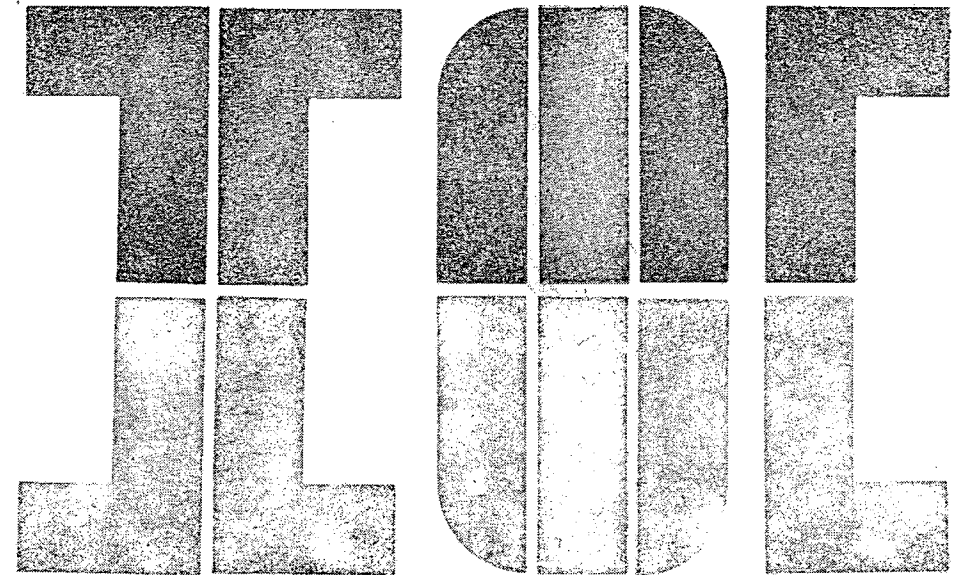


# THE MINUTE REVIEW

Vol. 2 No. 9 (December 2023)  
a little magazine of poetry, prose, and reviews

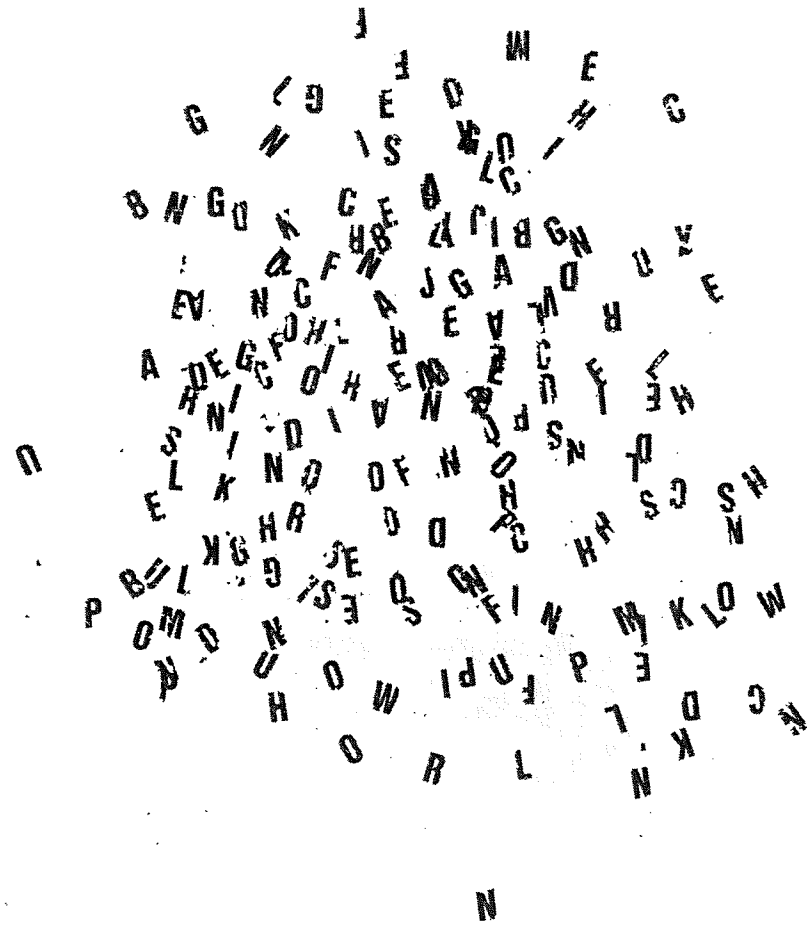
Derek Beaulieu, editor  
107 Tunnel Mountain Drive, Box 1020, Banff, Alberta, Canada T1L 1H5

**Contributors this issue:** petra schulze-wollgast | Sal Nunchakov | Mark Laliberte |  
Egidija Čiricaite | Greg Thomas & Stephen Nelson | Kirill Azernyy | Tom Jenks |  
Alex Benedict | Laura Kerr | Rémi Forte | Ana María Caballero | Lillian Nečakov |  
Lisa Golze

