

Or a et

ora

Dom Sylvester
Houédard

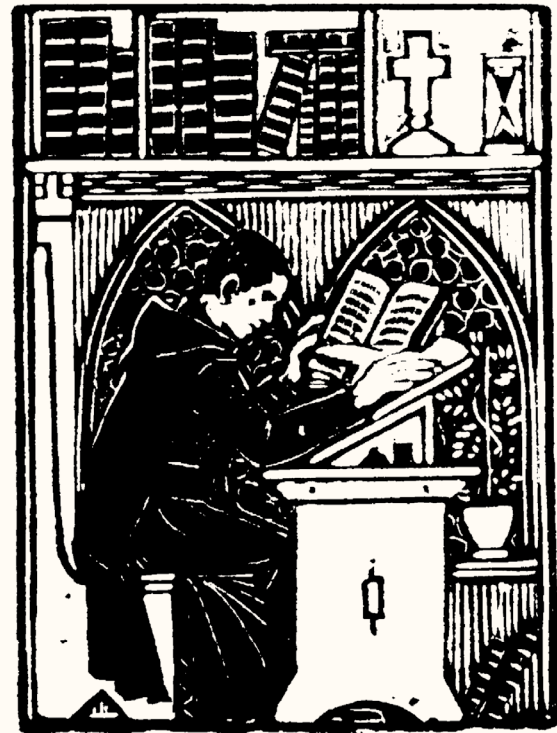
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inside

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lege III

Ora et



Broumov Monastery
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The image on the frontispiece comes from an anonymous artist and is taken from the magazine *Pax* published by Benedictines of the Emmaus Monastery, 1929, vol. 4, p. 162. It was used even in other years as a divider separating individual sections.
Original dimensions: 37 × 28 mm.

lege II

The Order of Saint Benedict and the History of Broumov Monastery

The Order of Saint Benedict is the oldest existing monastic order in Western Christianity. It follows the *Rule of Saint Benedict* which, according to legend, was written by Benedict of Nursia around 529 on the ruins of the altar of Apollo on Monte Cassino in central Italy. The *Rule of Benedict (Regula Benedicti)* contains the theoretical and spiritual foundations of monasticism as well as a set of guidelines for living together in a monastery.

Its individual monasteries operate as autonomous administrative units, and since the Middle Ages they have formed themselves loosely into congregations according to linguistic areas, territorial (state) borders or on the basis of mutual relations.¹ In 1893, at the instigation of Pope Leo XIII, the Benedictine Confederation was established in order to create a higher legal and organizational form for the purpose of more effective communication between Benedictine houses and congregations. Their head is the Abbot Primate, who resides at the Monastery of Sant’ Anselmo in Rome and represents the Benedictine order at the Holy See. However, each monastery still has its own abbot.

The *Rule of Saint Benedict* is considered a basic document of Western monastic life, which gradually replaced previous rules, especially Eastern ones. According to tradition, the *Rule of Saint Benedict* taught young Germanic peoples about Christian values and mottos such as “prayer and work”, “morals and decency”, “patience” and “living in peace”.² The text of the *Rule of Saint Benedict* cannot be perceived in a simplified way as a criticism or a counterpart of Eastern theology and monasticism.³ On the contrary, its roots can be traced to the tradition coming from Africa, Egypt, Asia Minor and Syria, to the texts of older religious orders and the writings of the Holy Fathers of Eastern monasticism (for example, the *Rule of Saint Pachomius* or the *Rule of Our Holy Father Basil*).⁴ However, it has significantly changed the aspects related to ascetic practice and, unlike the ancient world, emphasized the value and ethos of work.⁵ The Benedictine motto *ora et labora* (which, however, is not to be found in the text of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*) is based on the division of the day between prayer, *ora*, and physical labor, *labora*. The brethren ought to be employed in manual labor at certain times, at others, in devout reading. The Benedictine spirit represents peace, order, gentleness and calm. The ideal is the harmony between inner thoughts and outer expressions. The monastery is then a “place of peace in a troubled world”, *pax benedictina*.⁶

In the past, the Benedictine order significantly contributed to the development of book culture and study in the systematically built monastic libraries. Up to this day, members of Benedictine monasteries are obliged to regularly engage in “holy reading” (*lectio divina*) of the Scriptures. It is a specific method interconnecting reading of Biblical texts with meditation and contemplation. It consists of three specific steps: *lectio, meditatio, oratio* – reading, meditation and prayer. In the first step, the text is read aloud, the second step consisting of re-reading leads to a deeper understanding and development of individual ideas, and the third step results in a spontaneous prayer, i.e., the very goal of the *lectio divina*. In this way, Benedictines read together every day from the *Rule of Saint Benedict*.

Benedictines from Břevnov Monastery in Prague acquired the Broumov region in 1213 from Přemysl Otakar I, King of Bohemia. Over the time, from the inhospitable, sporadically populated, but strategically interesting area they created a supra-regional center of culture and education, reaching a peak in the 17th and 18th centuries when the monastery became the center of the Benedictine order in the Czech lands. Of special importance in the Broumov Monastery was its major reconstruction of (1727–1733) under Abbot Othmar Zinke (1664–1738), when the abbey acquired its impressive form of dynamic Baroque, designed by the architect Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer.

The monastic library, which came into being systematically since the founding of the Broumov Monastery, underwent modernization as well. During the reconstruction of the monastery, a two-story hall was built, covered with a barrel vault and decorated with a ceiling fresco painted by Jan Karel Kovář from Prague (1740). In the middle of the fresco in the hall, the Holy Spirit appears in the trompe l’oeil painting of a cupola, below which there is the inscription *Ille vos docebit omnia* (He will teach you all things). One side of the hall features a scene from the Gospel according to Luke, a twelve-year-old Jesus in discussion with the elders in a temple. On the opposite side there is a scene of the *Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor*, where Jesus has come with three apostles and is transfigured before their eyes, while Elijah and Moses appear next to him and he speaks with them. Together with the extensive library collection, the fresco is a manifestation of the scholarship and importance of the monastic community in spreading faith, culture and education.⁷

During the 1780s and 1790s, the books in the hall were placed in 33 bookcases with a uniform gray-green design with decorative extensions. These indicate the area of knowledge to which the books on the shelves belong. Their placement in bookcases was also a matter of aesthetics – the arrangement of books depended on their format and the type and color of their binding, i.e., the books also acquired a decorative function and had to please the eye.⁸ Saint Benedict provides three types of reading: biblical, monastic and theological. Nevertheless, Benedictine libraries are pan-sophical, seeking to encompass all the knowledge of the world. The main development of the Broumov monastic library took place in particular in the 17th and 18th centuries, when local abbots collaborated with a wide network of buyers covering the whole of Central, Western and Southern Europe, and complemented their collections with books both new and old.⁹ The vast part of the collections consisted of foreign volumes, but also included several pieces of *Bohemica* and books written by members of the monastery. In addition to religious literature, the library contained books on canonical and secular law, church history, secular history and auxiliary historical sciences (diplomacy, heraldry, numismatics, etc.), philosophical treatises, works on geography, medicine, art, architecture, encyclopedias and monolingual dictionaries as well as classical Latin literature. There were also forbidden books (*libri prohibiti*). The composition of the library was directly influenced by several historical events. The key ones are the connection of the library with the Břevnov Monastery (from the Hussite wars until

1938) and the functioning of the monastic school, later a grammar school, for which books for teaching students were required.¹⁰

The monastic library was thoroughly catalogued in the middle of the 19th century by the Prior Jeroným Růžička (1794–1884), who contributed to its development by his activities. The library was to serve as a reminder of the glorious past of the Benedictines of Broumov, but it did not last for long. It is documented that before the First World War the library of the abbey and that of the monastery comprised 45,000 volumes.¹¹ After 1945, irreplaceable losses of books began to occur, which was further intensified by the dissolution of the monastery in April 1950 as part of the first phase of the infamous Operation K – the state-controlled liquidation of male religious communities in Czechoslovakia, followed closely by Operation VŽK (the dissolution of women’s convents). An internment camp was set up in the Broumov Monastery for monks and priests and subsequently for nuns of various monastic orders from all over the country. Part of the monastery was taken over by the Czechoslovak People’s Army. In particular, the abbey’s library was damaged – its volumes were taken away for being sorted centrally, and those which were not useful to the communist regime or did not suit its ideology were pulped. It is said that as many as 20,000 books were irretrievably lost. The historical book collection, which was originally supposed to remain on the site as a complete cultural monument, was handed over to the care of the Regional Scientific Library in Hradec Králové, where it remained until the turn of 1992/1993.

In 1991, the Broumov Monastery was returned to the Benedictines of Břevnov, and their books gradually came back, too. However, the monastic community has not been restored and the monastery, including the monastic library, has been opened to the public. At present, the historical library contains approximately 17,000 volumes. In 2002, the monastery was declared a National Cultural Monument.

¹ <https://www.brevnov.cz/cs/benediktini-a-brevnovsky-klaster>, accessed on 3 June 2021.

² Georg Holzherr, *Řehole Benediktova, Uvedení do křesťanského života (komentář)* [The Rule of Benedict: An Invitation to the Christian Life (commentary)]; German original: *Die Benediktsregel: eine Anleitung zu christlichem Leben*, Paulusverlag, Freiburg, Switzerland, 1997], Prague 1998, p. 17.

³ Ibid., p. 13–17.

⁴ In the last chapter, for example, Saint Benedict specifically mentions the *Rule of the Holy Father Basil*, RB 73:5.

⁵ Holzherr (Note 2), p. 17.

⁶ *Regula Benedicti, Řehole Benediktova* [Regula Benedicti, Rule of Saint Benedict], Prague 1998, p. 49.

⁷ Religious orders had to defend this role first in conflict with the Protestant Church, later after the middle of the 18th century in confrontation with the Enlightenment and secularized education. Although the Benedictines, as a contemplative order, placed emphasis in decoration on finding higher truth through meditation (as depicted on the vault of the hall), at the end of the 18th century the library was extended to include a balustrade portraying members of the monastery. See Martin Mádl, *Nástěnná malba v kontextu barokní architektury* [Wall Painting in the Context of Baroque Architecture], in: Petr Macek – Richard Biegel – Jakub Bachtík (eds.), *Barokní architektura v Čechách* [Baroque Architecture in the Czech Lands], Prague 2015, p. 672.

⁸ Jíří Kolda, *Osudy broumovské konventní knihovny v Broumově* [The Fate of the Broumov Monastic Library in Broumov], in: Martina Bolom-Kotari (ed.), *Knihovny benediktinských klášterů Broumov a Rajhrad*, [Libraries of the Benedictine Monasteries of Broumov and Rajhrad], Hradec Králové 2019, p. 23.

⁹ Anna Holešová, *Obsahová skladba broumovské knihovny na příkladu starých tisků* [The Composition of the Content of the Broumov Library on the Example of Old Prints], in: Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁰ Martina Vitková, *Knihy broumovské klášterní knihovny a jejich provenience* [The Books in the Monastic Library in the Broumov Monastery and Their Origin], in: Ibid., p. 53.

¹¹ Martina Bolom-Kotari – Jindřich Kolda, *Stručné dějiny broumovské konventní knihovny* [Brief History of the Monastic Library of the Broumov Monastery], in: eosdem (eds.), *Brána moudrosti otevřená. Knihy a knihovny broumovského kláštera* [The Gate of Wisdom Open. Books and Libraries of the Broumov Monastery], Hradec Králové 2020, p. 60.

Ora et lege II — endlessly inside

The second round of the *Ora et lege* (Pray and Read) project, inspired by the ancient Benedictine Order, is a solo exhibition entitled *endlessly inside* by Dom Sylvester Houédard (1924–1992), also known as “dom” or “dsh”,¹ a Benedictine monk and a prominent concrete poet. dsh is a unique figure in the history of modern art, with a life and cultural background that is difficult to grasp, straddling the divide between London’s counterculture and the enclosure of the Benedictine monastery at Prinknash Abbey in Gloucestershire. In these two completely separate spheres, he was an absolutely singular phenomenon. Yet his work remains virtually unknown not only to the general public. The exhibition *endlessly inside* is his first in the Czech Republic, and it demonstrates the real possibility of an open artistic dialogue with the Catholic Church directly from within the institution.

