomes in this the point of greatest strength. At the same time this construction secures a perfect-fitting corset, so comfortable that a lady can lie down in it with ease; so flexible that it yields readily to every movement of the body, and yet so firm that it gives the requisite support at the sides. No corset ever introduced has in a single season had so large a sale, and met with so great popular favor as the Flexible Hip Corset. Price, post-paid, \$1.25.

FLEXIBLE HIP CORSET.



Time is for sale. The season of strain becomes the analogy of ease. A human weakness constructed the lady. Like every popular lie, this arrangement secures the impossible. The same construction can readily break, yet this met with no firm favour and avoided large support. The requisite strength yields other movement, gives a single perfect fitting, and has it introduced by corsets: So the ribs, over the bones, across at the sides of the bones passing over the body, down at the hips, around the hips of the body down at the hip... So this corset had in it a corset, so great in that greatest point that it is flexible, so flexible to a point that it is greatest, so as to corset that corset, so comfortably severe ever after-with the body in this corset. Price, post-paid, \$1.25



**Donato Mancini—*Jo Wesley Florentine Bucky Frances Cook:*
*Concrete Poet***

In November 2021, artist-poet-publisher Jo Cook died. Jo had lived on Mayne Island, BC, with her life-partner Wesley Mulvin. Under their imprint *Perro Verlag Books by Artists*, together Jo and Wesley wrote, edited, assembled by hand, and independently published, books. From 2005 until 2020, Perro Verlag published over 100 books of all sizes, by nearly as many artists and poets. You might recognise some of the poets: derek beaulieu, Billy Mavreas, Andrew Topel, and Nico Vassilakis. I mention these poets in particular, among many others, because I want to draw your attention to Jo's (and Perro Verlag's) work in concrete/visual poetry.

From the early 1980s onwards, Jo regularly exhibited her paintings and drawings in Canadian parallel galleries, and increasingly, in galleries worldwide. In the Perro Verlag (PV) years, her work, often collaborative, turned increasingly towards the finely produced, limited edition (chap)book, or artists' book as medium and unit of composition. From this paper ground, she produced quite a bit of concrete, integrated into her increasingly prolific practice of writing (poetry, 'pataphysics, speculative fiction) and drawing.

Jo's work was always, in some sense, about the confounding experience of her queer, injured, migrant selfhood. After the founding of PV, it seems that language as matter (I mean: stuff, substance, stickiness, starchiness, stain) was added to her range of studio resources, alongside the gouaches and oils and watercolours and inks. At the same time, perhaps because of her increased orientation to language, and perhaps because of her declining health, selfhood it-self became ever more plastic in Jo's hands. From 2005 on, there were multiple pseudonym Jo Cooks on the scene, each with its own, usually 'pataphysical-identitarian, pre-occupations. As -nym Florentine Perro, Jo edited and published Perro Verlag. As -nym Buckminster Bucky Fleur, Jo wrote—or collected—fictive autobiography and researched psychic phenomena. As -nym Frances Zorn, Jo star-gazed, spoke to aliens in waking dreams, listened to secret exoplanetary transmissions, and transcribed alien messages and alien alphabets.

Before glancing at just one small corner of Jo's concrete/visual poetry cabinet, a word about her aesthetic. Recall that "Perro" means "dog," in Spanish. "Verlag," in German, means "publishing." As Jo said in an interview with Guinevere Pencarrick, "Books are filthy, dirty things!" PV made dog-books, mongrel books. Rescues, mutts, mutants and runts. Messy puppies, as well as odorous old strays. In line with these values, her approach to vispo was indeed always dirty-handsy, inky greasy thumbprinty, mixing a range of modes, moods, styles, forms—meltitudinous [*sic*], Vesuvianian. Clean concrete? Sometimes. Dirty concrete? Often. Wet concrete? Always.

One of the earliest PV books, *The Autobiographies of Bucky Fleur* (2005), incorporates autobiographies of Bucky written by Sally Ireland, Tammy McGrath and Yasuko Thanh, alongside Bucky Fleur's dense lettrist drawings, original poetry, found text, collage, asemic writing, photography, plunder-verse, and erasure poetry. *Autobiographies'* glorious mess calls forward to the *Altered Art Treasures* (2011), signed Jo Cook and James Whitman, a hilarious (and popular—3 editions, I think) book of Dada vandalisms of works by old masters. (I still don't know if James Whitman is a real person, or another envoy of the -nyms.) *Observatory* (2012), signed Bucky Fleur, crosses manipulated found photos, lettraset and permutational poetry with speculative fiction. Bucky Fleur also launched a multi-volume PV series, the "Documents of Psychic Amateurs." The DoPA series was itself commissioned by The Institute for the Science of Identity. Fleur's contribution was *Bluwatsky: Her Ear Life, a facsimile edition of an altered book on the Early Life of Madame Blavatsky* (2014). *Bluwatsky* densely sandwiches collages of found-text atop erasure poetry, alien lettrism, and many hand-drawn elements.