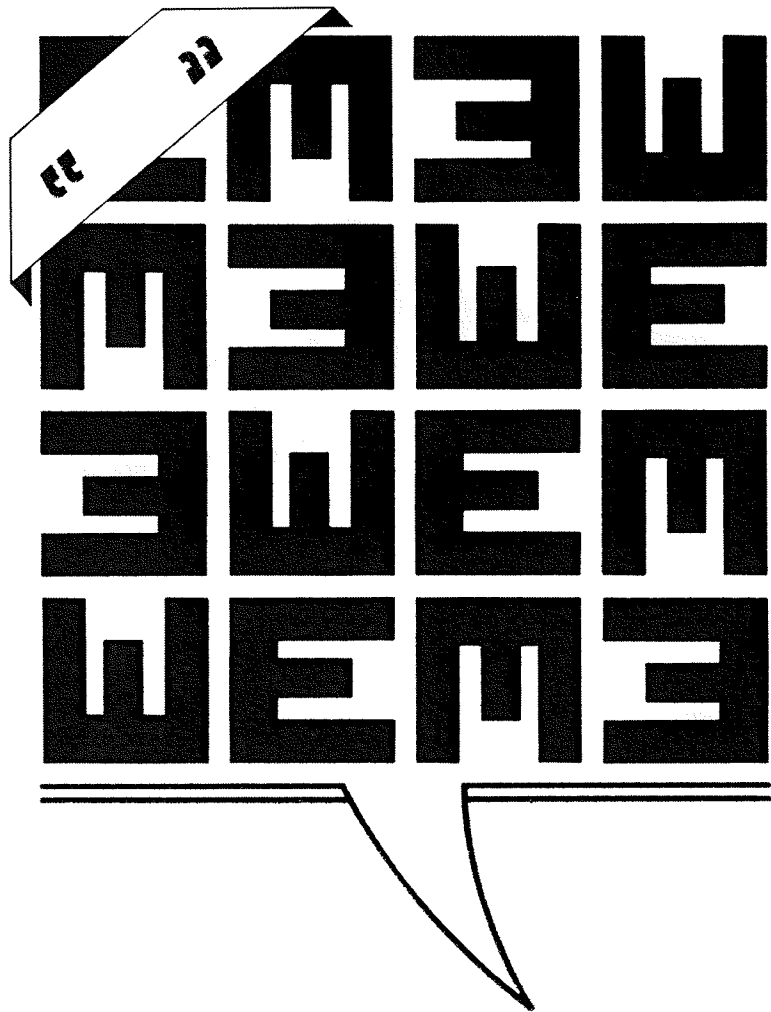


05/2023 psw

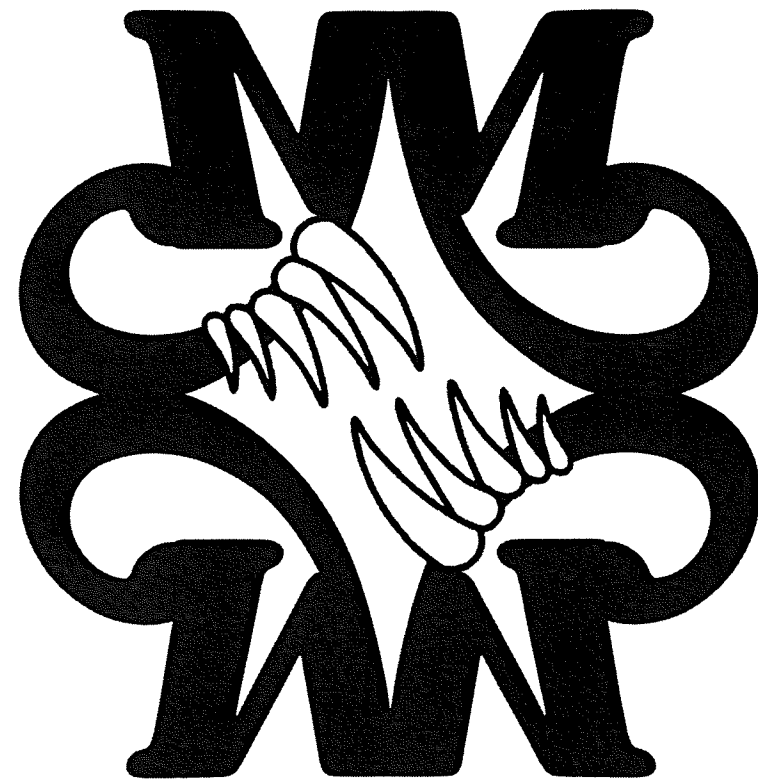
*Two Visual Poems*  
Sal Nunchakov



*EM3W*  
Mark Laliberte



*MMMM*  
Mark Laliberte





**Concrete and Tantra: A Conversation with Stephen Nelson about *Toys for Telepaths* (Dugort, Co. Mayo: Red Fox, 2023)**

**Greg Thomas**

*The visual poet Stephen Nelson, who lives in a burn in central Scotland with a cat called Amma, has been quietly amassing a singular body of asemic writing, visual poetry, and language-game exercises over the past few decades. His semantic work distils a gentle humour and conceptual ingenuity that reflects the influence of the Scottish concrete poetry tradition. His visual work, meanwhile, brings to mind figures such as Geoff Huth and Derek Beaulieu. But there is a particular subtlety of logographic gesture in Nelson's asemic and visual poetry that marks a more meditative compositional space. You can find his work in 3am Magazine, Otoliths, Jacket2, Xexoxial, and elsewhere. Nelson's new collection Toys for Telepaths (2023), part of the marvellous C'est Mon Dada series put out by Ireland's Red Fox Press, uses Roman, Greek, and Tibetan characters to create lithely enmeshed language-structures. This is digital work, but without the excessive effects of distortion or glitchiness that can mark out vispo in this medium. Characters are, for the most part, black, but with little planes of bright colour filling the holes in certain letters. Each piece expresses the delight of instinctive creation, with a sense of lightness and mobility to individual elements. But there is an overall visual integrity to each page that belies the swiftness of composition.*

*In a foreword to the collection, Nelson writes: "I'm interested in creating visual poems which can simply rest in the reader's awareness and open their mind naturally and freely." A grounding in Tantric thought is central to Nelson's conception of visual poetics, as it was for dom sylvester houédard—the Buddhism of d.a.levy is another touchstone. But I wanted to get under the skin of Nelson's thinking on these matters to fully engage with his new collection. The following conversation was conducted first on Instagram and then via email with the author during April 2023:*

**GT [Insta]:** Hey Stephen, I'm really enjoying your book. Could you tell me if there is a particular set of alphabets you're using here? It looks like mostly Greek and Roman ... Also, is there particular relevance to the use of grammatical symbols: the wee flowers, triangles, etcetera?

**SN:** Thanks Greg. Yes, Roman, Greek, and Tibetan alphabets. Quite a bit of Tibetan. And a lot of the Tibetan characters work alongside the flowers or stars or asterisks as offerings. So offerings to the poetry gods or whatever. I use commas as thorns quite a lot, piercing, and enlarged full stops and other grammatical symbols as endings, offerings, things carried over from one impulse to another. A cessation or offering of felt energy.