There are many legends surrounding dsh’s personality, especially given how naturally he was able to move within the Beatnik and queer community as a practicing monk, be an active part of the British art scene, and a pioneer of concrete poetry with his abstract typograms called “typestracts”. His work, however, is rather modestly represented in the collections of British and international public institutions, and Prinknash Abbey in Gloucestershire has been reticent to develop his artistic legacy.² He was a one of a kind person, not conforming to the notions of the bohemian way of life of the Beatnik generation or the obedience of Benedictines seeking God in the silence of a monastery isolated from the profane environment. An advocate of “wider ecumenism”, a theologian, an art theorist and an artist who stood at the center of the counterculture, he remained for many an eccentric monk expressing himself in the complicated language of concrete poetry.

The exhibition *endlessly inside* contributes to exhibition projects and publications that slowly bring his unjustly forgotten work back into cultural awareness.³ It features approximately 60 works in three sections, representing dsh’s interests in theology, Eastern religion (especially Tantric Buddhism), avant-garde art and socio-political events of the time. The exhibition also includes works by other concrete poets written for the Openings Press, which dsh co-founded in the 1960s. Just as his interests are intertwined in each work, so too are the sections of the exhibition.

The opening section, situated in the refectory of the Broumov Monastery, focuses on his abstract typograms called “typestracts”, which place dsh together with Ian Hamilton Finlay among the key figures of concrete poetry in the UK. The term “typestract” – a combination of the words “typewriter” and “abstract” – was coined by dsh’s friend, a poet and an author of concrete poetry, Edwin Morgan, in 1963. Typestracts were produced on an Olivetti 22 typewriter using black, red, or blue ink ribbons. dsh also rotated the paper as he worked, moving it around in various ways, thus defying the Western practice of precise linear writing and reading of text. dsh described typestracts as action poetry in which “words grow on paper to see language grow”.⁴ Initially, they were composed with an emphasis on reading.⁵

In the refectory of the Broumov Monastery, the typestracts are presented in three loosely conceived thematic

areas. The first two depict the relationship of dsh to the Catholic faith and to Eastern religion. Although dsh was a Catholic monk, he most often expressed himself in his work through references to Buddhism. The openness to different religious beliefs instilled in dsh from his youth manifested itself in his later practice of “wider ecumenism”. dsh was interested in Islam, South American religions and shamanism. He actively contributed to the acceptance of Tibetan monks in the Western world, later also officially as a member of the Pontifical Office for Interreligious Dialogue established after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), which led to more liberal attitudes towards other religions.⁶

The third area is a tribute to representatives of the independent cultural scene, but not only to them. It includes tributes to dsh’s favorite artists, such as the Dadaist Raoul Hausmann – *250766 (for Raoul Hausmann 65)* (1966), Marcel Duchamp – *memorial for marcel duchamp* (1968), or to those he had befriended – *for eugen* (1964). The not very frequent communication between dsh and Czechoslovak authors (the author duo Bohumila Grögerová & Josef Hiršal and Jiří Valoch) may have contributed to dsh’s interest in political events in the communist countries of Eastern Europe, which is commemorated with a tribute to Jan Palach – *dsh for jan palach* (1969).

The second section of the exhibition, also situated in the refectory, presents *Laminate Poems / Cosmic Dust Poems*, which dsh started to create in about 1966. This series of poetic “objects” consists of small found objects of either natural or man-made materials sealed in transparent, often colored plastic film. Compared to his subtle abstract pieces, these works are formally distinct and their playfulness is reminiscent of the Pop Art movement. The laminate works are an example of a creative compromise: they are financially accessible experiments within the sphere of visual arts, but due to financial reasons and space limitation, the more demanding sculptural realizations could have been produced only sporadically and outside the monastery.

The last third section of the exhibition is, with regard to its content, fittingly placed in the monumental library of the Broumov Monastery. It features dsh’s poetry books and his activities with the publishing house Openings Press, which he co-founded together with John Furnival and Edward Wright in 1964 in Rooksmoor House in Woodchester (Gloucestershire). They published a series of folded paper poems, including a concertina folded standing poem, as well as posters or postcards by acclaimed authors of concrete and visual poetry. Their collaborators included Ian Hamilton Finlay, Augusto de Campos, Franciszka Themerson and Stefan Themerson, Matsuo Bashō and Jiří Valoch, whose works for Openings Press are featured in this exhibition. The background of the inception of Jiří Valoch’s poster *homage to vietnam* (1966) is revealed at the exhibition in his correspondence with John Furnival.⁷ Also on display is Valoch’s correspondence with dsh, which lasted at least until 1980.

The exhibition *endlessly inside* in the Broumov Monastery does not aspire to be a comprehensive retrospective, although it undoubtedly presents a representative number of works. It is accompanied by a catalogue with texts presenting the work of dsh from different perspectives. dsh’s long-standing interest in the teachings

of Buddhism, including a thorough interpretation of each of the works on display, is discussed in the essay by Nicola Simpson, who is also the author of an extensive publication on dsh and has prepared several solo exhibitions of his work in the past.⁸ The encounter of the traditionally separate worlds of bohemia and the Church is described in this catalogue by Jonathan P. Watts in his text *H as H is H: The Avant-garde Monk*, beginning with an engaging description of the alternative culture gathering at the *International Poetry Incarnation* (1965) at the Albert Hall in London, which dsh attended. The text of the Broumov exhibition curator Monika Čejková deals with dsh’s correspondence with Czechoslovak authors, the doyens of experimental poetry Bohumila Grögerová and Josef Hiršal, and with the conceptual artist Jiří Valoch. It testifies about the solidarity between the concrete poets and their need to share information and their works despite the limitations of the political division of the world at that time.

The exhibition develops the long-term orientation of the *Ora et lege* project towards artists working with text and the critical dialogue between the art world and the Catholic Church. It loosely follows up on the preceding group exhibition *The Palace of Concrete Poetry* at the Writers’ House of Georgia in Tbilisi,⁹ which featured both the pioneers of concrete poetry and their successors from subsequent generations who look at this heritage critically, including the generation of the youngest artists who are shifting the issue towards a (post)digital way of working. As part of dsh’s solo exhibition at the Broumov Monastery, a series of performances by some of the artists represented in the Tbilisi exhibition will take place. Their performances are presented in the second part of the catalogue.

Monika Čejková

¹ Hereinafter referred to as “dsh”.

² In the collections of Tate Britain, for example, dsh’s work is represented by one work on paper, *Untitled* (1966). Several of his works are kept in the Tate Britain library archive.

³ In the new millennium, dsh’s work has been presented in group exhibitions, such as *Live in Your Head* (Whitechapel Gallery, 2000), *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse* (ICA, 2009), *Concept as Concrete Form: Visual Poetry, Texts and Typography* (University of Derby, 2011), *Concrete Poetry* (Hayward Gallery, 2011), *Concrete Poetries* (Lower Green, 2018), *New Typographics: Typewriter Art as Print* (The Print Center, 2019), as well as solo exhibitions, such as *Frog-Pond-Plop: the Yoga of Concrete* (NUCA Gallery, 2010), *Notes from the Cosmic Typewriter* (South London Gallery 2012), *Dom Sylvester Houédard: Typestracts* (Richard Saltoun, 2017), *dsh tantric poetries* (Lisson Gallery, 2020).

⁴ Mary Ellen Scott, England, in: Mary Ellen Scott, *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana 1968, available online at: <https://www.ubu.com/papers/solt/england.html>, accessed on 2 March 2023.

⁵ The now half-forgotten principle of concrete poetry, which was often primarily intended for being recited aloud as a kind of performance.

⁶ Charles Verrey, Dom Sylvester’s “Wider Ecumenism”: Considered Words, Explosive Meaning, in: Nicola Simpson (ed.), *Notes from the Cosmic Typewriter: The Life and Work of Dom Sylvester Houédard*, Occasional Papers, London 2012, p. 28.

⁷ His foreign correspondence is kept in Jiří Valoch Archive and Collection in the Moravian Gallery in Brno (work in progress). This topic is the subject of Monika Čejková’s text *my dear bohumila & josef* in this catalogue.

⁸ Simpson (ed.), *Notes from the Cosmic Typewriter* (Note 6).

⁹ *The Palace of Concrete Poetry*, exhibiting artists: Pavel Büchler, Bohumila Grögerová, David Horvitz, Susan Howe, Keti Kapanadze, Barbara Kapusta, Janice Kerbel, Ferdinand Kriwet, Ewa Partum, Jan Šerých, Sue Tompkins; Writers’ House of Georgia, Tbilisi, 9 September – 13 October 2022.

dsh

Born 1924. Died 1992.

Born on Guernsey, he was educated at Jesus College,
Oxford.

He served in the British Army Intelligence from
1944–1947.

In 1949 he joined the Benedictine community at
Prinknash Abbey in Gloucestershire (UK).

Dom Sylvester had many and various interests. He is
mostly known for his ground breaking work as one of
the leaders of concrete poetry and counted among his
acquaintances poets like Allen Ginsberg and musicians
like John Cage, both who visited him at the monastery.

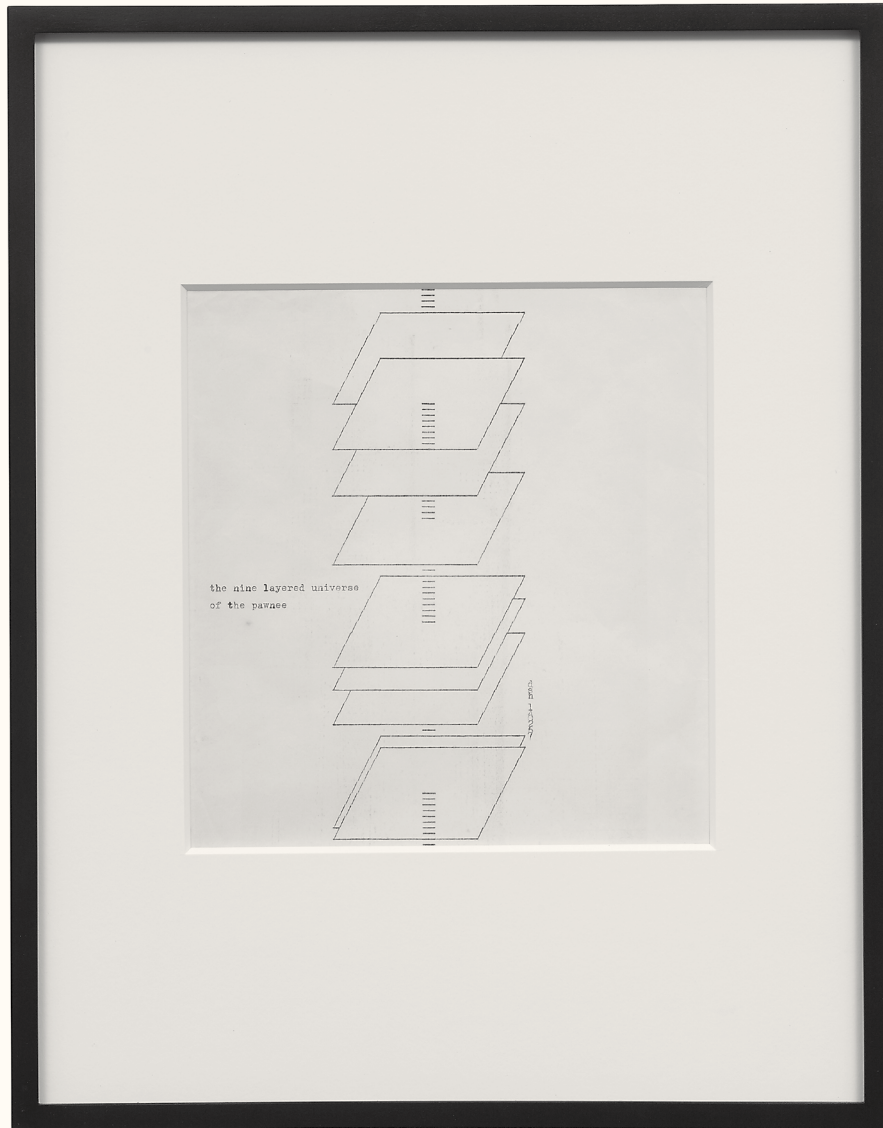
What is not so known about Dom Sylvester is that he
took an active role in what he termed “the wider ecumenism”
by which he meant non Christian religions. These included
Buddhists (especially Tibetans who frequently joined us
here at Prinknash as welcome guests) and Islam, which
involved him giving much time to discussions between
Christian and Islamic scholars at the Ibn Arabi Society of
which he was an honorary fellow. He wrote commentaries
on Meister Eckhart and was a founder member of the
Eckhart Society.

