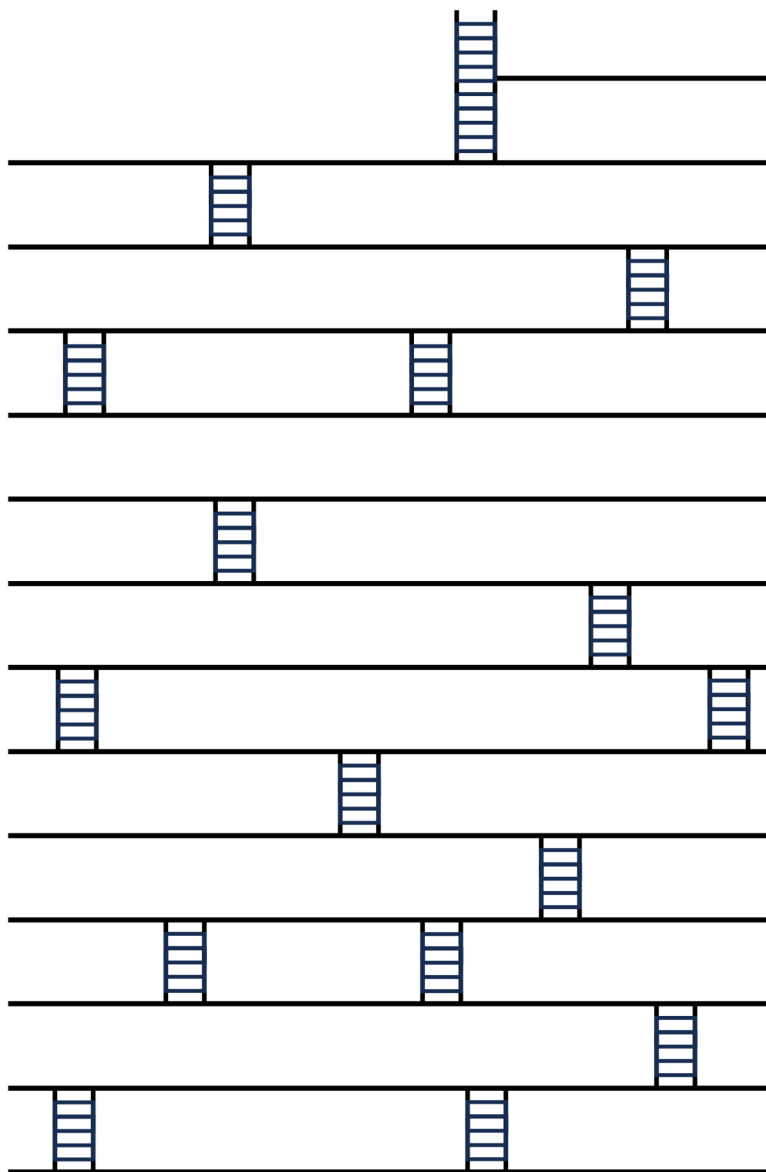


*Donkey Kong Sonnet*  
Tom Jenks



# THE MINUTE REVIEW

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a little magazine of poetry, prose, and reviews

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Kate Siklosi

**Getting into The Spirit of Things: On Alec Finlay's *Play My Game*  
(Stewed Rhubarb, 2023)  
Greg Thomas**

On the back page of Alec Finlay's new collection of poems is a pantheistic re-working of the *rock-paper-scissors* rules:

CLOUD  
*obscures*  
MOUNTAIN

PAPER  
*absorbs*  
CLOUD

MOUNTAIN  
*pulps*  
PAPER

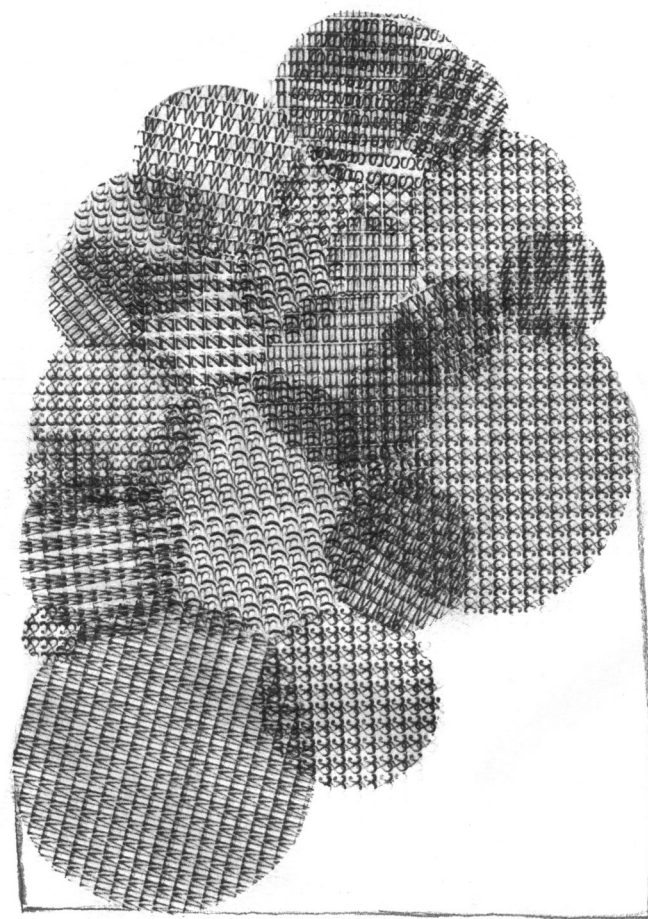
The verse reappears on the opening pages, with a little directive as preface: “gazing up at snowy peaks/ why not play our new game/ ‘paper-cloud-mountain”

We are invited to picture certain visual processes, either spurred by the sight of real snowy mountains or amidst the peaks of the mind's eye. Indeed, the simplicity and declarative mood of the language, mirrored across the book, leaves us no other options within the rules of the poem-game; there is no *grammatical* artifice obscuring what is shown to us. But it gets trickier to hold the visual transactions in our heads as we parse the verse. Cloud obscures mountain? OK. Paper absorbs cloud? Might we imagine cloud as vapour, paper as the hapless hiker's soggy OS Map as they venture along a high ridge? Mountain pulps paper? Are we now to picture a vast, stone fist? Perhaps geological processes unfolding across the sweep of deep time, pulping, as it were, humanity's paper stocks, along with all other trace of our creative endeavours?

I exaggerate for effect, and, of course, the above poem is also a game: the reader is encouraged to suspend their disbelief to get into the spirit of things (as it were). To understand that basic premise is, perhaps, to grasp the joy to be found in many of Finlay's little lyrics. It takes a while to accept the idea, though, because we are used to many of the forms whose outlines he faintly traces—the haiku, the kenning, (it must be said) the poetic dictums and maxims of his father, Ian Hamilton Finlay—unfolding some moment of revelation. Suddenly, the metaphor slots into place and the world shines with a new clarity. *X means Z because Y*. But in Finlay's universe all is gentle flux. Things are like other things but not *really*—not to the exhaustion of all the other things the first thing (and

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282 83284 85286 87288 89290 912  
293 94295 96297 98299 00301 023  
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From *Stained Glass Windows*  
Sacha Archer



the other things) could be or become. Sometimes the metaphor seems consciously stretched, or frayed, as if we were being reminded of the gaminess of the game. Or it has veiled layers of meaning that remind us we could be playing another game.

Some examples from another sequence early in the book, “questions and answers,” a set of riddles-in-reverse inspired by Celan’s “surrealist questions:” “*what’s a river?* a flower with its roots in the hills/...*what’s a lake?* a glass rinsed by cloud/ *what’s the sky?* jug of blue.” The idea of the river as a flower contains its own inbuilt word-play, but this also serves to magpie us of the clarity of the river-as-flower conceit. Maybe the poem is simply telling us the river is a river. A lake is like glass, but wouldn’t we expect the glass to *reflect* cloud rather than to be rinsed by it? How can water vapour be used for the purposes of rinsing anything? The sky is blue but it’s hardly jug-shaped. Might we be seeing it between the outlines of faces, as in the famous optical illusion—perhaps those of friends in a sunny park? If metaphors are vessels, Finlay’s contain inbuilt fissures and cracks allowing their contents to spill, playfully, nourishingly, into other shapes and forms. Thus, whereas we might expect a riddle to begin with the question and then offer the solution, Finlay’s “questions and answers” start with the answers then fill them full of holes.