I see something very playful in the Tibetan alphabet, and it's where the "toys" of the title came from. I think there's also a suggestion of seeds and embryos in the punctuation. From my perspective these might be karmic seeds, the seeds we sow with words and actions.

**GT:** Thanks so much Stephen. We should sit down to talk about all this some time. Are you versed in Buddhism, then?

**SN:** Yeah, I've quite a strong (but informal) connection to Vajrayana Buddhism, Tantric Buddhism. I remember [concrete poetry scholar and tantric Buddhism practitioner] Nicola Simpson talking about it on discussion about dom sylvester houédard on Radio Three a while back there, and it very much resonated with me.

**GT:** This is all so interesting. If you wanted to tell me any more I'd love to hear from you over email ...

**SN:** That'd be great. Just for starters, the spiritual element to the concrete and visual poetry movement in the 60s is a big draw for me. I really love d.a.levy's *Tibetan Stroboscope*. levy is a huge favourite of mine. I'll be in touch with more soon hopefully.

**SN: [Email]** Hi Greg. Further to our chat on Instagram, I have a few thoughts on the Tantric/Concrete connection in my work.

It involves the use of visualisation of seed mantras in Tantra. Mantras are usually thought of as sound, but more accurately they're vibration. So in Tantra, a seed syllable or mantra is visualised, in Tibetan or Sanskrit letters, during meditation, and placed at a point in the body, or subtle body (chakras etc). So, for example, *Om* at the crown, *Ab* at the throat, *Hum* at the heart. The seed mantra has the vibration of a deity, which might be thought of as an archetypal aspect of enlightened mind. It gets very detailed and intricate, but the energy of the syllable, as sound or image installed in the subtle body, potentially has the power to shift blocked psychological or emotional patterns and free up space in the mind.

So really much of the concrete work I'm doing is about the power of letters to affect the body, or subtle body, and the emotions that are stored there, via the imaginative faculties. I really want this to be a poetic thing though, not necessarily spiritual or therapeutic or healing. Looking at a letter composition placed on a page might have a similar effect to a visualised seed mantra placed in the body. It's like a transmission of energy which can calm or enliven the mind through the eye via the body, but in an altogether more playful way in *Toys for Telepaths*. It's about letter shapes sparking something internally, an imaginative response that opens up and expands certain areas of consciousness.