And what is totally hidden is that as Infirmarian at the
monastery he took patient and loving care of the sick
brethren and was never known to show frustration in
such a demanding role.

And so, Dom Sylvester had a public and private face.
Those outside who knew of his work and those inside
who knew of him as rather eccentric but also a man
of great compassion.

Dom Stephen Horton, Abbot of Prinknash Abbey

Written in remembrance of dsh on the occasion of his
exhibition in Broumov, 2023



Dom Sylvester Houédard
the nine layered universe of the pawnee, 1967
ink typed on paper
21.5 × 20.3 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

a monk attuned by tantrism to the cosmos:

a monk attuned by tantrism to the cosmos:
chakrometers, freedom songs and wide love
in the work of dom sylvester houédard

Nicola Simpson

“my own field of Zen and Tantric
Buddhism”

Dom Sylvester Houédard, dsh, was ordained and remained a Benedictine monk, yet his typestracts, poem-objects, laminate poems and theological writings engage directly with Eastern spiritual practices. His visual language and thinking has a dialogue that goes beyond the Abrahamic religions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, opening out into what he called “a wider ecumenism” that included the ideas and rituals in Hinduism, Shiva Tantra, The Mahayana Buddhisms of Zen and Tibet, Vajrayana Tantra, Taoism and Indigenous Shamanism.

Houédard traces this broad-minded freethinking nature to his early life remarking on a childhood, “memorable” he recalled, “for impossibility (survives) of catching up w/all my interests”. He lists interests that included Tibetan music, heraldry, cats, movement, autumn, time travel and eastern contemplation.¹ Giving an uncharacteristic autobiographical insight Houédard also writes about a memorable occasion in 1931 when, aged seven years, he insisted on staying up late to hear recordings of Tibetan music broadcast on the BBC. He outlined how this “fascination” with “east contemplation” spanned his childhood until the German occupation of his birthplace and home, the Channel Island of Guernsey, in 1940.

This childhood interest in the Eastern contemplative traditions was consolidated further when his MA in Modern History at Jesus College, Oxford 1942–1949 was interrupted by military service. He was posted to Bangalore in India from 1944–1945, and then Sri Lanka and Singapore in the years 1946–1947. Perhaps most significantly he writes about how his encounter with Hinduism whilst in the intelligence corps in India coincided with the development of typewriter arabesques that led direct to typestracts. Houédard cited the 1940s as the time of “discovery of void thru cloud.sufi.chasids.heshyachasts.zen”²

Even when Houédard joined Prinknash Abbey as a postulant in 1949, his biographer Charles Verey states, “[...] he was never quite able to confine his attention to a simple obedience to the Rule of St Benedict. Before he had even taken his first vows, he wrote to his friend, Brian Miller, in Oxford, with a list of books on Zen, asking him to buy them for him.”³

That a curiosity in Zen Buddhism should loom so large in the life of a novice Benedictine monk is not as surprising as it may first appear. The English Benedictine monk Dom Aelred Graham published his book *Zen Catholicism: A Suggestion* in 1963, “which first brought the encounter of Christianity and Zen to the attention of many Westerners”⁴ Graham was one of many twentieth-century Catholic monks who “all saw the monastic ideal as a vital link between Eastern and Western spirituality”.⁵ Another important figure was Dom

Bede Griffiths, who was guest master at Prinknash Abbey when Houédard first visited in 1944. As Verey writes, “Sylvester and Bede’s paths crossed only occasionally [...]. They had the opportunity to talk about Bede’s study of the Vedanta and Sylvester’s reading on Ch’an (Zen) Buddhism.”⁶

Dom Bede Griffiths had joined Prinknash a decade earlier, as Houédard states: “As guest master, after his ordination in 1940 he became rather well known to a large number of people, including myself, who visited Prinknash during the war. As well as being friends of C. S. Lewis at Oxford, Dom Bede and I shared interest in what Benedictine and Indian monasticism have in common. The concern for the contemplative side of the wider ecumenicalism is part of something that goes back to our foundation, nearly one hundred years ago.”⁷

Houédard suggests that Dom Bede Griffiths “was keenly aware that monks, prophets and shaman are equivalent terms”, a phrase which seems just as apt to describe Houédard himself and his countercultural moment as the barefooted mystic Griffiths. Establishing that it was the “metro climate” of Prinknash that enabled a “serious interest in the far Eastern [...] traditions of monastic theology” to develop, Houédard adds that “[...] whereas my own field has tended to be that of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, Dom Bede had already been able to devote many years to the study of the Vedanta before he left for India in 1955”.⁸ And this is exactly where the majority of Houédard’s typestracts, cosmic dust poems and kinetic sculptures can be placed, it what he calls “my own field [...] of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism”.

As stated above, Houédard’s first encounters with Buddhism, and Zen in particular, was predominantly through books. Robert Bluck writes how until the 1960s Buddhism in Europe and America was a private, intellectual, literary and autodidactic enterprise. And that for many of those interested in Buddhism during the immediate postwar period, the distinctions between the different Buddhist schools and traditions were not clear.⁹ Therefore it is never going to be an easy task to tease out the entangled influences in the transplanted, transnational and translated Modernist Buddhisms that Houédard read and contemplated from the 1940s onwards or know what understanding he achieved from undocumented conversations with Tibetan Lamas and Western converts and how all this is transformed through his “wider ecumenism” thinking into his concrete poems.

Houédard’s own collection of Buddhist texts included commentaries by prominent Western scholars such as Mircea Eliade, Philip Rawson and John Blofeld, all of whom he corresponded with on occasion.¹⁰ These texts help locate Houédard’s own approach to Buddhisms and Taoisms and can be useful in understanding individual works. The typestract *homage to bodhidharma the roly-poly daruma*, 1967, is one of series of works that engages with Blofeld’s, *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po: On the Transmission of Mind* (New York: Grove Press, 1958),¹¹ a text which influenced many artists of the 1960s. Houédard’s typestract is a diagrammatic explanation of the *Long Scroll of the Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices*, a text attributed to the 28th Indian Patriarch, Bodhidharma, in the 6th century CE.¹² The

two entrances are, according to a translation of the text by D. T. Suzuki, the “Entrance by Reason” and the “Entrance by Conduct”.¹³ The entrance by reason, or higher intuition, is Buddhist enlightenment attained through the methods presented in the scriptural teachings. The entrance by conduct is a path to enlightenment achieved through the four practices of correct actions. On the previous day, Houédard had made a structurally similar typestract entitled *sudden & gradual enlightenment / homage to hui neng*, which also depicts two ways to go through the wall of illusion to see reality as it exists. One way is a direct path through a doorway in the wall; the other way ascends a staircase of mind-practices encoded in the scriptural teachings or a series of spiritual realisations like those alluded to in *4 stages of contemplative t/writing* (1963).

I would like to suggest that these are the two doorways through which the reader / viewer in this exhibition entitled *endlessly inside* can enter to understand Houédard’s work. There is the direct and sudden Zen path to enlightenment invoked in a piece such as the laminate poem *live all the immediately while wafted available to the even waterlogged ground* (1967). When originally made and exhibited, this was a mobile (rotating sculpture) with three petals sandwiched in red, orange and blue plastic that would have “wafted” in the breeze made by gallery visitors circumambulating around the work, a movement bringing the attentive viewers awareness to the present moment, the now, where we can “live all the immediately”. By using the petals of a flower in this work, like in the laminate poem *AN ANGELS OPPORTUNITY* (1967), Houédard is invoking the traditional origin of Zen. It is established in the scriptures that Buddha modified the exposition of his dharma teachings to suit the different capacities and capabilities of those in attendance. On one occasion, at the end of his teaching, he picked a flower and held it up to the assembled monks to see. Only one monk, Mahākāśyapa, understood the profound meaning of this gesture and answered the Buddha with a smile. This wordless doctrine, Mind transmitting to Mind, is said to be the origin of Zen Buddhism, when Bodhidharma, a lineage holder of this doctrine, travelled to China in the 6th century. To walk through the door of sudden enlightenment depicted in the typestract *homage to bodhidharma the roly-poly daruma*, all we have to do is understand this wordless presentation of teachings and smile with understanding at the flower petals.

“attuned by tantrism to the cosmos”

The other doorway is through the entrance of gradual enlightenment depicted in the works that engage with the ritual practices of Tibetan Tantric Buddhism. As noted above, the beginning of Houédard’s understanding of the cultural and spiritual practices of Tibet had already appeared when he was a child, listening to the other-worldly sounds of the Kanglings, the human leg-bone flutes, on the airwaves. His interest increased, when in the years that followed the Second Vatican Council, an office was established by the papacy to set in motion a programme of monastic interfaith dialogue (1962–1965) and Houédard was enrolled as a committee member in Britain. This work introduced him directly to

the Tibetan Buddhist monks, Chögyam Trungpa, Akong Rinpoche, Jingpa Thupten Geshe and the Dalai Lama.¹⁴

As Houédard said in his 1980 talk, *the dimensions of the dimensionless*: “[...] at this moment of history, the presence among us of exiled Tibetan monks imposes on western monks certain obligations to treat them as our guests & as ‘pilgrim monks’ open to what they may have sent to tell us [...]”¹⁵

Over the years Houédard received numerous Tibetan monks as his guests at Prinknash Abbey and this wider ecumenical openness went much deeper than any monastic obligations and as he discloses: “[...] the need is not to ask if their dogma & its spirituality is true (especially when we can see the fruit produced by their practice in their lives & in the art they produce) but what truth is in their teaching, what truths they are explaining, what truths they have discovered [...]”¹⁶

As Tibetan Lamas migrated to the West, the newly expounded Tibetan Buddhist doctrines found a home in a transnational countercultural scene. The Buddhist teacher and scholar Reginald A. Ray describes this time as “somewhat freewheeling” but also the “open and intensely exploratory and creative days of the late 1960s and 1970s, when Tarthang Tulku, Chögyam Trungpa, Kalu Rinpoche, and other Tibetan lamas were first teaching in Europe and America.”¹⁷ This “freewheeling” spiritual atmosphere is exactly what Houédard’s “wider ecumenism” and specific interest in Tantra embody.

Tantrism appeared in India, within Hinduism, around the 5th or 6th century CE. In Sanskrit, “tantra” means “loom” or “weave”, but also “treatise”. In his text *Mahamudra Tantra: An Introduction to Meditation on Tantra*, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso Rinpoche states, “Tantra is defined as an inner realization that functions to prevent ordinary appearances and conceptions.”¹⁸

In his explanation, Houédard establishes his understanding of the performative reality of Tantra. He understood how a Benedictine monk can utilize these ritual methods of yantra, mantra and mudra from another tradition and become attuned to the cosmos by these very concepts of Tantra.¹⁹ “In tantra, the body is a microcosm of the universe; and its life force, like that of the cosmos, is dual: the solar or light force leads outward to knowledge, intellect, analysis and discrimination; the dark or lunar force leads inwards to the subconscious, the undifferentiated, the regenerative, and the reunification by love of all that has been separated by the intellect. It is a movement out from and back to man.”²⁰

Houédard saw his Christianity and any practice of Tantric Buddhism as dovetailing in the mystic’s journey to knowing his own heart: “[...] the Christian movement is out from and back to God (incarnation and resurrection, or God’s appeal and his people’s response). But it is a mistake to think that Christianity must *supplant* [his italics] that Tibetan scheme (old missionaries) or just *follow on* (new missionaries). The two movements must dovetail: Incarnation first, the initial move of God to man which makes grace and faith the beginning; then the mystic’s journey to the All; and the ascending movement to the Father through the Son will be the mystic’s re-entrance into his own heart.”²¹

: chakrometers, freedom songs and wide love in the work of dom sylvester houédard

The performative and experiential Tantric ritual methods of mudra, mantra and yantra transform the practitioner’s body, speech, mind and environment into that of their chosen Tantric deity. It is a journey of mind from the inner imaginative cosmophysiology of the subtle body of the meditator to the vastness of the equally imaginative universal cosmos, and for Houédard, it is a journey that can dovetail with “the Christian movement [...] out from and back to God”. The Tantric typestracts in this exhibition: *yantra of sex* (1966); *chakrometer* (1967); *om: sive – supreme guru – patron of all the tantras of all monks – contemplation – & sensecontrol* (1967); *helicoital akrobysthia* (1967); *inner blue womb* (1967) and *the nila bluediamond thunderbolt vajra* (1967) are a revealed image of this aspect of this journeying in the contemplative experience.

chakrometers

The Tantric typestracts selected for this exhibition are also in conversation with a whole sequence of works that the monk made that focus on the chakra system of the subtle energy body and developed from these ancient teachings of Hinduism, Tantric Buddhism and Kundalini Yoga.