I focus on the playfulness, the soft-pedalled surrealism. But this is, in a wider sense, also a book about loneliness, particularly the loneliness of life with chronic illness during a pandemic, as in the sequence “ABD:” “one bath/ *the poet*/ / another bath/*the poem*.” We can talk again of form, of how the metaphor overflows. Are the poet and the poem like two bathtubs next to each other, each filled with its own contents, not mingling with the other (New Criticism in the bath)? Or does the scene stretch out in time rather than space, the poem written during the second bath with the first bath for solitary introspection? But before and after it invites questions of grammar and imagery, this poem, like many others in *Play My Game*, seems to evoke long hours at home, alone: times of convalescence, recovery, self-care.

What saves the poems from grief at times is an authorial sense of endless imaginative possibility, the unique inscape of all things, if you like. Edwin Morgan, another Scottish late-modernist poet open to change, was enamoured of this concept of Gerard Manley Hopkins’s. In Finlay’s world, it may also reflect an investment in Buddhist and Taoist philosophies—late on we find a sequence after the I-Ching, “From the Book of Changes,” containing the line “too much stiffness/ stifles the heart.” Either way, one cause-and-effect of all this flux seems to be an impression of the narrator (and author) as open to change and to being changed, as an unfixed point through which ideas and connections might flow in new ways each day, each hour. Jump in the flower.

untitled  
Sal Nunchakov



wicked rickets  
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maker in counterpoint  
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letter to Paul

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whose episodic the graphic  
footnote of a Spitfire  
anarchist cop  
MacArthur penny  
surprise



From 1000 a-z poems  
Rémi Forte

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and time for with always more  
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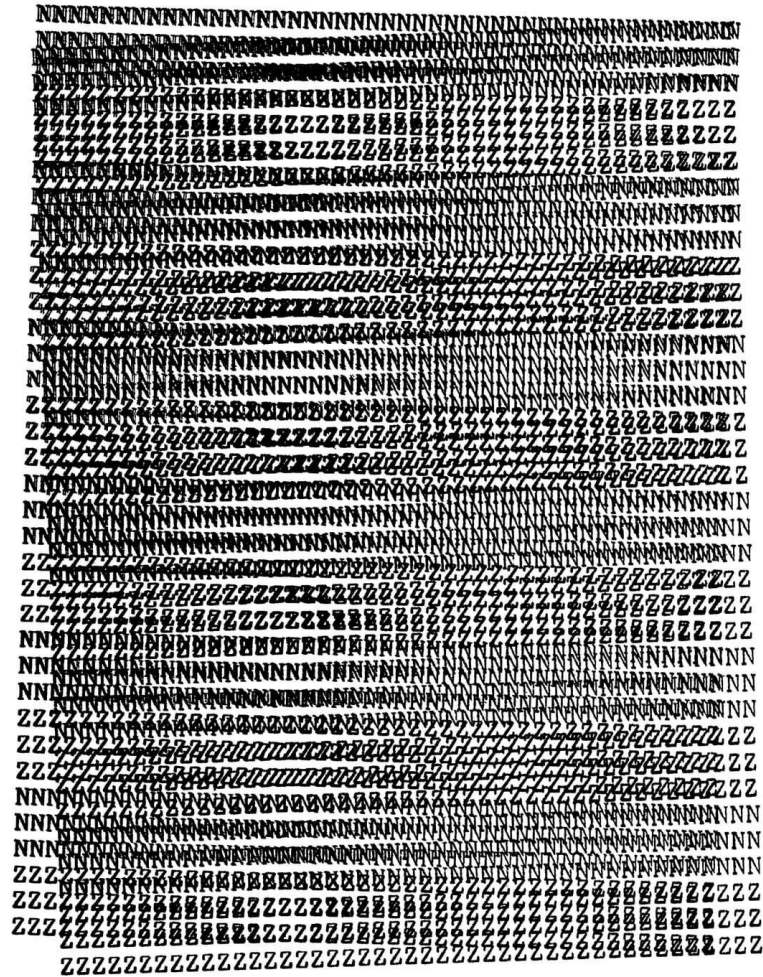
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3 untitled poems  
Frank Singleton