I work very fast, almost in a trance, pulling these shapes and compositions from an unconscious place, and I'm often blown away by the results. They have a cohesion I couldn't plan, very much a deep intuitive exploration. The only intention is to create an energetic flow from form to form, which is felt in the body. Some of this undoubtedly comes from a subconscious storehouse of

letter shapes, vispoetic forms etcetera, but some of it feels quite primal or childlike or archetypal, even cosmic at times, and beyond that, it expresses the experience of shunyata, or emptiness.

Personally, I've worked with tantric deities and their mantras in both the Buddhist and Hindu traditions (Shiva/Shakti) as a way of integrating a spontaneous kundalini awakening. I've done that since my twenties, and the marriage of that practise and concrete poetry seems very natural and easy. Tibetan has a very playful feel to me, but I'd also like to explore Sanskrit. The Greek and Roman alphabets are obviously more familiar here, but have similar potential. And the whole idea of placing "power letters" on the body by way of visualisations is paralleled in so many mystical traditions across the world. Kabbalah, working with Hebrew letters, is possibly the most well-known in the West.

A few of the poems also have semi-abstract figurative or narrative qualities. I think these reveal themselves organically in composition when the mind has some space or freedom. Again, they're primitive, archetypal patterns but also playful. For me, they come from a space that's shared with the ancient formulation of tantric or magick symbology and ritual, deeply rooted in the imagination. Visualised deities, ritualised movement or activity. All designed to reveal, then integrate more archetypal energies, or even more innocent or childlike qualities.

Ok, I'm rattling on a bit. It's a very exciting subject for me ...

**GT:** This is so fascinating Stephen. When you talk about the visualisation of a syllable and its placement on the body, could you talk me through that a bit more?

**SN:** Of course, yeah. The visualisation technique is something that's generally only learned at advanced stages of practice, after a solid grounding in more basic meditation techniques...

In meditation, the practitioners will place their awareness into the heart space, for example. Not the physical heart *per se*, but the energy centre in the chest, the chakra, visualised as a lotus. They'll begin to visualise the shape of the syllable inside the lotus: let's say TAM, which is the seed syllable of the goddess Tara, whom I've worked with ...

When there's a strong feeling for, or imagined awareness of, the syllable in that space, the practitioner then begins to visualise it filling with light or colour, expanding it, empowering it, lighting it up in the mind, in the heart, until it fills the whole chest. At some point, the syllable becomes the deity, felt or imagined, or actually seen, depending on the visualisation powers of the meditator. The syllable then fills with the deity's energy until it blazes. It can feel like heat. There's a practice called Tummo, where a HUM syllable is

imagined at the navel, which can generate a huge amount of heat when the practitioner visualises it catching fire (you can watch YouTube videos of people meditating semi-naked in the snowy mountains).

It's very much about the imagination, the mind's eye placed in the body, and that mysterious realm between imagination, creation and actual manifestation in the body or world at large. It's advanced practise though, with obvious pitfalls if there's no solid grounding in more basic spiritual ideas and principles. Proper breath control is an important factor too.

Obviously, something slightly different is happening with a visual poem, but it's that imaginative connection with a piece, and the energy it holds, that can light a spark in the reader's heart or mind.

Hope this is helpful.

**GT:** I'm amazed by these connections Stephen, thanks so much. Just one more thing to round it off. Could you tell me a bit more about how you got into concrete or visual poetry? And, if people wanted a good introduction to your practice, where should they start?

**SN:** I'm really pleased you're interested, Greg! I was aware of concrete poetry at school but my passion really ignited when I discovered Ian Hamilton Finlay. I was around 30 and it coincided with the internet becoming a major venue for furthering our interests. There was plenty of stuff online that excited me, and plenty of poets I was learning from. But IHF was big, then d.a. levy. The connections that the older Scottish concrete poets had internationally was really interesting to me. Especially with South America. I've been lucky enough to connect with a few poets from Brazil and Argentina, which feels really nice. It's still a great concrete scene down there.

I had an early piece of photo-vispo published in *The Last Vispo Anthology* (2012), edited by Nico Vassilakis and Crag Hill. Another important early-ish piece was *Dance of Past Lives*, selections from which appeared with commentary from Gary Barwin and others in *Jacket2* in 2013. In 2015 I published *Arcturian Punctuation* through Xexoxial Editions. The publisher of that was mIEKAL aND, a really amazing poet. And I've a few more recent pieces which I would say move from a visual poetry grounded in concrete towards asemic writing and other things. You can check out the article "Stephen Nelson's Asemic Writing," on *Atticus Review* from December 2020, which includes some examples, as does "PoemBrut #34: Three Asemic Poems," which appeared on *3ammagazine.com* in 2018. I published *subt* through *Otoliths* in 2022. (I'm mildly embarrassed that I called myself a "galactic wizard" in my author blurb.) I also have a recent written piece called "Tara's Playground," in *Mercurius* magazine, about the set of three bridges over the Cadzow Burn in Hamilton, which goes into some of my experiences of manifesting the Goddess Tara.