Composed in February 1967 *the nine layered universe of the pawnee* was made during a period when Houédard was intensely interested in shamanic transcendence, altered states of consciousness, the psychedelic drug experience and the non-semantic vocalization of sacred languages and performance art. The typestract depicts this shamanic celestial pole or the central susumna pole as it is generated within the Tantric body mandala. The Cosmic Tree is situated in the middle of the universe in the folklore, beliefs and rituals of ancient China, Germanic mythology, Vedic India and in many aboriginal religions. In the Central and North Asiatic religions its seven or nine branches symbolize the seven or nine celestial planes, the planetary heavens.

Houédard’s typestracts such as *chakrometer*, *helicoital akrobysthia* and *extracts from the mantra; jrim hum ho ho ho phat* depict these cosmic planes as chakras in more detail.

Tantric ritual practice is a complex ensemble of actions bringing together and arousing all of the bodily and mental powers of the practitioner in an ascending movement of identification with the ONE. For Houédard this could be the Christian God and a Buddhist manifestation of a Tantric deity.

Houédard’s typestract *inner blue womb*, for example, depicts the “womb” of the mind, where all phenomena, the creations of the mind, are born. This visualization of contemplative realizations in Houédard’s work is the characteristic distinguishing Tantric method of meditation.

This process is profoundly exemplified in the typestract *the nila bluediamond thunderbolt vajra*, a mental construction whereby the tantric path of Vajrayana Buddhism, Vajra here meaning ‘diamond’, cuts through the fabric of reality so that duality, depicted by Houédard as two intersecting planes, is transcended into the experience of non-duality.

Wide (Wild) and inclusive love

Tony Trigilio has noted, “Where surrealism, for instance, presumes desire and convulsive eroticism as its *telos*, so too, does Tantric Buddhism presume that attachment to desire is diminished only by an eschatological embrace of desire.”²² That sexual desire, in Buddhist discourse, is rarely discriminated as being either heterosexual or homosexual, and that this very desire itself can be a transformative means to enlightenment for a tantric practitioner of the Vajrayana, is something that appealed to Houédard. In the laminata poem *wide love eros a agape* (1967), Houédard’s “wider ecumenicalism” can be envisaged as a “wide love” for all humanity and all paths to God. Eros, the sensual and passionate love between living beings, all hetero and homoerotic desires, can be transformed through Tantric practices into the highest form of love, the transcendent and unconditional agape love God has for humanity and that an individual can experience as they journey towards God.

Within the limited scope of the catalogue, the text is published in an abridged version, its full text is available online at: <https://www.oractlege.cz/en/nicola-simpson-a-monk-attuned-by-tantrism-to-the-cosmos.pdf>

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1 Dom Sylvester Houédard, “bits of autobiography”, in: *Dom Sylvester Houédard*, ed. Andrew Hunt and Nicola Simpson (London: Richard Saltoun | Riding House, 2017): 27.

2 Ibid.

3 Charles Verey, “Wider Ecumenism, Considered Words Explosive Meanings”, *Notes From The Cosmic Typewriter: The Life and Work of Dom Sylvester Houédard*, ed. Nicola Simpson, Occasional Papers, London, 2012, p. 28.

4 Harry Oldmeadow, *Journeys East, 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Religious Traditions*, World Wisdoms, Indiana 2004, p. 431. See also chapter 9, “Christian Missionaries, Monks and Mystics in India”, pp. 215–244, for further context.

5 Ibid., 244.

6 Charles Verey, “Wider Ecumenism” (Note 3), pp. 27–28.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Robert Bluck, *British Buddhism: Teachings, Practice and Development*, Routledge, London 2006, p. 8.

10 See Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols, Studies in Religious Symbolism*, trans. Philip Mairet, Harvill Press, London 1961; *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Sheed and Ward, London 1958; *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask. Bollingen, Series LXXVI, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1972; *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Harcourt Inc., London 1959; *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series LVI, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1969. See Philip Rawson, “Foreword”, “Introduction”, in: *Tantra*, Arts Council of Great Britain, London 1971; *The Art of Tantra: A symbolic vision of cosmic sensuality*, Thames and Hudson, London 1973. See John Blofeld, *Gateway to Wisdom, Taoist and Buddhist Contemplative and Healing Yogas*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London 1980; *I-Ching: The Book of Change*, George Allen & Unwin, London 1976 (Reissue 1985); *The Way of Power: A Practical Guide to the Tantric Mysticism of Tibet*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London 1970; *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po: On the Transmission of Mind*, Grove Press, New York 1958.

11 Pei Hsiu, John Blofeld (translator), *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po: On the Transmission of Mind*, Grove Press, New York 1958

12 Houédard probably encountered through D. T. Suzuki’s recompilation and translation found in *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, Eastern Buddhist Society, Kyoto (1935), republished by Rider & Company, London 1950 & 1956.

13 Suzuki writes: “There are many ways to enter the Path, but briefly speaking they are of two sorts only. The one is ‘Entrance by Reason’ and the other ‘Entrance by Conduct’. *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, <https://consciouslivingfoundation.org/ebooks/new2/ManualOfZenBuddhism-manzen.pdf>, accessed on 14 March 2023.

14 Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1939–1987) was a Tibetan Buddhist Monk and teacher, founder of the influential Naropa University, Boulder Colorado (where both Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs were hired to teach literature.) in the USA. He translated many Tibetan texts and introduced many of the Vajrayana Buddhist teachings to the West. The controversial nature of many of his teaching methods and actions led many lamas and disciples to see him

as embodying the “yeshe chöIwa”, the crazy wisdom lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Akong Rinpoche (1939–2013) is a Tibetan Buddhist Monk and teacher of the Kagyu School and founder of the Samye Ling Monastery in Scotland. Geshe Thupten Jingpa (1958–) has been a principal English translator to the Dalai Lama since 1985. Tenzin Gyatso (1935–) is the 14th and current Dalai Lama and head of the monks of the Gelugpa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Since the 5th Dalai Lama, the position is one that also holds the political authority over Tibet.

15 Dom Sylvester Houédard, “the dimension of the dimensionless”, paper given at *The Spiritual Aspects of the Rule of St Benedict (RSB)*, Ampleforth Symposium (1980). Unpublished, John Rylands University Manchester Special Collections Archive.

16 Ibid.

17 Reginald A. Ray, *Touching Enlightenment: Finding Realization in the Body*, Sounds True, Boulder 2008, pp. 7–8.

18 Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Mahamudra Tantra: An Introduction to Meditation on Tantra*, Tharpa Publications, Ulverston 2005, p. 19.

19 *Mantra* is a Sanskrit word, literally meaning “mind protection”. They are believed to be sacred words of power. Mantra protects the mind from ordinary (conventional and mistaken) appearances and conceptions. Mantras can be both sound and form. They can be recited verbally or mentally. In the *Natya Shastra*, the ancient two-thousand year old Indian treatise on performing arts, there is a chapter devoted to *Mudra*, the “hand gestures” and their profound significance in communicating not only the nature and truth of the human condition, but also the nature of ultimate reality. In Buddhist terminology the word is mainly used to refer to the hand gestures that Buddhas and deities make and that Tantric practitioners emulate in their practice. *Yantra* is a geometrical diagram found in the Indian Hindu and Tantric traditions. They are used as an aid to meditation.

20 Dom Sylvester Houédard, “Heathen Holiness”, *The Aylesford Review*, 3,3 Autumn 1960, p. 97.

21 Ibid.

22 Tony Trigilo, *Allen Ginsberg’s Buddhist Poetics*. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale & Edwardsville 2007, p. 46.

“my dear bohumila & josef”

“my dear bohumila & josef”

Monika Čejková

In the collage-like entries of their extensive memoirs *Let let*¹, Bohumila Grögerová and Josef Hiršal mentioned that in 1965 Mike Weaver² told them about the work of a British concrete poet, Benedictine monk Dom Sylvester Houéard. Grögerová and Hiršal, seminal personalities of experimental poetry in Czechoslovakia, decided to include Houéard in a planned international anthology of experimental poetry, which they were preparing for publication in Prague.³ Henri Chopin⁴ reported their idea to Houéard the same year during his trip to Britain. Soon a letter from Prinknash Abbey arrived in Prague, beginning with the address “my dear bohumila & josef”⁵; together with a consignment of “typewritten creations”⁶. The anthology was published two years later by Odeon and Houéard is represented in it by three typewriter poems.

The story described here forms a fragment of a vast international networking, in Hiršal’s words, “an ever-growing family of those involved in new poetry”⁷. Houéard’s correspondence, signed with the abbreviations “dsh” or “dom”⁸, is naturally and closely related to his extensive publishing and lecturing activities and is scattered around the world. Several of his letters arrived in Czechoslovakia to the above-mentioned author duo Grögerová & Hiršal and to the Brno-based conceptual artist Jiří Valoch. In his letters, dsh is warm and generous in sending his work and arranging contacts.

dsh’s address-book reportedly contained 3000 names; in addition to poets and artists, it also included theologians and philosophers. According to John Sharkey, the author of the anthology of British concrete poetry *Mindplay*, it was “the biggest address-book in the universe”, which makes dsh a legendary letter writer.⁹ In addition to his publishing activities, dsh’s extensive correspondence with the movement’s leaders has placed him among the key figures of concrete poetry in the UK. Letters were an effective means of sharing information and distributing his work. In the case of dsh, their form often approached his own visual and concrete poetry. He wrote his letters using a portable Olivetti 22 typewriter, the same as for his poems, abstract typograms called “typestracts”¹⁰. Just like his poems, they often consisted of characters typed in red and black using a two-color ribbon, complemented with “curls around the text”¹¹; artistically conceived initials of the addressee or his own name or its abbreviation. For example, in the above-mentioned letter to Grögerová and Hiršal, their first names are shaped by the typewriter using individual letters, while at other times their shape is created by punctuation marks. In the following letter to the couple, dsh inserted samples of his poetry directly into the text together with his comments, and the letter turned into a lecture on his own work.

The time devoted by dsh to letter writing demonstrates the personal importance of the correspondence to him, which at Prinknash Abbey replaced daily contact with the (artistic) world. As a member of the Benedictine order, dsh had limited access to funds. As

a consequence, he traveled only occasionally on business, but also faced the difficulty of distributing his own works and publications, for which he had to use the help of other people. His artistic production, which did not require large investments, allowed him to work intensively even in a difficult financial situation and in the confined space of a monastic cell.¹²

The correspondence between dsh and Grögerová and Hiršal is less numerous. According to the surviving archival material in the file on Grögerová and Hiršal, they exchanged letters only in 1965 mainly in connection with the planned anthology. As already mentioned above, dsh attached typewriter poems to his letters, but he also distributed them through other authors. His poetry collection *KINKON, op and kinkon poems / and some non-kinkon*, published in 1965 by a small London publishing house, Writers Forum, was sent to Hiršal and Grögerová by Bob Cobbing.¹³ From this collection they selected the eponymous poem *Kinkon* of 1965 for their anthology in progress.¹⁴ *Kinkon* is an example of dsh’s early typestract, but, like his other untitled poem of 1965 from this collection presented in the anthology, it is evocative of “dirty poetry”, which became the epilogue of concrete poetry in the 1970s. There are misprints, ghost prints, overprints, doubling and wobbly lines, emphasizing the fact that the text has been typewritten. In *Kinkon*, the letters O and D appear repeatedly, overlapping each other and getting completely lost in the density of black ink in the center of the composition. Compared to later manifestations of dirty poetry, however, the authenticity of the “dirty” typewriter in these poems feels artificial. It is not an expression of dirty poetry’s kind of political engagement with language and representation, but rather a question of aesthetics and the resulting composition. Unlike the original version, the *Kinkon* poem in Grögerová and Hiršal’s anthology of experimental poetry is printed in the bleeds, which testifies about the degree of freedom dsh allowed them in reproducing his work, as well as in selecting the poems representing him in the anthology. The exhibition *endlessly inside* presents the original edition of *Kinkon* published by Writers Forum in the library of the Broumov Monastery.