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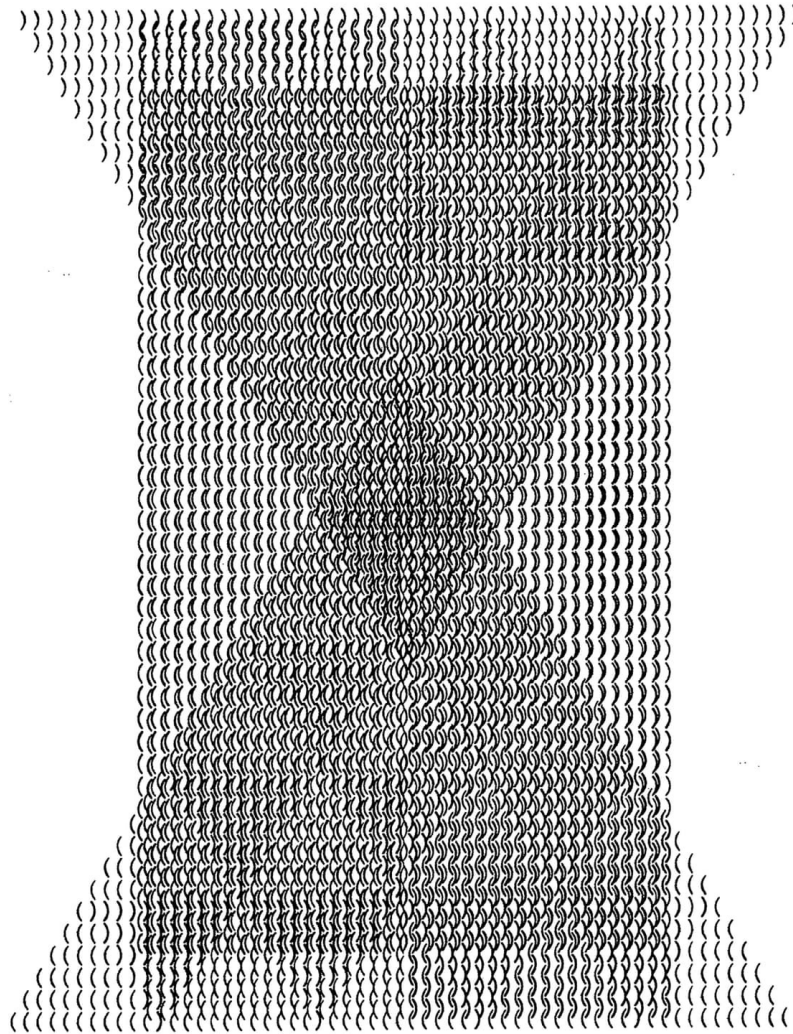
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of  
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and  
what

nausea

boxes

SOUP





further along the not yet  
but pending  
description (p.36)

Saidenberg's uses pronouns as pivots, slipping from "we" to "us" and I" to "he" so that the possessive "our" who owns experience works as a powerful shifter, blurring the lines between subject positions.

B reminds us whatever  
might have pleased us all  
of us—us & was—lost  
now & before even  
when we might have  
convinced B that we knew (p.36)

Saidenberg's poems and Lyle's drawings could easily stand on their own, but the collaboration makes each richer. Artist and poet share a strong sense of the structure of expression as well as the purpose to which it is put—to track intimate relations in their ongoing complexity. Saidenberg's nuanced ruminations express a precise personal calibration while Lyle's forms present embodied experience in which these tensions and pleasures play out.

**Review of *If An Elsewhere* by Jocelyn Saidenberg and Cybele Kyle  
(Kelsey Street Press, 2024).  
Johanna Drucker**

Jocelyn Saidenberg is adept at exploring the complex intimacies of relationships. In this new work, she tracks the moment-to-moment inter-personal dynamic shifts among three people. With near-mathematical precision, she captures the constant struggles of invitation, avoidance, and refusal among other vectors of exchange.

The language of these poems is rigorously precise. The shifting positions of words into and out of regular syntactic order is as carefully calculated as the sequence of terms in an algebraic equation. Saidenberg animates her characters as vibrant agent-actors in the dramatic push-pull of exchange, dissecting and analyzing tensions as these personae move towards and away from each other. No sentiment, no confessional verse, no hint of cloying self-indulgence makes an appearance. Instead, she provides a diagrammatic view of the system of intimate relations.