**Out of play**  
**Kirill Azernyy**

Day inhales, and when exhaling, something is stuck in the throat—of the day, I mean, but the growth of certainty is an exercise in disappearance. Hopper jumps from light into a shade, and from there, jumps nowhere. In the beginning, there might have been a word, but in the end there was nothing, I remember it clearly. And, I placed a mark—the one now expired—so that I tell start from end. Snowfall is so heavy it disrupts connection with visible snowflakes. That poor guy watching the fire, we should let go.

Snow is a currency tied to a resource. Days are so short that the invisible papers burnt by their light is not read by anyone. No one was fast enough to reach out for the running rope on which an hour descends to their kind. Darkness transcends into a black letter I: wall dividing something from anything. I am not sure if you are going to catch the ball you threw into the air. I don't know whether one could catch cold with bare hands. If you are seeing this, there is a chance you saw the above. If you are seeing this, there is a chance you might see the below.

I am writing to you from the place unwritten. Death is still not there, but the wandering traffic lights are too weak to tell light from dark. Entire room of a page is an edge, and on each edge my eyes sink into a marsh, a mush. The difference becomes so significant it doesn't signify anything. We waited too long for the drink to chill. That poor guy, marking all the possible difference by his presence, mapping the room by his face, we should let go. @ mail reaches me asleep. Minimal unit of touch creates ultimate intervention into the source. Possibly, minimal unit of touch slips through a human being.

Potentially, heart contains all the heartbeats, but the ball running across the road has already run across the road. A wandering tongue runs into a wall of dark. Minimal unit of interaction leaves a mark that is washed by saliva. One goes home after making sure outside there is no one. Only if you look at both sides, you keep wondering why would this piece of rust grow the other way around, and what is the handle made of. The rusty plastic, one might say, the melting paper. Clothes embody my thoughts of the weather, but a tree can't be standing under its own shade, however we see this from below, and slightly—behind.

From where I'm standing, there is nothing to see. When I change my perspective, I see how a hollow fire would stomach the swallowed letters, but my back hurts because I am not used to this particular angle of view. Long gone, but if we convert this length into a matter, it would be a black ribbon hardly connecting two edges of a ceiling. Ceiling is a badly printed floor—linen, soaking upside down. My neighbors struggle to sign their presence by timed and untimed typing. The language leads one to the world of blind and out of world of blind. A world of blend, one might say. Language leads world of blind into

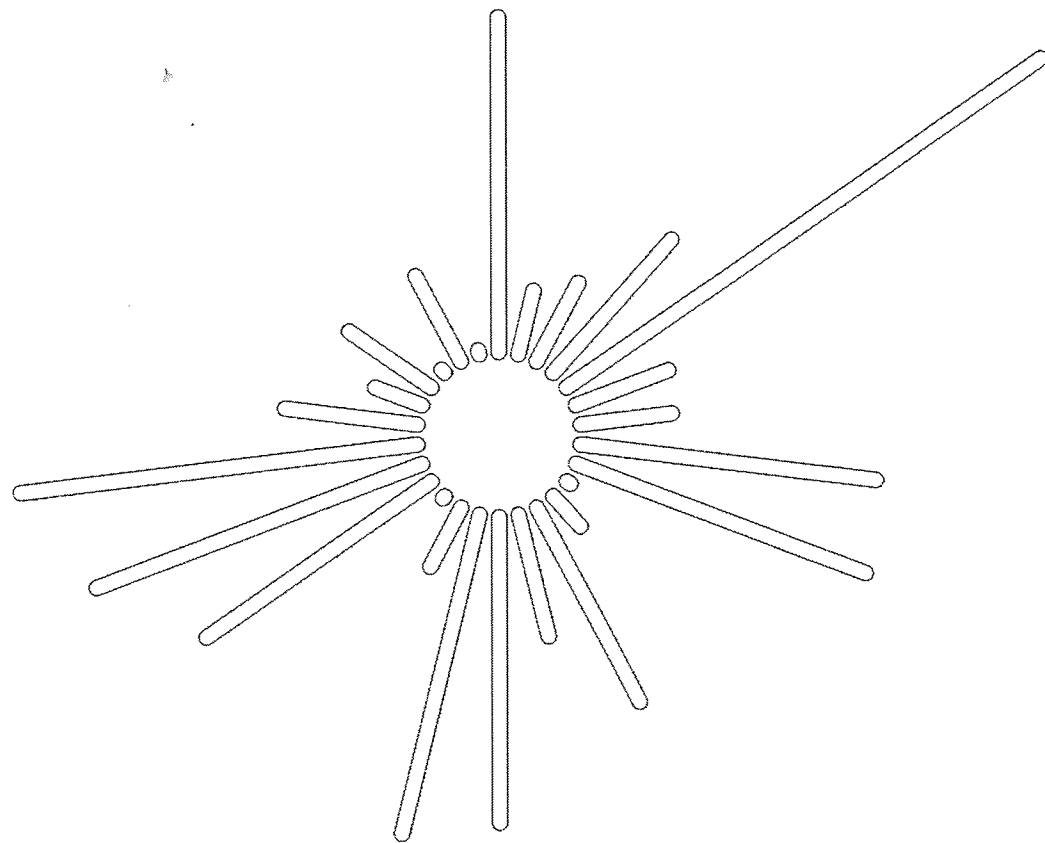
one, and after that, leads nowhere. Language divides one and the world of blind in two. Gloves (black) are the symbols of cold that lie between ourselves and the cold. In the absence of gloves, one might use pockets and sometimes—hands. Not to interfere time with a breath, or a heartbeat, again—something else ages and wares, aged and worn, something other removes from the house the stainless steel when kids are around. Sense is less than a word, but a blind ending of day finally cuts through these rigid visions of light. Upstream, shells reclaim bullets as no bullets. Again and a gain—a loss. Extremes of no particular application, excessive heartbeats.