The name *Kinkon* is a combination of the words kinetic and concrete. dsh often applied the term in his theoretical texts, in particular in reference to an international exhibition of concrete, kinetic and phonic poetry (*First International Exhibition of Concrete and Kinetic Poetry*) held in 1964 at St. Catherine’s College in Cambridge, where both dsh and Grögerová & Hiršal were represented.¹⁵ This was an unprecedented cultural event not only in the context of British art, which sought to draw a parallel between the kinetic art of the time and the art of concrete poetry. It looked for connections between the works of modernist artists such as Kazimir Malevich, Victor Vasarely and Max Bill and the works of concrete poets.¹⁶

Although in the case of the above-mentioned Czechoslovak authors it was a modest communication, it gave them a good overview of experimental poetry in Britain. “Father Houéard” provided them with “a straightforward geographical outline of where, who and what was ‘concrete’ in England.”¹⁷ However, like their communication with other British concrete poets (except perhaps for Ian Hamilton Finlay and Cavan McCarthy), their

interaction with each other was really marginal. In his German-written responses, Hiršal gave possible reasons for this, namely the language barrier and the geographical distance: “England is a bit far away for us and still hard to get to, plus the English language! I hope that one day we will be able to receive guests from England.”¹⁸ The brief correspondence may have also been a consequence of the generally late emergence of concrete poetry in Britain, which did not take place until the early 1960s. Grögerová and Hiršal had already established a strong connection with the pioneers of experimental poetry in neighboring countries, many of whom visited Czechoslovakia in person, such as the German authors Max Bens and Eugen Gomringer, Ernst Jandl and Friederike Mayröcker from Vienna, as well as the French representatives Henri Chopin and Ilse and Pierre Garnier or the Brazilian group Noigandres and others, with whom they shared common ideas. Grögerová & Hiršal found themselves in the position of “doyens” of experimental poetry in the 1960s and could choose where to publish their works. For example, they refused to publish in Finlay’s magazine *Poor: Old. Tired. House*.¹⁹ However, Grögerová & Hiršal continued to encounter the work of dsh in contemporary anthologies. In the Anglo-American context in the 1960s, it was, for example, in Mary Ellen Solt’s comprehensive anthology *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, 1965; in *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (1967) of Emmett Williams, an American artist living in Europe; as well as in many British “homemade” zines or literary magazines (*Writers Forum*, *Granta*, *Tlaloc* and others). The works by dsh and Grögerová & Hiršal also came together in major exhibitions of concrete and visual poetry held in the UK in the 1960s. In addition to the above-mentioned *First International Exhibition of Concrete and Kinetic Poetry* in Cambridge (1964) it was, for example, the iconic exhibition *Between Poetry and Painting* at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London, curated by Jasia Reichardt (1965), which in addition to Hiršal also featured Jiří Kolář and Ladislav Novák. The exhibition catalogue includes dsh’s text of the same name outlining the chronological development of the relationship between poetry and painting. As regards the post-war period, dsh mentions Grögerová & Hiršal’s book *JOB-BOJ* and Kolář’s *Básně ticha* [Poetry of Silence] as well as Novák’s works created on a typewriter.²⁰

Jiří Valoch was also closely connected to British representatives of experimental poetry. He was in intense correspondence with them especially after 1964.²¹ In the extant correspondence with British authors in the extensive archive of Jiří Valoch, there is a letter from dsh from September 1976 and a postcard from 1980.²² Judging from its content, the communication between the authors had taken place earlier. A slightly older letter is an example of active mediation of contacts – dsh mentions experimental poets whom he told about Valoch’s art or whom Valoch should contact, namely Stefan Themerson, Bob Cobbing, Peter Mayer, John Furnival and Alan Riddell. Valoch had already been in contact with some of them. In the letter, Valoch’s first name Jiří and dsh’s signature “s” are decoratively rendered. However, of particular interest is a postcard from dsh’s birthplace in the island of Guernsey from 1980, in which dsh mentions his work on abstract typograms, although it is generally considered that he was no longer working on them at all at this time.²³

The connecting link between Valoch and dsh was John Furnival, a prominent British concrete poet. In 1964 Furnival, together with dsh and Edward Wright, founded the publishing house Openings Press in Woodchester (Gloucestershire), which published series of folded poems, posters and artistic cards by authors of concrete and visual poetry who later attained fame. In July 1966 Furnival approached Valoch for collaboration, offering to publish one of his typograms or one of his so-called non-semantic visual creation.²⁴ This gave rise to *Plakat No. 6: homage to vietnam* printed black and purple on off-white stock.²⁵ At the exhibition, this piece is accompanied with the relevant correspondence which indicates that Valoch sent Furnival two works, of which the one mentioned above was published and the other was probably passed onto the magazine *Tlaloc*.²⁶ Although in his following letter Furnival proposed a name change – *Hommage to N.L.F.* instead of *Hommage to Vietcong* since “Vietcong is a term invented by the Americans” – the work was eventually published as *homage to vietnam*.²⁷ Valoch’s correspondence with Furnival or dsh seems to have been more intense compared to dsh’s communication with Grögerová and Hiršal. In this case, the foreign language was not a barrier since Valoch could ask his long-time partner Gerta Pospíšilová, director of the Brno House of Arts and translator into English, for help. Pospíšilová traveled to England on business in 1972 and kept Valoch regularly informed of the progress of her trip in her letters. In them we read about exhibitions and meetings with artists and experimental poets.

Concrete poetry is generally referred to as a demonstrative illustration of artistic expression particularly suitable for international exchange. Its form easily adapted to the conventions of postal mail, i.e., the A4 size which could be folded and put into an envelope plus the lightweight paper, easy to transport. The poems often went without translation into other languages and reflected the movement’s efforts to create a supranational language. From the beginning, concrete poetry was to be an international movement, so it was important that it was not tied to individual national languages. Especially for artists living in totalitarian dictatorships, it was essential that their poems could get to foreign periodicals and exhibitions not only by mail, but often through a trusted intermediary. Today, works in the form of ephemeral postcards, letters, portfolios and artists’ books complete the story of artists communicating their art in the blind spots of totalitarian censorship. It is an example of solidarity and the intense need to share information.

Throughout the 1970s, the experimental poetry movement and the principle of the tension between image and speech slowly diluted into other artistic expressions such as conceptual art, mail art, stamp art, graphic design and typography. This closed the chapter now historically referred to as “the last international neoavant-garde”²⁸.

H as H is H:

consumption – Buddhist soup for the soul. Even the self-styled cult leader Joseph Beuys, master of the public spectacle, met his Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama of Tibet to talk world peace.⁵ Unlike Beuys’s meticulously documented conference, all that remains of Dom Sylvester’s various meetings with his holiness is a poorly-exposed snapshot.

In *Wholly Communion*, Dom Sylvester Houédard, a vision in his Benedictine monk’s habit, appears as a cypher of authority. And yet it was what he called his “wider ecumenism”, defined in an article for the *The Aylesford Review*, published within months of the International Poetry Incarnation, that entailed the importance of interacting with a diverse range of spiritual traditions from within and beyond the confines of organised religion, including artistic and intellectual communities. “[O]ur basically jewish-greek-northeastern synthesis,” he writes: “feels its limitations as sacred history & feels the need to incorporate the sacred history of the regional insights of african-indian-eastern genius, as well as the nonregional insights of technological mentalities that are today’s mental theophanies.”⁶

As spirituality so art: under his hand “concrete poetry... became a symbol for demolished boundaries”⁷. It’s this wider ecumenism that reconciles the life of the monk, who takes vows of chastity, poverty, obedience and stability, with his life and art.

dsh met Derek Jarman – later sainted, a martyr for the HIV/AIDS crisis – at his first solo exhibition of paintings at the Lisson Gallery in 1969. At the time, Jarman recalls in one of many of his journals, “Sylvestre made the Lisson Gallery a second home, you could be sure to find him in the little room upstairs, his hands dancing across the typewriter”⁸. Throughout the evening the monk dispatched cryptic, erotic messages to the young artist: “Mrs God invites you to her opening. Sylvestre.”⁹

It was here, too, at Lisson Gallery, central to avant-garde artistic life in the 1960s London, that Jarman met the Czech-German translator and writer Peter Tegel, who invited him to design a set for a production of *The Poet of the Anemones* at the Theatre Upstairs at the Royal Court. Influenced by Dom Sylvester Houédard’s laminated poems, one of Jarman’s costume designs for the lead, Karl Bowen, was a diaphanous plastic cape laced with dollar bills and dust between laminated surfaces. A press photo shows Bowen swaddled in the cape, the layered plastic abstracting the form of the body; emerging at both ends, the feet and head are signs of vital life despite the airless preserving vacuum of the laminates.¹⁰

Matisse, of course, had produced stunning cutout designs for priests’ chasubles at the Chapel of the Rosary of the Dominicans at Vence in the 1950s. For the poetmonk and the queer martyr the meaning of the cape extended further: “Capes are both practical and sensual, especially when closing nakedness. They are geometric: if hung on the wall, they form a half circle. They have mythic overtones: by donning a cape, the wearer can effect a transformation. These qualities, particularly the latter, had considerable potency for Jarman, who now set about working and reworking this new possibility until the capes he produced – and

H as H is H: The Avant-garde Monk

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“Traditional Christian attitudes were also consistent... In the internal world, it was the hierarchy of the soul: intellect over body, thoughts over passions, disciplined preparation for a future life over the anarchy of here-now sensuality.”

Arthur Evans, 1978¹

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Remembered in the tide-ripple of recent writing on Dom Sylvester Houédard – Peter Sylvester Houédard, Pierre, Dom Sylvestre, dsh, the Dom, Sil, Syl, Sylvia, Silvester, S, P, H, H as H is H – is a strange and novel vision. The British filmmaker Peter Whitehead’s camera pans the interior of the Albert Hall in his feature on the June 1965 International Poetry Incarnation, *Wholly Communion*, before pausing, briefly, on this bald, middle-aged man dressed in a clerical habit and dark glasses.²

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Moments later, as the light falls on the stage, illumined cigarette smoke layered as cloud-trails, the poet-monk appears at the edge of the frame. Dom Sylvester Houédard was not only present at the International Poetry Incarnation but also, a year later, at the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) at the Africa Centre, Covent Garden – two happenings formative of “the emerging counterculture of the mid-sixties” in London.³

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Ginsberg the beardy guru was international, his image highly mediated and widely circulated. *Wholly Communion* is but one of many documents of that day. Another, *The Kodak Mantra Diaries*, a slim, black-and-white ring-bound dossier (its form resembling a 16mm film strip), documents its author, the British novelist and psycho-geographer Iain Sinclair, and friends, mic and camera to hand, pursuing Ginsberg throughout the city over five years, from Hampstead to the Albert Hall. Latter-day celebrity vloggers, the cult demand answers from their harangued spiritual leader, Ginsberg, like:

“What do you make of the Pound/Fenollosa thesis?”

“How can whites end violence towards black people?”

“What is the solution for world peace?”

Ginsberg promised answers for a generation disillusioned by the establishment and its apparatus. It’s a curious moment when poets, gurus, quacks, monks, artists and leaders sought to de-centre their violent and imperialistic Western purview to address the issues of world peace, human rights and ending poverty.⁴ In the post-war years the Western avant-garde, from Jack Kerouac to Alison Knowles, Robert Filliou to John Cage, sought alternatives in the teachings of D. T. Suzuki on Zen Buddhism, even if, to paraphrase the art historian Jennie Klein, it was packaged for American

1 Josef Hiršal – Bohumila Grögerová, *Let let. Pokus o rekapitulaci* [The Passing of Time. An Attempt at Recapitulation], first edition, Torst, Prague 2007, p. 516.

2 Mike Weaver was a prominent English critic who organized The First International Exhibition of Concrete and Kinetic Poetry in Cambridge in 1964.

3 The anthology was published under the title *Experimentální poezie* [Experimental Poetry] in a single edition (Odeon, Prague 1967) and for a long time was almost unavailable until 2021, when the Museum of Czech Literature in Prague published its reprint.

4 Henri Chopin (1922–2008) was a well-known French representative of concrete poetry. – Letter from Dom Sylvester Houédard to Josef Hiršal and Bohumila Grögerová, 24 August 1965, Literary Archive of the Museum of Czech Literature, Josef Hiršal – Bohumila Grögerová File (work in progress), Own correspondence received by Josef Hiršal.

5 Ibid.

6 Hiršal – Grögerová (Note 1), p. 577. By “typewritten creations” Bohumila Grögerová means Houédard’s typestracts. For more see Note 10.