For all of these reasons, Saidenberg's economical text might seem an unlikely pairing with the visual lushness of Cybele Lyle's drawings. Instead, the graphic works flesh out the poetic lines with their suggestions of bodies as well as sinewy pathways of subterranean burrows whose existence weaves through the poems. By contrast to Saidenberg's distilled economy, Lyle uses a vividly varied palette. Scraps of lace, patterned cloth, notebook pages (Saidenberg's handwritten copy of Franz Kafka's *The Burrow*), scribbles, and thickly drawn lines map the interior territories tracked in Saidenberg's text. Lyle offers curved outlines that might be bellies and breasts within spatial boundaries intertwined in their own ambiguous relations. Vistas of netting and atmospheric passages create horizons and cuts that play double roles between depth and surface. Just as the visual language of abstraction has begun to feel completely exhausted, Lyle's approach shows it is still possible for suggestive allusion of graphics to illuminate a densely intimate poetic text.

Advances and detours, the competition for attention, summons and snubs are active in the play of replies returned and pardoned. The constant use of participles keeps the actions from resolution, along with the prepositions and phrases dangling open at the ends of lines and verses:

so I ask B why then  
the need to postpone  
the deciding

***Campfire Tango*  
Lillian Nećakov**

For the last few days we've been eating tomato sandwiches. Heat-cruel nights, days blistering the wings off anything that flies, the sun sleepwalking across the backs of infernal balconies. We don't touch skin to skin, a binary star, two luminous bodies, orbiting each other like a campfire tango measured in Kelvin.

There are fires burning on every shoreline and coast, all we hear is the fizz and bumble of the powerlines and the news anchor from 4,000 kilometers away repeating, *the migratory monarch butterfly has entered the Red List of Threatened Species as Endangered.*

Yesterday the sun finally set down her head, soft as butter and I walked near the lake, shepherded by a single monarch. Some say they appear as a forewarning, that they are the souls of dead children too tired to speak. Tula warriors painted their likeness onto breastplates as proof of eternal youth and ancient Celts believed they were the silvery scars of their mistakes.

The Hopi gift each girl a *Kachina* doll, with the head of a cow or owl, the wings of a monarch, carved out of cottonwood root. Cloud white hair, blue heart, scooped out to fit the spirit of a small crow, to bring rain, to whisper back the restlessness of imaginary meadows, close the wounds like tired eyes.