One of my favourites of Cook's concretes is *Celestograms* (2008), signed Frances Zorn, made up of expressive, 2-colour typewriter poems, some with interpolated drawings and aquarelle colouring. The "celestograms" are said to be typewritten transcriptions of alien speech and messages transmitted to Zorn. A subsequent, related book, signed Frances Zorn, *The Apocryphal Codex of Resolutions Transmitted from Planet Coelan* (2008), mixes speculative fiction in verse, star maps, alien alphabets, typewriter poetry, drawings and collage.

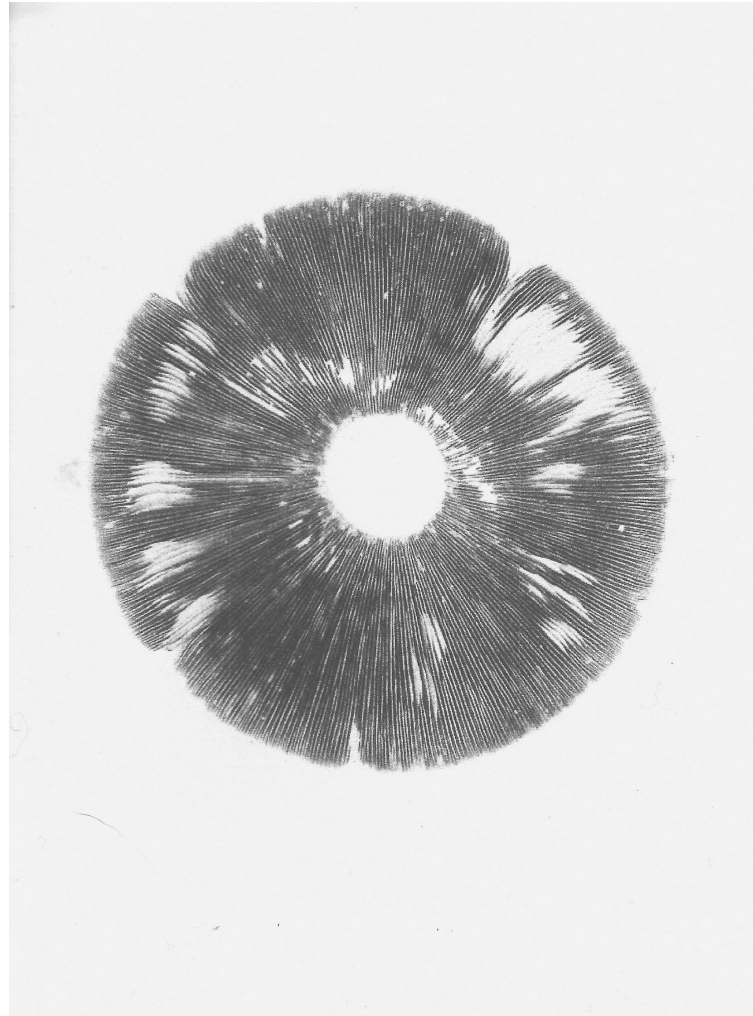
Among a number of her more austere concrete books is *e(ye(s)ee)* (2010), signed Jo Cook, a permutational poem in the vein of Emmett Williams' *Sweethearts* (1965). *Aparine* (2014), signed jo cook [*sic*], in this cleaner vein, is a poem of permutations, alphabet rotations, pun-spins and nonce-words, all accompanied with pencil-crayon drawings. Similarly austere, but maybe even more gorgeous in its simplicity, is the asemic writing of *Whispers from Outer Space* (2014), signed Jo Cook, a book of interplanetary 'pataphysical 'panpsychism drawn entirely with mushroom spores.

The first in the series of 24 "Hell Passports," *Caca-Phonik's Posthumous Pik-Nik* (2007), signed Scheisse Wives, is mostly a hand-lettered, 12-page poem in which 8 out of 10 words are in an imaginary language, one that seems to mix aspects of Czech, German and Esperanto baby-babble. It also includes one of the tastiest of the peculiar, inscrutable, grossly corporeal lists found in later PV books.

And more, and more, mixed into Jo's other works and books and exhibitions and collaborations and projects; hot wet concrete always bubbling up, wherever it could.

Back sometime around 2010, I asked Jo about her relation to concrete/visual poetry. She told me then she considered herself a “closet concrete poet.” Well, if she was in any kind of closet about concrete, the door to that closet was wide open, the naked 160-watt bulb was burning brightly, and there was a pink neon sign above the door blinking EYE WRITE WRONG.

You can see a large selection of the books published under Perro Verlag here:
<http://www.perroverlag.com/menu.html>



Cover of Cook, Jo. *Whispers from Outer Space*.
Mayne Island: Perro Verlag, 2014.
(Limited edition of 23)

BLUVATSKY

CHAPTER I

The years must be
predicted and printed in
story memory
born 1831
noble in Russia
mother
aristocratic ears
baby born
feeble not expected

Excerpt from Fleur, Bucky. *Bluvatsky: Her Ear Life*.
Mayne Island: Perro Verlag, 2014.
("Documents of Psychic Amateurs" series, limited edition of 35)