7 Copy of Josef Hiršal’s letter to Dom Sylvester Houédard (written in German). Literary Archive of the Museum of Czech Literature, Josef Hiršal – Bohumila Grögerová File (work in progress), Own correspondence sent by Josef Hiršal. The experimental poetry movement developed simultaneously in many parts of the world – in Eastern and Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Brazil and Japan - and was characterized by a wide network of contacts that its representatives built despite the political division of the world at the time.

8 Hereinafter referred to as “dsh”.

9 John J. Sharkey, *MINDPLAY. An Anthology of British Concrete Poetry*, Lorrimer Publishing, London 1971, especially pp. 14–15.

10 The term “typestracts” was coined by Houédard’s friend, a Scottish poet and also author of concrete poetry, Edwin Morgan, in 1963. Together with Ian Hamilton Finlay, dsh was one of the pioneers of concrete poetry in England. These are works produced on an Olivetti 22 typewriter using blue, red or black ink ribbons in various combinations.

11 Hiršal – Grögerová (Note 1), p. 577.

12 dsh contemplated attempts to transfer the language of concrete poetry into space; his sporadic experiments with objects and sculptures were carried out outside the monastery. One of his designs were realized by Ken Cox, among others.

13 Bob Cobbing (1920–2002) was a British poet and artist, a central figure in the movement known as the British Poetry Revival. In 1963 he founded Writers Forum, a publishing house and networking platform for writers. Between 1963 and 2002, Writers Forum published more than a thousand pamphlets and books, including works by John Cage, Allen Ginsberg, Brion Gysin and P. J. O’Rourke, as well as a wide range of modernist poets of the British Poetry Revival.

14 The anthology *Experimentální poezie* includes dsh’s poem *Rhyming Alphabet* of 1964 and an untitled poem of 1965, featuring geometric forms composed from letters and diacritical marks organically arranged on paper.

15 dsh was represented by his typestracts, Grögerová and Hiršal by their works from the book *JOB–BOJ*. Ladislav Novák also took part in the exhibition with his phonic poetry.

16 Gustavo Grandal Montero, From Cambridge to Brighton: Concrete Poetry in Britain, an Interview with Stephen Bann, in: Sarah Bodman (ed.), *Artist’s Book Yearbook 2016–17*, Impact Press, Bristol 2015, p. 71.

17 Hiršal – Grögerová (Note 1), p. 579.

18 Copy of Josef Hiršal’s letter to Dom Sylvester Houédard (written in German), Literary Archive of the Museum of Czech Literature, Josef Hiršal – Bohumila Grögerová File (work in progress), Own correspondence sent by Josef Hiršal.

19 “[...] although Ladislav and us have agreed that we will not sent anything to Finlay to his *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse*. due to various reasons, we will at least write to him, because he keeps sending us various prints, leaflets and single issues of his magazine.” – Hiršal – Grögerová (Note 1), p. 602.

20 Dom Sylvester Houédard, Between Poetry and Painting. Chronology, in: *Between Poetry and Painting*, Institute of Contemporary Art, London 1965.

21 Helena Musilová, *Jiří Valoch – kurátor, teoretik, sběratel. Léta 1965–1980* [Jiří Valoch – Curator, Theoretician, Collector. Years 1965–1980], Books & Pipes, Brno 2021.

22 Deposited at the Moravian Gallery in Brno, Jiří Valoch Archive and Collection (work in progress).

23 His late typestracts date from the late 1970s.

24 Letter from John Furnival to Jiří Valoch dated 9 July 1966. Jiří Valoch Archive and Collection, Moravian Gallery in Brno, Foreign Correspondence File (work in progress).

25 Jiří Valoch, *Plakat No. 6: homage to vietnam*, Openings Press, September 1966, 25,6 × 20 cm

26 *Tlaloc* was founded by the British poet Cavan McCarthy with the aim of providing an “open forum for modern poetry”. The main emphasis was on concrete and visual poetry. Its contributors included Dom Sylvester Houédard, Ian Hamilton Finlay and Angela Carter, among others. The first issue was published in 1964 and the last one in 1970.

27 Quoted from John Furnival’s letter to Jiří Valoch dated 25 July 1966. Jiří Valoch Archive and Collection, Moravian Gallery in Brno, Foreign Correspondence File (work in progress).

28 Bohumila Grögerová, Počátky a vývoj konkrétní a vizuální poezie [The Origins and Development of Concrete and Visual Poetry], in: Bohumila Grögerová – Josef Hiršal (eds.), *Báseň, Obraz, Gesto, Zvuk: Experimentální poezie 60. let* [Poem, Image, Gesture, Sound: Experimental Poetry of the 1960s], Památník národního písemnictví [Museum of Czech Literature], Prague 1997, p. 21.

: The Avant-garde

began to hang on the wall of his studio – no longer resembled design, but approached the condition of painting or sculpture.”¹¹

After the Lisson opening their ongoing exchanges were characterised by a certain intoxicated flirtatiousness. On the occasion of 1971 exhibition *Visual Poetries* at the Victoria & Albert Museum, Jarman designed a kinetic sculpture with a textual element that read “H as H is H” – an insider joke on identity and religious immanence.¹² What is given belies something else – the counter-cultural soft drug of choice. Titled *Grass Poem*, the letters, made of brass, were attached to fine steel stalks so that the whole thing gently vibrated at eye level. Houédard was delighted with this conceit – a “Kiff Garden”, he called it.¹³

On return trips to Guernsey, before returning by train to his Abbey, Houédard would stop by Jarman’s legendary Thames-side studio, a space that functioned variously as screening room, art gallery and unofficial gay club, offering refuge for the temporarily homeless. Writing in *Smiling in Slow Motion* Jarman recalls him decanting an enormous bottle of duty-free perfume into the bath before dipping in. He continues, noting that when he made *Sebastiane*, his 1976 Latin-language feature on the life of the fourth-century gay hero, Houédard “sent me pages of closely typed information – a scandal sheet for the Emperor Diocletian’s court”.¹⁴

Returning from filming only to find there was not enough footage to make a feature, Jarman restaged a lavish party at Diocletian’s palace to celebrate the birth of the sun. dsh was invited to play Diocletian. At the centre of this scene, performing for the Emperor, is a carnivalesque dance sequence of athletic dildo-wearing men. They writhe around in increasingly feverish circles, masturbating evermore vociferously before symbolically ejaculating on their troupe leader. Regretfully, not without humour, dsh had to pass up the role: “sept 13 we shall be just ending the curious renaissance institution of the so-called retreat and that afternoon the abbot’s cousin is bringing 50 pious ladies so I just can’t get away.”¹⁵

Perhaps it was that little bit too *outré*. The painter Robert Medley played Diocletian instead.

Houédard, like Jarman, was an energetic and inveterate letter writer. Like Jarman, he had a vast address book, was what we might call today a “networker”. Beyond this, beyond their collaborations and shared love of the esoteric, there is a familiar wider ecumenism – Houédard’s more obviously from within religion, Jarman’s from without.¹⁶ If the various aspects of Jarman’s prolific output – painting, stage design, films, journals, pop videos and his garden at Dungeness – fuse together to make his life a kind of living *Gesamtkunstwerk*, then religion is implicit in this. Particularly in his later works, Jarman approached Roman Catholicism as an institution, historically hostile to his lifestyle, to be queered, which ultimately would take his life – a queer martyrdom.¹⁷

For the saint the monk was a queer intellectual hero. In a typed draft of a sermon given in 1987, speaking across decades to the word play of Jarman’s designation of “H as H is H”, Dom Sylvester writes: “he alone can say I AM

& he reveals himself as the one who alone is ‘I AM’: our name for him is therefore YAHWEH or HE IS but though we know that god is, the meaning of the word ‘is’ we do not know: not one of us can say ‘i am’ since all we who live & grow & are conscious can saw is ‘i become, i change, i grow’.”¹⁸

Look for H in Sebastiane: He is there despite his absence. Look for H in Wholly Communion: He is there at the edges of the frame. Writing from his cell in Prinknash Abbey his inspiration extended far and wide. Life like a negative theology: A profound presence in post-war British avant-garde culture.

The text was first published as *H as H is H: The Monk and the Queer Martyr*, in: Matt O’dell – Hana Noorali – Ossian Ward (eds.), *dsh*, Lisson Gallery, New York 2018, pp. 47–51.

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Monk

¹ Arthur Evans, “The Medieval Counterculture”, *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture*, White Crane Books, 1978

² See “Dom Sylvester: a talk by Charles Verey” published by the Beshara Trust and Nicola Simpson’s essay “can yr t/writer wiggle its ears?” in *dom sylvester houédard*, Andrew Hunt and Nicola Simpson (eds.), Richard Saltoun Gallery – Ridinghouse, 2017.

³ Andrew Wilson, “A Poetics of Dissent: Notes on a Developing Counterculture in London in the Early Sixties”, in Chris Stephens and Katharine Stout (eds.), *Art & the 60s: This Was Tomorrow*, Tate, 2004, p. 93.

⁴ It had its abusers: the charismatic mindfuckers – think Charles Manson and Mel Lyman – who, as David Felton argues in *Mindfuckers: A Source Book on the Rise of Acid Fascism* (1972), filled a spiritual void.

⁵ See Chris Thompson, *Felt: Fluxus, Joseph Beuys, and the Dalai Lama*, University of Minnesota Press, 2011. For a critique of the Beuys cult’s quasi-fascism see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh’s 1980 *Artforum* essay “Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol”.

⁶ Dom Sylvester Houédard, “The Wider Ecumenism”, *The Aylesford Review* 7, 1965, pp. 118–119.

⁷ Charles Verey, “Dom Sylvester’s ‘Wider Ecumenism’: Considered Words, Explosive Meaning”, *Notes from the Cosmic Typewriter: The Life and Work of Dom Sylvester Houédard*, Nicola Simpson (ed.), Occasional Papers, 2012, p. 25.

⁸ Derek Jarman, *Smiling in Slow Motion*, Keith Collins (ed.), Vintage, 2001, p. 71.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ dsh’s laminates are of a kind with Duchamp’s *The Large Glass* (1917), which traps oil paint, lead, wire and dust between glass sheets, and anticipate the French artist Juliette Bonnevot’s PET plastic assemblages and the vacuum pack wall-mounted sculpture of Greco-Belgian artist Danai Anesiadou.

¹⁰ Jarman (Note 8), p. 71.

¹¹ In the archive of Bob Cobbing there is a single A4 page work by dsh from 1968, on which “H as H is H is H” is written in black marker pen. Signed “dsh 200468”, it is dedicated “for steve abrams”. It suggests this pseudonym was created by dsh himself. To view the archive go to www.n156nt.uk.

¹² Jarman (Note 8), p. 158.

¹³ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁴ Tony Peake, *Derek Jarman*, Little, Brown and Company, 1999, p. 224.

¹⁵ See Robert Mills, *Derek Jarman’s Medieval Modern*, D. S. Brewer, 2018.

¹⁶ See Dominic Janes, *Visions of Queer Martyrdom from John Henry Newman to Derek Jarman*, University of Chicago Press, 2015.

¹⁷ Verey (Note 7), p. 26.

Dom Sylvester

Dom Sylvester Houédard (1924, Guernsey - 1992, UK), born Pierre-Thomas-Paul Joseph Houédard, was a Benedictine monk, a prominent British theologian, and a concrete poet. He lived his life between a Benedictine monastery, activities within the underground counterculture, and last but not least within the queer community in the UK. His interest in a "wider ecumenism", resulting in his openness to all religions, led him to Buddhism, which also brought him closer to the authors of the Beatnik generation, whom he befriended (in particular, Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs). Houédard wrote many theological texts and shared his ideas with, for example, the Eckhart Society, the Beshara School and the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society. During his lifetime, however, he gained fame primarily as a leading author and theorist of concrete poetry. Houédard was educated in Rome and later studied modern history at Oxford (1942-1949, Jesus College). His studies were temporarily interrupted by his military service (1944-1947), during which he visited India (Bengaluru), Sri Lanka and Singapore. In 1949 he entered the Benedictine monastic community at Prinknash Abbey in Gloucestershire, taking his final vows 10 years later. He wrote texts on the new spirituality in art and aesthetics, among other things, and gave lectures. In 1964, together with John Furnival and Edward Wright, he co-founded the Openings Press in Woodchester (Gloucestershire), publishing their own and other authors' works. From 1971 to 1976 he edited four issues of the magazine *Kroklok*. In the late 1970s he slowly abandoned his artwork and focused more on lecturing and publishing. He worked at the Ibn Arabi Society and, from 1977, at the Beshara School, where he lectured and published until his death. Within these two institutions he published his most representative theoretical texts. His works were exhibited in many solo and group exhibitions. For example, he gave solo shows at the Lisson Gallery in London (2020, 2018, 1967), the Richard Saulton Gallery in London (2017), the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle (1972) and the Victoria & Albert Museum in London (1971). He also participated in many group exhibitions of concrete poetry, including the Institute of Contemporary Arts - ICA in London (*Poor. Old. Tired. Horse*, 2009), the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford (*Concrete Poetry*, 1972), the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (*Konkrete poezie, klankteksten, visuele teksten*, 1970), the Venice Biennale (*Mostra di Poesia Concreta*, 1969), and the Midlant Group Gallery in Nottingham (*Concrete / Spatial Poetry*, 1966). His work is also represented in the collections of the Victoria & Albert Museum, The British Council, and the Tate, among others.