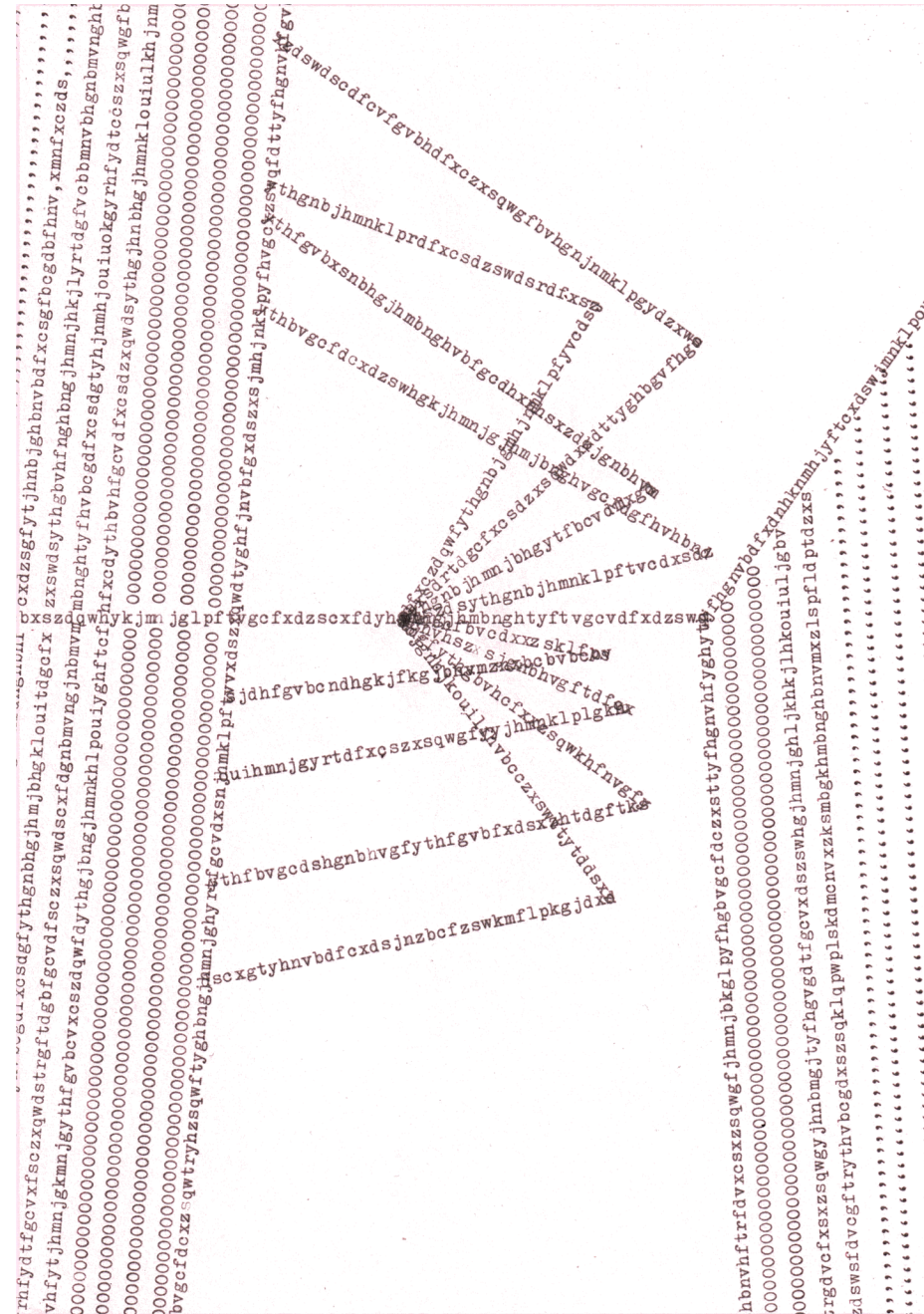
Some call it witchcraft, voodoo, black magic. I think we have taken a wrong turn, no longer feel the water in which we swim. The hyacinth bows her head away from us, the rosehip moves bitter across our tongues. I call it homesickness, the fiddleheads unfurling their fronds and everyone in heaven is tired.



I decide to join the Shakespeare and Company Lending Library  
Brentano's at 27 avenue de l'Opéra on the right bank requires  
far too many dictionaries, it will cost me eight francs plus a  
seven-franc deposit, that makes fifteen

