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GALATEA RESURRECTS #26 (A Poetry Engagement)

Presenting engagements (including reviews) of poetry books & projects. Some issues also offer Featured Poets, a "The Critic Writes Poems" series, and/or Feature Articles.

Tuesday, July 12, 2016

AN ANTHOLOGY OF CONCRETE POETRY edited by EMMETT WILLIAMS

ALLEN BRAMHALL Reviews

AN ANTHOLOGY OF CONCRETE POETRY edited by Emmett Williams
(*Something Else Press / Primary Information, New York, 2013*)

This is a reissue of a book initially published in 1967 by Something Else Press. Even if you know from nothing about concrete or visual poetry, you will I hope recognize some names in this anthology. Jonathan Williams, Ronald Johnson, Bob Cobbing, bp Nichol, Mary Ellen Solt all appear here, plus many other writers from around the globe.

I'm no expert on concrete poetry and you know what? I don't need to be. Neither need you. That is not to discount the complexity of the work in this anthology. I just mean that concrete poetry can be so visually exciting and intriguing. There's pleasure to be had.

Editor Emmett Williams refers to Concrete Poetry as a movement. My eyes glaze at the mention of artistic movements. Artistic movements seem so temporal, mostly because art does not like to stay within bounds. The term Concrete Poetry, however, validly describes a change in possibility. Williams himself states that he prefers emphasis on *poetry* in the term rather than *concrete*. He also states that the movement "is blessed with a disunity that unshackles it from the aims and aesthetic principles of the many manifestos it has engendered; a mixed blessing to be sure."

I don't know that the term Concrete Poetry still has usage, just as the term *red dog* (meaning blitz) in football no longer seems extant. I'm happy to conflate or confuse it with visual poetry, vispo, whatever. I guess it resides outside Pound's three categories: logopeia, melopeia, and phanopeia. The point is, this poetry has a visual element to it.

More than 100 writers/artists (call them what you will) appear in this anthology, each with a biography set in tiny tiny font. Williams provides a brief, foundational Foreword, and notes on the works. In a number of cases it is the artist who provides the notes. Many of these works use languages other than English, so some explanation proves helpful. To get the depth of the work, that is. These images often delight without reference to language.

These works aren't exactly quotable and some hardly describable (picture worth a thousand words sort of thing). Still, some sense of the work should be given.

Editor: Eileen R. Tabios

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In one, by Pedro Sixto, we see a rectangle on the page (oh dear, the book lacks pagination). Two vertical lines within the rectangle create three abutting boxes. A line runs from the lower left corner of the left box to the right corner of the same box. A centered horizontal line runs across the center box. A line slants from lower right corner of the right box to the upper left corner of the same box. If you're playing at home, look for a moment. The word ZEN appears within the rectangle. The *lack* of immediacy as you puzzle why this is a poem makes you think. And then you see.

An untitled work by Adriano Spatolo offers a wonderful permutation. The word **invitation** runs across the top of a figure of letters. At the bottom of the figure is the word **ionisation**. The same two words crisscross inside the figure. That is, the bottom left 'i' begins **invitation**, which ends at top left 'n'. And similarly, **ionisation** runs from top left to bottom right. What occurs, then, as presented, is a space on each horizontal line between the letters on the slant. The second line has two 'o's, the third line (closer together), 'n' and 'i', the fourth line (again closer) 'l' and 't'. The center of the figure is a box of four letters:

sa

at

From there we see **i/t** (spreading apart), then, **v/i**, then **n/o**, then **ionisation** at the bottom. Do you see the *picture*? As a reader of this, I just see things happen. It makes you look at the two 'real' words, and the singular and grouped letters (as letters). And just what *is* the relationship between *invitation* and *ionisation*?

I have the thought that this book would be a great learning tool. Not just for art class, either. The effort of seeing what the artist might have meant, discovering the semantics involved, teasing out exactly what the work presents and means: that seems exciting to me. The apparent simplicity of these works engages the curiosity, and the unexpected depth provides exciting surprise. Discussions not just of poetry and art but of language and meaning would naturally arise. That's what I see here.

Re. Allen Bramhall: A diminishing flow of poems, a continuing insistence in watching superhero movies with my son, an increasing interest in the healing, lifebound elation of creativity, and some websites:

<http://simpletheory.wix.com/mandalaweb>

www.tribute-airy.blogspot.com

www.simpletheories.blogspot.com

Generally cheerful.

Posted by EILEEN at 2:25 PM



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