Houédard



Portrait of Dom Sylvester Houédard, undated (ca. 1971)
photo: Chris Steele-Perkins
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

List of Exhibited Works

Typestracts

Dom Sylvester Houéard
Hodegetria 260171, 1971
ink typed on paper
29.6 × 21 cm
courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

Dom Sylvester Houéard
4 stages of contemplative t/writing, 1963
ink typed on paper
12.4 × 20.0 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Dom Sylvester Houéard
la recreation de l'homme a l'image de dieu (the recreation of man is the image of god), 1969
ink typed on paper
15.2 × 11.5 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Dom Sylvester Houéard
sacred puke fork for the holy popcorn, 1969
ink typed on paper
20.2 × 22 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
Christ Vishnu, 1975
translucent reversal poem *CHRIST/VISHNU*, offset
published by LYC Museum, Cumbria
8.5 × 14.5 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Dom Sylvester Houéard
yantra of sex, 1966
ink typed on paper
33 × 20.3 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
chakrometer, 1967
ink typed on paper
32.9 × 20.2 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
inner blue womb, 1967
ink typed on paper
25.9 × 20.4 × 0.1 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
the nine layered universe of the pawnee, 1967
ink typed on paper
21.5 × 20.3 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
the nila bluediamond thunderbolt vajra, 1967
ink typed on paper
13.5 × 20.3 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
helicoital akrobysthia, 1967
ink typed on paper
18.3 × 20.3 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
extracts from the mantra; jrim hum ho ho ho phat, 1967
ink typed on paper
33 × 20.3 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
om: sive – supreme guru – patron of all the tantras of all monks – contemplation – & sensecontrol, 1967
ink typed on paper
8.5 × 20.3 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
homage to bodhidharma the roly-poly daruma, 1967
ink typed on paper
33 × 20.3 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
dsh for jan palach, 1969
pen on glossy card
11 × 13 cm
courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

Dom Sylvester Houéard
250766 (for Raoul Hausmann 65), 1966
ink typed on paper
20.5 × 12.8 cm
courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

Dom Sylvester Houéard
In memoriam Aldous Huxley, 1963
ink typed on paper
10 × 16.5 cm
courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

Dom Sylvester Houéard
memorial for marcel duchamp, 1968
pen on paper
18 × 12 cm
courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

Dom Sylvester Houéard
for eugen, 1964
ink typed on paper
13 × 17 cm
courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

Laminate Works / Cosmic Dust Poems

Dom Sylvester Houéard
AN ANGELS OPPORTUNITY, 1967
vinyl plastic laminate (newspaper cuttings, miscellaneous material and PVC plastic)
9.4 × 7.4 × 0.1 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
69, 1968
vinyl plastic laminate (newspaper cuttings, miscellaneous material and PVC plastic)
27.3 × 12.3 × 0.1 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
freedom song, 1967
vinyl plastic laminate (newspaper cuttings, glitter and PVC plastic)
8 × 12.6 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
live all the immediately while wafted available to the even waterlogged ground, 1967
vinyl plastic laminate (newspaper cuttings, miscellaneous material and PVC plastic)
38.7 × 13.7 × 0.1 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
wild love eros a gape, 1967
vinyl plastic laminate (newspaper cuttings, miscellaneous material and PVC plastic)
16.4 × 10.3 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
his LIPS, ca. 1967
vinyl plastic laminate (newspaper cuttings, miscellaneous material and PVC plastic)
15.7 × 12.2 × 0.1 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
helps get things, 1968
vinyl plastic laminate (newspaper cuttings and PVC plastic)
17.4 × 11 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
Untitled, 1967
vinyl plastic laminate (newspaper cuttings, fabric and PVC plastic)
35.7 × 33.7 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
19th CENTURY ENGRAVING, ca. 1967
vinyl plastic laminate (newspaper cutting and PVC plastic)
13.7 × 8.4 × 0.1 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
CONSTRUIRE POUR MACH 2, 1967
vinyl plastic laminate (newspaper cuttings, miscellaneous material and PVC plastic)
18.2 × 19.5 × 0.1 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
Untitled, 1967
vinyl plastic laminate
34.6 × 12.3 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
Untitled, 1967
vinyl plastic laminate (newspaper cuttings, miscellaneous material and PVC plastic)
14 × 23.3 × 0.1 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Dom Sylvester Houéard
travaillant sous le vide éviter la caramélisation, 1967
vinyl plastic laminate (newspaper cutting and PVC plastic)
15 × 6 × 0.1 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Poetry Books

Dom Sylvester Houéard
12 dancepoems from the cosmic typewriter by Dom Sylvester Houéard, 1969
book of poems
published by South Street Publications, Prinknash Abbey
25.8 × 13.2 cm
courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

Dom Sylvester Houéard
tantric poems perhaps, 1967
12 prints (offset); loose sheet (mimeographed); envelope (paper, collaged, label)
published by Writers Forum, London
29 × 23.1 cm
courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

Dom Sylvester Houéard
Op and Kinkon Poems, 1965
book of poems
published by Writers Forum, London
24.4 × 18.2 × 0.3 cm
courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

Dom Sylvester Houéard
Begin Again, 1975
8 sleeve pages; 8 prints (offset, translucent paper)
published by LYC Museum, Cumbria
20.2 × 20.2 cm
edition of 500 copies, of which numbers 1-15 are signed; this one numbered 3/15
courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

Dom Sylvester Houéard
Like Contemplation, Writers Forum Folder No. 11, 25 February 1972
series of 6 prints, ink on paper; envelope with additional print on cover; produced to coincide with Dom Sylvester Houéard exhibition at Heals
published by Writers Forum, London
20.4 × 30.4 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Openings Press Collection (Folded Poems)

Ian Hamilton Finlay (with John Furnival)
Pole Night, Opening No. 3, Openings Press, 1965
concertina book
edition 395 of 500; printed by Glevum Press Ltd.
22.5 × 11.4 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Augusto de Campos
event/poet, Opening No. 2, Openings Press, 1965
folding card
edition 487 of 500; artwork by Jeffrey Steele; typography by Jeremy Rees; printed by Cannell Ball & Company Ltd.
20.6 × 11.2 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Franciszka Themerson and Stefan Themerson
An Excerpt from a Code, Opening No. 5, Openings Press, September 1965
folding card
edition 407 of 500; printed by the Downfield Press Ltd.
11.6 × 11.6 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Dom Sylvester Houéard and Matsuo Bashō
frog pond plop, Opening No. 6, Openings Press, 1965
folding card
edition 486 of 500; design by Edward Wright, Nazli Zaki and Matilda Cheung, School of Graphics, Chelsea School of Art; printed by Shenval Press Ltd.
11.6 × 11.6 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Hansjörg Mayer
openingnisolc, Opening No. 8, Openings Press, undated (ca. 1966)
folding poster
edition 74 of 600
12 × 12 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

(Posters)

Dom Sylvester Houéard
typestract, Plakat 1, Openings Press, April 1965
design first published in *Ou*, December 1964
26.1 × 20.4 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Richard Loncraine
rhythm machine, Plakat 2, Openings Press, undated (ca. 1965)
25.4 × 20.3 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

John Furnival
semiotic drawing, Plakat 3, Openings Press, November 1965
design first published in *Ou*, December 1964
dedicated to Henri Chopin: “*de John Furnival à Henri Chopin dessin pseudocryptique crypto-cybermetique quasi-semaphorique*”
26 × 20.4 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Ian Hamilton Finlay
fauve poem, Plakat 5, Openings Press, July 1966
26 × 20.3 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Jiří Valoch
homage to vietnam, Plakat 6, Openings Press, September 1966
26 × 20.3 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Julien Blaine
engrenage, Plakat 7, Openings Press, December 1966
26.6 × 20.3 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Philip Ward
LOAKRIME – idol of the shattered pyramid, Plakat 9, Openings Press, undated (ca. 1967)
26.6 × 20.3 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

(Opening Card Series)

Dom Sylvester Houéard
DEUS / SNAP, Card Series 2, Openings Press, 1968–1972
second reprint of “Mirror/Reflection” poem
19 × 14 cm each (4 pieces)
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Jiří Valoch
uncorrect poem for henri chopin, Card Series 4, Openings Press, February 1969
text to recto reads “poésie est fionie”; with the “i” replaced by an “o”, “poetry is finished” in French it becomes a sort of franglais phrase, “poetry is phony/ phonic/funny”
18.9 × 14.1 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Richard Kostelanetz
ECHO, Card Series 5, Openings Press, March 1969
19 × 14.1 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

John Furnival
Bestiary, Card Series 6, Openings Press, September 1969
14 × 18.9 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Dom Sylvester Houéard
successful cube tranceplant in honor of chairman mao, Card Series 7, Openings Press, December 1970
text to verso reads “First published in *London Magazine* October 1970”
18.9 × 14 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Dom Sylvester Houéard
hellas, Card Series 8, Openings Press, 1970
text to verso reads “ode to the colonels / the gloster ode supply co. ltd.”
18.9 × 14 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

John Furnival
the missing, Card Series 9, Openings Press, 1972
18.9 × 14 cm
courtesy of William Allen Word & Image, London

Correspondence

From Dom Sylvester Houéard to Jiří Valoch, probably 1980
postcard
10.5 × 14.9 cm
Jiří Valoch Archive and Collection, Moravian Gallery in Brno

From Dom Sylvester Houéard to Jiří Valoch, 24 September 1976
letter
29.6 × 21 cm
Jiří Valoch Archive and Collection, Moravian Gallery in Brno

From John Furnival to Jiří Valoch, 25 July 1966
letter
25.4 × 20.2 cm
Jiří Valoch Archive and Collection, Moravian Gallery in Brno

From John Furnival to Jiří Valoch, 9 July 1966
letter
19.6 × 13.9 cm
Jiří Valoch Archive and Collection, Moravian Gallery in Brno

Pavel Büchler

Pavel Büchler (born 1952 in Prague; lives and works in Manchester) belongs to the generation that entered the art scene in the 1970s and was active in Czechoslovakia outside the official sphere. In 1981 Büchler emigrated to the United Kingdom. Since the beginning of his artistic practice, he has been concerned with the dematerialization of art and the conceptual work with text, e.g., by intervening in books and exploring the limits of language, which in his art has resulted in an increasingly sophisticated form of his literary works. In the late 1980s, he taught at the Slade School of Fine Art in London; in 1997 he became the head of the fine art department at the Glasgow School of Art. In 1997 he was appointed Professor of Fine Art at the Manchester Metropolitan University, where he actively taught until 2016 and now is Emeritus Professor.

Büchler's work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions, e.g., at the Moravian Gallery in Brno (2021), Galerie PCP in Paris (2018), the Künstlerhaus Palais Thurn und Taxis in Bregenz (2014), as well as group exhibitions, e.g., at the Kunsthalle Oslo (2022), the Moravian Gallery in Brno (2022), the National Gallery Prague (2019–2020), the Fondazione Prada in Milan (2018), the Palazzo Fortuny in Venice (2016), Galerie Rudolfinum in Prague (2015) and the Tinguely Museum in Basel (2010).