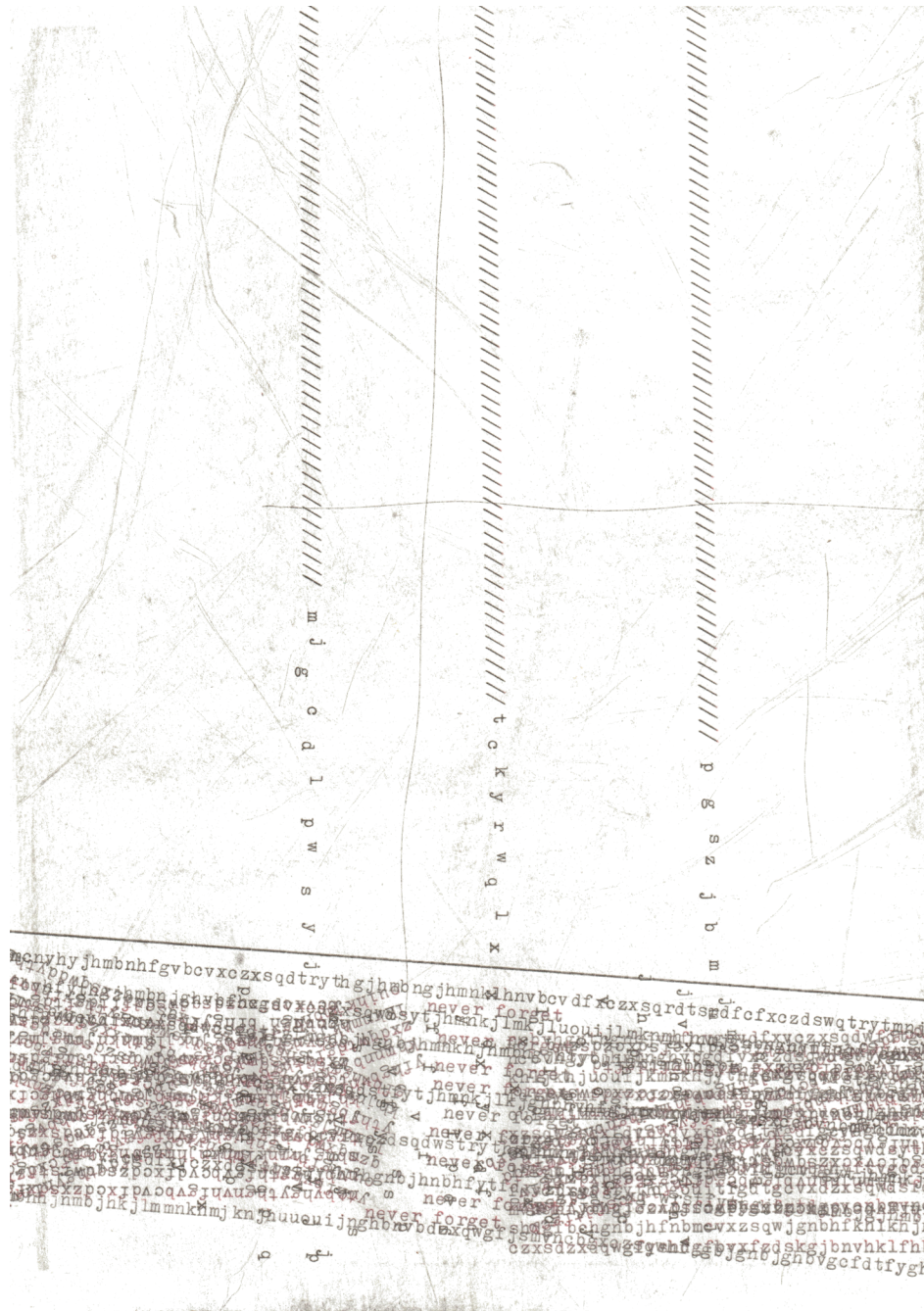
inside the bookshop I find Ezra Pound in a swimming pool  
made of small egoists reading poetry maps and a wolf  
disguised as the royal botanical Kew Gardens  
in the corner is a woman whose name is pronounced  
*sylvia beach*

the number on my lending card is 341 which means  
I am a Canadian in Paris, guilty of nothing.





*Never Forget*  
Robin Tomens



85  
Lillian Nećakov

Allen Ginsberg climbs up the drainpipe, carrying a satchel full of papers, he is Billie Holiday and Miles Davis, he is lips. He is a singer, a Buddhist, a wavering hope, a twig snapped in half over the back of America. *I heard, I heard, I heard, he says, I heard your loneliness calling to me through the prayers of the dead. I heard your small life crack under the weight of snowbirds, northern fauna, hospital beds and sluggish words, I heard. I heard your fear of the supermarket whispered between joker trees. I heard rumour of broken femurs set in papier-mâché while the daffodils spilled over into the street for every stranger's eye, I heard. I heard the scab peeling from your skin like rice paper and promised a promise. I heard the wind break the cadence of your breath as if you were walking a tightrope. I heard you call the calendar Houdini, ghost, naught, I heard. I heard the trembling of your hand pressed against the face of a small child who was now a grown man with hair as black as poppy seed. I heard the bodies fall like missiles and brought you wings. I heard Georgia O'Keefe's brush rippling over wheat and black iris, I heard her hair as a baptism. I heard Missouri, Texas, Paris and Nelson Ball in your voice, I heard. I heard there is something salvageable waiting for us in the beat hotel under the eyes of Shiva. I heard the ashes of the devil in your throat, stirring up a wickedness, I heard. I heard Burroughs and his junkie hounds howling in your backyard. I heard the magpie conspire with the trickster spring and the knives, I heard. I heard the portrait of Dr. Gachet taking you into its fold like the suicide sea. I heard the orange hall and Belfast Bridges, Sandy Row crying your troubles, I heard. I heard the sunflowers bow to the elements, then scatter like lost boys, I once heard. I heard flags burning like stogies between the jowls of mother-fucking stooges, I heard. I heard the bullshit, the crackling neon and the skyscrapers' mail. I heard the stitches being ripped out, I heard the pages being torn, I heard the bending of numbers, I heard the investigation, I heard the snake. I heard, I heard, I heard.*