Shade descends as a shape of an object it fails to match. My hands are washed by prints from thousands of things that surround me to an extend that I'm narrowed in my shape, rather than broadened in my borders. The light is so thin that you will never know you are divided in two parts. Note reaches me—"never seek me" it says. A bird comes closer, becoming a gull. A pet gull, I feed it with the other side of my bread. A pet gull, I leave it on the ground as a bait for the other side of the gull's bread.

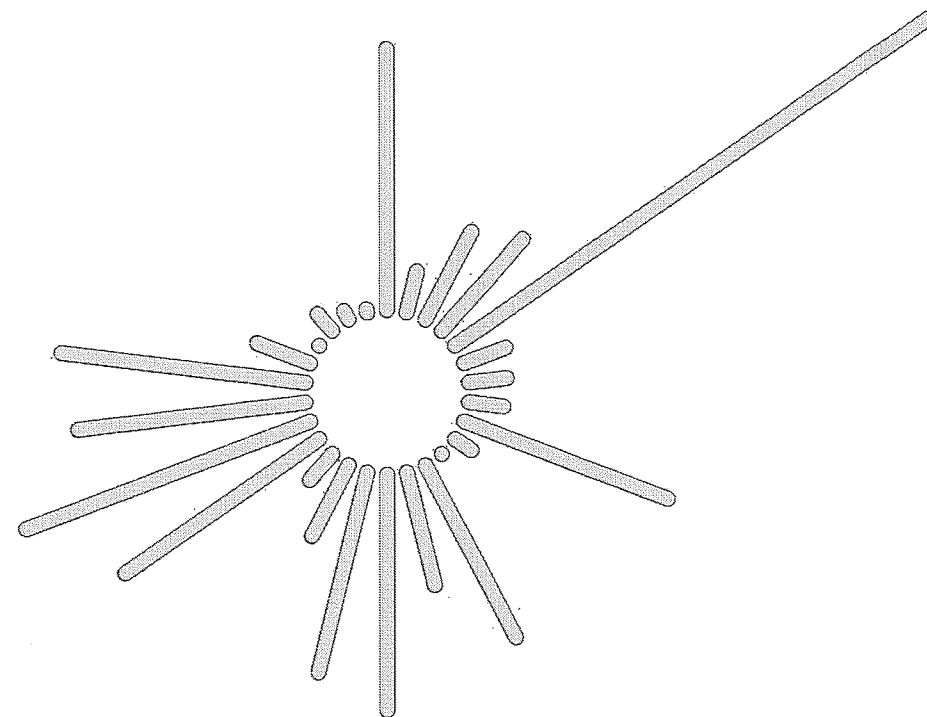
Stay assured the wall of dark is not homogeneous. Lips and lids dissociate sleep from the sleepers, but we can't count on the length keeping the night together. How many times could the tape of time wrap round the earth to stop its own bleeding?

Earth is a ball out of play.

*The Flowers of Evil*—Charles Baudelaire (1857)  
Translated into English by Cyril Scott  
Tom Jenks



*Les Fleurs du mal*—Charles Baudelaire (1857)  
French  
Tom Jenks





Review *Triadic Intimacy And the Sound of Secrets* by Emily Leon  
(Inside the Castle, 2023)  
Alex Benedict

When I asked the editors of Inside the Castle for the wildest book that I could easily read in a sitting, without hesitation, they recommended Emily Leon's *Triadic Intimacy*. Although I've been following their publications for a year or so and submitted a potential manuscript and plan for their intensive residency, Leon's publication was the first I've read, now including Mike Kleine's *THIRD WORLD MAGICKS*. On this note, I'd like to highlight one of their distributors: Asterism, which recently began providing an alternative, digital distribution system for small publishers. Among their many diverse publishers, some include 11:11, Sagging Meniscus, Sublunary Editions, KERNPUNKT, and Burrow Press.