As part of the second round of the *Ora et lege* project, Büchler is presented in the exhibition by his performance that had already taken place at the exhibition *The Palace of Concrete Poetry* at the Writers' House of Georgia in Tbilisi. Its title is *Secondary Information* and it is a formally simple performance that introduces a non-standard situation into the exhibition space. It features a performer / gallery invigilator sitting at a small typist's desk with a mechanical typewriter. Every time he is approached by a visitor, the invigilator types the words "ticho prosím" (silence please) on a piece of paper and without any further comment hands it to the visitor by whom he was addressed. The performance took place for the first time at the Pratt Institute in New York (2011) and later at the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham (2020). Compared to previous performances, its presentation at the *Ora et lege* project provides it with new interpretative frameworks where the words "silence please" refer not only to the habit of moving silently in the exhibition hall, but also to the conditions of the sacred space of a Catholic or, in Georgia, an Orthodox church, where silence is part of the liturgy and contemplation of God. In the case of the Benedictine Order, the phrase also refers to one of its fundamental characteristics, consisting of peace, humility, gentleness and serenity, which are reflected in the quiet and deliberate outward appearance of the Benedictine monk. In this particular presentation, the performance has been updated by a bell that is heard at the end with the last letter of the sentence. Its sound is in harmony with the liturgical context of the *Ora et lege* project.

Pavel Büchler
Secondary Information, 2011
performance
courtesy of the artist

24 June 2023, Broumov

The exhibition *endlessly inside* by Dom Sylvester Houédard in the Broumov Monastery includes a series of performances by artists connected with concrete poetry and its contemporary reflection.

They follow up on the exhibition *The Palace of Concrete Poetry*, which was held as part of the *Ora et lege* project at the Writers' House of Georgia in Tbilisi (9 September – 13 October 2022). That exhibition featured the pioneers of concrete poetry and their successors from subsequent generations.

Bohumila Grögerová

Bohumila Grögerová (1921–2014, Prague) was a Czech translator, editor and writer who beginning in the 1950s worked closely with the poet Josef Hiršal. In their joint work, they focused mainly on visual and sound poetry, radio plays, poetic prose and extensive translation activity. In the 1960s they became part of the international artistic movement of experimental poetry and pioneers of concrete poetry in Czechoslovakia. At the same time, they were drawn to the issues of cybernetics and new technologies, which Grögerová also explored in her own textual works. Her creative work long oscillated between sound poetry, visual art and distinctive philosophical puzzles.

Grögerová's works have been presented in numerous solo exhibitions, e.g., at the Star Summer Palace in Prague (2021–2022), Literaturhaus in Berlin (2012) and Brno House of Arts (2009), as well as included in group exhibitions, e.g., at the Kvalitář Gallery (2021), Museo d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Bolzano (2019–2020), 8mička Gallery in Humpolec (2019) and Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe (2016).

The diverse oeuvre of Bohumila Grögerová is represented at the *Ora et lege II* project by selected grammar texts, originally published in the book *JOB-BOJ*, which she authored in collaboration with Josef Hiršal in the years 1960–1962.¹ The texts of this author couple will be presented in the Broumov Monastery for the first time in the form of performances in collaboration with director Jiří Adámek Austerlitz. For example, the poem *Láska* [Love] consists of a visual constellation of the pronouns *on* (he) and *ona* (she), which are combined together in sixteen lines and gradually merge into one word. The text concludes with the gender-neutral pronoun *ONO* (it) in capital letters, which is the culmination of a play with the grammatical structures of Grögerová's mother tongue. The text *Love* was presented at the exhibition *The Palace of Concrete Poetry* at the Writers' House of Georgia in Tbilisi on the steps of the lobby. It became legible from the frontal view upon entering the exhibition, and while the visitor ascended the stairs, he/she was able to read its individual lines.

For Grögerová and Hiršal, the book *JOB-BOJ* represented not only an attempt at interdisciplinary expression and a new form of poetry, but also a tool against the misuse of language to legitimize a certain (political) system. This social-critical dimension is also present in the above-mentioned texts, which touch upon interpersonal relationships as well as, from today's perspective, the issues of gender linguistics and the degree of representation of femininity versus masculinity in the Czech language, and also develop the theme of gender-neutral language and non-binary grammar.

Bohumila Grögerová
Sobectví, Hádky, Láska [Egoism, Fight, Love], 2023
performance using experimental texts from the book *JOB-BOJ*, written in collaboration with Josef Hiršal, 1960–1962
directed by Jiří Adámek Austerlitz; performers: Vendula Holičková, Petr Vančura
courtesy of the heirs

24 June 2023, Broumov
23 September 2023, Prague

Barbara Kapusta

Barbara Kapusta (born 1983 in Vienna; lives and works in Vienna) is a writer and artist who in her works interconnects human bodies with the language of the digital world. Her texts are literary fiction that, in the form of fragments or whole stories, penetrate into artists' publications, performances, film works and object installations on the border between physical and virtual environments. The texts touch upon environmental issues, cyberculture, queerness, as well as the ideas of a post-gender world and post-humanism.

Kapusta's work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions, e.g., at the Kunsthalle Bratislava (2022), Gianni Manhattan in Vienna (2020), the Kunstraum in London (2019), as well as group exhibitions, e.g., at the Kunsthau Hamburg (2022), the Belvedere 21 in Vienna (2021), the Kunsthalle Wien (2021), the Futura Gallery in Prague (2021), the Kunstforum Wien (2020) and the KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin (2017).

For the *Ora et lege II* project, Barbara Kapusta has prepared a new performance called *The Fragiles*, which is situated in the garden of the monastery. It is based on a speculative science-fiction story dealing with issues of (self-)determination, modern isolation, economic migration and the intersection of public and digital space and deals with the issue of how our understanding of mobility, capital and labor on a global scale is influenced by various cultural and social factors. It consists of a four-channel audio installation evoking the heartbeat of beings half biological and half artificial. The artist enters the sound installation by reading her own poetic text, in which she mentions the trading of personal data that spreads unchecked in digital space. A few years ago, data became one of the most valuable sources of capital and were referred to as the "new oil". Kapusta also reflects on the purposeful handling of intimate experiences and emotions in virtual environments. She criticizes emotional capitalism and the instrumentalization of empathy. The chosen form of working with her own text, which is committed but at the same time impersonal, is reminiscent of a manifesto calling for the activation of the individual. Its content should help us clarify how we understand this new situation and why we feel the way we do.

Barbara Kapusta
The Fragiles, 2023
4-channel sound, performance
courtesy of the artist and Gianni Manhattan, Vienna

24 June 2023, Broumov

¹ Josef Hiršal – Bohumila Grögerová, *JOB-BOJ*, Československý spisovatel, Prague 1968, p. 33.

Janice Kerbel

Janice Kerbel (born 1969 in Toronto; lives and works in London) is a conceptual artist whose work explores communication – and sometimes the lack thereof – through prints, performances and light and sound. Her constant shift of media is a result of the artist's interest in transcending established notions of particular disciplines. It becomes a tool for her to explore the indeterminate space between reality and fiction, abstraction and representation. Her work often involves extensive research in the form of plans, proposals, scripts or scenarios that cannot or will not happen in reality. She draws on the potential of language and text to convey these imagined events.

Kerbel's work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions, e.g., at the greengrassi in London (2023, 2018), Catriona Jeffries in Vancouver (2022), i8 Gallery in Reykjavik (2019), the Tate Britain in London (2010), the Moderna Museet in Stockholm (2006), as well as group exhibitions, e.g., at Peak in London (2019), the Liverpool Biennial (2018), the Hamburger Kunsthalle (2017), MoMA in New York (2013) and the KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin (2010). In 2015 she was nominated for the Turner Prize.

Kerbel's multimedia work is presented by two performative works, *Fight!* and *Speech!*, on the historical premises of the Convent of Saint Agnes of Bohemia of the National Gallery Prague (24 September 2023). *Fight!* is a follow up of a series of posters of the same name, which was first presented as part of the 2018 Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art and in part also at the exhibition *The Palace of Concrete Poetry* at the Writers' House of Georgia in Tbilisi. The series of posters documented a fight between 12 dancers, whose moves were choreographed by the artist. The fight was monitored in such a way that every move appears in words on a poster at the height it happened in relation to someone's body. The words thus faithfully demonstrate the course of staged physical violence. Later, these verbal records were transferred onto silkscreen prints, whose visual form resembles that of commercial billboards and posters.

For her performances within the *Ora et lege II* project, Kerbel has chosen a more intimate scale, featuring a single performer fighting with an absent adversary. Unlike her earlier event, whose publically presented output was a series of posters, the audience can watch *Fight!* as a live performance. The dancer moves through the space in a frenzy of panicked yet precise movements, according to Kerbel's graphic notations that evoke those of the renowned choreographer Merce Cunningham. The subsequent performance *Speech!* plays with the speech as a typology, referring to various historical, Shakespearean, motivational, political and evangelical texts, manipulated so as not to be overtly recognizable. Both performances were first presented in 2022 at the Catriona Jeffries gallery in Vancouver.

Janice Kerbel
Fight!, 2022
live performance, 6 min
courtesy of the artist and greengrassi, London

24 June 2023, Prague

Janice Kerbel
Speech!, 2022
live performance, 6 min
courtesy of the artist and greengrassi, London

Ferdinand Kriwet

Ferdinand Kriwet (born 1942, Düsseldorf – died 2018, Bremen) was a German multimedia artist belonging to the Düsseldorf neo-avant-garde scene and the International Concrete Poetry Movement. Beginning in the early 1960s, he engaged with phonetic, semantic and visual components of text. He experimented with the format of radio pieces in the spirit of the New Radio Play (*Neues Hörspiel*). His series *Hörtexte* (Radio Texts), produced for German public radio stations, is a sound collage of edited sound bites taken from mass media broadcasts – political speeches, news, advertising slogans as well as prayers. In addition to audio works, Kriwet has created text discs (*Sehtexte / Rundscheiben*) and artist's books, and dealt with film, performance media, installation and painting.

Kriwet's artwork has been presented in many solo exhibitions, e.g., at the BQ in Berlin (2022, 2013), the Georg Kargl Fine Arts in Vienna (2017), the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2011), the Modern Institute in Glasgow (2008), as well as group exhibitions, e.g., the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin (2022–2023), the Weserburg Museum für moderne Kunst in Bremen (2022), the Kunsthalle Wien (2020–2021), the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (2018), the Badischer Kunstverein v Karlsruhe (2016), the Institute of Contemporary Art in London (2012) and MoMA in New York (2012).

Kriwet, one of the pioneers of concrete poetry, is represented in the exhibition by a projection of *Apollo America* (1969). The composition will be introduced by a lecture entitled *On the Radiophonic Works of Ferdinand Kriwet* by the poet, translator, Germanist and expert on Kriwet's work Pavel Novotný. As Novotný says: "Kriwet's precision and at the same time considerable creative vivacity were already fully manifested in his famous composition *Apollo America* (1969, co-production of SWF, BR and WDR), which is now considered one of the historical milestones of radio production. The composition also exists in film form (*Apollo Vision*, WDR 1969) and also as a book (*Apollo America*, Suhrkamp 1969). Kriwet used the Apollo expedition to the moon as an opportunity for his own expedition to the American mass media. The material obtained for *Apollo America* ran the gamut from radio transmissions, political speeches, news reports, commercials, pop songs, and pathetic rants. Arranged as an open-ended collage, the audio composition is structured as both a global, civilization narrative and an abstractly functioning piece of music."¹

Ferdinand Kriwet
Apollo America, 1969
radiophonic composition 21'57"
The composition will be heard within Pavel Novotný's lecture *On the Radiophonic Works of Ferdinand Kriwet*, 2023
courtesy of Nachlass Kriwet

24 June 2023, Broumov
22 September 2023, Prague

¹ <https://www.pavelnovotny.net/preklady/ferdinand-kriwet/>, accessed on 10 May 2022.

Ora et lege (Pray and Read) is a dialogue between contemporary art and the essence of the teachings of the Benedictines and the Catholic Church in general. It is a unique project thematically focused on the work of contemporary visual artists with text. From the very beginning it has been conceived of as a small biennial, with the main exhibition in the Broumov Monastery in Eastern Bohemia (the first one took place in 2021), while in the “odd” year there are lectures and exhibitions in the Czech Republic as well as abroad. The project is organized by the Educational and Cultural Centre Broumov in collaboration with the curator Monika Čejková.

www.oraetlege.com

Ora et lege II
Broumov Monastery
25 June – 24 September 2023

Ora et lege II
Dom Sylvester Houédard

Performance
Pavel Büchler, Bohumila Grögerová, Barbara Kapusta,
Janice Kerbel, Ferdinand Kriwet

Exhibition Curator
Monika Čejková

Exhibition Architecture
Objektor architekti

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sacred
puke fork
for
the holy popcorn

Dom Sylvester Houédard
sacred puke fork for the holy popcorn, 1969
ink typed on paper
20.2 × 22 cm
courtesy of Lisson Gallery