As described on their press site, "Inside the Castle is a small press operated from Lawrence, Kansas [that] began operations in the spring of 2014." Perhaps in an approach similar to many concrete poets and artists, yet largely inspired by the French author and critic Joris-Karl Huysmans, Inside the Castle states that their "books are unique from one another but share a vision, that literature is not representational but incantatory, that books are objects that exist much like other objects in your life and home, only they have additional dimensions, not dimensions separate or distant from the ones you occupy, but involuted dimensions that only become apparent when you reach out to them." In an interview with *3AM MAGAZINE*, editor John Trefry expands on this approach to the press and literature. Though I've yet to read their early publications, I've always been interested in Inside the Castle's emphasis on literature as not being separate from the world and I think Leon's *Triadic Intimacy* stands out as an example of this vision for writing and publishing.

When I was a child, I was terrified of waking up to the sight of an angel at the foot of my bed. Perhaps I was afraid of meeting my newly created soul.

Beginning with a dream of eternal circles that induced severe panic and concluding with the vision above, Leon's book allows readers to navigate a sequence of seamless dreams, diagrams, diaphragms, and diets or dialogues with a Doctor, or, more specifically, an Obstetrician. Often beginning each section with a quote, the first from Bataille's "The Solar Anus," once from a Placenta, and often from the Obstetrician, the narrator becomes increasingly obscure. Often, I questioned whether Leon is speaking to the Doctor or *as* the Doctor. This effect is further complicated by the frequent quotations as the text saturates with a multitude of voices.

The Obstetrician quote from the first section:

One thing I would like to do, perhaps, is to blindfold you and block

your ears and have you get on your hands and knees. I would slowly lather my hand, perhaps, with coconut oil and slide one finger after another into your asshole until, well, until all of my fingers and maybe even my thumb is deep inside you very still like a sleeping mass. And then, perhaps, I would read, I don't know, something like Bachelard, maybe the *Psychoanalysis of Fire* and I would ask you to listen to my words through my hand. You see, your ears would be blocked. All of the regular channels or receiving sound information would be blocked, and you would have to try and concentrate on the sound of my voice as it flowered through my reading arm into your asshole.

Although, written in a somewhat academic register—frequently quoting psychoanalytic, physiological, existential, geometrical, astronomical, and other theoretical texts—Leon's book subtitled "And The Sound Of Secretes" also reaches into personal trauma: the nausea of "the self that needs to be destroyed" in order to transform itself. Instead of dwelling in the abstract and theoretical sources, the series of essays forms intimate connections with its varied texts and illustrations, such as Bett's diagrams of geometrical psychology, Lispector's "Aqua Viva," Catherine Malabou's "Ontology of the Accident," and her own rhythmic sketches.

Recalling a moment of personal trauma, Leon writes:

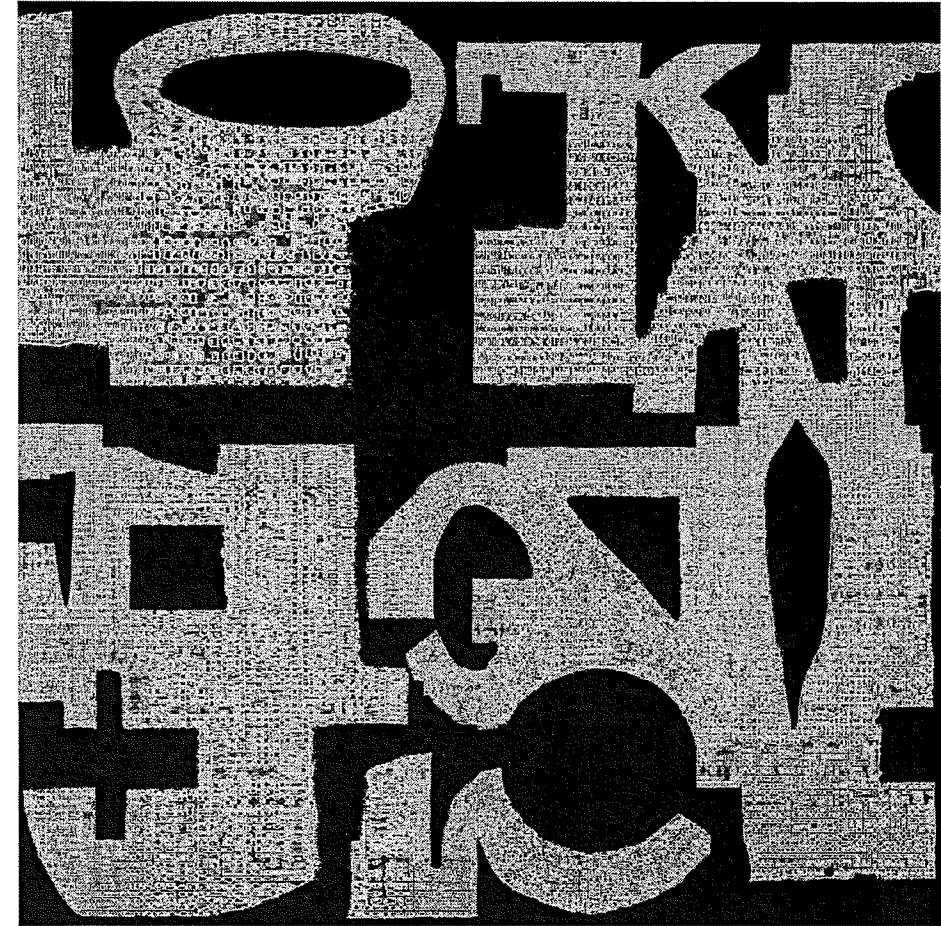
I truly believe there is nothing more reassuring than absolute and utter failure, a reminder of individual experience, that you can't *become* without this *lack*. The fact that my body was breaking down in health cleared the path for many failures. There's not much I can say about the accident itself, Doctor. I have a very broken memory when it comes to that night. It's fragmented like shattered glass disjuncting the field of vision. However, the morning I awoke in the hospital, I ripped an IV from my arm whilst vomiting on the floor. I remember crying out as though I was the only patient in the hospital. I knew I had not only died, but that I had killed everything in proximity to me.

Entering the book, readers worm their way through every passage like a body caving in with the same "silent indifference" as "the motions of the planets" have to our sufferings, insecurities, and secrets. Having half-way eaten my way into Leon's book, I'm reminded of the writing collective Laboria Cuboniks and their *The Xenofeminist Manifesto: A Politics for Alienation* (Verso, 2015) where they ask "How are we to become hosts of this new world? How do we build a better semiotic parasite—one that arouses the desires we want to desire, that orchestrates not an autophagic orgy of indignity or rage, but an emancipatory and egalitarian community buttressed by new forms of unselfish solidarity and collective self-mastery?" *Triadic Intimacy* provokes the same questions for me, yet, instead of asking how to "build a better semiotic parasite," Leon's book does not wander beyond the body in seeking its transformation.

Rather, through her essays, Leon sheds this body that seeks to displace pain. And describing her new body as “an ecosystem of secrets,” she begins illustrating various transformed bodies of hers: in fantasy, ecstasy, anxiety, awe, and dreams, recalling a boneless body like that of Matisse’s snails, one of brilliant fire, another of pure geometry not unlike her first dream, a body of laughter; and, lastly, she imagines her body as secrets to be given away. Here, the body of Leon’s book becomes clear like the skin of a grass frog. Her transformation is one of becoming the “ecosystem of secrets” that is her writing embodied in the book. After all, as readers thumb through, she notes how she “can feel [us] fingering [her] diaphragm.”

Just as Leon makes personal connections with her varied sources, instead of page numbers, each reader’s thumbs press against the miniature, black triangles as they pass through the book—a meeting place for secrets, dreams, and the pores of skin.

*Typography Poem*  
Laura Kerr



From 1000 a-z poems  
Rémi Forte



*Custodial*  
Ana María Caballero

It is the child who establishes the legality of war

The child who begets parents  
out of mere partner mere  
spouse

Custodial who renders a couple  
who ends reign of mother's  
mother & father's father

The child  
who by absolute need commands its makers to reiterate

the domestic clamor

of spoil

*Creature Comforts*  
Ana María Caballero

It is too late, now, for me—  
a mommy with framework  
fridge.

The child yelps, insists I look.  
I watch myself  
watch.

Somewhere lurks  
the scarlet devastation of  
change.

I toy with it, a coward—  
by ruthless  
word.

Allow life to adorn life,  
stack columns of boxes to  
hoard.

For how much longer?

I repeat—  
for how much longer

without my say.

*Radio Theory*  
Lillian Nećakov

When you're a kid, you have theories but you don't know what a theory is.

Maybe it's just an idea that you don't speak, maybe it's hundreds of tiny stars you see in the short night of your own eyes, shut tight against the world. Which you later learn are really winged messengers, blood of your blood, fields of golden poppies, underworld emporiums, a seaside promenade, gilded celestial drifters. And what if the Oxford English dictionary and *all* the humble books are just rivers or streams of consciousness and my people—mongrel cells, theories of evolution—jitterbugging through the liquid dance halls of my being. What if bliss-blue-glory-promise is a transistor radio and they are all there, the ones you loved best, oscillating through the ether-milk, divine ink spots as transmitters. Song as animal, as touch, as opium tea garden where night stretches her velvet torso over the living.

What if this poem, this stubby morning, this keloid, this frequency, this entire life as a stray bullet, as a Rorschach?

